Lectures Introductory to the Study of the New Testament

by William Kelly

Three volumes in one
Introduction to the One Volume Edition

William Kelly gave introductory lectures to the study of the NT and also covered parts of the OT. These lectures were contained in three volumes covering the NT and another three volumes for lectures on portions of the OT.

It is because someone has typeset and proofread this volume, and has added the Scripture references in braces { } in the text, that Present Truth Publishers has been able to provide this edition of the combined three books of introductory lectures to the study of the NT in one volume. The combination into one volume accomplishes two things: it is cheaper to produce one book than three books; and, the Subject Index and Scripture Index created for this edition covers the three NT volumes together. The original volumes each had a detailed table of contents but these are not included in this edition.

Work is proceeding on a matching volume regarding the three OT books of introductory lectures by W. Kelly.

W. Kelly also produced separate volumes of exposition for each book of the NT, volumes that either he wrote, or were the result of lectures. These are all valuable and it is well if they are included in the library of students of God’s Word.

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Lectures Introductory to the
Study of the Gospels
Preface to the First Edition

The volume before the reader pretends to be nothing more than a rapid sketch of the four inspired accounts of our blessed Lord, which the Holy Ghost has been pleased to give for our instruction and joy through the faith of Him who is there revealed to us. Eleven discourses delivered in London (between May 31st and June 20th, 1866) did not afford much space for details. Taken in shorthand, they were corrected by the lecturer, with additions and retrenchments. He now commits the book, spite of shortcoming abundant, to His blessing who loved the Church and gave Himself for it, who still nourishes and cherishes it with tender care. May He graciously pardon every thought, feeling, and word inconsistent with Himself! May He deign to own and use the thing spoken of Him that is right!

*Guernsey, 18th December, 1866.*

Preface to the Second Edition

In this Second Edition only a very few verbal changes have been made, in order to express the sense with greater clearness. It is now commended once more to the blessing of the Lord.

*London, 20th November, 1873.*
Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Gospels

Lecture 1
Matthew 1 - 7

God has been pleased, in the separate accounts He has given us of our Lord Jesus, to display not only His own grace and wisdom, but the infinite excellency of His Son. It is our wisdom to seek to profit by all the light He has afforded us; and, in order to this, both to receive implicitly, as the simple Christian surely does, whatever God has written for our instruction in these different Gospels, and also by comparing them, and comparing them according to the special point of view which God has communicated in each Gospel, to see concentrated the varying lines of everlasting truth which there meet in Christ. Now, I shall proceed with all simplicity, the Lord helping me, first taking up the Gospel before us, in order to point out, as far as I am enabled to do, the great distinguishing features, as well as the chief contents, that the Holy Ghost has here been pleased to communicate. It is well to bear in mind, that in this Gospel, as in all the rest, God has in nowise undertaken to present everything, but only some chosen discourses and facts; and this is the more remarkable, inasmuch as in some cases the very same miracles, etc., are given in several, and even in all the Gospels. The Gospels are short; the materials used are not numerous; but what shall we say of the depths of grace that are there disclosed? What of the immeasurable glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, which everywhere shines out in them?

The undeniable certainty that God has been pleased to confine Himself to a small portion of the circumstances of the life of Jesus, and, even so, to repeat the same discourse, miracle, or whatever other fact is brought before us, only brings out, to my mind, more distinctly the manifest design of God to give expression to the glory of the Son in each Gospel according to a special point of view. Now, looking at the Gospel of Matthew as a whole, and taking the most enlarged view of it before we enter into details, the question arises, What is the main idea before the Holy Ghost? It is surely the lesson of simplicity to learn this from God, and, once learnt, to apply it steadily as a help of the most manifest kind; full of interest, as well as of the weightiest instruction, in examining all the incidents as they come before us. What, then, is that which, not merely in a few facts, in particular chapters, but throughout, comes before us in the Gospel of Matthew? It matters not where we look, whether at the beginning, the middle, or the end, the same evident character proclaims itself. The prefatory words introduce it. Is it not the Lord Jesus, Son of David, Son of Abraham -- Messiah?

But, then, it is not simply the anointed of Jehovah, but One who proves Himself, and is declared of God, to be Jehovah-Messiah. No such testimony appears elsewhere. I say not that there is no evidence in the other Gospels to demonstrate that He is really Jehovah and Emmanuel too, but that nowhere else have we the same fulness of proof, and the same manifest design, from the very starting-point of the Gospel, to proclaim the Lord Jesus as being thus a divine Messiah -- God with us.

The practical object is equally obvious. The common notion, that the Jews are in view, is quite correct, as far as it goes. The Gospel of Matthew bears internal proof that God specially provides for the instruction of His own among those that had been Jews. It was written more particularly for leading Jewish Christians into a truer understanding of the glory of the Lord Jesus. Hence, every testimony that could convince and satisfy a Jew, that could correct or enlarge his thoughts, is found most fully here; hence the precision of the quotations from the Old Testament; hence the converging of prophecy on the Messiah; hence, too, the manner in which the miracles of Christ, or the incidents of His life, are here grouped together. To Jewish difficulties all this pointed with peculiar fitness. Miracles we have elsewhere, no doubt, and prophecies occasionally; but where is there such a profusion of them as in Matthew? Where, in the mind of the Spirit of God, such a continual, conspicuous point of quoting and applying Scripture in all places and seasons to the Lord Jesus? To me, I confess, it seems impossible for a simple mind to resist the conclusion.

But this is not all to be noticed here. Not only does God deign to meet the Jew with these proofs from prophecy, miracle, life, and doctrine, but He begins with what a Jew would and must demand -- the question of genealogy. But even then the answer of Matthew is after a divine sort. The book, he says,

of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David,
the Son of Abraham {Matt. 1:1}.

These are the two principal landmarks to which a Jew turns: -- royalty given by the grace of God in the one, and the original depositary of the promise in the other.

Moreover, not only does God condescend to notice the line of fathers, but, if He turns aside for a moment now and
Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Gospels

then for aught else, what instruction, both in man’s sin and need, and in His own grace, does thus spring up before us from the mere course of His genealogical tree! He names in certain cases the mother, and not the father only; but never without a divine reason. There are four women alluded to. They are not such as any of us, or perhaps any man, would beforehand have thought of introducing, and into such a genealogy, of all others. But God had His own sufficient motive; and His was one not only of wisdom, but of mercy; also, of special instruction to the Jew, as we shall see in a moment. First of all, who but God would have thought it necessary to remind us that Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar? I need not enlarge; these names in divine history must speak for themselves. Man would have hidden all this assuredly; he would have preferred to put forth either some flowering account of ancient and august ancestry, or to concentrate all the honour and glory in one, the lustre of whose genius eclipsed all antecedents. But God’s thoughts are not our thoughts; neither are our ways His ways. Again, the allusion to such persons thus introduced is the more remarkable because others, worthy ones, are not named. There is no mention of Sarah, no hint of Rebecca, no notice whatever of so many holy and illustrious names in the female line of our Lord Jesus. But Thamar does appear thus early (Matt. 1:3); and so manifest is the reason, that one has no need to explain further. I am persuaded that the name alone is sufficient intimation to any Christian heart and conscience. But how significant to the Jew! What were his thoughts of the Messiah? Would he have put forward the name of Thamar in such a connection? Never. He might not have been able to deny the fact; but as to bringing it out thus, and drawing special attention to it, the Jew was the last man to have done it. Nevertheless, the grace of God in this is exceeding good and wise.

But there is more than this. Lower down we have another. There is the name of Rachab, a Gentile, and a Gentile bringing no honourable reputation along with her. Men may seek to pare it down, but it is impossible either to cloak her shame, or to fritter away the grace of God. It is not to be well or wisely got rid of, who and what Rachab publicly was; yet is she the woman that the Holy Ghost singles out for the next place in the ancestry of Jesus.

Ruth, too, appears -- Ruth, of all these women -- most sweet and blameless, no doubt, by the working of the divine grace in her, but still a daughter of Moab, whom the Lord forbade to enter His congregation to the tenth generation for ever.

And what of Solomon himself, begotten by David, the king, of her that had been the wife of Uriah? How humiliating to those who stood on human righteousness? How thwarting to mere Jewish expectations of the Messiah! He was the Messiah, but such He was after God’s heart, not man’s. He was the Messiah that somehow would and could have relations with sinners, first and last; whose grace would reach and bless Gentiles -- a Moabite -- anybody. Room was left for intimations of such compass in Matthew’s scheme of His ancestry. Deny it they might as to doctrine and fact now; they could not alter or efface the real features from the genealogy of the true Messiah; for in no other line but David’s, through Solomon, could Messiah be. And God has deemed it meet to recount even this to us, so that we may know and enter into His own delight in His rich grace as He speaks of the ancestors of the Messiah. It is thus, then, we come down to the birth of Christ.

Nor was it less worthy of God that He should make most plain the truth of another remarkable conjunction of predicted circumstances, seemingly beyond reconciliation, in His entrance into the world.

There were two conditions absolutely requisite for the Messiah: one was, that He should be truly born of a -- rather of the -- Virgin; the other was, that He should inherit the royal rights of the Solomon-branch of David’s house, according to promise. There was a third too, we may add, that He who was the real son of His virgin-mother, the legal son of His Solomon-sprung father, should be, in the truest and highest sense, the Jehovah of Israel, Emmanuel -- God with us. All this is crowded into the brief account next given us in Matthew’s Gospel, and by Matthew alone. Accordingly,

the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as His mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost [Matt. 1:18].

This latter truth, that is, of the Holy Ghost’s action as to it, we shall find, has a still deeper and wider import assigned to it in the Gospel of Luke, whose office is to show us the Man Christ Jesus. I therefore reserve any observations that this larger scope might and ought, indeed, to give rise to, till we have to consider the third Gospel.

But here the great thing is the relationship of Joseph to the Messiah, and hence he is the one to whom the angel appears. In the Gospel of Luke it is not to Joseph, but to Mary. Are we to think that this variety of account is a mere accidental circumstance? or that if God has thus been pleased to draw out two distinct lines of truth, we are not to gather up the divine principle of each and all? It is impossible that God could do what even we should be ashamed of. If we act and speak, or forbear to do either, we ought to have a sufficient reason for one or other. And if no man of sense doubts that this should be so in our own case, has not God always had His own perfect mind in the various accounts He has given us of Christ? Both are true, but with distinct design. It is with divine wisdom that Matthew mentions the Angel’s visit to Joseph; with no less direction from on high does Luke relate Gabriel’s visit to Mary (as before to Zacharias); and the reason is plain. In Matthew, while he not in the least degree weakens, but proves the fact that Mary was the real mother of the Lord, the point was, that He inherited the rights of Joseph.

And no wonder; for no matter how truly our Lord had been the Son of Mary, He had not thereby an indisputable legal right to the throne of David. This never could be in virtue of His descent from Mary, unless He had also inherited the title of the royal stem. As Joseph belonged to the Solomon-branch, he would have barred the right of our Lord
to the throne, looking at it as a mere question now of His being the Son of David; and we are entitled so to take it. His being God, or Jehovah, was in no way of itself the ground of Davidical claim, though otherwise of infinitely deeper moment. The question was to make good, along with His eternal glory, a Messianic title that could not be set aside, a title that no Jew on his own ground could impeach. It was His grace so to stoop; it was His own all-sufficient wisdom that knew how to reconcile conditions so above man to put together. God speaks, and it is done.

Accordingly, in the Gospel of Matthew, the Spirit of God fixes our attention upon these facts. Joseph was the descendant of David, the king, through Solomon: the Messiah must therefore, somehow or other, be the son of Joseph; yet had he really been the son of Joseph, all would have been lost. Thus the contradictions looked hopeless; for it seemed that, in order to be the Messiah, He must, and yet He must not, be Joseph’s son. But what are difficulties to God? With Him all things are possible; and faith receives all with assurance. He was not only the son of Joseph, so that no Jew could deny it, and yet not so, but that He could be in the fullest manner the Son of Mary, the Seed of the woman, and not literally of the man. God, therefore, takes particular pains, in this Jewish Gospel, to give all importance to His being strictly, in the eye of the law, the son of Joseph; and so, according to the flesh, inheriting the rights of the regal branch, yet here He takes particular care to prove that He was not, in the reality of His birth as man, Joseph’s son. Before husband and wife came together, the espoused Mary was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Such was the character of the conception. Besides, He was Jehovah. This comes out in His very name. The Virgin’s Son was to be called

Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins
(Matt. 1:21).

He shall not be a mere man, no matter how miraculously born; Jehovah’s people, Israel, are His; He shall save His people from their sins.

This is yet more revealed to us by the prophecy of Isaiah cited next, and particularly by the application of that name found nowhere else but in Matthew;

Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us
(Matt. 1:22, 23).

This, then, is the introduction and the great foundation in fact. The genealogy is, no doubt, formed peculiarly according to the Jewish manner; but this very shape serves rather as a confirmation, I will not say to the Jewish mind alone, but to every honest man of intelligence. The spiritual mind, of course, has no difficulty -- can have none by the very fact that it is spiritual, because its confidence is in God. Now there is nothing that so summarily banishes a doubt, and silences every question of the natural man, as the simple but happy assurance that what God says must be true, and is the only right thing. No doubt God has been pleased in this genealogy to do that which men in modern times have cavilled at; but not even the darkest and most hostile Jews raised such objections in former days. Assuredly they were the persons, above all, to have exposed the character of the genealogy of the Lord Jesus, if vulnerable. But no; this was reserved for Gentiles. They have made the notable discovery that there is an omission! Now in such lists an omission is perfectly in analogy with the manner of the Old Testament. All that was demanded in such a genealogy was to give adequate landmarks so as to make the descent clear and unquestionable.

Thus, if you take Ezra, for instance, giving his own genealogy as a priest, you find that he omits not three links only in a chain, but seven. Doubtless there may have been a special reason for the omission; but whatever may be our judgment of the true solution of the difficulty, it is evident that a priest who was giving his own genealogy would not put it forward in a defective form. If in one who was of that sacerdotal succession where the proofs were rigorously required, where a defect in it would destroy his right to the exercise of spiritual functions -- if in such a case there might legitimately be an omission, clearly there might be the same in regard to the Lord’s genealogy; and the more, as this omission was not in the part of which the Scripture speaks nothing, but in the centre of its historical records, whence the merest child could supply the missing links at once. Evidently, therefore, the omission was not careless or ignorant, but intentional. I doubt not myself that the design was thereby to intimate the solemn sentence of God on the connection with Athaliah of the wicked house of Ahab, the wife of Joram. (Compare Matt. 1:8 with 2 Chron. 22–26.) Ahaziah vanishes, and Joash, and Amaziah, when the line once more reappears here in Uzziah. These generations God blots out along with that wicked woman.

There was literally another reason lying on the surface, that required certain names to drop out. The Spirit of God was pleased to give, in each of the three divisions of the Messiah’s genealogy, fourteen generations, as from Abraham down to David, from David to the captivity, and from the captivity to Christ. Now, it is evident, that if there were in fact more links in each chain of generation than these fourteen, all above that number must be omitted. Then, as we have just seen, the omission is not haphazard, but made of special moral force. Thus, if there was a necessity because the Spirit of God limited Himself to a certain number of generations, there was also divine reason, as there always is in the word of God, for the choice of the names which had to be omitted.

However this may be, we have in this chapter, besides the genealogical line, the person of the long-expected son of David; we have Him introduced precisely, officially, and fully as the Messiah; we have His deeper glory, not merely that which He took but who He was and is. He might be styled, as indeed He was,

the son of David, the son of Abraham {Matt. 1:1};

but He was, He is, He could not but be, Jehovah-Emmanuel. How all-important this was for a Jew to believe and confess, one need hardly stop to expound: it is enough to mention it by the way. Evidently Jewish unbelief, even where there was an acknowledgment of the Messiah, turned upon this, that the
Jew looked upon the Messiah purely according to what He
designs to become as the great King. They saw not any deeper
glory than His Messianic throne, not more than an offshoot,
though no doubt one of extraordinary vigour, from the root
of David. Here, at the very starting-point, the Holy Ghost
points out the divine and eternal glory of Him who designs to
come as the Messiah. Surely, too, if Jehovah condescended
to be Messiah, and in order to this to be born of the Virgin,
there must be some most worthy aims infinitely deeper than
the intention, however great, to sit upon the throne of David.
Evidently, therefore, the simple perception of the glory
of His person overrules all conclusions of Jewish unbelief;
shews us that He whose glory was so bright must have a work
commensurate with that glory; that He whose personal dignity
was beyond all time and even thought, who thus stoops to
enter the ranks of Israel as Son of David, must have had some
ends in coming, and, above all, to die suitable to such glory.
All this, it is plain, was of the deepest possible moment for
Israel to apprehend. It was precisely what the believing
Israelite did learn; even as it was just the rock of offence on
which unbelieving Israel fell and was dashed to pieces.

The next chapter {Matt. 2} shows us another
characteristic fact in reference to this Gospel; for if the aim
of the first chapter was to give us proofs of the true glory and
character of the Messiah, in contrast with mere Jewish
limitation and unbelief about Him, the second chapter shows
us what reception Messiah would find, in contrast with the
wise men from the East, from Jerusalem, from the king and
the people, and in the land of Israel. If His descent be as sure
as the royal son of David, if His glory be above all human
lineage, what was the place that He found, in fact, in His land
and people? Indefeasible was His title: what were the
circumstances that met Him when He was found at length in
Israel? The answer is, from the very first He was the rejected
Messiah. He was rejected, and most emphatically, by those
whose responsibility it was most of all to receive Him. It was
not the ignorant; it was not those that were besotted in gross
habits; it was Jerusalem -- it was the scribes and Pharisees.
The people, too, were all moved at the very thought of
Messiah’s birth.

What brought out the unbelief of Israel so distressingly
was this -- God would have a due testimony to such a
Messiah; and if the Jews were unready, He would gather
from the very ends of the earth some hearts to welcome Jesus
-- Jesus-Jehovah, the Messiah of Israel. Hence it is that
Gentiles are seen coming forth from the East, led by the star
which had a voice for their hearts. There had ever rested
traditionally among Oriental nations, though not confined to
them, the general bearing of Balaam’s prophecy, that a star
should arise, a star connected with Jacob. I doubt not that
God was pleased in His goodness to give a seal to that
prophecy, after a literal sort, not to speak of its true symbolic
force. In His condescending love, He would lead hearts that
were prepared of Him to desire the Messiah, and come from
the ends of the earth to welcome Him. And so it was. They
saw the star; they set forth to seek the Messiah’s kingdom.
It was not that the star moved along the way; it roused them and
set them going. They recognised the phenomenon as looking
for the star of Jacob; they instinctively, I may say, certainly
by the good hand of God, connected the two together. From
their distant home they made for Jerusalem; for even the
universal expectation of men at the time pointed to that city.
But when they reached it, where were faithful souls awaiting
the Messiah? They found active minds -- not a few that could
tell them clearly where the Messiah was to be born: for this
God made them dependant upon His word. When they came
to Jerusalem, it was not any longer an outward sign to guide.
They learnt the scriptures as to it. They learnt from those that
cared neither for it nor for Him it concerned, but who,
nevertheless, knew the letter more or less. On the road to
Bethlehem, to their exceeding joy, the star re-appears,
confirming what they had received, till it rested over where
the young child was. And there, in the presence of the father
and the mother, they, Easterns though they were, and
acustomed to no small homage, proved how truly they were
guided of God; for neither father nor mother received the
smallest part of their worship: all was reserved for Jesus -- all
poured out at the feet of the infant Messiah. Oh, what a
withering refutation of the foolish men of the West! Oh, what
a lesson, even from these dark Gentiles, to self-complacent
Christendom in East or West! Spite of what men might look
down upon in these proud days, their hearts in their simplicity
were true. It was but for Jesus they came; it was on Jesus that
their worship was spent; and so, spite of the parents being
there, spite of what nature would prompt them to do, in
sharing, at least something of the worship on the father and
mother with the Babe, they produced their treasures and
worshipped the young child alone.

This is the more remarkable, because in the Gospel of
Luke we have another scene, where we see that the same
Jesus, truly an infant of days, in the hands of an aged one
with far more divine intelligence than these Eastern sages
could boast. Now we know what would have been the
prompting of affection and of Godly desires in the presence
of a babe; but the aged Simeon never pretends to bless Him.
Nothing would have been more simple and natural, had not
that Babe differed from all others, had He not been what He
was, and had Simeon not known who He was. But he did
know it. He saw in Him the salvation of God; and so, though
he could rejoice in God, and bless God, though he could in
another sense bless the parents, he never presumes so to bless
the Babe. It was indeed the blessing that he had got from that
Babe which enabled him to bless both God and his parents;
but he blesses not the Babe even when he blesses the parents.
It was God Himself, even the Son of the Highest that was
there, and his soul bowed before God. We have here, then,
the Easterns worshipping the Babe, not the parents; and in the
other case we have the blessed man of God blessing the
parents, but not the Babe: a most striking token of the
remarkable difference which the Holy Ghost had in view
when inditing these histories of the Lord Jesus.

Further, to these Easterns intimation is given of God, and
they returned another way, thus defeating the design of the
treachery of the heart and cruel head of the Edomite king,
notwithstanding the slaughter of the innocents.

Next comes a remarkable prophecy of Christ, of which we must say a word -- the prophecy of Hosea. Our Lord is carried outside the reach of the storm into Egypt. Such indeed was the history of His life; it was continual pain, one course of suffering and shame. There was no mere heroism in the Lord Jesus, but the very reverse. Nevertheless, it was God shrouding His Majesty; it was God in the person of man, in the Child that takes the lowliest place in the haughty world. Therefore, we find no more a cloud that covers Him, no pillar of fire that shields Him. Apparently the most exposed, He bows before the storm, retires, carried by His parents into the ancient furnace of affliction for His people. Thus even from the very first our Lord Jesus, as a babe, tastes the hate of the world -- what it is to be thoroughly humbled, even as a child. The prophecy, therefore, was accomplished, and in its deepest meaning. It was not merely Israel that God called out, but His Son out of Egypt. Here was the true Israel; Jesus was the genuine stock before God. He goes through, in His own person, Israel's history. He goes into Egypt, and is called out of it.

Returning, in due time, to the land of Israel at the death of him that reigned after Herod the Great, His parents are instructed, as we are told, and turn aside into the parts of Galilee. This is another important truth; for thus was to be fulfilled the word, not of one prophet, but of all --

That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene
{Matt. 2:23}.

It was the name of man's scorn; for Nazareth was the most despised place in that despised land of Galilee. Such, in the providence of God, was the place for Jesus. This gave an accomplishment to the general voice of the prophets, who declared Him despised and rejected of men. So He was. It was true even of the place in which He lived,

that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene
{Matt. 2:23}.

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We enter now upon the announcement of John the Baptist. The Spirit of God carries us over a long interval, and the voice of John is heard proclaiming,

Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand
{Matt. 3:2}.

Here we have an expression which must not be passed over -- all-important as it is for the understanding of the Gospel of Matthew. John the Baptist preached the nearness of this kingdom in the wilderness of Judæa. It was clearly gathered from the Old Testament prophecy, particularly from Daniel, that the God of heaven would set up a kingdom; and more than this, that the Son of man was the person to administer the kingdom.

And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people; nations, and languages, should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away; and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed

{Dan. 7:14}.

Such was the kingdom of heaven. It was not a mere kingdom of the earth, neither was it in heaven, but it was heaven governing the earth for ever.

It would appear that, in John the Baptist’s preaching it, we have no ground for supposing that either he believed at this time, or that any other men till afterwards were led into the understanding of the form which it was to assume through Christ’s rejection and going on high as now. This our Lord divulged more particularly in Matt. 13. I understand, then, by this expression, what might be gathered justly from Old Testament prophecies; and that John, at this time, had no other thought but that the kingdom was about to be introduced according to expectations thus formed. They had long looked for the time when the earth should no longer be left to itself, but heaven should be the governing power; when the Son of man should control the earth; when the power of hell should be banished from the world; when the earth should be put into association with the heavens, and the heavens, of course, therefore, be changed, so as to govern the earth directly through the Son of man, who should be also King of restored Israel. This, substantially, I think, was in the mind of the Baptist.

But then he proclaims repentance; not here in view of deeper things, as in the Gospel of Luke, but as a spiritual preparation for Messiah and the kingdom of heaven. That is, he calls man to confess his own ruin in view of the introduction of that kingdom. Accordingly, his own life was the witness of what he felt morally of Israel’s then state. He retires into the wilderness, and applies to himself the ancient oracle of Isaiah --

The voice of one crying in the wilderness {Matt. 3:3; John 1:23}.

The reality was coming: as for him, he was merely one to announce the advent of the King. All Jerusalem was moved, and multitudes were baptized by him in Jordan. This gives occasion to his stern sentence upon their condition in the sight of God.

But among the crowd of those who came to him was Jesus. Strange sight! He, even He, Emmanuel, Jehovah, if He took the place of Messiah, would take that place in lowliness on the earth. For all things were out of course; and He must prove by His whole life, as we shall find by-and-by He did, what the condition of His people was. But, indeed, it is but another step of the same infinite grace, and more than that, of the same moral judgment on Israel; but along with it the added and most sweet feature -- His association with all in Israel who felt and owned their condition in the sight of God. It is what no saint can afford lightly to pass over; it is what, if a saint recognize not, he will understand the Scripture most imperfectly: nay, I believe he must grievously misunderstand the ways of God. But Jesus looked at those who came to the waters of Jordan, and saw their hearts touched, if ever so little, with a sense of their state before God; and His heart was truly with them. It is not now taking the people out of Israel, and bringing them into a position with Himself -- that we shall find by and by; but it is the Saviour identifying
Himself with the godly-feeling remnant. Wherever there was
the least action of the Holy Spirit of God in grace in the
hearts of Israel, He joined Himself. John was astonished;
John the Baptist himself would have refused, but,

Thus, said the Saviour,

including, as I apprehend, John with Himself.

Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness
{Matt. 3:15}.

It is not here a question of law; it was too late for this --
ever a ruinous thing for the sinner. It was a question of
another sort of righteousness. It might be the feeblest
recognition of God and man; it might be but a remnant of
Israelites; but, at least, they owned the truth about
themselves; and Jesus was with them in owning the ruin fully,
and felt it all. No need was in Himself -- not a particle; but it
is precisely when the heart is thus perfectly free, and
infinitely above ruin, that it can most of all ascend and take
up what is of God in the hearts of any. So Jesus ever did, and
did it thus publicly, joining Himself with whatever was
excellent on the earth. He was baptized in Jordan -- an act
most inexplicable for those who then or now might hold to
His glory without entering into His heart of grace. To what
painful feelings it might give rise! Had He anything to
confess? Without a single flaw of His own He bent down to
confess what was in others; He owned in all its extent, in its
reality as none else did, the state of Israel, before God and
man; He joined Himself with those who felt it. But at once,
as the answer to any and every unholy misapprehension that
could be formed, heaven is opened and a twofold testimony
is rendered to Jesus. The Father’s voice pronounces the Son’s
relationship, and His own complacency; while the Holy Ghost
anoints Him as man. Thus, in His full personality, God’s
answer is given to all who might otherwise have slighted
either Himself or His baptism.

The Lord Jesus thence goes forth into another scene --
the wilderness {Matt. 4} -- to be tempted of the devil; and
this, mark, now that He is thus publicly owned by the Father,
and the Holy Ghost had descended on Him. It is indeed, I
might say, when souls are thus blessed that Satan’s
temptations are apt to come. Grace provokes the enemy. Only
in a measure, of course, can we thus speak of any other than
Jesus; but of Him who was full of grace and truth, in whom,
too, the fulness of the Godhead dwelt -- even so, of Him it
was fully true. The principle, at least, applies in every case.
He was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness, to be there
tried of the devil. The Holy Spirit has given the temptation to
us in Matthew, according to the order in which it occurred.
But here, as elsewhere, the aim is dispensational, not
historical, as far as intention goes, though really so in point of
fact; and I apprehend, specially with this in view, that it is
only at the last temptation our Lord says,

Get thee hence, Satan {Matt. 4:10}.

We shall see by and by why this disappears in the Gospel of
Luke. There is thus the lesson of wisdom and patience even
before the enemy; the excellent, matchless grace of patience
in trial; for what more likely to exclude it than the
apprehension that it was Satan all the while? But yet our
Saviour was so perfect in it, that He never uttered the word
Satan

until the last daring, shameless effort to tempt Him to render
to the evil one the very worship of God Himself. Not till then
does our Lord say,

Get thee hence, Satan.

We shall dwell a little more upon the three temptations,
if the Lord will, as to their intrinsic moral import, when we
come to the consideration of Luke. I content myself now with
giving what appears to me the true reason why the Spirit of
God here adheres to the order of the facts. It is well,
however, to remark, that the departure from such an order is
precisely what indicates the consummate hand of God, and
for a simple reason. To one who knew the facts in a human
way, nothing would be more natural than to put them down
just as they occurred. To depart from the historical order,
more particularly when one had previously given them that
order, is what never would been thought of, unless there were
some mighty preponderant reason in the mind of him who did
so. But this is no uncommon thing. There are cases where an
author necessarily departs from the mere order in which the
facts took place. Supposing you are describing a certain
character; you put together striking traits from the whole
course of his life; you do not restrain yourself to the bare
dates at which they occurred. If you were only chronicling
the events of a year, you keep to the order in which they
happened; but whenever you rise to the higher task of
bringing out moral features, you may be frequently obliged
to abandon the consecutive order of events as they occurred.

It is precisely this reason that accounts for the change in
Luke; who, as we shall find when we come to look at his
Gospel more carefully, is especially the moralist. That is to
say, Luke characteristically looks upon things in their springs
as well as effects. It is not his province to regard the person
of Christ peculiarly, i.e., His divine glory; neither does he
occupy himself with the testimony or service of Jesus here
below, of which we all know Mark is the exponent. Neither
is it true, that the reason why Matthew occasionally gives the
order of time, is because such is always his rule. On the
contrary, there is no one of the Gospel writers who departs
from that order, when his subject demands it, more freely
than he, as I hope to prove to the satisfaction of those open to
conviction, before we close. If this be so, assuredly there
must be some key to these phenomena, some reason sufficient
to explain why sometimes Matthew adheres to the order of
events, why he departs from it elsewhere.

I believe the real state of the facts to be this: -- first of
all, God has been pleased, by one of the evangelists (Mark),
to give us the exact historical order of our Lord’s eventful
ministry. This alone would have been very insufficient to set
forth Christ. Hence, besides that order, which is the most
elementary, however important in its own place, other
presentations of His life were due, according to various
spiritual grounds, as divine wisdom saw fit, and as even we are capable of appreciating in our measure. Accordingly, I think it was owing to special considerations of this sort that Matthew was led to reserve for us the great lesson, that our Lord had passed through the entire temptation -- not only the forty days, but even that which crowned them at the close; and that only when an open blow was struck at the divine glory did His soul at once resent it with the words,

Get thee hence, Satan.

Luke, on the contrary, inasmuch as he, for perfectly good and divinely given reason, changes the order, necessarily omits these words. Of course, I do not deny that similar words appear in your common English Bibles (in Luke 4:8); but no scholar needs to be informed that all such words are left out of the third Gospel by the best authorities, followed by almost every critic of note save the testy Mathai, though scarce one of them seems to have understood the true reason why. Nevertheless, they are omitted by Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists; by High Church, and Low Church; by Evangelicals, Tractarians, and Rationalists. It does not matter who they are, or what their system of thought may be: all those who go upon the ground of external testimony alone are obliged to leave out the words in Luke. Besides, there is the clearest and the strongest evidence internally for the omission of these words in Luke, contrary to the prejudices of the copyists, which thus furnishes a very cogent illustration of the action of the Holy Spirit in inspiration. The ground of omitting the words lies in the fact, that the last temptation occupies the second place in Luke. If the words be retained, Satan seems to hold his ground, and renew the temptation after the Lord had told him to retire. Again, it is evident that, as the text stands in the received Greek text and our common English Bible,

Get thee behind me, Satan {Luke 4:8},

is another mistake. In Matt. 4:10, it is, rightly,

Get thee hence.

Remember, I am not imputing a shade of error to the Word of God. The mistake spoken of lies only in blundering scribes, critics, or translators, who have failed in doing justice to that particular place.

Get thee hence, Satan,

was the real language of the Lord to Satan, and is so given in closing the literally last temptation by Matthew.

When it was a question, at a later day, of His servant Peter, who, prompted by Satan, had fallen into human thoughts, and would have dissuaded His Master from the cross, He does say,

Get thee behind me {Matt. 16:23; Mark 8:33}.

For certainly Christ did not want Peter to go away from Him and be lost, which would have been its effect.

Get thee [not hence, but] behind me,

He says. He rebuked His follower, yea, was ashamed of him; and He desired that Peter should be ashamed of himself.

Get thee behind me, Satan {Matt. 16:23; Mark 8:33},

was thus appropriate language then. Satan was the source of the thought couched in Peter’s words.

But when Jesus speaks to him whose last trial thoroughly betrays the adversary of God and man, i.e., the literal Satan, His answer is not merely, “Get thee behind me,” but,

Get thee hence, Satan.

Nor is this the only mistake, as we have seen, in the passage as given in the authorised version; for the whole clause should disappear from the account in Luke, according to the weightiest testimony. Besides, the reason is manifest. As it stands now, the passage wears this most awkward appearance, that Satan, though commanded to depart, lingers on. For in Luke we have another temptation after this; and of course, therefore, Satan must be presented as abiding, not as gone away.

The truth of the matter, then, is, that with matchless wisdom Luke was inspired of God to put the second temptation last, and the third temptation in the second place. Hence (inasmuch as these words of the third trial would be wholly incongruous in such an inversion of the historic order), they are omitted by him, but preserved by Matthew, who here held to that order. I dwell upon this, because it exemplifies, in a simple but striking manner, the finger and mind of God; as it shows us, also, how the copyists of the scriptures fell into error, through proceeding on the principle of the harmonists, whose great idea is to make all the four Gospels practically one Gospel; that is, to fuse them together into one mass, and make them give out only, as it were, a single voice in the praise of Jesus. Not so; there are four distinct voices blending in the truest harmony, and surely God Himself in each one, and, equally in all, but, withal, showing out fully and distinctively the excellencies of His Son. It is the disposition to blot out these differences, which has wrought such exceeding mischief, not merely in copyists, but in our own careless reading of the Gospels. What we need is, to gather up all, for all is worthy; to delight ourselves in every thought that the Spirit of God has treasured up -- every fragrance, so to speak, that He has preserved for us of the ways of Jesus.

Turning, then, from the temptation (which we may hope to resume in another point of view, when the Gospel of Luke comes before us and we shall have the different temptations on the moral side, with their changed order), I may in passing notice, that a very characteristic difference in the Gospel of Matthew meets us in what follows. Our Lord enters upon His public ministry as a minister of the circumcision {Rom. 15:8}, and calls disciples to follow Him. It was not His first acquaintance with Simon, Andrew, and the rest, as we know from the Gospel of John. They had before known Jesus, and, I apprehend, savingly. They are now called to be His companions in Israel, formed according to His heart as His servants here below; but before this we have a remarkable Scripture applied to our Lord. He changes His place of sojourn from Nazareth to Capernaum. And this is the more observable, because, in the Gospel of Luke, the first opening of His ministry is expressly at Nazareth; while the point of emphasis in Matthew is, that He leaves Nazareth, and comes
and dwells in Capernaum. Of course, both are equally true; but who can say that they are the same thing? or that the Spirit of God had not His own blessed reasons for giving prominence to both facts? Nor is the reason obscure. His going to Capernaum was the accomplishment of the word of Isa. 9, specifically mentioned for the instruction of the Jew, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying,

    The land of Zebulun, and the land of Nephthalim, by
    the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the
    Gentiles. The people which sat in darkness saw great
    light; and to them which sat in the region and
    shadow of death light is sprung up {Matt. 4:15, 16}.

That quarter of the land was regarded as the scene of darkness; yet was it just there that God suddenly caused light to arise. Nazareth was in lower, as Capernaum was in upper Galilee. But more than this, it was the seat, above all others in the land, frequented by Gentiles -- Galilee (“the circuit”) of the Gentiles. Now, we shall find throughout this Gospel that which may be well stated here, and will be abundantly confirmed everywhere -- that the object of our Gospel is not merely to prove what the Messiah was, both according to the flesh, and according to His own divine intrinsic nature, for Israel; but also, when rejected by Israel, what the consequences of that rejection would be for the Gentiles, and this in a double aspect -- whether as introducing the kingdom of heaven in a new form, or as giving occasion for Christ’s building His Church. These were the two main consequences of the rejection of the Messiah by Israel.

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Accordingly, as in Matt. 2 we found Gentiles from the East coming up to own the born King of the Jews, when His people were buried in bondage and Rabbinic tradition -- in heartless heedlessness, too, while boasting of their privileges; so here our Lord, at the beginning of His public ministry, as recorded in Matthew, is seen taking up His abode in these despised districts of the north, the way of the sea, where especially Gentiles had long dwelt, and on which the Jews looked down as a rude and dark spot, far from the centre of religious sanctity. There, according to prophecy, light was to spring up; and how brightly was it now accomplished? Next, we have the call of the disciples, as we have seen. At the end of the chapter is a general summary of the Messiah’s ministry, and of its effects, given in these words:

And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. And His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought unto Him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and He healed them. And there followed Him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judæa, and from beyond Jordan {Matt. 4:23-25}.

This I read, in order to show that it is the purpose of the Spirit, in this part of our Gospel, to gather a quantity of facts together under one head, entirely regardless of the question of time. It is evident, that what is here described in a few verses must have demanded a considerable space for its accomplishment. The Holy Ghost gives it all to us as a connected whole.

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The selfsame principle applies to the so-called sermon on the mount, on which I am about to say a few words. It is quite a misapprehension to suppose that Matt. 5-7 was given all in a single, unbroken discourse. For the wisest purposes, I have no doubt, the Spirit of God has arranged and conveyed it to us as one whole, without notice of the interruptions, occasions, etc.; but it is an unwarrantable conclusion for any to draw, that our Lord Jesus delivered it simply and solely as it stands in Matthew’s Gospel. What proves the fact is, that in the Gospel of Luke we have certain portions of it clearly pertaining to this very sermon (not merely similar, or the same truth preached at other times, but this identical discourse), with the particular circumstances which drew them out. Take the prayer, for instance, that was here set before the disciples (Matt. 6). As to this, we know from Luke 11 there was a request preferred by the disciples which led to it. As to other instruction, there were facts or questions, found in Luke, which drew out the remarks of the Lord, common to him and Matthew, if not Mark.

If it be certain that the Holy Ghost has been pleased to give us in Matthew this discourse and others as a whole, leaving out the originating circumstances found elsewhere, it is a fair and interesting inquiry why such a method of grouping with such omissions is adopted. The answer I conceive to be this, -- that the Spirit in Matthew loves to present Christ as the One like unto Moses, whom they were to hear. He presents Jesus not merely as a legislating prophet-king like Moses, but greater by far; for it is never forgotten that the Nazarene was the Lord God. Therefore it is that, in this discourse on the mountain, we have throughout the tone of One who was consciously God with men. If Jehovah called Moses up to the top of one mount, He who then spake the ten words sat now upon another mount, and taught His disciples the character of the kingdom of heaven, and its principles introduced as a whole, just answering to what we have seen of the facts and effects of His ministry, entirely passing by all intervals or connecting circumstances. As we had His miracles all put together as I may say, in the gross, so with His discourses. We have thus in either case the same principle. The substantial truth is given to us without noticing the immediate occasion in particular facts, appeals, etc. What was uttered by the Lord, according to Matthew, is thus presented as a whole. The effect, therefore, is, that it is much more solemn, because unbroken, carrying its own majesty along with it. The Spirit of God imprints on it purposely this character here, as I have no doubt there was an intention that it should be so reproduced for the instruction of His own people.

The Lord, in short, was here accomplishing one of the parts of His mission according to Isa. 53, where the work of
Christ is twofold. It is not, as the authorized version has it, “By His knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many;” for it is unquestionable that justification is not by His knowledge. Justification is by faith of Christ, we know; and as far as the efficacious work on which it depends is concerned, it is clearly in virtue of what Christ has suffered for sin and sins before God. But I apprehend that the real force of the passage is,

By His knowledge shall my righteous servant instruct many in righteousness [Isa. 53:11].

It is not “justify” in the ordinary forensic sense of the word, but rather instructing in righteousness, as the context here requires, and as the usage of the word elsewhere, as in Dan. 12, leaves open. This seems to be what is meant of our Lord here.

In the teaching on the mount He was, in fact, instructing the disciples in righteousness: hence, too, one reason why we have not a word about redemption. There is not the slightest reference to His suffering on the cross; no intimation of His blood, death, or resurrection; He is instructing, though not merely in righteousness. To the heirs of the kingdom the Lord is unfolding the principles of that kingdom, -- most blessed and rich instruction, but instruction in righteousness. No doubt there is also the declaration of the Father’s name, as far as could be then; but, still, the form taken is that of instructing in righteousness.

Let me add, as to the passage of Isa. 53, that the remainder of the verse also accords with this: not “for,” but, and He shall bear their iniquities [Isa. 53:11].

Such is the true force of it. The one was in His life, when He taught His own; the other was in His death, when He bore the iniquities of many.

Into the details of the discourse on the mount I cannot enter particularly now, but would just say a few words before I conclude to-night. In its preface we have a method often adopted by the Spirit of God, and not unworthy of our study. There is no child of God that cannot glean blessing from it, even through a scanty glance; but when we look into it a little more closely, the instruction deepens immensely. First of all He pronounces certain classes blessed. These blessednesses divide into two classes. The earlier character of blessedness savours particularly of righteousness, the later of mercy, which are the two great topics of the Psalms. These are both taken up here:

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled [Matt. 5:3-6].

In the fourth case righteousness comes in expressly, and closes that part of the subject; but it is plain enough that all these four classes consist in substance of such as the Lord pronounces blessed, because they are righteous in one form or another. The next four are founded upon mercy. Hence we read as the very first,

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God {Matt. 5:7-9}.

Of course, it would be impossible to attempt more than a sketch at this time. Here, then, occurs the number usual in all these systematic partitions of Scripture; there is the customary and complete seven of Scripture. The two supplementary blessednesses at the end rather confirm the case, though at first sight they might appear to offer an exception. But it is not so really. The exception proves the rule convincedly; for in Matt 5:10 you have,

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake;

which answers to the first four. Then, in Matt. 5:11, 12, you have,

Blessed are ye . . . . for my sake;

which answers to the higher mercy of the last three.

Blessed, are ye, [there is thus a change. It is made a direct personal address] when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake {Matt. 5:11}.

Thus it is the very consummation of suffering in grace, because it is for Christ’s sake.

Hence the twofold persecutions (Matt. 5:10-12) bring in the double character we find in the epistles -- suffering for righteousness’ sake, and suffering for Christ’s sake. These are two perfectly distinct things; because, where it is a question of righteousness, it is simply a person brought to a point. If I do not stand and suffer here, my conscience will be defiled; but this is in no way suffering for Christ’s sake. In short, conscience enters where righteousness is the question; but suffering for Christ’s sake is not a question of plain sin, but of His grace and its claims on my heart. Desire for His truth, desire for His glory, carries me out into a certain path that exposes me to suffering. I might merely do my duty in the place in which I am put; but grace is never satisfied with the bare performance of one’s duty. Fully is it admitted that there is nothing like grace to meet duty; and doing one’s duty is a good thing for a Christian. But God forbid that we should be merely shut up to duty, and not be free for the flowing over of grace which carries out the heart along with it. In the one case, the believer stops dead short: if he did not stand, there would be sin. In the other case, there would be a lack of testimony for Christ, and grace makes one rejoice to be counted worthy of suffering for His name: but righteousness is not in question.

Such, then, are the two distinct classes or groups of blessedness. First, there are the blessednesses of righteousness, to which the persecution for righteousness’ sake pertains; next, the blessednesses of mercy or grace. Christ instructs in righteousness according to prophecy, but He does not confine Himself to righteousness. This never could be consistent with the glory of the person who was there. Accordingly, therefore, while there is the doctrine of righteousness, there is the introduction of what is above it and
mightier than it, with the corresponding blessedness of being persecuted for Christ’s sake. All here is grace, and indicates manifest progress.

The same thing is true of what follows:

Ye are the salt of the earth {Matt. 5:13}

-- it is that which keeps pure what is pure. Salt will not communicate purity to what is impure, but it is used as the preservative power according to righteousness. But light is another thing. Hence we hear,

Ye are the light of the world {Matt. 5:14}.

Light is not that which simply preserves what is good, but is an active power, which casts its bright shining into what is obscure, and dispels the darkness from before it. Thus it is evident that in this further word of the Lord we have answers to the differences already hinted at.

Much of the deepest interest might be found in the discourse; only this is not the occasion for entering into particulars. We have, as usual, righteousness developed according to Christ, which deals with man’s wickedness under the heads of violence and corruption; next come other new principles of grace infinitely deepening what had been given under law (Matt. 5). Thus, in the former of these, a word detects, as it were, the thirst of blood, as corruption lies in a look or desire. For it is no longer a question of mere acts, but of the soul’s condition. Such is the scope of Matt. 5. As in earlier verses (Matt. 5:17, 18) the law is fully maintained in all its authority, we have later on (Matt. 5:21-48) superior principles of grace, and deeper truths, mainly founded upon the revelation of the Father’s name -- the Father which is in heaven. Consequently it is not merely the question between man and man, but the Evil One on one side, and God Himself on the other; and God Himself, as a Father, disclosing and proving the selfish condition of fallen man upon the earth.

In the second of these chapters (Matt. 6) composing the discourse, two main parts appear. The first is again righteousness.

Take heed [He says] that you do not your righteousness before men {Matt. 6:1}.

Here it is not “alms,” but righteousness,

as you may see in the margin. Then the righteousness spoken of branches out into three parts: -- alms, which is one part of it; prayer, another part; and fasting, a part of it not to be despised. This is our righteousness, the especial point of which is, that it should be not a matter of ostentation, but before our Father who sees in secret. It is one of the salient features of Christianity. In the latter part of the chapter, we have entire confidence in our Father’s goodness to us, counting upon His mercy, certain that He regards us as of infinite value, and that, therefore, we need not be careful as the Gentiles are, because our Father knows what we have need of. It is enough for us to seek the kingdom of God, and His righteousness: our Father’s love cares for all the rest.

The last chapter (Matt. 7) presses on us the motives of heart in our intercourse with men and brethren, as well as with God, who, however good, loves that we should ask Him, and earnestly too, as to each need; the adequate consideration of what is due to others, and the energy that becomes ourselves; for the gate is strait, and narrow the way that leads to life; warnings against the devil and the suggestions of his agents, the false prophets, who betray themselves by their fruits; and, lastly, the all-importance of remembering that it is not a thing of knowledge, or of miraculous power even, but of doing God’s will, of a heart obedient to Christ’s sayings. Here, again, if I be not mistaken, righteousness and grace are found alternating; for the exhortation against a censorious spirit is grounded on the certainty of retribution from others, and paves the way for an urgent call to self-judgment, which in us precedes all genuine exercise of grace (Matt. 7:1-4). Further, the caution against a lavishing of what was holy and beautiful on the profane is followed by rich and repeated encouragements to count on our Father’s grace (Matt. 7:5-11).

Here, however, I must for the present pause, though one can only and deeply regret being obliged to pass so very cursorily over the ground; but I have sought in this first lecture to give thus far as simple, and at the same time as complete, a view of this portion of Matthew as I well could. I am perfectly aware that there has not been time for comparing it much with the others; but occasions will, I trust, offer for bringing into strong contrast the different aspects of the various Gospels. However, my aim is also that we should have before us our Lord, His person, His teaching, His way, in every Gospel.

I pray the Lord that what has been put, however scantily, before souls may at least stir up enquiry on the part of God’s children, and lead them to have perfect, absolute confidence in that word which is of His grace indeed. We may thus look for deep profit. For, although to enter upon the Gospels before the soul has been founded upon the grace of God will not leave us without a blessing, yet I am persuaded that the blessing is in every respect greater, when, having been attracted by the grace of Christ, we have at the same time been established in Him with all simplicity and assurance, in virtue of the accomplished work of redemption. Then, set free and at rest in our souls, we return to learn of Him, to look upon Him, to follow Him, to hear His word, to delight ourselves in His ways. The Lord grant that thus it may be, as we pursue our path through these different Gospels which our God has vouchsafed to us.
Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Gospels

Lecture 2

Matthew 8 – 20:28

Matt. 8, which opens the portion that comes before us to-night, is a striking illustration as well as proof of the method which God has been pleased to employ in giving us the apostle Matthew’s account of our Lord Jesus. The dispensational aim here leads to a more manifest disregard of the bare circumstance of time than in any other specimen of these Gospels. This is the more to be noticed, inasmuch as the Gospel of Matthew has been in general adopted as the standard of time, save by those who have rather inclined to Luke as supplying the desideratum. To me it is evident, from a careful comparison of them all, as I think it is capable of clear and adequate proof to an unprejudiced Christian mind, that neither Matthew nor Luke confines himself to such an order of events. Of course, both do preserve chronological order when it is compatible with the objects the Holy Spirit had in inspiring them; but in both the order of time is subordinated to still greater purposes which God had in view.

If we compare the eighth chapter, for example, with the corresponding circumstances, as far as they appear, in the Gospel of Mark, we shall find the latter gives us notes of time, which leave no doubt on my mind that Mark adheres to the scale of time; the design of the Holy Ghost required it, instead of dispensing with it in his case. The question fairly arises, Why is it that the Holy Ghost has been pleased so remarkably to leave time out of the question in this chapter, as well as in the next? The same indifference to the mere sequence of events is found occasionally in other parts of the Gospel; but I have purposely dwelt upon this chapter, Matt. 8, because here we have it throughout, and at the same time with evidence exceedingly simple and convincing.

The first thing to be remarked is, that the leper was an early incident in the manifestation of the healing power of our Lord. In his defilement he came to Jesus and sought to be cleansed, before the delivery of the sermon on the mount. Accordingly, notice that, in the manner in which the Holy Ghost introduces it, there is no statement of time whatever. No doubt the first verse says, that

when He was come down from the mount, great multitudes followed Him {Matt. 8:1};

but then the second verse gives no intimation that the subject which follows is to be taken as chronologically subsequent. It does not say, that “then there came a leper,” or “immediately there came a leper.” No word whatever implies that the cleansing of the leper happened at that time. It says simply,

And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean {Matt. 8:2}.

Matt. 8:4 seems quite adverse to the idea that great multitudes were witnesses of the cure; for why
tell no man,

if so many knew it already? Inattention to this has perplexed many. They have not seized the aim of each Gospel. They have treated the Bible either with levity, or as too awful a book to be apprehended really; not with the reverence of faith, which waits on Him, and fails not in due time to understand His word. God does not permit Scripture to be thus used without losing its force, its beauty, and the grand object for which it was written.

If we turn to Mark 1, the proof of what I have said will appear as to the leper. At its close we see the leper approaching the Lord, after He had been preaching throughout Galilee and casting out devils. In the Mark 2 it says,

And again he entered into Capernaum {Mark 2:1}.

He had been there before. Then, in Mark 3, there are notes of time more or less strong. In verse 13 our Lord went up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would: and they came unto him. And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach {Mark 3:13, 14}.

To him who compares this with the sixth chapter of Luke, there need not remain a question as to the identity of the scene. They are the circumstances that preceded the discourse upon the mount, as given in Matt. 5–7. It was after our Lord had called the twelve, and ordained them -- not after He had sent them forth, but after He had appointed them apostles -- that the Lord comes down to a plateau upon the mountain, instead of remaining upon the more elevated parts where He had been before. Descending then upon the plateau, He delivered what is commonly called the Sermon on the Mount.

Examine the Scripture, and you will see for yourselves. It is not a thing that can be settled by a mere assertion. On the other hand, it is not too much to say, that the same Scriptures which convince one unbiased mind that pays heed to these notes of time, will produce no less effect on others. If I assume from the words set forth in order {Luke 1:1},
in the beginning of Luke’s Gospel, that therefore his is the chronological account, it will only lead me into confusion,
both as to Luke and the other Gospels; for proofs abound that the order of Luke, most methodical as he is, is by no means absolutely that of time. Of course, there is often the order of time, but through the central part, and not infrequently elsewhere, his setting forth in order turns on another principle, quite independent of mere succession of events. In other words, it is certain that in the Gospel of Luke, in whose preface we have expressly the words

set in order,

the Holy Ghost does in no way tie Himself to what, after all, is the most elementary form of arrangement; for it needs little observation to see, that the simple sequence of facts as they occurred is that which demands a faithful enumeration, and nothing more. Whereas, on the contrary, there are other kinds of order that call for more profound thought and enlarged views, if we may speak now after the manner of men; and, indeed, I deny not that these the Holy Ghost employed in His own wisdom, though it is hardly needful to say He could, if He pleased, demonstrate His superiority to any means or qualifications whatsoever. He could and did form His instruments according to His own sovereign will. It is a question, then, of internal evidence, what that particular order is which God has employed in each different Gospel. Particular epochs in Luke are noted with great care; but, speaking now of the general course of the Lord’s life, a little attention will discover, from the immensely greater preponderance paid to the consideration of time in the second Gospel, that there we have events from first to last given to us in their consecutive order. It appears to me, that the nature or aim of Mark’s Gospel demands this. The grounds of such a judgment will naturally come before us ere long: I can merely refer to it now as my conviction.

If this be a sound judgment, the comparison of the first chapter of Mark affords decisive evidence that the Holy Ghost in Matthew has taken the leper out of the mere time and circumstances of actual occurrence, and has reserved his case for a wholly different service. It is true that in this particular instance Mark no more surrounds the leper with notes of time and place than do Matthew and Luke. We are dependent, therefore, for determining this case, on the fact that Mark does habitually adhere to the chain of events. But if Matthew here laid aside all question of time, it was in view of other and weightier considerations for his object. In other words, the leper is here introduced after the sermon on the mount, though, in fact, the circumstance took place long before it. The design is, I think, manifest: the Spirit of God is here giving a vivid picture of the manifestation of the Messiah, of His divine glory, of His grace and power, with the effect of this manifestation. Hence it is that He has grouped together circumstances which make this plain, without raising the question of when they occurred; in fact, they range over a large space, and, otherwise viewed, are in total disorder. Thus it is easy to see, that the reason for here putting together the leper and the centurion lies in the Lord’s dealing with the Jew, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, in His deep grace working in the Gentile’s heart, and forming his faith, as well as answering it, according to His own heart. The leper approaches the Lord with homage, but with a most inadequate belief in His love and readiness to meet his need. The Saviour, while He puts forth His hand, touching him as man, and yet as none but Jehovah might dare to do, dispels the hopeless disease at once. Thus, and after the tenderest sort, there is that which evidences the Messiah on earth present to heal His people who appeal to Him; and the Jew, above all counting upon His bodily presence -- demanding it, I may say, according to the warrant of prophecy, finds in Jesus not merely the man, but the God of Israel. Who but God could heal? Who could touch the leper save Emmanuel? A mere Jew would have been defiled. He who gave the law maintained its authority, and used it as an occasion for testifying His own power and presence. Would any man make of the Messiah a mere man and a mere subject of the law given by Moses? Let them read their error in One who was evidently superior to the condition and the ruin of man in Israel. Let them recognize the power that banished the leprosy, and the grace withal that touched the leper. It was true that He was made of woman, and made under the law; but He was Jehovah Himself, that lowly Nazarene. However suitable to the Jewish expectation that He should be found a man, undeniably there was that apparent which was infinitely above the Jew’s thought; for the Jew showed his own degradation and unbelief in the low ideas he entertained of the Messiah. He was really God in man; and all these wonderful features are here presented and compressed in this most simple, but at the same time significant, action of the Saviour -- the fitting frontispiece to Matthew’s manifestation of the Messiah to Israel.

In immediate juxtaposition to this stands the Gentile centurion, who seeks healing for his servant. Considerable time, it is true, elapsed between the two facts; but this only makes it the more sure and plain, that they are grouped together with a divine purpose. The Lord then had been shown such as He was towards Israel, had Israel in their leprosy come to Him, as did the leper, even with a faith exceedingly short of that which was due to His real glory and His love. But Israel had no sense of their leprosy; and they valued not, but despised, their Messiah, albeit divine -- I might almost say because divine. Next, we behold Him meeting the centurion after another manner altogether. If He offers to go to his house, it was to bring out the faith that He had created in the heart of the centurion. Gentile as he was, he was for that very reason the less narrowed in his thoughts of the Saviour by the prevalent notions of Israel, yea, or even by Old Testament hopes, precious as they are. God had given his soul a deeper, fuller sight of Christ; for the Gentile’s words prove that he had apprehended God in the man who was healing at that moment all sickness and disease in Galilee. I say not how far he had realized this profound truth; I say not that he could have defined his thoughts; but he knew and declared His command of all as truly God. In him there was a spiritual force far beyond that found in the leper, to whom the hand that touched, as well as cleansed him, proclaimed Israel’s need and state as truly as Emmanuel’s grace.
As for the Gentile, the Lord's proffer to go and heal his servant brought out the singular strength of his faith.

Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof {Matt. 8:8}.

He had only to say in a word, and his servant should be healed. The bodily presence of the Messiah was not needed. God could not be limited by a question of place; His word was enough. Disease must obey Him, as the soldier or the servant obeyed the centurion, their superior. What an anticipation of the walk by faith, not by sight, in which the Gentiles, when called, ought to have glorified God, when the rejection of the Messiah by His own ancient people gave occasion to the Gentile call as a distinct thing! It is evident that the bodily presence of the Messiah is the very essence of the former scene, as it ought to be in dealing with the leper, who is a kind of type of what Israel should have been in seeking cleansing at His hands. So, on the other hand, the centurion sets forth with no less aptness the characteristic faith that suits the Gentile, in a simplicity which looks for nothing but the word of His mouth, is perfectly content with it, knows that, whatever the disease may be, He has only to speak the word, and it is done according to His divine will. That blessed One was here whom He knew to be God, who was to Him the impersonation of divine power and goodness -- His presence was uncalled for, His word more than enough.

The Lord admired the faith superior to Israel’s, and took that occasion to intimate the casting out of the sons or natural heirs of the kingdom, and the entrance of many of them into the kingdom. What can be conceived so perfectly to illustrate the great design of the Gospel of Matthew?

Thus, in the scene of the leper, we have Jesus presented as

Jehovah that healeth Israel {see Ex. 15:26},

as man here below, and in Jewish relationships, still maintaining the law. Next, we find Him confessed by the centurion, no longer as the Messiah, when actually with them, confessed according to a faith which saw the deeper glory of His person as supreme, competent to heal, no matter where, or whom, or what, by a word; and this the Lord Himself hails as the foreshadowing of a rich incoming of many multitudes to the praise of His name, when the Jews should be cast out. Evidently it is the change of dispensation that is in question and at hand, the cutting off of the fleshy seed for their unbelief, and the bringing in of numerous believers in the name of the Lord from among the Gentiles.

Then follows another incident, which equally proves that the Spirit of God is not here reciting the facts in their natural succession; for it is assuredly not at this moment historically that the Lord goes into the house of Peter, sees there his wife’s mother laid sick of a fever, touches her hand, and raises her up, so that she ministers unto them at once. In this we have another striking illustration of the same principle, because this miracle, in point of fact, was wrought long before the healing of the centurion’s servant, or even of the leper. This, too, we ascertain from Mark 1, where there are clear marks of the time. The Lord was in Capernaum, where Peter lived; and on a certain Sabbath-day, after the call of Peter, wrought in the synagogue mighty deeds, which are here recorded, and by Luke also. Mark 1:29 gives us strict time.

And forthwith when they were come out of the synagogue they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John; but Simon’s wife’s mother was sick of a fever, and anon they tell him of her. And he came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up, and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them {Mark 1:29-31}.

It would require the credulity of a sceptic to believe that this is not the self-same fact that we have before us in Matt. 8. I feel sure that no Christian harbours a doubt about it. But if this be so, there is here absolute certainty that our Lord, on the very Sabbath in which He cast out the unclean spirit from the man in the synagogue of Capernaum, immediately after quitting the synagogue, entered the house of Peter, and that there and then He healed Peter’s wife’s mother of the fever. Subsequent, considerably, to this was the case of the centurion’s servant, preceded a good while before by the cleansing of the leper.

How are we to account for a selection so marked, an elimination of time so complete? Surely not by inaccuracy; surely not by indifference to order, but contrariwise by divine wisdom that arranged the facts with a view to a purpose worthy of itself: God’s arrangement of all things -- more particularly in this part of Matthew -- to give us an adequate manifestation of the Messiah; and, as we have seen, first, what He was to the appeal of the Jew; next, what He was and would be to Gentile faith, in still richer form and fulness. So now we have, in the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law, another fact containing a principle of great value, -- that His grace towards the Gentile does not in the least degree blunt His heart to the claims of relationship after the flesh. It was clearly a question of connection with the apostle of the circumcision (i.e. Peter’s wife’s mother). We have the natural tie here brought into prominence; and this was a claim that Christ slighted not. For He loved Peter -- felt for him, and his wife’s mother was precious in His sight. This sets forth not at all the way in which the Christian stands related to Christ; for even though we had known Him after the flesh, henceforth know we Him no more. But it is expressly the pattern after which He was to deal, and will deal, with Israel. Zion may say of the Lord who laboured in vain, whom the nation abhorred,

The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me {Isa. 49:14}.

Not so.

Can a woman forget her sucking child? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands {Isa. 49:15, 16}.

Thus it is shown that, though we have rich grace to the Gentile, there is the remembrance of natural relationship still.

In the evening multitudes are brought, taking advantage of the power that had so shown itself; publicly in the
synagogue, and privately in the house of Peter; and the Lord accomplished the words of Isa. 53:4:

Himself,
it is said,

took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses,
an oracle we might do well to consider in the light of its application here. In what sense did Jesus, our Lord, take their infirmities, and bear their sicknesses? In this, as I believe, that He never employed the virtue that was in Him to meet sickness or infirmity as a matter of mere power, but in deep compassionate feeling He entered into the whole reality of the case. He healed, and bore its burden on His heart before God, as truly as He took it away from men. It was precisely because He was Himself untouchable by sickness and infirmity, that He was free so to take up each consequence of sin thus. Therefore it was not a mere simple fact that He banished sickness or infirmity, but He carried them in His spirit before God. To my mind, the depth of such grace only enhances the beauty of Jesus, and is the very last possible ground that justifies man in thinking lightly of the Saviour.

After this our Lord sees great multitudes following Him, and gives commandment to go to the other side. Here again is found a fresh case of the same remarkable principle of selection of events to form a complete picture, which I have maintained to be the true key of all. The Spirit of God has been pleased to cull and class facts otherwise unconnected; for here follow conversations that took place a long time after any of the events we have been occupied with. When do you suppose these conversations actually occurred, if we go to the question of their date? Take notice of the care with which the Spirit of God here omits all reference to this:

And a certain scribe came [Matt. 8:19].

There is no note of the time when he came, but simply the fact that he did come. It was really after the transfiguration recorded in Matt. 17. Subsequently to that, the scribe offered to follow Jesus whithersoever He went. We know this by comparing it with the Gospel of Luke. And so with the other conversation:

Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father [Matt. 8:21];
it was after the glory of Christ had been witnessed on the holy mount, when man's selfishness of heart shewed itself in contrast to the grace of God.

Next, the storm follows.

There arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves; but he was asleep [Matt. 8:24].

When did this take place, if we enquire into it merely as a matter of historical fact? On the evening of the day when He delivered the seven parables given in Matt. 13. The truth of this is apparent, if we compare the Gospel of Mark. Thus, the fourth chapter of Mark coincides, marked with such data as can leave no doubt. We have, first, the sower sowing the word. Then, after the parable of the mustard seed (Mark 4:33), it is added,

And with many such parables spake he the word unto them . . . . and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples [in both the parables and the explanations alluding to what we possess in Matt. 13]. And the same day, when the even was come, he saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side. [There is what I call a clear, unmistakable note of time.] And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships. And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish? And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith? And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him? [Mark 4:33-41].

After this (what makes it still more unquestionable) comes the case of the demoniac. It is true, we have only one in Mark, as in Luke; whereas in our Gospel we have two. Nothing can be simpler. There were two; but the Spirit of God chose out, in Mark and Luke, the more remarkable of the two, and traces for us his history, a history of no small interest and importance, as we may feel when we come to Mark; but it was of equal moment for the Gospel of Matthew that the two demoniacs should be mentioned here, although one of them was in himself, as I gather, a far more strikingly desperate case than the other. The reason I consider to be plain; and the same principle applies to various other parts of our Gospel where we have two cases mentioned, and in the other Gospels we have only one. The key to it is this, that Matthew was led by the Holy Ghost to keep in view adequate testimony to the Jewish people; it was the tender goodness of God that would meet them in a manner that was suitable under the law. Now, it was an established principle, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word should be established. This, then, I apprehend to be the reason why we find two demoniacs mentioned; whereas, in Mark or Luke, for other purposes, the Spirit of God only draws attention to one of the two. A Gentile (indeed, any mind not under any kind of legal prejudice or difficulty) would be far more moved by a detailed account of what was more conspicuous. The fact of two without the personal details would not powerfully tell upon mere Gentiles perhaps, though to a Jew it might be for some ends necessary. I do not pretend to say that this was the only purpose served; far be it from me to think of restraining the Spirit of God within the narrow bounds of our vision. Let none suppose that, in giving my own convictions, I have the presumptuous thought of putting these forward as if they were the sole motives in God’s mind. It is enough to meet a difficulty which many feel by the simple plea that the reason assigned is in my judgment a valid explanation, and in itself a sufficient solution of the apparent discrepancy. If it be so, it is surely a ground of thankfulness to God; for it turns a stumbling-block into an evidence of the perfection of
Scripture.

Reviewing, then, these closing incidents of the chapter (Matt. 8:19-22), we find first of all the utter worthlessness of the flesh's readiness to follow Jesus. The motives of the natural heart are laid bare. Does this scribe offer to follow Jesus? He was not called. Such is the perversity of man, that he who is not called thinks he can follow Jesus whithersoever He goes. The Lord hints at what the man's real desires were -- not Christ, not heaven, not eternity, but present things. If he were willing to follow the Lord, it was for what he could get. The scribe had no heart for the hidden glory. Surely, had he seen this, everything was there; but he saw it not, and so the Lord spread out His actual portion, as it literally was, without one word about the unseen and eternal.

The foxes,
says He,

have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but
the Son of man hath not where to lay his head {Matt. 8:20}.

He takes accordingly the title of the Son of man

for the first time in this Gospel. He has His rejection before His eyes, as well as the presumptuous unbelief of this sordid, and self-confident, would-be follower.

Again, when we listen to another (and now it is one of His disciples), at once faith shows its feebleness. Suffer me first, he says,

to go and bury my father {Matt. 8:21}.

The man that was not called promises to go anywhere in his own strength; but the man that was called feels the difficulty, and pleads a natural duty before following Jesus. Oh, what a heart is ours! but what a heart was His!

In the next scene, then, we have the disciples as a whole tried by a sudden danger to which their sleeping Master paid no heed. This tested their thoughts of the glory of Jesus. No doubt the tempest was great; but what harm could it do to Jesus? No doubt the ship was covered with the waves; but how could that imperil the Lord of all? They forgot His glory in their own anxiety and selfishness. They measured Jesus by their own impotence. A great tempest and a sinking ship are serious difficulties to a man.

Lord, save us; we perish {Matt. 8:25}.

cried they, as they awoke Him; and He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea. Little faith leaves us as fearful for ourselves as dim witnesses of His glory whom the most unruly elements obey.

In what follows we have that which is necessary to complete the picture of the other side. The Lord works in delivering power; but withal the power of Satan fills and carries away the unclean to their own destruction. Yet man, in face of all, is so deceived of the enemy, that he prefers to be left with the demons rather than enjoy the presence of the Deliverer. Such was and is man. But the future is in view also. The delivered demoniacs are, to my mind, clearly the foreshadow of the Lord's grace in the latter days separating a remnant to Himself, and banishing the power of Satan from this small but sufficient witness of His salvation. The evil spirits asked leave to pass into the herd of swine, which thus typify the final condition of the defiled apostate mass of Israel: their presumptuous and impenitent unbelief reduces them to that deep degradation -- not merely the unclean, but the unclean filled with the power of Satan, and carried down to swift destruction. It is a just prefiguration of what will be in the close of the age -- the mass of the unbelieving Jews, now impure, but then also given up to the devil, and so to evident perdition.

Thus, in the chapter before us, we have a very comprehensive sketch of the Lord's manifestation from that time, and in type going on to the end of the age. In the chapter that follows we have a companion picture, carrying on, no doubt, the Lord's presentation to Israel, but from a different point of view; for in Matt. 9 it is not merely the people tried, but more especially the religious leaders, till all closes in blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. This was testing matters more closely. Had there been a single thing good in Israel, their choicest guides would have stood that test. The people might have failed; but, surely, there were some differences -- surely those that were honoured and valued could not be so depraved! The anointed priests in the house of God -- would not they at least receive their own Messiah? This question is accordingly put to the proof in Matt. 9. To the end the events are put together, just as in Matt. 8, without regard to the point of time when they occurred.

And he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city {Matt. 9:1}.

Having left Nazareth, as we saw, He takes up His abode in Capernaum, which was henceforth his own city.

To the proud inhabitant of Jerusalem, both one and the other were but a choice and change within a land of darkness. But it was for a land of darkness and sin and death that Jesus came from heaven -- the Messiah, not according to their thoughts, but the Lord and Saviour, the God-man. So in this case there was brought to Him a paralytic man, lying upon a bed;

and Jesus, seeing their faith, said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee {Matt. 9:2}.

Most clearly it is not so much a question of sin in the aspect of uncleanness (typifying deeper things, but still connected with the ceremonial requirements of Israel, as we find from what our Lord said in the chapter to the cleansed leper). It is more particularly sin, viewed as guilt, and consequently as that which absolutely breaks and destroys all power in the soul towards both God and man. Hence, here it is a question not merely of cleansing, but of forgiveness, and forgiveness, too, as that which precedes power manifested before men. There never can be strength in the soul till forgiveness is known. There may be desires, and the real working of the Spirit of God in the soul, but there can be no power to walk
before men and to glorify God thus till there is forgiveness possessed and enjoyed in the heart. This was the very blessing that aroused, above all, the hatred of the scribes. The priest in Matt. 8 could not deny what was done in the case of the leper, who showed himself duly, and brought his offering, according to the law, to the altar. Though a testimony to them, still it was in the result a recognition of what Moses commanded. But here pardon dispensed on earth arouses the pride of the religious leaders to the quick, and implacably. Nevertheless, the Lord did not withhold the infinite boon, though He knew too well their thoughts; He spoke the word of forgiveness, though He read their evil heart that counted it blasphemy. This utter growing rejection of Jesus was coming out now -- rejection, at first allowed and whispered in the heart, soon to be pronounced in words like drawn swords.

And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth [Matt. 9:3].

Jesus blessedly answered their thoughts, had there only been a conscience to hear the word of power and grace, which brings out His glory the more.

That ye may know,

He says,

that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, &c. [Matt. 9:6].

He now takes His place of rejection; for Him it is manifest even now by their inmost thoughts of Him though not revealed.

This man blasphemeth [Matt. 9:3].

Yet is He the Son of man who hath power on earth to forgive sins; and He uses His authority.

That ye may know it,

(them saith He to the sick of the palsy), Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house [Matt. 9:6].

The man's walk before them testifies to the reality of his forgiveness before God. It ought to be so with every forgiven soul. This as yet draws out wonder, at least from the witnessing multitudes, that God had given such power unto men. They glorified God.

On this the Lord proceeds to take a step farther, and makes a deeper inroad, if possible, upon Jewish prejudice. He is not here sought as by the leper, the centurion, the friends of the palsied man; He Himself calls Matthew, a publican -- just the one to write the Gospel of the despised Jesus of Nazareth. What instrument so suitable? It was a scorned Messiah who, when rejected of His own people Israel, turned to the Gentiles by the will of God: it was One who could look upon publicans and sinners anywhere. Thus, Matthew, called at the very receipt of custom, follows Jesus, and makes a feast for Him. This furnishes occasion to the Pharisees to vent their unbelief: to them nothing is so offensive as grace, either in doctrine or in practice. The scribes, at the beginning of the chapter, could not hide from the Lord their bitter rejection of His glory as man on earth entitled, as His humiliation and cross would prove, to forgive. Here, too, these Pharisees question and reproach His grace, when they see the Lord sitting at ease in the presence of publicans and sinners, who came and sat down with Him in Matthew's house. They said to His disciples,


The Lord shows that such unbelief justly and necessarily excludes itself, but not others, from blessing. To heal was the work for which He was come. It was not for the whole the Physician was needed. How little they had learnt the divine lesson of grace, not ordinances!

I will have mercy, and not sacrifice [Matt. 9:13].

Jesus was there to call, not righteous men, but sinners.

Nor was the unbelief confined to these religionists of letter and form; for next the question comes from John's disciples:

Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not? [Matt. 9:14].

Throughout it is the religious kind that are tested and found wanting. The Lord pleads the cause of the disciples.

Can the children of the bridegroom mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? [Matt. 9:15].

Fasting, indeed, would follow when the Bridegroom was taken from them. Thus He points out the utter moral incongruity of fasting at that moment, and intimates that it was not merely the fact that He was going to be rejected, but that to conciliate His teaching and His will with the old thing was hopeless. What He was introducing could not mix with Judaism. Thus it was not merely that there was an evil heart of unbelief in the Jew particularly, but law and grace cannot be yoked together.

No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment; for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse [Matt. 9:16].

Nor was it only a difference in the forms the truth took; but the vital principle which Christ was diffusing could not be so maintained.

Neither do men put new wine into old bottles, else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish; but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved [Matt. 9:17].

The spirit, as well as the form, was alien.

But at the same time it is plain, although He bore the consciousness of the vast change He was introducing, and expressed it thus fully and early in the history, nothing turned away His heart from Israel. The very next scene, the case of Jairus, the ruler, shows it.

My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live [Matt. 9:18].

The details, found elsewhere, of her being at the point of death -- then, before reaching the house, the news that she was dead, are not here. Whatever the time may have been, whatever the incidents added by others, the account is given
here for the purpose of showing, that as Israel’s case was
desperate, even unto death, so He, the Messiah, was the giver
of life, when all, humanly speaking, was over. He was then
present, a man despised, yet with title to forgive sins, proved
by immediate power to heal. If those who trusted in
themselves that they were wise and righteous would not have
Him, He would call even a publican on the spot to be among
the most honoured of His followers, and would not disdain to
be their joy when they desired His honour in the exercise of
His grace. Sorrow would come full soon when He, the
Bridegroom of His people, should be taken away; and then
should they fast.

Nevertheless, His ear was open to the call on behalf of
Israel perishing, dying, dead. He had been preparing them for
the new things, and the impossibility of making them coalesce
with the old. But none the less do we find His affections
engaged for the help of the helpless. He goes to raise the
dead, and the woman with the issue of blood touches Him by
the way. No matter what the great purpose might be, He was
there for faith. Far different this was from the errand on
which He was intent; but He was there for faith. It was His
meat to do the will of God. He was there for the express
purpose of glorifying God. Power and love were come for
any one to draw on. If there were, so to speak, a justification
of circumcision by faith, undoubtedly there was also the
justification of uncircumcision through their faith. The
question was not who or what came in the way; whoever
appealed to Him, there He was for them. And He was Jesus,
Emmanuel. When He reaches the house, minstrels were
there, and people, making a noise: the expression, if of woe,
certainly of impotent despair. They mock the calm utterance
of Him who chooses things that are not; and the Lord turns
out the unbelievers, and demonstrates the glorious truth that
the maid was not dead, but living.

Nor is this all. He gives sight to the blind.

And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men
followed him, crying and saying, Thou Son of
David, have mercy on us {Matt. 9:27}.

It was necessary to complete the picture. Life had been
imparted to the sleeping maid of Zion -- the blind men call on
Him as the Son of David, and not in vain. They confess their
faith, and He touches their eyes. Thus, whatever the
peculiarity of the new blessings, the old thing could be taken
up, though upon new grounds, and, of course, on the
confession that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
The two blind men called upon Him as the Son of David; a
sample this of what will be in the end, when the heart of
Israel turns to the Lord, and the vail is done away.

According to your faith be it done unto you
{Matt. 9:29}.

It is not enough that Israel be awakened from the sleep of
death, and see aright. There must be the mouth to praise the
Lord, and speak of the glorious honour of His majesty, as
well as eyes to wait on Him. So we have a farther scene.
Israel must give full testimony in the bright day of His
coming. Accordingly, here we have a witness of it, and a
witness so much the sweeter, because the present total
rejection that was filling the heart of the leaders surely
testified to the Lord’s heart of that which was at hand. But
nothing turned aside the purpose of God, or the activity of
His grace.

As they went out, behold, they brought to him a
dumb man possessed with a devil. And when the
devil was come out, the dumb spake: and the
multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in
Israel. {See Matt. 9:32, 33.}

The Pharisees were enraged at a power they could not deny,
which rebuked themselves so much the more on account of its
persistent grace; but Jesus passes by all blasphemy as yet, and
goes on His way -- nothing hinders His course of love. He
goes about all the cities and villages, teaching in
their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the
kingdom, and healing every sickness and every
disease among the people {Matt. 9:35}.

The faithful and true witness, it was His to display that power
in goodness which shall be put forth fully in the world to
come, the great day when the Lord will manifest Himself to
every eye as Son of David, and Son of man too.

At the close of this chapter Matt. 9, in His deep
compassion He bids the disciples pray the Lord of the harvest
to send forth labourers into His harvest. At the beginning of
Matt. 10 He Himself sends forth themselves as labourers. He
is the Lord of the harvest. It was a grave step this, and in
view of His rejection now. In our Gospel we have not seen
the apostles called and ordained. Matthew gives no such
details, but call and mission are together here. But, as I have
stated, the choice and ordination of the twelve apostles had
really taken place before the sermon on the mount, though not
mentioned in Matthew, but in Mark and Luke. {Compare
Mark 3:13-19, and 6:7-11; Luke 6 and 9.} The mission of the
apostles did not take place till afterwards. In Matthew we
have no distinction of their call from their mission. But the
mission is given here in strict accordance with what the
Gospel demands. It is a summons from the King to His
people Israel. So thoroughly is it in view of Israel, that our
Lord does not say one word here about the Church, or the
intervening condition of Christendom. He speaks of Israel
then, and of Israel before He comes in glory, but He entirely
omits any notice of the circumstances which were to come in
by the way. He tells them that they should not have gone over
(or finished) the cities of Israel till the Son of man be come.
Not that His own rejection was not before His spirit, but here
He looks not beyond that land and people; and, as far as the
twelve were concerned, He sends them on a mission which
goes on to the end of the age. Thus, the present dealings of
God in grace, the actual shape taken by the kingdom of
heaven, the calling of the Gentiles, the formation of the
Church, are all passed completely over. We shall find
something of these mysteries later on in this Gospel; but here
it is simply a Jewish testimony of Jehovah-Messiah in His
unwearied love, through His twelve heralds, and in spite of
rising unbelief, maintaining to the end what His grace had in
view for Israel. He would send fit messengers, nor would the
work be done till the rejected Messiah, the Son of man,
came. The apostles were then sent thus, no doubt forerunners of those whom the Lord will raise up for the latter day. Time would fail now to dwell on this chapter, interesting as it is. My object, of course, is to point out as clearly as possible the structure of the Gospel, and to explain according to my measure why there are these strong differences between the Gospel of Matthew and the rest, as compared with one another. The ignorance is wholly on our side: all they say or omit was owing to the far-reaching and gracious wisdom of Him who inspired them.

Acts 11, exceedingly critical for Israel, and of surpassing beauty, as it is, must not be passed over without some few words. Here we find our Lord, after sending out the chosen witnesses of the truth (so momentous to Israel, above all) of His own Messiahship, realizing His utter rejection, yet rejoicing withal in God the Father’s counsels of glory and grace, while the real secret in the chapter, as in fact, was His being not Messiah only, nor Son of man, but the Son of the Father, whose person none knows but Himself. But, from first to last, what a trial of spirit, and what triumph! Some consider that John the Baptist enquired solely for the sake of his disciples. But I see no sufficient reason to refuse the impression that John found it hard to reconcile his continued imprisonment with a present Messiah; nor do I discern a sound judgment of the case, or a profound knowledge of the heart, in those who thus raise doubts as to John’s sincerity, any more than they appear to me to exalt the character of this honoured man of God, by supposing him to play a part which really belonged to others. What can be simpler than that John put the question through his disciples, because he (not they only) had a question in the mind? It probably was no more than a grave though passing difficulty, which he desired to have cleared up with all fulness for their sakes, as well as his own. In short, he had a question because he was a man. It is not for us surely to think this impossible. Have we, spite of superior privileges, such unwavering faith, that we can afford to treat the matter as incredible in John, and therefore only capable of solution in his staggering disciples? Let those who have so little experience of what man is, even in the regenerate, beware lest they impute to the Baptist such an acting of a part as shocks us, when Jerome imputed it to Peter and Paul in the censure of Gal. 2. The Lord, no doubt, knew the heart of His servant, and could feel for him in the effect that circumstances took upon him. When He uttered the words,

Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me
{Matt. 11:6},

it is to me evident that there was an allusion to the wavering, let it be but for a moment, of John’s soul. The fact is, beloved brethren, there is but one Jesus; and whoever it may be, whether John the Baptist, or the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, after all it is divinely-given faith which alone sustains: else man has to learn painfully somewhat of himself; and what is he to be accounted of?

Our Lord then answers, with perfect dignity, as well as grace; He puts before the disciples of John the real state of the case; He furnishes them with plain, positive facts, that could leave nothing to be desired by John’s mind when he weighed all as a testimony from God. This done, with a word for the conscience appended, He takes up and pleads the cause of John. It ought to have been John’s place to have proclaimed the glory of Jesus; but all things in this world are the reverse of what they ought to be, and of what they will be when Jesus takes the throne, coming in power and glory. But when the Lord was here, no matter what the unbelief of others, it was only an opportunity for the grace of Jesus to shine out. So it was here; and our Lord turns to eternal account, in His own goodness, the shortcoming of John the baptist, the greatest of women-born. Far from lowering the position of His servant, He declares there was none greater among mortal men. The failure of this greatest of women-born only gives Him the just occasion to show the total change at hand, when it should not be a question of man, but of God, yea, of the kingdom of heaven, the least in which new state should be greater than John. And what makes this still more striking, is the certainty that the kingdom, bright as it is, is by no means the thing nearest to Jesus. The Church, which is His body and bride, has a far more intimate place, even though true of the same persons.

Next, He lays bare the capricious unbelief of man, only consistent in thwarting every thing and one that God employs for His good; then, His own entire rejection where He had most laboured. It was going on, then, to the bitter end, and surely not without such suffering and sorrow as holy, unselfish, obedient love alone can know. Wretched we, that we should need such proof of it; wretched, that we should be so slow of heart to answer to it, or even to feel its immensity!

Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. . . . At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father {Matt. 11:20-25}.

What feelings at such a time! Oh, for grace so to bow and bless God, even when our little travail seems in vain! At that time Jesus answered,

I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight {Matt. 11:25, 26}.

We seem completely borne away from the ordinary level of our Gospel to the higher region of the disciple whom Jesus loved. We are, in fact, in the presence of that which John so loves to dwell on -- Jesus viewed not merely as Son of David or Abraham, or Seed of the woman, but as the Father’s Son, the Son as the Father gave, sent, appreciated, and loved Him. So, when more is added, He says,

All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to
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whomsoever the Son will reveal him. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest {Matt. 11:27, 28}.

This, of course, is not the moment to unfold it. I merely indicate by the way how the thorough increasing rejection of the Lord Jesus in His lower glory has but the effect of bringing out the revelation of His higher. So, I believe now, there is no attempt ever made on the Name of the Son of God, there is not a single shaft levelled at Him, but the Spirit turns to the holy, and true, and sweet task of asserting anew and more loudly His glory, which enlarges the expression of His grace to man. Only tradition will not do this work, nor will human thoughts or feelings.

In Matt. 12 we find not so much Jesus present and despised of men, as these men of Israel, the rejectors, in the presence of Jesus. Hence, the Lord Jesus is here disclosing throughout, that the doom of Israel was pronounced and impending. If it was His rejection, these scornful men were themselves rejected in the very act. The plucking of the corn, and the healing of the withered hand, had taken place long before. Mark gives them in the end of his second and the beginning of his third chapters. Why are they postponed here? Because Matthew’s object is the display of the change of dispensation through, or consequent on, the rejection of Jesus by the Jews. Hence, he waits to present their rejection of the Messiah, as morally complete as possible in his statement of it, though necessarily not complete in outward accomplishment. Of course, the facts of the cross were necessary to give it an evident and literal fulfilment; but we have it first apparent in His life, and it is blessed to see it thus accomplished, as it were, in what passed with Himself, fully realized in His own Spirit, and the results exposed before the external facts gave the fullest expression to Jewish unbelief. He was not taken by surprise; He knew it from the beginning. Man’s imitable hatred is brought about most manifestly in the ways and spirit of His rejectors. The Lord Jesus, even before He pronounced the sentence, for so it was, indicated what was at hand in these two instances of the Sabbath-day, though one may not now linger on them. The first is the defence of the disciples, grounded on analogies taken from that which had the sanction of God of old, as well as on His own glory now. Reject Him as the Messiah; in that rejection the moral glory of the Son of man would be laid as the foundation of His exaltation and manifestation another day; He was the Lord of the Sabbath-day. In the next incident the force of the plea turns on God’s goodness towards the wretchedness of man. It is not only the fact that God slighted matters of prescriptive ordinance because of the ruined state of Israel, who rejected His true anointed King, but there was this principle also, that certainly God was not going to bind Himself not to do good where abject need was. It might be well enough for a Pharisee; it might be worthy of a legal formalist, but it would never do for God; and the Lord Jesus was come here not to accommodate Himself to their thoughts, but, above all, to do God’s will of holy love in an evil, wretched world.

Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased

{Matt. 12:18}.

In truth, this was Emmanuel, God with us. If God was there, what else could He, would He do? Lowly, noiseless grace now it was to be, according to the prophet, till the hour strikes for victory in judgment. So He meekly retires, healing, yet forbidding it to be blazed abroad. But still, it was His carrying on the great process of shewing out more and more the total rejection of His rejectors. Hence, lower down in the chapter, after the demon was cast out of the blind and dumb man before the amazed people, the Pharisees, irritated by their question, Is not this the Son of David? essayed to destroy the testimony with their utmost and blasphemous contempt.

This [fellow] doth not cast out devils, &c. {Matt. 12:24}.

The English translators have thus given the sense well; for the expression really conveys this slight; though the word fellow is printed in italics. The Greek word is constantly so used as an expression of contempt.

This [fellow] doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils {Matt. 12:24}.

The Lord now lets them know their mad folly, and warns them that this blasphemy was about to culminate in a still deeper, deadlier form when the Holy Ghost should be spoken against as He had been. Men little weigh what their words will sound and prove in the day of judgment. He sets forth the sign of the prophet Jonah, the repentance of the men of Nineveh, the preaching of Jonah, and the earnest zeal of the queen of the south in Solomon’s day, when an incomparably greater was there despised. But if He here does not go beyond a hint of that which the Gentiles were about to receive on the ruinous unbelief and judgment of the Jew, He does not keep back their own awful course and doom in the figure that follows. Their state had long been that of a man whom the unclean spirit had left, after a former dwelling in him. Outwardly it was a condition of comparative cleanliness. Idols, abominations, no longer infected that dwelling as of old. Then says the unclean spirit,

I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation {Matt. 12:44, 45}.

Thus He sets forth both the past, the present, and the awful future of Israel, before the day of His own coming from heaven, when there will be not only the return of idolatry, solemn to say, but the full power of Satan associated with it, as we see in Dan. 11:36-39; 2 Thess. 2; Rev. 13:11-15. It is clear that the unclean spirit, returning, brings idolatry back again. It is equally clear that the seven worse spirits mean the complete energy of the devil in the maintenance of Antichrist against the true Christ: and this, strange to say, along with idols. Thus the end is as the beginning, and even far, far worse. On this the Lord takes another step, when one said to
Him,

Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee {Matt. 12:47}.

A double action follows.

Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? {Matt. 12:48}, said the Lord; and then stretched forth His hand toward His disciples with the words,

Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother {Matt. 12:49, 50}.

Thus the old link with the flesh, with Israel, is now disowned; and the new relationships of faith, founded on doing the will of His Father (it is not a question of the law in any sort), are alone acknowledged. Hence the Lord would raise up a fresh testimony altogether, and do a new work suitable to it. This would not be a legal claim on man, but the scattering of good seed, life and fruit from God, and this in the unlimited field of the world, not in the land of Israel merely. In Matt. 13 we have the well-known sketch of these new ways of God. The kingdom of heaven assumes a form unknown to prophecy and, in its successive mysteries, fills up the interval between the rejected Christ’s going to heaven, and His returning again in glory.

Many words are not now required for that which is happily familiar to most here. Let me passingly notice a very few particulars. We have here not only our Lord’s ministry in the first parable, but in the second parable that which He does by His servants. Then follows the rise of what was great in its littleness till it became little in its greatness in the earth; and the development and spread of doctrine, till the measured space assigned to it is brought under its assimilating influence. It is not here a question of life (as in the seed at first), but a system of Christian doctrine; not life germinating and bearing fruit, but mere dogma -- natural mind -- which is exposed to it. Thus the great tree and the leavened mass are in fact the two sides of Christendom. Then inside the house we have not only the Lord explaining the parable, the history from first to last of the tares and wheat, the mingling of evil with the good which grace had sown, but more than that, we have the kingdom viewed according to divine thoughts and purposes. First of these comes the treasure hidden in the field, for which the man sells all he had, securing the field for the sake of the treasure. Next is the one pearl of great price, the unity and beauty of that which was so dear to the merchantman. Not merely were there many pieces of value, but one pearl of great price. Finally, we have all wound up, after the going forth of a testimony which was truly universal in its scope, by the judicial severance at the close, when it is not only the good put into vessels, but the bad dealt with by the due instruments of the power of God.

In Matt. 14 facts are narrated which manifest the great change of dispensation that the Lord, in setting forth the parables we have just noticed, had been preparing them for. The violent man, Herod, guilty of innocent blood, then reigned in the land, in contrast with whom goes Jesus into the wilderness, showing who and what He was -- the Shepherd of Israel, ready and able to care for the people. The disciples most inadequately perceive His glory; but the Lord acts according to His own mind. After this, dismissing the multitudes, He retires alone, to pray, on a mountain, as the disciples toil over the storm-tossed lake, the wind being contrary. It is a picture of what was about to take place when the Lord Jesus, quitting Israel and the earth, ascends on high, and all assumes another form -- not the reign upon earth, but intercession in heaven. But at the end, when His disciples are in the extremity of trouble, in the midst of the sea, the Lord walks on the sea toward them, and bids them not fear; for they were troubled and afraid. Peter asks a word from His Master, and leaves the ship to join Him on the water. There will be differences at the close. All will not be the wise that understand, nor those who instruct the mass in righteousness. But every Scripture that treats of that time proves what dread, what anxiety, what dark clouds will be ever and anon. So it was here. Peter goes forth, but losing sight of the Lord in the presence of the troubled waves, and yielding to his ordinary experience, he fears the strong wind, and is only saved by the outstretched hand of Jesus, who rebukes his doubt. Thereon, coming into the ship, the wind ceases, and the Lord exercises His gracious power in beneficent effects around. It was a little foreshadowing of what will be when the Lord has joined the remnant in the last days, and then fills with blessing the land that He touches.

In Matt. 15 we have another picture, and twofold. Jerusalem’s proud, traditional hypocrisy is exposed, and grace fully blesses the tried Gentile. This finds its fitting place, not in Luke, but in Matthew, particularly as the details here (not in Mark, who only gives the general fact) cast great light upon God’s dispensational ways. Accordingly, here we have, first, the Lord judging the wrong thoughts of scribes and Pharisees which were of Jerusalem {Matt. 15:1}.

This gives an opportunity to teach what truly defiles -- not things that go into the man, but those things which, proceeding out of the mouth, come forth from the heart. To eat with unwashed hands defileth not a man. It is the death-blow to human tradition and ordinance in divine things, and in reality depends on the truth of the absolute ruin of man -- a truth which, as we see, the disciples were very slow to recognize. On the other side of the picture, behold the Lord leading on a soul to draw on divine grace in the most glorious manner. The woman of Canaan, out of the borders of Tyre and Sidon, appeals to Him; a Gentile of most ominous name and belongings -- a Gentile whose case was desperate; for she appeals on behalf of her daughter, grievously vexed with a devil. What could be said of her intelligence then? Had she not such confusion of thought that, if the Lord had heeded her words, it must have been destruction to her?

Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David {Matt. 15:22}!

she cried; but what had she to do with the Son of David? and what had the Son of David to do with a Canaanite? When He
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upon this rock

-- Himself, the Son of God. Henceforth, too, He forbids the disciples to proclaim Him as the Messiah. That was all over for the moment through Israel's blind sin; He was going to suffer, not yet reign at Jerusalem. Then, alas! we have in Peter what man is, even after all this. He who had just confessed the glory of the Lord would not hear His master speaking thus of His going to the cross (by which alone the Church, or even the kingdom, could be established), and sought to swerve Him from it. But the single eye of Jesus at once detects the snare of Satan into which natural thought led, or at least exposed, Peter to fall. And so, as savouring not divine but human things, he is bid to go behind (not from) the Lord as one ashamed of Him. He, on the contrary, insists not only that He was bound for the cross, but that its truth must be made good in any who will come after Him. The glory of Christ's person strengthens us, not only to understand His cross, but to take up ours.

In Matt. 17 another scene appears, promised in part to some standing there in Matt. 16:28, and connected, though as yet hiddenly, with the cross. It is the glory of Christ; not so much as Son of the living God, but as the exalted Son of man, who once suffered here below. Nevertheless, when there was the display of the glory of the kingdom, the Father's voice proclaimed Him as His own Son, and not merely as the man thus exalted. It was not more truly Christ's kingdom as man than He was God's own Son, His beloved Son, in whom He was well pleased, who was now to be heard, rather than Moses or Elias, who disappear, leaving Jesus alone with the chosen witnesses.

Then the pitiable condition of the disciples at the foot of the hill, where Satan in fallen ruined man, is tested by the fact, that notwithstanding all the glory of Jesus, Son of God, and Son of man, the disciples rendered it evident that they knew not how to bring His grace into action for others; yet was it precisely their place and proper function here below. The Lord, however, in the same chapter, shows that it was not a question alone of what was to be done, or to be suffered, or is to be by and by, but what He was, and is, and never can but be. This came out most blessedly through the disciples. Peter, the good confessor of Matt. 16, cuts but a sorry figure in Matt. 17; for when the demand was made upon him as to his Master's paying the tax, surely the Lord, he gave them to know, was much too good a Jew to omit it. But our Lord with dignity demands of Peter,


He evinces, that at the very time when Peter forgot the vision and the Father's voice, virtually reducing Him to mere man, He was God manifest in the flesh. It is always thus. God proves what He is by the revelation of Jesus.

Of whom do the kings of the earth take custom? of their own children, or of strangers? {Matt. 17:25}.

Peter answers,

Of strangers. Then,

said the Lord,

are the children free. Notwithstanding, lest we

reigns as David's Son, there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts. Judgment will have early cut them off. But the Lord could not send her away without a blessing, and without a blessing reaching to His own glory. Instead of giving her at once a reply, He leads her on step by step; for so He can stoop. Such is His grace, such His wisdom. The woman at last meets the heart and mind of Jesus in the sense of all her utter nothingness before God; and then grace, which had wrought all up to this, though pent-up, can flow like a river; and the Lord can admire her faith, albeit from Himself, God's free gift.

In the end of this chapter (Matt. 15) is another miracle of Christ's feeding a vast multitude. It does not seem exactly as a pictorial view of what the Lord was doing, or going to do, but rather the repeated pledge, that they were not to suppose that the evil He had judged in the elders of Jerusalem, or the grace freely going out to the Gentiles, in any way led Him to forget His ancient people. What special mercy and tenderness, not only in the end, but also in the way the Lord deals with Israel!

In Matt. 16 we advance a great step, spite (yea, because) of unbelief, deep and manifest, now on every side. The Lord has nothing for them, or for Him, but to go right on to the end. He had brought out the kingdom before in view of that which betrayed to Him the unpardonable blasphemy of the Holy Ghost. The old people and work then closed in principle, and a new work of God in the kingdom of heaven was disclosed. Now He brings out not the kingdom merely, but His Church; and this not merely in view of hopeless unbelief in the mass, but of the confession of His own intrinsic glory as the Son of God by the chosen witness. No sooner had Peter pronounced to Jesus the truth of His person,

Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God {Matt. 16:16}.

than Jesus holds the secret no longer.

Upon this rock,
says He,

I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it {Matt. 16:18}.

He also gives Peter the keys of the kingdom, as we see afterwards. But first appears the new and great fact, that Christ was going to build a new building, His assembly, on the truth and confession of Himself, the Son of God. Doubtless, it was contingent upon the utter ruin of Israel through their unbelief; but the fall of the lesser thing opened the way for the gift of a better glory in answer to Peter's faith in the glory of His person. The Father and the Son have their appropriate part, even as we know from elsewhere the Spirit sent down from heaven in due time was to have His. Had Peter confessed who the Son of man really is? It was the Father's revelation of the Son; flesh and blood had not revealed it to Peter, but,

my Father, which is in heaven {Matt. 16:17}.

Thereon the Lord also has His word to say, first reminding Peter of his new name suitably to what follows. He was going to build His Church
should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an
hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and
when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a
piece of money: that take and give unto them for me
and thee {Matt. 17:26, 27}.

Is it not most sweet to see, that He who proves His divine
glory at once associates us with Himself? Who but God could
command not only the waves, but the fish of the sea? As to
any one else, even the most liberal gift that ever was given of
God to fallen man on earth, to the golden head of the
Gentiles, exempted the deep and its untamed inhabitants. If
Psa. 8 goes farther, surely that was for the Son of man, who
for the suffering of death was exalted. Yes, it was His to rule
and command the sea, even as the land and all that in them is.
Neither did He need to wait for His exaltation as man; for He
was ever God, and God’s Son, who therefore, if one may so
say, waits for nothing, for no day of glory. The manner, too,
was in itself remarkable. A hook is cast into the sea, and the
fish that takes it produces the required money for Peter as for
his gracious Master and Lord. A fish was the last being for
man to make his banker of; with God all things are possible,
who knew how to blend admirably in the same act divine
glory, unanswerably vindicated, with the lowest grace in
man. And thus He, whose glory was so forgotten by His
disciples -- Jesus Himself -- thinks of that very disciple, and

For me and thee.

The next chapter (Matt. 18) takes up the double thought
of the kingdom and the Church, showing the requisite for
entrance into the kingdom, and displaying or calling forth
divine grace in the most lovely manner, and that in practice.
The pattern is the Son of man saving the lost. It is not a
question of bringing in law to govern the kingdom or guide
the Church. The unparalleled grace of the Saviour must form
and fashion the saints henceforth. In the end of the chapter is
set forth parabolically the unlimited forgiveness that suits the
kingdom; here, I cannot but think, looking onward in strict
fulness to the future, but with distinct application to the moral
need of the disciples then and always. In the kingdom so
much the less sparing is the retribution of those who despise
or abuse grace. All turns on that which was suitable to such
a God, the giver of His own Son. We need not dwell upon it.

Matt. 19 brings in another lesson of great weight.
Whatever might be the Church or the kingdom, it is precisely
when the Lord unfolds His new glory in both the kingdom
and the Church that He maintains the proprieties of nature
in their rights and integrity. There is no greater mistake than to
suppose, because there is the richest development of God’s
grace in new things, that He abandons or weakens natural
relationships and authority in their place. This, I believe, is
a great lesson, and too often forgotten. Observe that it is at
this point the chapter begins with vindicating the sanctity of
marriage. No doubt it is a tie of nature for this life only.
None the less does the Lord uphold it, purged of what
accretions had come in to obscure its original and proper
character. Thus the fresh revelations of grace in no way
detract from that which God had of old established in nature;

but, contrariwise, only impart a new and greater force in
asserting the real value and wisdom of God’s way even in
these least things. A similar principle applies to the little
children, who are next introduced; and the same thing is true
substantially of natural or moral character here below.
Parents, and the disciples, like the Pharisees, were shown that
grace, just because it is the expression of what God is to a
ruined world, takes notice of what man in his own imaginary
dignity might count altogether petty. With God, as nothing is
impossible, so no one, small or great, is despised: all is seen
and put in its just place; and grace, which rebukes creature
pride, can afford to deal divinely with the smallest as with the
greatest.

If there be a privilege more manifest than another which
has dawned on us, it is what we have found by and in Jesus,
that now we can say nothing is too great for us; nothing too
little for God. There is room also for the most, thorough
self-abnegation. Grace forms the hearts of those that
understand it, according to the great manifestation of what
God is, and what man is, too, given us in the person of
Christ. In the reception of the little children this is plain; it is
not so generally seen in what follows. The rich young ruler
was not converted: far from being so, he could not stand the
test applied by Christ out of His own love, and, as we are
told,

went away sorrowful {Matt. 19:22}.

He was ignorant of himself, because ignorant of God, and
imagined that it was only a question of man’s doing good for
God. In this he had laboured, as he said, from his youth up:

What lack I yet? {Matt. 19:20}.

There was the consciousness of good unattained, a void for
which he appeals to Jesus that it might be filled up. To lose
all for heavenly treasure, to come and follow the despised
Nazarene here below -- what was it to compare with that
which had brought Jesus to earth? but it was far too much for
the young man. It was the creature doing his best, yet proving
that he loved the creature more than the Creator. Jesus,
nevertheless, owned all that could be owned in him. After
this, in the chapter we have the positive hindrance asserted of
what man counts good.

Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly
enter into the kingdom of heaven {Matt. 19:23}.

This made it to be plainly and only a difficulty for God to
solve. Then comes the boast of Peter, though for others as
well as himself. The Lord, while thoroughly proving that He
forgot nothing, owned everything that was of grace in Peter
or the rest, while opening the same door to
every one {Matt. 19:29}

who forsakes nature for His name’s sake, solemnly adds,

But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall
be first {Matt. 19:30}.

Thus the point that meets us in the conclusion of the chapter
is, that while every character, every measure of giving up for
His name’s sake, will meet with the most worthy recompence
and result, man can as little judge of this as he can
accomplish salvation. Changes, to us inexplicable, occur:
many first last, and last first.

The point in the beginning of the next chapter (Matt. 20) is not reward, but the right and title of God Himself to act according to His goodness. He is not going to lower Himself to a human measure. Not only shall the Judge of all the earth do right, but what will not He do who gives all good?

For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. . . . And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny {Matt. 20:1-10}.

He maintains His sovereign title to do good, to do as He will with His own. The first of these lessons is,

Many first shall be last, and last first (Matt. 19:30).

It is clearly the failure of nature, the reversal of what might be expected. The second is,

So the last shall be first, and the first last; for many are called, but few are chosen {Matt. 20:16}.

It is the power of grace. God’s delight is to pick out the hindmost for the first place, to the disparagement of the foremost in their own strength.

Lastly, we have the Lord rebuking the ambition not only of the sons of Zebedee, but in truth also of the ten; for why was there such warmth of indignation against the two brethren? why not sorrow and shame that they should have so little understood their Master’s mind? How often the heart shows itself, not merely by what we ask, but by the uncalled-for feelings we display against other people and their faults! The fact is, in judging others we judge ourselves.

Here I close to-night. It brings me to the real crisis; that is, the final presentation of our Lord to Jerusalem. I have endeavoured, though, of course, cursorily, and I feel most imperfectly, to give thus far Matthew’s sketch of the Saviour as the Holy Ghost enabled him to execute it. In the next discourse we may hope to have the rest of his Gospel.
Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Gospels

Lecture 3
Matthew 20:29 - 23

We now enter on the Lord's final presentation of Himself to Jerusalem, traced, however, from Jericho; that is, from the city which had once been the stronghold of the power of the Canaanite. The Lord Jesus presenting Himself in grace, instead of sealing up the curse which had been pronounced on it, makes it contrariwise the witness of His mercy towards those who believed in Israel. It was there that two blind men (for Matthew, we have seen, abounds in this double token of the Lord's grace), sitting by the wayside, cried out, and most appropriately,

Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David
{Matt. 20:30}!

They were led and taught of God. It was no question of law, yet strictly in His capacity of Messiah. Their appeal was in thorough keeping with the scene; they felt that the nation had no sense of its own blindness, and so addressed themselves at once to the Lord thus presenting Himself where divine power wrought of old. It is remarkable that, although there had been signs and wonders given from time to time in Israel, miraculous cures wrought, dead even raised to life, and leprosy cleansed, yet never, previously to the Messiah, do we hear of restoring the blind to sight. The Rabbis held that this was reserved for the Messiah; and certainly I am not aware of any case which contradicts their notion. They appear to have founded it upon the remarkable prophecy of Isaiah (Isa. 35). I do not affirm that the prophecy proves their notion to be true in isolating that miracle from the rest; but it is evident that the Spirit of God does connect emphatically the opening of blind eyes with the Son of David, as part of the blessing that He will surely diffuse when He comes to reign over the earth.

What appears further here is, that Jesus does not put the blessing off till His reign. Undoubtedly, the Lord in those days was giving signs and tokens of the world to come; and it was continued by His servants afterwards, as we know from the end of Mark, the Acts, &c. The miraculous powers which He exercised were samples of the power which would fill the earth with Jehovah’s glory, casting out the enemy, and effacing the traces of his power, and making it the theatre of the manifestation of His kingdom here below. Thus our Lord gives evidence that the power was in Himself already, so that they need not lack because the kingdom was not yet come, in the full, manifest sense of the word. The kingdom was then come in His own person, as is said by Matthew (Matt. 12) as well as Luke. Still less did the blessing tarry for the sons of men. Virtue went forth at His kingly touch: this, at least, did not depend on the recognition of His claims by His people. He takes up this sign of Messiah’s grace -- the opening of the eyes of the blind, -- itself no mean sign of the true condition of the Jews, could they but feel and own the truth. Alas! they sought not mercy and healing at His hands; but if there were any to call on Him at Jericho, the Lord would hearken. Here, then, Messiah answers to the cry of faith of these two blind men. When the multitude rebuked them, that they should hold their peace, they cried the more. The difficulties presented to faith only increased the energy of its desire; and so they cried,

Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David!

Jesus stands, calls the blind men, and says,

What will ye that I should do? {Matt. 20:32}.

Lord, that our eyes should be opened {Matt. 20:33}.

And so it was according to their faith. Moreover, it is noted that they follow Him, the pledge of what will be done when the people, by and by owning their blindness, and turning to Him for eyes, receive sight from the true Son of David to see Himself in the day of His earthly glory.

The Lord thereon enters Jerusalem according to prophecy. He enters it, however, not in the outward pomp and glory which the nations seek after, but according to what the prophet’s words now made good literally: Jehovah’s King sitting on an ass in the spirit of humiliation. But even in this very thing, the fullest proof was afforded that He was Jehovah Himself. From first to last, as we have seen, it was Jehovah-Messiah. The word to the owner of the ass and colt was,

The Lord hath need of them {Matt. 21:3}.

Accordingly, on this plea of Jehovah of hosts, all difficulties disappear, though unbelief finds there its stumbling-block. It was indeed the power of the Spirit of God that controlled his heart; even as to Christ

the porter opened {John 10:3}.

God left nothing undone on any side, but so ordered that the heart of this Israelite should yield a testimony that grace was at work, spite of the lamentable chill that stupefied the people. How good it is thus to raise up a witness, never indeed to leave it absolutely lacking, not even on the road to Jerusalem -- alas! the road to the cross of Christ. This, as we are told by the evangelist, came to pass that the word of the
prophet should be fulfilled:

Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek [for such meekness was the character of His presentation as yet], and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass {Matt. 21:5}.

All must be in character with the Nazarene. Accordingly, the disciples went on and did as Jesus commanded. The multitudes, too, were acted on -- a very great multitude. It was, of course, but a transient action, yet was it of God for a testimony, this moving of hearts by the Spirit. Not that it penetrated beneath the surface, but was rather a wave that passed over men’s hearts, and then was gone. For the moment they followed, crying.

Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest {Matt. 21:9}!

(applying to the Lord the congratulations of Psa. 118).

Jesus, according to our evangelist’s account, comes to the temple and cleanses it. Remark the order as well as character of the events. In Mark this is not the first act which is recorded, but the curse on the barren fig tree, between His inspection of all things in the temple and His ejection of those who profaned it. The fact is, there were two days or occasions in which the fig tree comes before us, according to the Gospel of Mark, who gives us the details more particularly than any one, notwithstanding his brevity. Matthew, on the contrary, while he is so careful in furnishing us frequently with a double witness of the Lord’s gracious ways toward His land and people, gives only as one whole His dealing with both the fig tree and the temple. We should not know from the first evangelist of any interval in either case; nor could we learn from either the first or the third but that the cleansing of the temple occurred on His earlier visit. But we know from Mark, who sets forth an exact account of each of the two days, that in neither case was all done at once. This is the more remarkable because, in the instances of the two demonsiacs, or the two blind men in Matthew, Mark, like Luke, speaks only of one. Nothing can account for such phenomena but design; and the more so as there is no ground to assume that each succeeding evangelist was kept in ignorance of his predecessor’s account of our Lord. It is evident that Matthew compresses in one the two acts about the temple, as well as about the fig tree. His scope excluded such details, and, I am persuaded, rightly so, according to the mind of God’s Spirit. It may render it all the more striking when one observes that Matthew was there, and Mark was not. He who actually saw these transactions, and who therefore, had he been a mere acting human witness, would peculiarly have dwelt on them; he, too, who had been a personal companion of the Lord, and therefore, had it been only a question of treasuring all up as one that loved the Lord, would, naturally speaking, have been the one of the three to have presented the amphib least and minutest picture of the circumstance, is just the one who does nothing of the kind. Mark, as confessedly not being an eye-witness, might have been supposed to content himself with the general view. The reverse is the fact unquestionably. This is a notable feature, and not here alone, but elsewhere also. To me it proves that the Gospels are the fruit of divine purpose in all, distinctively in each. It establishes the principle that, while God condescended to employ eye-witness, He never confined Himself to it, but, on the contrary, took full and particular care to show that He is above all creature means of information. Thus it is in Mark and Luke we find some of the most important details; not in Matthew and John, though Matthew and John were eye-witnesses, Mark and Luke not. A double proof of this appears in what has been just advanced. To Matthew, acting according to what was given him of the Spirit, there was no sufficient reason to enter into points which did not bear dispensationally upon Israel. He therefore, as often elsewhere, presents the entrance into the temple in its completeness, as being the sole matter important to his aim. Any thoughtful mind must allow, if I do not greatly err, that entrance into detail would rather detract from the augustness of the act. The minute account has its just place, on the other hand, if it be a question of the Lord’s method and bearing in His service and testimony. Here I want to know the particulars; there every trace and shade are full of instruction to me. If I have to serve Him, I do well to learn and ponder His every word and way; and in this the style and mode of Mark’s Gospel is invaluable. Who but feels that the movements, the pauses, the sighs, the groans, the very looks of the Lord, are fraught with blessing to the soul? But if, as with Matthew, the object be the great change of dispensation consequent on the rejection of the divine Messiah (particularly if the point, as here, be not the opening out of coming mercy, but, on the contrary, a solemn and a stern judgment on Israel), the Spirit of God contents Himself with a general notice of the painful scene, without indulging in any circumstantial account of it. To this it is I attribute the palpable difference in this place of Matthew as compared with Mark, and with Luke also, who omits the cursed fig tree altogether, and gives the barest mention of the temple’s cleansing (Luke 19:45). The notion of some men, especially a few men of learning, that the difference is due to ignorance on the part of one or other or all the evangelists, is of all explanations the worst, and even the least reasonable (to take the lowest ground); it is in plain truth the proof of their own ignorance, and the effect of positive unbelief. What I have ventured to suggest I believe to be a motive, and an adequate motive, for the difference; but we must remember that divine wisdom has depths of aim infinitely beyond our ability to sound. God may be pleased to vouchsafe us a perception of what is in His mind, if we be lowly, and diligent, and dependant on Him; or He may leave us ignorant of much, where we are careless or self-confident; but sure I am that the very points men ordinarily fix on as blots or imperfections in the inspired word are, when understood, among the strongest proofs of the admirable guidance of the Holy Spirit of God. Nor do I speak with such assurance because of the least satisfaction in any attainments, but because every lesson I have learnt and do learn from God’s word brings with it the ever accumulating conviction that Scripture is perfect. For the question in hand, it is enough to produce sufficient evidence that it was not in ignorance, but with full knowledge, that
Matthew, Mark, and Luke wrote as they have done; I go farther, and say it was divine intention, rather than, as I conceive, any determinate plan of each evangelist, who may not himself have had before his mind the full scope of what the Holy Ghost gave him to write about it. There is no necessity to suppose that Matthew deliberately designed the result which we have in his Gospel. How God brought it all to pass is another question, which, of course, it is not for us to answer. But the fact is, that the evangelist, who was present, he who consequently was an eye-witness of the details, does not give them; while one who was not there states them with the greatest particularity -- thoroughly harmonious with the account of him who was there, but, nevertheless, with differences as marked as their mutual corrobations. If we might rightly use, in this case, the word “originality,” then originality is stamped upon the account of the second. I affirm, then, in the strictest sense, that divine design is stamped upon each, and that consistency of purpose is found everywhere in all the Gospels.

The Lord then goes straight to the sanctuary. The kingly Son of David, destined to sit as the Priest upon His throne (Zech 6:13), the head of all things sacred as well as pertaining to the polity of Israel, -- we can understand why Matthew should describe such an One visiting the temple of Jerusalem; and why, instead of stopping, like Mark, to narrate that which attests His patient service, the whole scene should be given here without a break. We have seen that a similar principle accounts for the massing of the facts of His ministry in the end of Matt. 4, and also for giving as a continuous whole the Sermon on the Mount, although, if we enquired into details, we might find many and considerable intervals; for, as undoubtedly those facts were grouped, so I believe also it was between the parts of that sermon. It fell in, however, with the object of Matthew’s Gospel to pass by all notice of these interstices, and so the Spirit of God has been pleased to interweave the whole into a beautiful web of the first Gospel. In this way, as I believe, we may and should account for the difference between Matthew and Mark in this particular, without in the smallest degree casting the shadow of an imperfection upon one any more than on the other: while the fact, already pressed, that eye-witnessing, while employed as a servant, is never allowed to govern in the composition of the Gospels, bespeaks loudly that men forget their true Author in searching into the writers He employed, and that the only key to all difficulties is the simple but weighty truth that it was God communicating His mind about Jesus, as by Matthew so by Mark.

Next, the Lord acts upon the word. He finds men selling and buying in the temple (that is, in its buildings), overthrows their tables, and turns out themselves, pronouncing the words of the prophets, both Isaiah and Jeremiah. But at the same time there is another trait noted here only: the blind and the lame (the hated of David’s soul (2 Sam. 5:8), the pitied of David’s greater Son and Lord) find a friend instead of an enemy in Him who loved them, the true beloved of God. Thus, at the very time He showed His hatred and righteous indignation at the covetous profaning of the temple, His love was flowing out to the desolate in Israel. Then we see the chief priests and scribes offended at the cries of the multitude and children, and turning reproachfully to the Lord, who allowed such a right royal welcome to be addressed to Him; but the Lord calmly takes His place according to the sure word of God. It is not now Deuteronomy that is before Him (that He had quoted when tempted of Satan at the beginning of His career). But now, as they had borrowed the words of Psa. 118 (and who will say they were wrong?), so the Lord Jesus (and I say He was infinitely right) applies to them, as well as to Himself, the language of Psa. 8. Its central truth is the entrance of the rejected Messiah, the Son of man by humiliation and suffering unto death, into heavenly glory and dominion over all things. And this was just the point before the Lord: the little ones were thus in the truth and spirit of that oracle. They were sucklings, out of whose mouth praise was ordained for the despised Messiah soon to be in heaven, exalted there and preached here as the once crucified and now glorified Son of man. What could be more appropriate to that time, what more profoundly true for all time, yea, for eternity?

Matthew, as we have seen, crowds into one scene all mention of the barren fig tree (Matt. 21:18-22), without distinguishing the curse of the one day from the manifestation of its accomplishment on the day following. Was it without moral import? Impossible. Did it convey the notion of a hearty and true reception of the Messiah, with fruits meet for His hand who had so long tended it, and failed in no care or culture? Was there anything answering to the welcome of the little ones who cried Hosanna, the type of what grace will effect in the day of His return, when the nation itself will contentedly, thankfully take the place of babes and sucklings, and find their best wisdom in so owning the One whom their fathers rejected, the man thereon exalted to heaven during the night of His people’s unbelief? Meanwhile, another picture better suits them, the state and the doom of the fruitless fig tree. Why so scornful of the jubilant multitude, of the joyous babes? What was their condition before the eyes of Him who saw all that passed within their minds? They were no better than that fig tree, that solitary fig tree which met the Lord’s eyes as He comes from Bethany, entering once more into Jerusalem. Like it, they, too, were full of promise; like its abundant foliage, they lacked not fair profession, but there was no fruit. That which made its barrenness evident was the fact that it was not yet the time of figs. Therefore, the unripe figs, the harbinger of harvest, ought to have been there. Had the season of figs been come, the fruit might have been already gathered; but that season having not yet arrived, beyond controversy the promise of the coming harvest should, and indeed must, have been still there, had any fruit been really borne. This, therefore, represented too truly what the Jew, what the nation, was in the eye of the Lord. He had come seeking fruit; but there was none; and the Lord pronounced this curse, Henceforth let no fruit grow on thee for ever {Matt. 21:19}. 
And so it is. No fruit ever sprang from that generation. Another generation there must be; a total change must be wrought if there is to be fruitbearing. Fruit of righteousness can only be through Jesus to God’s glory; and Jesus they yet despised. Not that the Lord will give up Israel, but He will create a generation to come, wholly different from the present Christ-rejecting one. Such an issue will be seen to be implied, if we compare our Lord’s curse with the rest of the word of God, which points to better things yet in store for Israel.

But He adds more than this. It was not only that the Israel of that day should thus pass away, giving place to another generation, who, houoring the Messiah, will bear fruit to God; He tells the wondering disciples that, had they faith, the mountain would be cast into the sea. This appears to go farther than the disappearance of Israel as responsible to be a fruit-bearing people; it implies their whole polity dissolved; for the mountain is just as much the symbol of a power in the earth, an established world-power, as the fig tree is the special sign of Israel as responsible to produce fruit for God; and it is clear that both figures have been abundantly verified. For the time Israel is passed away. After no long interval, the disciples saw Jerusalem not only taken, but completely torn as it were from the roots. The Romans came, as the executioners of the sentence of God (according to the just forebodings of the unjust high priest Caiaphas, who prophesied not without the Holy Ghost), and took away their place and nation, not because they did not, but because they did, kill Jesus their Messiah. Notoriously this total ruin of the Jewish state came to pass when the disciples had grown up to be a public witness to the world, before the apostles were all taken away from the earth; then their whole national polity sunk and disappeared when Titus sacked Jerusalem, and sold and scattered the people to the ends of the earth. I have no doubt that the Lord intended us to know the uprooting of the mountain just as much as the withering of the fig tree. The latter may be the simpler application of the two, and evidently more familiar to ordinary thought; but there seems no real reason to question, that if the one be meant symbolically, so too is the other. However this may be, these words of the Lord close that part of the subject.

We enter upon a new series in the rest of this chapter and the next. The religious rulers come before the Lord to put the first question that ever enters the minds of such men.

By what authority doest thou these things? {Matt. 21:23}.

Nothing is more easily asked by those who assume that their own title is unimpeachable. Our Lord answers them by another question, which soon disclosed how thoroughly they themselves, in what was incomparably more serious, failed in moral competence. Who were they, to raise the question of His authority? As guides of religion, surely they ought to be able to decide that which was of the deepest consequence for their own souls, and for those of whom they assumed the spiritual charge. The question He puts involved indeed the answer to theirs; for had they answered Him in truth, this would have decided at once by what and by whose authority He acted as He did.

The baptism of John, whence was it (asks the Lord), from heaven, or of men? {Matt. 21:25}.

There was no singleness of purpose, there was no fear of God, in these men so full of swelling words and fancied authority. Accordingly, instead of its being an answer from conscience declaring the truth as it was, they reason solely how to escape from the dilemma. The only question before their minds was, what answer would be politic? how best to get rid of the difficulty? Vain hope with Jesus! The base conclusion to which they were reduced is,

We cannot tell {Matt. 21:27}.

It was a falsehood: but what of that, where the interests of religion and their own order were concerned? Without a blush, then, they answer the Saviour,

We cannot tell;

and the Lord with calm dignity strikes home His answer -- not “I cannot tell,” but,

Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things {Matt. 21:27}.

Jesus knew and laid bare the secret springs of the heart; and the Spirit of God records it here for our instruction. It is the genuine universal type of worldly leaders of religion in conflict with the power of God.

If we shall say, From heaven, he will say unto us, Why did ye not, then, believe him? But if we shall say, Of men, we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet {Matt. 21:25, 26}.

If they owned John, they must bow to the authority of Jesus; if they rejected John, they feared the people. They were thus put to silence; for they would not risk loss of influence with the people, and they were determined at all cost to deny the authority of Jesus. All they cared about was themselves.

The Lord goes on and meets parabolically a wider question than that of the rulers, gradually enlarging the scope, till He terminates these instructions in Matt. 22:14. First, He takes up sinful men where natural conscience works, and where conscience is gone. This is peculiar to Matthew:

A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went {Matt. 21:28, 29}.

He comes to the second, who was all complacency, and answers to the call,

I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto Him, The first. Jesus saith unto them [such is the application], Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him {Matt. 21:28-32}.

But He was not content with merely thus touching conscience in a way that was painful enough to the flesh; for they found that, spite of authority or anything else, those who professed
most, if disobedient, were counted worse than the most depraved, who repented and did the will of God.

Next, our Lord looks at the entire people, and this from the commencement of their relations with God. In other words, He gives us in this parable the history of God’s dealings with them. It was in no way, so to speak, the accidental circumstance of how they behaved in one particular generation. The Lord sets out clearly what they had been all along, and what they were then. In the parable of the vineyard, they are tested as responsible in view of the claims of God, who had blessed them from the first with exceeding rich privileges. Then, in the parable of the marriage of the king’s son, we see what they were, as tested by the grace or gospel of God. These are the two subjects of the parables following.

The householder, who lets out his vineyard to husbandmen, sets forth God trying the Jew, on the ground of blessings abundantly conferred upon him. Accordingly we have, first, servants sent, and then more, — not only in vain, but with insult and increase of wrong. Then, at length, He sends His Son, saying,

They will reverence my Son {Matt. 21:37},

This gives occasion for their crowning sin — the utter rejection of all divine claims, in the death of the Son and Heir; for

they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him {Matt. 21:39}.

When the lord therefore of the vineyard comes,

He asks,

what will he do unto these husbandmen? They say unto Him, He will miserably destroy these wicked men, and let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons {Matt. 21:40, 41}.

The Lord accordingly pronounces according to the Scriptures, not leaving it merely to the answer of the conscience,

Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? {Matt. 21:42}.

Then He applies further this prediction about the stone, connecting, it would appear, the allusion in Psa. 118 with the prophecy of Dan. 2. The principle at least is applied to the case in hand, and, I need hardly say, with perfect truth and beauty; for in that day apostate Jews will be judged and destroyed, as well as Gentile powers. In two positions the stone was to be found. The one is here on the earth — the humiliation, to wit, of the Messiah. Upon that Stone, thus humbled, unbelief trips and falls. But, again, when the Stone is exalted, another issue follows; for

the Stone of Israel {Gen. 49:24},

the glorified Son of man, shall descend in unsparing judgment, and crush His enemies together. When the chief priests and Pharisees had heard His parables, they perceived that He spake of them.

The Lord, however, turns in the next parable to the call of grace. It is a likeness of the kingdom of heaven. Here we are on new ground. It is striking to see this parable introduced here. In the Gospel of Luke there is a similar one, though it might be too much to affirm that it is the same. Certainly an analogous parable is found, but in a totally different connection. Besides, Matthew adds various particulars peculiar to himself, and quite falling in with the Spirit’s design by him; as we find also in Luke his own characteristics. Thus, in Luke, there is a remarkable display of grace and love to the despised poor in Israel; then, further, that love enlarging its sphere, and going out to the highways and hedges to bring in the poor that were there — the poor in the city — the poor everywhere. I need not say how thoroughly in character all this is. Here, in Matthew, we have not only God’s grace, but a kind of history, very strikingly embracing the destruction of Jerusalem, on which Luke is here silent.

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king which made a marriage for his son {Matt. 22:2}.

It is not merely a man making a feast for those that have nothing — that we have fully in Luke; but here rather the king bent upon the glorification of his son.

He sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which were bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage {Matt. 22:3, 4}.

There are two missions of the servants of the Lord here: one during His lifetime; the other after His death. On the second mission, not the first, it is said,

All things are ready.

The message is, as ever, despised.

They made light of it, and went their ways {Matt. 22:5}.

It was the second time when there was this most ample invitation which left no excuse for man, that they not only would not come, going one to his farm, and another to his merchandise, but

the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully and slew them {Matt. 22:6}.

This was not the character of the reception given to the apostles during our Lord’s lifetime, but exactly what transpired after His death. Thereupon, though in marvellous patience the blow was suspended for years, nevertheless judgment came at last.

When the king heard thereof, he was wroth, and sent forth his armies and destroyed those murderers, and burnt up their city {Matt. 22:7}.

This, of course, closes this part of the parable as predicting a providential dealing of God; but, besides being thus judicial after a sort to which we find nothing parallel in the Gospel of Luke (i.e. in what answers to it), as usual, the great change of dispensation is shown in Matthew much more distinctly.
than in Luke. There it is rather the idea of grace that began with one sending out to those invited, and a very full exposure of their excuses in a moral point of view, followed by the second mission to the streets and lanes of the city, for the poor, maimed, halt, and blind; and finally, to the highways and hedges, compelling them to come in that the house might be filled. In Matthew it is very much more in a dispensational aspect; and hence the dealings with the Jews, both in mercy and judgment, are first given as a whole, according to that manner of his which furnishes a complete sketch at one stroke, so to speak. It is the more manifest here, because none can deny that the mission to the Gentiles was long before the destruction of Jerusalem. Next is appended the Gentile part to itself.

Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests [Matt. 22:8-10].

But there is a further thing brought out here, in a very distinctive manner. In Luke, we have no judgment pronounced and executed at the end upon him that came to the wedding without the due garment. In Matthew, as we saw the providential dealing with the Jews, so we find the closing scene very particularly described, when the king judges individually in the day that is coming. It is not an external or national stroke, though that too we have here -- a providential event in connection with Israel. Quite different, but consistent with that, we have a personal appraisal by God of the Gentile profession, of those now bearing Christ's name, but who have not really put on Christ. Such is the conclusion of the parable: nothing more appropriate at the same time than this picture, peculiar to Matthew, who depicts the vast change at hand for the Gentiles, and God's dealing with them individually for their abuse of His grace. The parable illustrates the coming change of dispensation. Now this falls in with Matthew's design, rather than Luke's, with whom we shall find habitually that it is a question of moral features, which the Lord may give opportunity of exhibiting at another time.

After this come the various classes of Jews -- the Pharisees first of all, and, strange consorts! the Herodians. Ordinarily they were, as men say, natural enemies. The Pharisees were the high ecclesiastical party; the Herodians, on the contrary, were the low worldly courtier party: those, the strong sticklers for tradition and righteousness according to the law; these, the panders to the powers that then were for whatever could be got in the earth. Such allies now joined hypocritically against the Lord. The Lord meets them with that wisdom which always shines in His words and ways. They demand whether it be lawful to give tribute to Caesar or no.

Shew me, says He,

the tribute money. . . . And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's [Matt. 22:19-21].

Thus the Lord deals with the facts as they then came before Him. The piece of money they produced proved their subjection to the Gentiles. It was their sin which had put them there. They wretched under their masters; but still under alien masters they were; and it was because of their sin. The Lord confronts them not only with the undeniable witness of their subjection to the Romans, but also with a graver charge still, which they had entirely overlooked -- the claims of God, as well as of Caesar.

Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's.
The money you love proclaims that you are slaves to Caesar. Pay, then, to Caesar his dues. But forget not to render to God the things that are God's.
The fact was, they hated Caesar only less than they hated the true God. The Lord left them therefore under the reflections and confusion of their own guilty consciences.

Next, the Lord is assailed by another great party.
The same day came to him the Sadducees [Matt. 22:23]

-- those most opposed to the Pharisees in doctrine, as the Herodians were in politics. The Sadducees denied resurrection, and put a case which to their mind involved insuperable difficulties. To whom would belong in that state a woman who here had been married to seven brethren successively? The Lord does not cite the clearest Scripture about the resurrection; He does what in the circumstances is much better; He appeals to what they themselves professed most of all to revere. To the Sadducee there was no part of Scripture possessed of such authority as the Pentateuch, or five books of Moses. From Moses, then, He proved the resurrection; and this in the simplest possible way. Everyone -- their own conscience -- must allow that God is the God, not of the dead, but of the living. Therefore, if God calls Himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, it is not an unmeaning thing. Referring long afterwards to their fathers who were passed away, He speaks of Himself as in relationship with them. Were they not, then, dead? But was all gone? Not so. But far more than that, -- He speaks as one who not merely had relations with them, but had made promises to them, which never yet were accomplished. Either, then, God must raise them from the dead in order to make good His promises to the fathers; or He could not be careful to keep His promises. Was this last what their faith in God, or rather their want of faith, came to? To deny resurrection is, therefore, to deny the promises, and God's faithfulness, and in truth God Himself. The Lord, therefore, rebukes them on this acknowledged principle, that God was the God of the living, not of the dead. To make Him God of the dead would have been really to deny Him to be God at all: equally so to make His promises of no value or stability. God, therefore, must raise again the fathers in order to fulfil His promise to them; for they certainly never got the promises in this life. The folly of their thoughts too was manifest in this, that the difficulty
presented was wholly unreal -- it only existed in their imagination. Marriage has nothing to do with the risen state: there they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. Thus, on their own negative ground of objection, they were altogether in error. Positively, as we have seen, they were just as wrong; for God must raise the dead to make good His own promises. There is nothing now in this world that worthy witnesses God, save only that which is known to faith; but if you speak of the display of God, and the manifestation of His power, you must wait until the resurrection. The Sadducees had not faith, and hence were in total error and blindness:

Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God {Matt. 22:29}.

Therefore it was that, refusing to believe, they were unable to understand. When the resurrection comes, it will be manifest to every eye. Accordingly this was the point of our Lord's answer; and the multitudes were astonished at His doctrine.

Though the Pharisees were not sorry to find the then ruling party, the Sadducees, put to silence, one of them, a lawyer, tempted the Lord in a question of near interest to them.

Master, which is the greatest commandment in the law?
{Matt. 22:36}.

But He who came full of grace and truth never lowered the law, and at once gives its sum and substance in both its parts -- Godward and manward.

The time, however, was come for Jesus to put His question, drawn from Ps. 110. If Christ be confessedly David's Son, how does David in Spirit call Him Lord, saying,

Jehovah said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool?
{Matt. 22:44}.

The whole truth of His position lies here. It was about to be realized; and the Lord can speak of the things that were not as though they were. Such was the language of David the king in words inspired of the Holy Ghost. What was the language, the thought of the people now, and by whom inspired? Alas! Pharisees, lawyers, Sadducees -- it was only a question of infidelity in varying forms; and the glory of David's Lord was even more momentous than the dead rising according to promise. Believe it or not, the Messiah was about to take His seat at the right hand of Jehovah. They were -- indeed, they are -- critical questions: If the Christ be David's Son, how is He David's Lord? If He be David's Lord, how is He David's Son? It is the turning point of unbelief at all times, now as then, the continual theme of the testimony of the Holy Ghost, the habitual stumblingblock of man, never so vain as when he would be wisest, and either essay to sound by his own wit the unfathomable mystery of Christ's person, or deny that there is in it any mystery whatever. It was the very point of Jewish unbelief. It was the grand capital truth of all this Gospel of Matthew, that He who was the Son of David, the Son of Abraham, was really Emmanuel and Jehovah. It had been proved at His birth, proved throughout His ministry in Galilee, proved now at His last presentation in Jerusalem.

And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions {Matt. 22:46}.

Such was their position in presence of Him who was so soon about to take His seat at the right hand of God; and there each remains to this day. Awful, unbelieving silence of Israel despising their own law, despising their own Messiah, David's Son and David's Lord, His glory their shame!

But if man was silent, it was the Lord's place not merely to question but to pronounce; and in Matt. 23 most solemnly does the Lord utter His sentence upon Israel. It was an address both to the multitude and to the disciples, with woes for scribes and Pharisees. The Lord fully sanctioned that kind of mingled address for the time, providing, it would appear, not merely for the disciples, but for the remnant in a future day who will have this ambiguous place; believers in Him, on the one hand, yet withal filled, on the other, with Jewish hopes and Jewish associations. This seems to me the reason why our Lord speaks in a manner so remarkably different from that which obtains ordinarily in Scripture.

The scribes,

He says,

and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. All, therefore, whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do to be seen of men {Matt. 23:2-5}.

The principle fully applied then, as it will in the latter day; the Church scene coming in meanwhile as a parenthesis. The suitability of such instruction to this Gospel of Matthew is also obvious, as indeed here only it is found. Then, again, our souls would shrink from the notion, that what our Lord taught could have merely a passing application. Not so; it has a permanent value for His followers; save only that the special privileges conferred on the Church, which is His body, modify the case, and, concurrently with this, the setting aside meanwhile of the Jewish people and state of things. But as these words applied literally then, so I conceive will it be at a future day. If this be so, it preserves the dignity of the Lord, as the great Prophet and Teacher, in its true place. In the last book of the New Testament we have a similar combination of features, when the Church will have disappeared from the earth; that is, the keeping the commandments of God and having the faith of Jesus. So here, the disciples of Jesus are exorted to heed what was enjoined by those who sat in Moses' seat -- to follow what they taught, not what they did. So far as they brought out God's commandments, it was obligatory. But their practice was to be a beacon, not a guide. Their objects were to be seen of men, pride of place, honour in public and private, high-sounding titles, in open contradiction of Christ and that
oft-repeated word of His --

Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted {Matt. 23:12}.  

Yet, of course, the disciples had the faith of Jesus.

Next the Lord 1 launches out woe after woe against the scribes and Pharisees. They were hypocrites. They shut out the new light of God, while zealous beyond measure for their own thoughts; they undermined conscience by their casuistry, while insisting on the minutest alliteration in ceremonializing; they laboured after external cleanliness, while full of rapine and intemperance; and if they could only seem righteously fair without, feared not within to be full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Finally, their monuments in honour of slain prophets and past worthies were rather a testimony to their own relationship, not to the righteous, but to those who murdered them. Their fathers killed the witnesses of God who, while living, condemned them; they, the sons, only built to their memory when there was no longer a present testimony to their conscience, and their sepulchral honours would cast a halo around themselves.

Such is worldly religion and its heads: the great obstructions to divine knowledge, instead of living only to be its channels of communication; narrow, where they should have been large; cold and lukewarm for God, earnest only for self; daring sophists, where divine obligations lay deep, and punctilious pettifoggers in the smallest details, straining at the gnats and swallowing the camel; anxious only for the outside, reckless as to all that lay concealed underneath. The honour they paid those who had suffered in times past was the proof that they succeeded not them but their enemies, the true legitimate successors of those that slew the friends of God. The successors of those that of old suffered for God are those who suffer now; the heirs of their persecutors may build them sepulchres, erect statues, cast monumental brasses, pay them any conceivable honour. When there is no longer the testimony of God that pierces the obdurate heart, when they who render it are no longer there, the names of these departed saints or prophets become a means of gaining religious reputation for themselves. Present application of the truth is lacking, the sword of the Spirit is no longer in the hands of those who wielded it so well. To honour those who have passed away is the cheapest means, on the contrary, for acquiring credit for the men of this generation. It is to swell the great capital of tradition out of those that once served God, but are now gone, whose testimony is no longer a sting to the guilty. Thus it is evident, that as their honour begins in death, so it bears the sure stamp of death upon it. Did they plume themselves on the progress of the age? Did they think and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the

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1. The most ancient text, represented by the Vatican, Sinai, Beza’s Cambridge, L. of Paris (C. being defective, as well as the Alexandrian), and the Rescript of Dublin, omits verse 14, which may have been foisted in from Mark 12:40 and Luke 20:47. This leaves the complete series of seven woes.
distinctness in noticing the Gentiles, and their times of supremacy during the long period of Israel’s degradation. Again, it is only in Matthew that we find direct allusion to the question of the end of the age. The reason is evident. That consummation is the grand crisis for the Jew. Matthew, writing under the Holy Ghost’s direction for Israel, in view both of the consequences of their past unfaithfulness and of that future crisis, furnishes alike the momentous question and the Lord’s special answer to it. This, too, is the reason why Matthew opens out what we do not find in either Mark or Luke, at least in this connection. We have here very comprehensively the Christian part, as it appears to me (i.e., what belongs to the disciples, viewed as professing Christ’s name when Israel rejected Him). This suits Matthew’s view of the prophecy; and the reason is plain. Matthew shows us not only the consequences of the rejection of the Messiah to Israel, but the change of dispensation, or what would follow on their fatal opposition to One who was their King, yea, not only Messiah, but Jehovah. The consequences were to be, could not but be, all-important; and the Spirit here records this portion of the Lord’s prophecy most appropriately to His purpose by Matthew. Would not God turn the Jewish rejection of that glorious Person to some wondrous and suitable account? Accordingly this is what we find here. The order, though different from that which obtains elsewhere, is regulated by perfect wisdom. First of all, the Jews are taken up, or the disciples as representing them, where they then were. They had not got beyond their old thoughts of the temple, those buildings that had excited their admiration and awe. The Lord announces the judgment that was at hand. Indeed, it was involved in the words said before --

Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

It was their house. The Spirit was fled. It was no better than a dead body now. Why should it not be carried out speedily to burial?

See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down {Matt. 24:2}.

All would soon be over for the present.

And as He sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto Him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? {Matt. 24:3}.

In answer the Lord sets before them a general history -- so general, indeed, that one might hardly gather at first whether He did not contemplate even here Christians as well as Jews (Matt. 24:4-14). They are viewed really as a believing but Jewish remnant, which accounts for the breadth of the language. Then, from Matt. 24:15, come the details of Daniel’s special last half week, whose prophecy is emphatically appealed to. The establishment of the abomination of desolation in the holy place would be the sign for the instant flight of godly ones, like the disciples, who will then be found in Jerusalem. For this is to be followed by great tribulation, exceeding any time of trouble since the beginning of the world up to that day. Nor will there be outward affliction only, but unparalleled deceits, false Christs and false prophets showing great signs and wonders. But the elect are here warned graciously of the Saviour, and far, far beyond any guards afforded in the prophecies of the Old Testament.

Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heaven shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory {Matt. 24:29, 30}.

The appearing of the Son of man is a grand point in Matthew, and indeed in all the Gospels. The once rejected Christ will come in glory as the glorious Heir of all things. His advent in the clouds of heaven will be to take the throne, not of Israel only, but of all people, nations, and languages. Returning thus, to the horror and shame of His adversaries, in or out of the land, the first thing spoken of here is the mission of His angels to gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. There is no hint of resurrection or of rapture to heaven here. The elect of Israel are in question, and His own glory as Son of man, without a word of His being Head; nor of the Church His body. What we find here is a process of gathering the chosen, not merely of the Jews, but of all Israel, as I suppose, from the four winds of heaven. This interpretation derives support, then, if that be needed, from the parable that immediately follows (Matt. 24:32, 33). It is the fig tree once more, but used for a far different purpose. Be it curse in one connection, be it blessing in another, the fig tree typifies Israel.

Then comes, not what may be called the natural, but the scriptural, parable. As that alluded to the outside realm of nature, so this was taken from the Old Testament. The reference here is to the days of Noah, applied to illustrate the coming of the Son of man. So should the blow fall suddenly on all its objects.

Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left {Matt. 24:40, 41}.

They must not imagine that it would be like an ordinary judgment in providence, which sweeps here, not there, and sweeps here indiscriminately. In such the guiltless suffer with the guilty, without any approach to an adequate personal distinction. But it will not be so in the days of the Son of man, when He returns to deal with mankind at the end of the age. To be without or within will be no protection. Of two men in the field; of two women grinding at the mill, the one shall be taken, and the other left. The discrimination is precise and perfect to the last degree.

Watch therefore,
says the Lord; in conclusion of it all;
for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But
know this, that if the goodman of the house had
known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh {Matt. 24:42-44}.

This transition, in my judgment, leads from the part particularly devoted to the destinies of the Jewish people, and opens into that which concerns the Christian profession. The first of these general pictures of Christendom, which drop all reference to Jerusalem, the temple, the people, or their hope, is found in Matt. 24:45-51. Next follows the parable of the ten virgins; then, last of these, is that of the talents. Let me observe, however, that there is a clause in Matt. 25:13 which has a little falsified the application. But the truth is, as is well known, that men, in copying the Greek New Testament, added the words, “Wherein the Son of man cometh,” to this verse, which is complete without them. The Spirit really wrote,

Watch therefore; for ye know not the day nor the hour {Matt. 25:13}.

To those versed in the text as it stands in the best copies, this is a fact too familiar to demand many words said about it. No critic of weight considers that these words have any just claim to be in the text that is founded on ancient authority. Others may defend the clause who accept what is commonly received, and what can only be defended by modern or uncertain manuscripts. Surely those I now address are the last men who ought to contend for a mere traditional or vulgar basis in anything which pertains to God. If we accept the traditional text of the printers, we are on this ground; if, on the contrary, we reject human meddling as a principle, assuredly we ought not to accredit such clauses as this, which we have the strongest grounds to pronounce a mere interpolation, and not truly the word of God. But this being so, we may proceed to notice how strikingly beautiful is the effect of omitting these words.

First, then, in the Christian part, came the parable of the household servant. He who, faithful and wise, met the wishes of his Lord that set him over His household to give them meat in due season, being found so doing when He comes, is made ruler over all His goods. The evil servant, on the contrary, who settled in his heart that his Lord was not coming, and so yielded to overbearing violence and evil commerce with the profane world, shall be surprised by judgment, and have his portion with the hypocrites in hopeless shame and sorrow.

It is an instructive sketch of Christendom; but there is more.

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept {Matt. 25:1-5}.

Thus Christendom entirely breaks down. It is not only the foolish who go to sleep, but the wise. All fail to give a right expression to their waiting for the Bridegroom.

They all slumbered and slept.

But God takes care, without telling us how, that there shall be an interruption of their slumber. Instead of remaining out to wait, they must have gone in somewhere to sleep. In short, the original position is deserted. Not only have they not discharged their duty of awaiting the return of the Bridegroom, but they are no longer in their true posture. When the hope revives, the position is recovered, not before. At midnight, when all were asleep, there was a cry,

The bridegroom cometh: go ye out to meet him {Matt. 25:6}.

This acts on the virgins, wise and foolish. So it is now. Who can deny that foolish people enough speak and write about the Lord’s coming? An universal agitation of spirit goes on in all countries and all towns. Spite of opposition, the expectation spreads far and wide. It is in no way confined to the children of God. Those who are in quest of oil, going hither and thither, are disturbed by it as certainly as those who have oil in their vessels are cheered to go out once more while waiting for the Bridegroom’s return. But what a difference! The wise were prepared with oil beforehand; the rest proved their folly in doing without it. Let me particularly call your attention to this. The difference consisted not in expecting the Lord’s coming or not, but in the possession or the lack of oil (i.e., the unction from the Holy One). All profess Christ; they are all virgins with their lamps. But the want of oil is fatal. He who has not the Spirit of Christ is none of His. Such are the foolish. They know not what has made the others wise unto salvation, whatever they may profess; and their restless search, after that which they have not, finally severs them even here from the company of those they started with as looking for the Lord.

The notion that they are Christians who lack intelligence in prophecy seems to me not false only, but utterly unworthy of a spiritual mind. Is the possession of Christ less precious than a correct chart of the future? I cannot conceive a Christian without oil in his vessel. It is clearly to have the Holy Ghost, whom every saint that submits to the righteousness of God in Christ has dwelling within him. As John teaches us, the least members of God’s family are said to have that unction -- not the fathers and young men, but expressly the babes. Of course, if the youngest in Christ are so privileged, the young men and fathers do not want. Therefore I do assert, with the fullest conviction of its truth, that, as the oil in the parable sets forth, not prophetic intelligence, but the gift of God’s Spirit, so every Christian, and no other, has the Holy Ghost dwelling in him. These, then, are the wise virgins who make ready for the Bridegroom, and go in with Him to the marriage at His coming. As that hour draws near, the others, on the contrary, are more and more agitated. Not resting on Christ for their souls by faith, they have not the Spirit, and seek the inestimable gift among those who sell it, asking who will show them any good -- of whom they may buy this priceless oil. The Lord meanwhile comes, they that were ready go in with Him to the wedding, and the door was shut: the rest of
the virgins are excluded. The Lord knew them not.

Let me say in passing, that these virgins are distinguished from those who will be called in the end of the age by broad and deep differences. There is no ground to believe that the sufferers in that crisis will ever become heavy with sleep, as saints have done during the long delay of Christendom. That brief season of unprecedented trial and danger does not admit of it. Next, as little ground is there in Scripture to predicate of these latter-day sufferers the possession of the Holy Ghost, which is the peculiar privilege of the believer since the rejected Christ took His place as Head in heaven. The Holy Ghost is to be poured out on all flesh for the millennial day, no doubt; but no prophecy declares that the remnant will be so characterized till they see Jesus. And, again, there is the third point of distinction, that these sufferers are nowhere set forth as going out to meet the Bridegroom. They may flee away because of the abomination that makes desolate, but this is a contrast rather than a similar feature.

The third of these parables presents another phase again. During the absence of the Lord, before He appears to take the kingdom of the world, He gives gifts to men -- different gifts, and in different measures. This pre-eminently belongs to Christianity and its active testimony in peculiar variety. I am not aware of anything exactly answering to it in its full character in the latter day (which will be distinguished by a brief energetic witness of the kingdom). These gifts of Matt. 25 seem to me the thorough expression of the activity of grace, that goes out and labours for a rejected and absent Lord on high. However, I may not dwell upon minute points, which would, of course, frustrate the desire to give a comprehensive sketch in a short compass.

The latter scene of the chapter is, to a simple mind, evident enough.

All the nations {Matt. 25:32}
or Gentiles are in question: there can be no mistake as to this. The Jew has already come before us, and at the beginning of the Lord’s discourse, because the disciples were then Jews. Next, as disciples emerged from Judaism into Christianity, we have in this very distinctly the reason why the Christian parenthesis comes second in order. Then, in the third place, we find

all the nations

who are formally designated as such, and distinguished in the clearest manner from the two others, both in terms and in the things said of them. They come up and are visibly dealt with as Gentiles at the close, when the Son of man reigns as king over the earth. The question which comes before His throne, and decides their eternal lot, does not consist of the secrets of the heart then laid bare, nor their general life, but of their behaviour to His messengers. How had they treated certain persons that the King calls His brethren? It is an appraisal then, founded on their relation to a brief testimony rendered at the close of the present dispensation (I doubt not, by Jewish brethren of the King, when all the world wonders after the beast, and in general men go back to idols, and fall into Antichrist’s hands); a testimony suited to the crisis, after the Christian body has been taken to heaven, and the question of the earth is raised once more. Thus these nations or Gentiles are dealt with according to their behaviour to the messengers of the King, just before and up to the time that the King summons them before the throne of His glory. To own His despised heralds, when the time of strong delusion comes, will demand the quickening work of the Spirit; which, indeed, is needful for receiving any and every testimony of God. It is not a question of any general issue that would apply to a course of ages, as to the present preaching of God’s grace, or to the ordinary current of men’s lives. Nothing of the sort appears to be the ground of the Lord’s action with either the sheep or the goats.

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Formal teaching is over now, whether practical or prophetic. The scene above all scenes draws near, on which, however blessed, I cannot say much at this time. The Lord Jesus has been presented to the people, has preached, has wrought miracles, has instructed disciples, has met all the various classes of His adversaries, has launched into the future up to the end of the age. Now He prepares to suffer, -- to suffer in absolute surrender of Himself to the Father. Accordingly, in this scene it is no longer man judging Him in words, but God judging Him in His person on the cross. Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. So it is here. He maintains, too, every affection in its fulness. Here, aside from the crowd, the Lord for a season takes whatever of rest might be vouchsafed to His spirit. The active work was done. The cross remained -- a few brief hours, but of eternal value and unfathomable import, with which indeed nothing can compare.

At the house of Bethany Jesus is now found. It is one of the few scenes introduced by the Spirit of God into all the Gospels save Luke, in contrast with, yet in preparation for, the cross. Was the Spirit of God then acting mightily in the heart of one who loved the Saviour? At this very time Satan was pushing on the heart of man to dare the worst against Jesus. Around these were the parties. What a moment for heaven, and earth, and hell! How much, how little was man seen! for if one feature be prominent in His foes more than another, it is this, that man is powerless, even when Jesus was the victim, exposed to every hostile breath as it might appear. Yet does He accomplish everything, when He was but a sufferer; they nothing, when free to do all (for it was their hour, and the power of darkness), nothing but their iniquity; but even in their iniquity doing the will of God, spite of themselves, and contrary to their own plans. They did their will in point of guilt, but it was never accomplished as they desired. First of all, as we are told, their great anxiety was, that the deed on which their heart was set, the death of Jesus, should not be at the passover. But their resolution was vain. From the beginning God had decided that then, and at no other time, it should be. They assembled, they consulted,

that they might take Jesus by subtlety and kill him  
{Matt. 26:4}.

The upshot of their deliberations was only --

Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among
the people {Matt. 26:5}.

Little did they foresee the treachery of a disciple, or the public sentence of a Roman governor. Again, there was no uproar among the people, contrary to their fears. Yet did Jesus die on that day according to God's word.

But let us turn aside to the company of our Lord for a little while at Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper. There was poured out the worship of a heart that loved Him, if ever there was one. She waited not for the promise of the Father; but He who was soon after given to overflowing, even then wrought in the instincts of her new nature.

There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head as he sat at meat {Matt. 26:7}.

This, John lets us know, she had kept; it was no new thing got up for the occasion; it was her best, and spent on Jesus. How little it was in her eyes, how precious in His, spent on one whom she loved, for whom she felt the impending danger; for love is quick to feel, and feels more truly than man's most sharpened prudence. So it was, then, that this woman pours her ointment on His head. John mentions His feet. Certainly it was poured upon both. But as Matthew has the King before him, and it was usual to pour on, not the feet of a king, but his head, he naturally records that part of the action which was suitable to the Messiah. John, on the contrary, whose point is that Jesus was infinitely more than a king, while lowly enough in love for anything -- John most appropriately tells us that Mary poured it on His feet. It is interesting, too, to observe, that love, and a profound sense of the glory of Jesus, led her to do that which a sinner's heart, thoroughly broken down in the presence of His grace, prompted her to do. For Luke mentions another person. In this case it was

a woman in the city, who was a sinner {Luke 7:37},

a totally different person, at another and earlier time, and in the house of another Simon, a Pharisee. She too anointed the feet of Jesus with an alabaster box of ointment; but she stood at His feet behind, weeping, and began to wash His feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet. There are thus many added circumstances in harmony with the case. All I would point out now is, the kindred feeling to which is led a poor sinner that tasted His grace in presence of her proved unworthiness, and a loving worshipper, filled with the glory of His person, and sensitive to the malice of His foes. However that may be, the Lord vindicates her in the face of murmuring disaffected disciples. It is a solemn lesson; for it shows how one corrupt mind may defile others, incomparably better than its own. The whole college of the apostles, the twelve, were tainted for the moment by the poison insinuated by one. What hearts are ours at such a season, in the face of such love! But so it was, alas! -- is. One evil eye may too soon communicate its foul impression, and thereby many be defiled. It was Judas at bottom; but there was also that in the rest which made them susceptible of similar selfishness at the expense of Jesus; although there was not in them the same allowance of diabolical influence which had suggested thoughts to Judas.

The example is surely not without serious admonition to ourselves. How often care for doctrine cloaks Satan, as here care for the poor! Morally, too, this connects itself with Christ's sufferings that should follow. The devotedness of the woman is used of Satan to push Judas into his last wickedness, so much the more determined by the outflow of what his heart could not in the smallest degree appreciate. Thence he goes to sell Jesus. If he could not manage to get the box of precious ointment, or its worth, he would, while he could, secure his little profit on the sale of Jesus to His enemies.

What will ye give me,
says he to the chief priests,
and I will deliver him unto you? {Matt. 26:15}.

Accordingly the covenant takes place -- a covenant with death, and an agreement with hell.

They covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver
{Matt. 26:15}
-- man's, Israel's, worthy price for Jesus!

But now, as the woman had her token for Jesus, and in it her own memorial, wherever, whenever the gospel of the kingdom is preached in the whole world, so Jesus next institutes the standing, undying token of His dying love. He founds the new feast, His own supper for His disciples. At the paschal feast He takes up the bread and the wine, and consecrates them to be on earth the continual remembrance of Himself in the midst of His own. In the language of its institution there are some distinctive features which may claim a notice when we have the opportunity of looking at the other Gospels. From this table our Lord goes to Gethsemane, and His agony there. Whatever there was of sorrow, whatever there was of pain, whatever there was of suffering, our Lord never bowed to any suffering from men without, before He bore it on His heart alone with His Father. He went through it in spirit before He went through it in fact. And this, I believe, is the main point here. I say not all that we have; for here He met the terrors of death -- and what a death! -- pressed on Him by the prince of this world, who nevertheless found nothing in Him. Thus at the actual hour it was God glorified in Him, the Son of man, even as, when raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, He forthwith declares to His brethren the name of His Father and their Father, of His God and their God, both nature and relationship. Here His cry still is simply to His Father, as in the cross it was, My God, though not this only. However profoundly instructive all this may be, our Lord in the garden calls upon the disciples to watch and pray; but this is precisely what they find hardest. They slept, and prayed not. What a contrast, too, with Jesus afterwards, when the trial came! And yet for them it was but the merest reflection of that which He passed through. For the world, death is either borne with the obduracy that dares all because it believes nothing, or it is a pang as the end of present enjoyment, the sombre portal of they know not what beyond. To the believer, to the Jewish disciple, before redemption, death was even worse in a sense; for there was a juster perception of God,
and of man’s state morally. Now all is changed through His death, which the disciples so little estimated, the bare shadow of which, however, was enough to overwhelm them all, and silence every confession of their faith. For him who most of all presumed on the strength of his love, it was enough to prove how little he yet knew of the reality of death, spite of his too ready boasts. And yet what would death have been in his case compared with that of Jesus! But even that was incomparably too much for the strength of Peter; all was proved powerless, save the One who shewed, even when He was weakest, that He was alone the Giver of all strength, the Manifestor of all grace, even when He was crushed under such judgment as man never knew before, nor can know again.

We next see our Lord, not with the disciples, failing, false, or traitorous, but His hour come, in the power of the hostile world, priests, governors, soldiers, and people. What was attempted by man completely broke down. They had their witnesses, but the witnesses agreed not. Failure everywhere is found, even in wickedness -- failure not in men’s will, but in its accomplishment. God alone governs. So now Jesus was condemned, not for their testimony, but for His own. How wondrous, that even to put Him to death they needed the witness of Jesus; they could not condemn Him to die but for His good confession. For His testimony to the truth they consummated their worst deed; and this doubly, before the high priest as well as before the governor. Warned of his wife (for the Lord took care that there should be providential testimony), as well as too keen-sighted to overlook the malice of the Jews and the innocence of the accused, Pontius Pilate acknowledges his prisoner to be guiltless, yet allowed himself to be forced to act contrary to his own conscience, and according to their wishes whom he wholly despised. Once more, ere Jesus is led out to be crucified, the Jews showed what they were morally; for when the coarse-minded heathen put before them the alternative of releasing Jesus or Barabbas, their instant preference (not without priestly instigation) was a wretch, a robber, a murderer. Such was the feeling of the Jews, God’s people, toward their King, because He was the Son of God, Jehovah, and not a mere man. With bitter irony, but not without God, wrote Pilate the accusation,

This is Jesus the King of the Jews {Matt. 27:37}.

But this was not the only testimony which God gave. For from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And then when Jesus, crying with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost, that ensued which particularly would strike the heart of the Jew. The veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent. What could be conceived more solemn to Israel? His death was the death blow to the Jewish system, struck by one who was unmistakably the Maker of heaven and earth. But it was not the dissolution of that system only, but of the power of death itself; for the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after His resurrection, the witness of the value of His death, though not declared till after His resurrection. The death of Jesus, I hesitate not to say, is the sole groundwork of righteous deliverance from sin. In the resurrection is seen the mighty power of God; but what is power for a sinner, with God before his soul, compared with righteousness? What with grace? And this is precisely what we have here. Hence, it is the death of Jesus alone that is the true centre and pivot of all God’s counsels and ways, whether in righteousness or in grace. The resurrection, no doubt, is the power that manifests and proclaims all; but what it proclaims is the power of His death, because that alone has vindicated God morally. The death of Jesus alone has proved that nothing could overcome His love -- rejection, death itself, so far from this, being only the occasion of displaying love to the uttermost. Therefore it is that, of all things even in Jesus, there is none that affords such a common and perfect resting-place for God and man as the death of Jesus. When it is a question of power, liberty, life, no doubt we must turn to the resurrection; and hence it is, that in the Acts of the apostles this necessarily comes out most prominently, because the matter in hand was to afford proof, on the one hand, of manifested but despised grace; on the other, of God’s reversing man’s attainer of Jesus by raising Him from the dead and exalting Him to His own right hand on high. The death of Jesus would be no demonstration of this sort. On the contrary, His death was what man appeared to triumph in. They had got rid of Jesus thus, but the resurrection proved how vain and short-lived it was, and that God was against them. The object was to make evident that man was wholly opposed to God, and that God even now manifested His sentence on it. The raising up Him whom man slew renders this unquestionable. I admit that in the resurrection of Christ God is for us, for the believer. But the sinner and the believer must not be confounded together, for there is an immense difference between the two things. Whatever the witness of perfect love in the gift and death of Jesus, for the sinner there is not, there cannot be, anything whatever in the resurrection of Jesus save condemnation. I press this the more strongly, because the recovery of the precious truth of Christ’s resurrection exposes some, by a kind of reaction, to weaken the value which His death has in God’s mind, and ought to have in our faith. Let those, then, who prize the resurrection, see to it that they be exceedingly jealous for the due place of the cross.

The two things we find remarkably guarded here. It was not the resurrection, but the death of Jesus, that rent the veil of the temple; it was not His resurrection that opened the graves, but His cross, though the saints rose not till after He rose. It is just so with us practically. In point of fact, we never do know the full worth of the death of Christ until we look upon it from the power and results of the resurrection. But what we contemplate from the side of resurrection is not itself, but the death of Jesus. Hence it is that in the Church’s assembling, and most properly, on the Lord’s day, we do in the breaking of bread show forth, not the resurrection, but the death of the Lord. At the same time we show forth His death not on the day of death, but upon that of resurrection. Do I forget that it is the day of resurrection? Then I little understand my liberty and joy. If, on the contrary, the
resurrection-day brings no more before me than the resurrection, it is too plain that the death of Christ has lost its infinite grace for my soul.

The Egyptians would have liked to cross the Red Sea, but they had no care for the doors sprinkled with the blood of the lamb. They essayed to pass through the watery walls, desiring thus to follow Israel to the other side. But we do not read that they ever sought the shelter of the Paschal Lamb’s blood. No doubt this is an extreme case, and the judgment of the world of nature; but we may learn even from an enemy not to value resurrection less, but to value the death and blood-shedding of our precious Saviour more. There is really nothing towards God and man like the death of Christ.

Then, in contrast with the poor, but devoted, women of Galilee that surrounded the cross, we behold the fears, the just fears, of those who had accomplished the death of Jesus. These guilty men go full of anxiety to Pilate. They feared that he would deceive them (Matt. 27:63), and so had their watch, and stone, and seal -- in vain! The Lord that sat in the heavens had them in derision. Jesus had prepared His own (and His enemies knew it) for His rising on the third day. Women came there the evening before to look at the place where the Lord lay buried. That morning, very early, when there were none there but the guards, the angel of the Lord descends. We are not told that our Lord rose at that time; still less is it said that the angel of the Lord rolled away the stone for Him. He that passed through the doors, closed for fear of the Jews, could just as easily pass through the sealed stone, despite all the soldiers of the empire. We know that there the angel sat after rolling away the great stone which had closed the sepulchre, where our Lord, despised and rejected of men, nevertheless accomplished Isaiah’s prophecy in making His grave with the rich. The Lord then had this further witness, that the very keepers, hardened and bold as such usually are, trembled, and became as dead men, while the angel bids the women not to fear: for this Jesus which was crucified is not here; he is risen. Come, see the place where the Lord lay: and go and tell the disciples, Behold, he goeth before you into Galilee (Matt. 28:6, 7).

This is a point of importance for completing the view of His rejection, or its consequences in resurrection, and so Matthew takes particular care of it, though the same fact may be recorded also by Mark for his purpose.

But Matthew does not speak of the various appearances of the Lord in Jerusalem after the resurrection. What he does dwell upon particularly, and of course with his special reasons for it, is, that the Lord, after His resurrection, adheres to the place where the state of the Jews led Him to be habitually, and shed His light around according to prophecy; for the Lord resumed relations once more in Galilee with the remnant represented by the disciples after He rose from the dead. It was in the place of Jewish contempt; it was where the benighted poor of the flock were, the neglected of the proud scribes and rulers of Jerusalem. There the risen Lord was pleased to go before His servants and rejoin them.

But as the Galilean women went with this word from the angel, the Lord Himself met them.

And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him (Matt. 28:9).

It is remarkable that in our Gospel this was permitted. To Mary Magdalene, who in her desire to pay her wonted obeisance probably was attempting something similar, He altogether declines it; but this is mentioned in the Gospel of John. How is it, then, that the two apostolic accounts show us the homage of the women received, and of Mary Magdalene refused, on the same day, and perhaps at the same hour? Clearly the action is significant in both. The reason, I apprehend, was this, Matthew sets before us that while He was the rejected Messiah, though now risen, He not only reverted to His relations in the despised part of the land with His disciples, but gives, in this accepted worship of the daughters of Galilee, the pledge of His special association with the Jews in the latter day; for it is precisely thus that they will look for the Lord. That is, a Jew, as such, counts upon the bodily presence of the Lord. The point in John’s record is the very reverse; for it is the taking one, who was a sample of believing Jews, out of Jewish relations into association with Himself just about to ascend to heaven. In Matthew He is touched. They held Him by the feet without remonstrance, and thus worshipped Him in bodily presence.

In John He says,

Touch me not;

and the reason is,

for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God (John 20:17).

Worship henceforth was to be offered to Him above, invisible, but known there by faith. To the women in Matthew it was here that He was presented for their worship; to the woman in John it was there only He was to be known now. It was not a question of bodily presence, but of the Lord ascended to heaven and there announcing the new relationships for us with His Father and God. Thus, in the one case, it is the sanction of Jewish hopes of His presence here below for the homage of Israel; in the other Gospel, it is His personal absence and ascension, leading souls to a higher and suited association with Himself, as well as with God, taking even those who were Jews out of their old condition to know the Lord no more after the flesh.

Most consistently, therefore, in this Gospel, we have no ascension scene at all. If we had only the Gospel of Matthew, we should possess no record of this wonderful fact: so striking is the omission, that a well-known commentary, Mr. Alford’s first edition, broached the rash and irreverent hypothesis founded upon it, that our Matthew is an incomplete Greek version of the Hebrew original, because there was no such record; for it was impossible, in the opinion of that writer, that an apostle could have omitted a description of that event. The fact is, if you add the ascension to Matthew, you would overload and mar his Gospel. The beautiful end of Matthew is, that (while chief priests and
elders essay to cover their wickedness by falsehood and bribery, and their lie

is commonly reported among the Jews until this day

{Matt. 28:15}

our Lord meets His disciples on a mountain in Galilee, according to His appointment, and sends them to disciple all the Gentiles. How great is the change of dispensation is manifest from His former commission to the same men in Matt. 10. Now they were to baptize them unto the name of the Father, &c. It was not a question of the Almighty God of the fathers, or the Jehovah God of Israel. The name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is characteristic of Christianity. Permit me to say, that this is the true formula of Christian baptism, and that the omission of this form of sound words appears to me quite as fatal to the validity of baptism as any change that can be pointed out in other respects. Instead of being a Jewish thing, this is what supplanted it. Instead of a relic of older dispensations to be modified or rather set aside now, on the contrary, it is the full revelation of the name of God as now made known, not before. This only came out after the death and resurrection of Christ. There is no longer the mere Jewish enclosure He had entered during the days of His flesh, but the change of dispensation was now dawning: so consistently does the Spirit of God hold to His design from the first to the very end.

Accordingly He closes with these words,

Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world [age] {Matt. 28:20}.

How the form of the truth would have been weakened, if not destroyed, had we then heard of His going up to heaven! It is evident that the moral force of it is infinitely more preserved as it is. He is charging His disciples, sending them on their world-wide mission with these words,

Lo, I am with you alway, all the days, &c.

The force is immensely increased, and for this very reason, that we hear and see no more. He promises His presence with them to the end of the age; and thereon the curtain drops. He is thus heard, if not seen, for ever with His own on earth, as they go forth upon that errand so precious, but perilous. May we gather real profit from all He has given us.
Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Gospels

Lecture 4

Mark 1 – 8

{Characteristics of the Four Gospels}

It is remarkable how tradition has contrived to injure the truth in touching the question of the method of the Gospel we now enter on; for the current view which comes down to us from the ancients, stamped too with the name of one who lived not long after the apostles, lays down -- that Mark's is that Gospel which arranges the facts of our Lord's life, not in, but out of the order of their occurrence. Now that order is precisely what he most observes. And this mistake, if it be one, which notoriously had wrought from the earliest days, and naturally, therefore, to a large extent since, of course vitiated the right understanding of the book. I am persuaded that the Spirit of God intended that we should have among the Gospels one that adheres to the simple order of the facts in giving our Lord's history. Otherwise we must be plunged in uncertainty, not merely as to one particular Gospel, but as lacking the means of rightly judging departures from historic order in all the others; for it is plain that if there be no such thing as a regular order in any one Gospel, we are necessarily deprived of all power of determining in any case when the events did really occur which stand differently connected in the rest of the Gospels. It is not in any way that one would seek what is commonly called a “harmony,” which is really to obscure the perception of the special objects of the Gospels. At the same time nothing can be more certain than that the real author of the Gospels, even God Himself, knew all perfectly. Nor, even to take the lowest ground, on the part of the different writers, is ignorance of the order in which the facts occurred a reasonable key to the peculiarities of the Gospels. The Holy Ghost deliberately displaced many events and discourses; but this could not be through carelessness, still less through caprice, but only for ends worthy of God. The most obvious order would be to give them just as they occurred. Partly, then, as it seems to me, that we might be able to judge with accuracy and with certainty of the departures from the order of occurrence, the Spirit of God has given us in one of these Gospels that order as the rule. In which of them is it found, do you ask? I have no doubt that the answer is, spite of tradition, In the Gospel of Mark. And the fact exactly agrees with the spiritual character of his Gospel, because this also ought to have great weight in confirming the answer, if not in deciding the question.

Any person who looks at Mark, not merely piecemeal, though it is evident in any part, but, much more satisfactorily, as a whole, will rise from the consideration of the Gospel with the fullest conviction that what the Holy Ghost has undertaken to give us in this history of Christ is His ministry. It is now so much a matter of common knowledge, that there is no need to dwell long upon a fact that is generally confessed. I shall endeavour to show how the whole account hangs together, and bears out this well-known and most simple truth -- how it accounts for the peculiarities in Mark, for what is given us, and for what is left out; and of course, therefore, for his differences from the others. All this, I think, will be made clear and certain to any who may not have thoroughly examined it before. Here I would only observe how entirely this goes along with the fact that Mark adheres to the order of history, because, if he is giving us the service of the Lord Jesus Christ, and particularly His service in the word, as well as in the miraculous signs which illustrated that service, and which were its external vouchers, it is plain that the order in which the facts occurred is precisely that which is the most calculated of all to give us a true and adequate view of His ministry; whereas it is not so if we look at the object of either Matthew or Luke.

In the former the Holy Ghost is showing us the rejection of Jesus, and that rejection proved from the very first. Now, in order to give us the right understanding of His rejection, the Holy Ghost groups facts together, and groups them often, as we have had occasion to notice, entirely regardless of the time at which they occurred. What was wanted was a bright, vivid view of the shameless rejection of the Messiah by His own people. It was needed, thereupon, to make plain what God would undertake in consequence of that rejection, that is to say, the vast economic change that would follow. It was necessarily the weightiest thing that had ever been or that could be in this world, the rejection of a divine Person who was at the same time

the great King {Psa. 48:2; Matt. 5:35},

the promised, expected Messiah of Israel. For that very reason the mere order of the facts would be entirely insufficient to give proper weight to the object of the Holy Ghost in Matthew. Therefore the Spirit of God does what even man has wit enough to do, where he has any analogous object before him. There is a bringing together, from different places, persons, and times in the history, the great salient facts which make evident the total rejection of the
Messiah, and the glorious change which God was able to introduce for the Gentiles in consequence of that rejection. Such is the object in Matthew; and accordingly this accounts for the departure from mere sequence of events.

In Luke, again, there is another reason that we shall find, when we come to details, abundantly confirmed. For therein the Holy Ghost undertakes to show us Christ as the one who brought to light all the moral springs of the heart of man, and at the same time the perfect grace of God in dealing with man as he is; therein, too, the divine wisdom in Christ which made its way through this world, the lovely grace, too, which attracted man when utterly confounded and broken down enough to cast himself upon what God is. Hence throughout the Gospel of Luke we have, in some respects, a disregard of the mere order of time equal to that which characterized Matthew. If we suppose two facts, mutually illustrating each other, but occurring at totally different times, in such a case these two facts might be brought together. For instance, supposing the Spirit of God desired in our Lord’s history to show the value of the word of God and of prayer. He might clearly bring together two remarkable occasions, in one of which our Lord revealed the mind of God about prayer — in the other, His judgment of the value of the word. The question whether the two events took place at the same time is here entirely immaterial. No matter when they occurred, they are here seen together; put out of the order of their occurrence, in fact, it is to form the justest order for illustrating the truth that the Holy Ghost meant us to receive.

This general observation is made here, because I think it is particularly in place in introducing the Gospel of Mark.

But God has taken care to meet another point by the way. Man might take advantage of this departure from the historical order in some Gospels, and the maintenance of it in others, in order to decry the writers or their writings. Of course, he is hasty enough to impute “discrepancy.” There is no real ground for the charge. God has taken a very wise method to contradict and rebuke the credulous incredulity of man. As there are four evangelists, so He has arranged it that, of these four, two should adhere to historical order, and two should forsake it where it was required. Further, of these two, one was, and one was not an apostle in each case. Of the two evangelists, Mark and John, who generally maintain historical order, the most remarkable thread of events was not given by an apostle. Nevertheless, John, who was an apostle, adheres to the historical order in the fragmentary series of facts, here and there, in the life of Christ, that he gives us. At the same time the Gospel of John does not undertake to present a sketch of the entire course of Christ. Mark describes the whole career of His ministry with more particularity than any other. Hence it is that John practically acts as a kind of supplement, not to Mark only, but to all the evangelists; and we have ever and anon a cluster of the richest events, yet keeping to historical order. Not to speak of its wondrous preface, there is an introduction that precedes the account given in the other Gospels, filling up a certain space after His baptism, but before His public ministry. And then, again, we have a number of discourses which our Lord gave more particularly to His disciples after His public relations were over. These are all given, as it appears to me, in the exact order of their delivery, without any departure from it, save only that we find a parenthesis once or twice in John, which, if not seen there to be a parenthesis, wears an appearance of a departure from the succession of time; but of course a parenthesis does not come under the ordinary structure of a regular sentence or series of things.

This explanation, I trust, will help to a general understanding of the relative place of the Gospels. We have Matthew and Luke, one of them an apostle and the other not, both of whom are wont to depart from historical order very largely. We have Mark and John, one of them an apostle and the other not, both of whom likewise, as a rule, adhere to historical order. God has thus cut off all just reason on men’s part for saying that it is a question of knowing or not knowing the facts as they occurred, some being eye-witnesses, and others learning the events, &c., otherwise. Of those that keep the order of history, one was, the other was not, an eye-witness; to those that adopt a different arrangement precisely the same remark applies. Thus it is that God has confuted all attempts of His enemies to cast the smallest discredit upon the instruments He has used. It is thus made apparent that (so far from the structure of the Gospels being attributable in any way to ignorance on one side, or, on the other, to a competent knowledge of the facts), on the contrary, he was no eye-witness who has given us the fullest, minutest, most vivid, and graphic sketch of the Lord’s service here below; and this in small particulars, which, as every one knows, is always the great test of truth. Persons who do not commonly speak the truth can nevertheless be careful enough sometimes about great matters; but it is in little words and ways where the heart betrays its own treachery, or the eye its lack of observation. And it is precisely in this that Mark triumphs so completely — rather, let me say, the Spirit of God in His employment of Mark. Nor was it that Mark had earlier been a worthy servant himself. Far from it. Who does not know that, when he began his work, he was not always fervent in serving the Lord? We are told in the Acts of the Apostles that he deserted the great apostle of the Gentiles when he accompanied him and his cousin Barnabas; for such was the relationship, rather than that of uncle. He left them, returning home to his mother and Jerusalem. His associations were with nature and the great seat of religious tradition, which for awhile, of course, ruined him, as it tends to ruin every servant of God who is similarly ensnared. Nevertheless, God’s grace overcomes all difficulties. So it was in the personal ministry of Mark, as we gather from the glorious work Mark was afterwards given to do, both in other ministry (Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11), and in the extraordinary honour of writing one of the inspired accounts of his Master. Mark had not possessed the advantage of that personal acquaintance with the facts which some of the other writers had enjoyed; yet is he the one through whom the Holy Ghost condescended to impart the minutest, and at the same time the most suggestive touches, if I may so say, that are found in any view vouchsafed us of the actual living ministry of our Lord Jesus. Indeed, such was the current of his own history,
as forming him for the work he subsequently had to do; for while at first there was certainly that which looked uncommonly like a false start, afterwards, on the contrary, he is acknowledged by Paul most cordially, spite of early disappointment and rebuke; for his company had been absolutely refused, even at the cost of losing Barnabas, to whom the apostle had special grounds of personal attachment. Barnabas was the man who had first gone after Saul of Tarsus; for assuredly he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost, and thus the more willing to accredit the great grace of God in Saul of Tarsus, when the new convert was regarded with suspicion, and might have been left alone for a season. Thus Saul had known literally in his own history how little the grace of God commands confidence in a sinful world. After all this, then, it was that Mark, who had fallen under the censure of Paul, and had been the occasion of separating Barnabas from that apostle -- that very Mark afterwards completely retrieved his lost character, and the apostle Paul takes more pains by far to reinstate him in the confidence of the saints, than he had done personally to refuse association with him in the service of the Lord.

Who, then, so fit to give us the Lord Jesus as the true servant? Choose whom you like. Go over the whole range of the New Testament; find out one whose own personal career so adapted him to delight in, and to become the suited vessel for the Holy Ghost to show us, the perfect servant of God. It was the man that had been the faulty servant; it was the man whom grace had restored and made to be a faithful servant -- who had proved how ensnaring is the flesh, and how dangerous the associations of human tradition and of home; but who thus, unprofitable at first for the ministry, became afterwards so profitable, as Paul himself took care to declare publicly and for ever in the imperishable word of God. This was the instrument whom God employed by the Holy Ghost to give us the grand lineaments of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Surely, as Levi the publican, the apostle Matthew was providentially formed for his task; and grace, condescending to look at all circumstances, never deigns to be controlled by them, but always, while working in them, nevertheless retains its own supremacy above them. Even so in Mark's case there was just as great an appropriateness for the task God had assigned him, as there was in the call of the earlier evangelist from the receipt of custom, and the choice of one so despised of Israel to show the fatal course of that nation, when the Lord turned at the great epoch of dispensational change to call in Gentiles and the despised of Israel themselves. But if there was this manifest fitness in Matthew for his work, it would be strange if there were not as much in Mark for his. And this is what we find in his Gospel. There is no parade of circumstance; there is no pomp of introduction even for the Lord Jesus Christ in this Gospel, not even that style which is most rightly found elsewhere. It could not be that the Messiah of Israel was to enter among His chosen people, and be found in Israel's land, without due witness and clear tokens preceding His approach; and the God who had given promises, and who had established the kingdom, would surely make it manifest; for the Jews did require a sign, and God gave them signs in abundance before the coming of the greatest sign of all.

Thus it is that in the Gospel of Matthew we have seen the mildest credentials from angels and among men of the Messiah, who then and there was born the King of the Jews, in Immanuel's land. But in Mark all this is with equal beauty absent; and suddenly, without any other preparation than John preaching and baptizing -- the voice of one crying in the wilderness,

Prepare ye the way of the Lord {Mark 1:3}

-- at once, after this, the Lord Jesus is found, not born, not the subject of homage, but preaching, taking up the work which John not long after laid down, as it were, on going to prison. That setting aside of the Baptist {Mark 1:14} becomes the signal for the public service of the Lord; and, accordingly, the service of Christ is thenceforward pursued throughout our Gospel; and first of all His Galilean service, which continues down to the end of Mark 10. I do not purpose to-night to look even at the whole of this Galilean ministry, but to divide the subject-matter as my time requires, and therefore I do not now limit myself to the natural divisions of the Gospel, but simply follow it according to chapters, as the occasion may require. We shall take it in two portions.

In the opening section or preface {Mark 1:1-13}, then, we have here no genealogy whatsoever, but very simply the announcement of John the Baptist. We have our Lord then ushered into His public ministry, and, first of all, His Galilean labours. As He walks by the sea, He sees Simon, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea. These He calls to follow Him. It was not the first acquaintance of the Lord Jesus with these two apostles. At first sight it might seem strange that a word, even though it were the word of the Lord, should call these two men away from their father or their occupation; yet no one can call it unprecedented, as the call of Levi, already referred to, makes plain. Nevertheless, so it is that in the case of Andrew and Simon, as well as the sons of Zebedee, called about the same time, there was certainly previous acquaintance with the Saviour. Two disciples of the Baptist, one of them Andrew, preceded his brother Simon, as we know from John 1. But here it is not at all the same time or facts that are described in that Gospel. In the call to the work, I have no hesitation in saying that Andrew and Simon were called before John and James; but in the personal acquaintance with the Saviour, which we find in the Gospel of John, it is evident to me, that an unnamed disciple (as I think, John himself) was before Simon. Both are perfectly true. There is not even the appearance of contradiction when the Scripture is rightly understood. Each of these is exactly in its proper place, for we have in our Gospel Christ's ministry. That is not the theme of the Gospel of John, but a far deeper and more personal subject; it is the revelation of the Father in the Son to man upon the earth. It is eternal life found by souls, and of course in the Son of God. This accordingly is the first point of contact which the Holy Ghost loves to trace in John's Gospel. Why is it all that entirely left out of Mark? Evidently because his province is...
not a soul acquainted for the first time with Jesus, the display of the wonderful truth of eternal life in Him. Another subject is in hand. We have the Saviour’s grace, of course, in all the Gospels; but the great theme of Mark is His ministry. Hence it is, that not the personal so much as the ministerial call is the one referred to here. In John, on the contrary, where it was the Son made known to man by faith of the Holy Ghost’s operation, it is not the ministerial call, but the previous one -- the personal call of grace unto the knowledge of the Son, and eternal life in Him.

This may serve to show that weighty lessons lie under that which a careless eye might count a comparatively trivial difference in these Gospels. Well we know that in God’s word there is nothing trivial; but what might at first sight seem so is pregnant with truth, and also in immediate relation to God’s aim in each particular book where these facts are found.

All things, then, they now forsake at the call of the Lord. It was not a question simply of eternal life. The principle, no doubt, is always true; but we do not, in fact, find all things thus forsaken in ordinary cases. Eternal life is brought to souls in the Christ who attracts them, but they are enabled to glorify God where they are. Here it is all abandoned in order to follow Christ. The next scene is the synagogue of Capernaum. And there our Lord shows the objects of His mission here in two particulars. First there is teaching --

He taught them,

as it is said,

as one that had authority, and not as the scribes {Mark 1:22}.

It was not tradition, it was not reason, not imagination, or the persuasible words of man’s wisdom. It was the power of God. It was that, therefore, which was equally simple and sure. This necessarily gives authority to the tone of him who, in a world of uncertainty and deceit, utters with assurance the mind of God. It is a dishonour to God and His word to pronounce with hesitation the truth of God, if indeed we know it for our own souls. It is unbelief to say “I think,” if I am sure; nay, revealed truth is not only what I know, but what God has made known to me. It is to cloud and weaken the truth, it is to injure souls, it is to lower God Himself, if we do not speak with authority where we have no doubt of His word. But then it is plain that we must be taught of God before we are at liberty to speak thus confidently.

But it is here to be noted that this is the first quality mentioned in our Lord’s teaching. This, I need not say, has a voice to us. Where we cannot speak with authority we had better not speak at all. It is a simple rule, and abundantly short. At the same time it is clear that it would lead to a great deal of searching of heart; but, I am no less persuaded, it would be with immense profit to ourselves and to our hearers.

The second thing was not authority in teaching, but power in action; and our Lord deals with the root of the mischief in man -- the power of Satan, now so little believed in -- the power of Satan over human spirits or bodies, or both. There was then in the synagogue -- the very place of meeting, where Jesus was -- a man with an unclean spirit. The demoniac cried out; for it was impossible that the power of God in the person of Jesus could be there without detecting him that was under the power of Satan. The bruiser of the serpent was there, the deliverer of the enthralled sons of Adam. The mask is thrown off; the man, the unclean spirit, cannot rest in the presence of Jesus.

He cried out, saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth?

In the most singular way he blends together the action of the evil spirit with his own --

What have we to do with thee? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee, who thou art, the Holy One of God {Mark 1:23, 24}.

Jesus rebukes him. The unclean spirit tore him; for it was right that there should be the manifestation of the effects of the evil power, restricted as it was before Him who had defeated the tempter. It was a profitable lesson, that man should know what the working of Satan really is. We have on the one side, then, the malignant effect of Satan’s power, and on the other the blessed benignant might of the Lord Jesus Christ, who compels the spirit to come out, amazing all that saw and heard, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying,

What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him {Mark 1:27}.

There was, we thus see, both the authority of truth, and also the power that wrought in outward signs accompanying.

The next scene proves that it was not merely displayed in such acts as these: there was the misery and the maladies of man apart from the direct possession of the enemy. But virtue goes out of Jesus wherever there was an appeal of need. Peter’s wife’s mother is the first who is presented after He leaves the synagogue; and the marvellous grace and power blended in His healing of Peter’s mother-in-law attracts crowds of sick with every evil; so that we know all the city was come together at the door.

And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him {Mark 1:34}.

Thus, then, the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ is fully come. It is thus that He enters upon it in Mark. It is clearly the manifestation of the truth of God with authority. Divine power is vested in man over the devil, as well as over disease. Such was the form of the ministry of Jesus. There was a fulness in it naturally, one need scarce say, which was suitable to Him who was the head of ministry as well as its great pattern here below, no less than, as He is now, its source from His place of glory in heaven. But there is another notable feature in it, too, as contributing to fill this instructive introductory picture of our Lord’s ministry in its actual exercise. Our Lord

suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him.
He refused a testimony that was not of God. It might be true, but He would not accept the testimony of the enemy.

But positive strength is also requisite in dependence on God. Hence we are told,

In the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed [Mark 1:35].

There, just as there is the rejection of the enemy’s testimony, so there is the fullest leaning upon God’s power. No personal glory, no title to power that attached to Him, was the smallest reason for relaxing in entire subjection to His Father, or for neglecting to seek His guidance day by day. Thus He waited on God after the enemy was vanquished in the wilderness, after He had proved the value of that victory in healing those oppressed of the devil. Thus engaged it is that Simon and others follow and find Him.

And when they had found him, they said unto him, All men seek for thee [Mark 1:37].

But this public attraction to the Lord Jesus was a sufficient ground for not returning. He did not seek the applause of man, but that which comes from God. Directly it came to be published, so to speak, the Lord Jesus retires from the scene. If all men sought Him, He must go where it was a question of need, not of honour. Accordingly He says,

Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there; for therefore came I forth [Mark 1:38].

He ever abides the perfect, lowly, dependent servant of God here below. No sketch can be more admirable, nowhere else can we see the perfect ideal of ministry completely realized.

Are we, then, to assume that all this was set down at random? How are we to account without a definite purpose for these various particulars, and no others, swelling the picture of ministry? Very simply. It was what God inspired Mark for. It was the Spirit’s object by him. It was owing to a different design that we find other topics introduced elsewhere. No other Gospel presents even the same facts after such a sort, because no other is thus occupied with the Lord’s ministry. Thus the reason is most plain. It is Mark, and he alone, who was led of God to put the facts together that bear upon Christ’s ministry, adhering to the simple natural order of the facts related, omitting of course what did not illustrate the point, but among those which did, keeping the events as they followed one another. Christ is thus seen as the perfect servant. He was Himself showing what service of God is at the beginning of His ministry. He was forming others. He had called Peter, and James, and Andrew, and John. He was making them fishers of men -- servants, too. And so it is that the Lord presents before their eyes -- before their hearts -- before their consciences -- these perfect ways of grace in His own path here below. He was forming them after His own heart.

Then, at the close of the chapter, the leper comes; and, at the beginning of the next chapter, the paralytic man is brought. These we have had in Matthew, and we shall find the same in Luke. But here you will observe that the two cases are closer together. It is not so in Matthew, but in Luke. Matthew, as we saw, gave us the leper at the beginning of Matt. 8 and the paralytic man at the beginning of Matt. 10. Mark, who simply relates facts as they occur, introduced nothing between these two cases. They were, as I conceive, not long apart. The one followed soon after the other, and they are so introduced to us here. In the one, sin is viewed as the great type of defilement! in the other, sin is viewed as guilt accompanied by utter weakness. Man, utterly unfit for the presence of God, needs to be cleansed from his loathsome impurity. Such is the representation in leprosy. Man, utterly powerless for walk here below, needs to be forgiven as well as strengthened. Such is the great truth set forth in the paralytic case. Here too, with singular fulness, we have the picture of the crowds that were gathered round the door of the house, and the Lord, as usual, preaching to them. We have then a graphic picture of the palsied man brought in, borne by four. All the particulars are brought before our eyes. More than that: as they could not come nigh to Jesus for the press, the roof was uncovered, and the man is let down before the Lord’s eyes. Jesus, seeing their faith, addresses the man, meets the unbelieving blasphemous thoughts of the scribes that were there, and brings out His own personal glory as Son of man, rather than as God. This latter was the great point in curing the leper; for it was an axiomatic that God alone could cure a leper. Such was the acknowledgment of Israel’s king at a remarkable point in their history; such would have been the common confession of any Jew --

Am I God? {2 Kings 5:7}.

This was the point there. God must act directly or by a prophet, as every Jew would allow, in order to cure leprosy; but, in the case of the palsied man, our Lord asserted another thing altogether, namely, that

the Son of man had power on earth to forgive sins {Mark 2:10}.

Then He proved His power over the most hopeless bodily weakness as a witness of His authority here below to forgive. It was the Son of man on earth that had power. Thus the one proved that God had come down from heaven, and had really, in the person of that blessed Saviour, become a man without ceasing to be God. Such is the truth apparent in the cleansing of the leper; but in the paralytic healed, it is a different side of the Lord’s glory. The servant of God and man in every case, here He was the Son of man that had power on earth to forgive the guilty, and prove its reality by imparted strength to walk before all.

Then follows the call of the publican.

As he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him {Mark 2:14}.

Next, the Lord is seen at a feast in the house of him who was thus called by grace, which excites hatred in the slaves of religious routine.

When the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples -- not to Him; they had not honesty enough for that --
How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners? When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick [Mark 2:16, 17].

It gave the Lord an opportunity to explain the true character and suited objects of His ministry. To sinners, as such, went forth the call of God. It was not the government of a people now, but the invitation of sinners. God had delivered His people once; He had called them His son too, and called His son out of Egypt; but now it was a question of calling sinners, even if the words “to repentance” be given up as an interpolation derived from the corresponding passage in Luke, where its propriety is evident. The Lord gloried in the grace which He was ministering here below.

As the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast, this is the next scene, raising the question of the character of those whom Jesus was sent to call. The narrative presents all this in a very orderly manner, but still adhering simply to the facts. Then comes the question of mingling the new principles with the old. This the Lord pronounces quite impossible. He shows that it was inconsistent to expect fasting when the Bridegroom was there. It would argue an entire unbelief in His glory, a total want of right feeling in those who owned His glory. It was all very well for people who did not believe in Him; but if the disciples recognised Him as the Bridegroom, it were utterly incongruous to fast in His presence.

Hence, our Lord takes the opportunity of pursuing the subject more deeply in the observation that

no man also seeth a piece of new cloth on an old garment, else the new piece that filleth it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse [Mark 2:21].

The forms, the outward manifestation of that which Christ was introducing, will not suit, and cannot mingle with the old elements of Judaism, still less will their inner principles consent. This He enters on next:

And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles [Mark 2:22].

Christianity demands an outward expression, agreeable to its own intrinsic and distinctive life.  

This theme is followed up by the two sabbaths, the first of these sabbath days bringing clearly out to view that God no longer owned Israel, and this because that Jesus was as much despised in this day as David had been of old. Such is the point referred to here. The disciples of Christ were starving. What a position! No doubt David and his men suffered lack in that day. What was the effect then as to the system which God had sanctioned? God would not maintain His own ordinances in presence of the moral wrong to His anointed, and those that clave unto Him. His own honour was at stake. His ordinances, however important in their place, give way before the sovereign dispositions of His purpose. The application was evident. The Lord Jesus Christ was a greater than David; and were not the followers of Jesus quite as precious as those of Jesse’s son? If the bread of priests became common, when they of old were hungry, would God now hold to His sabbath when the disciples of Jesus lacked ordinary food? Besides, He adds,

The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is Lord also of the sabbath [Mark 2:27, 28].

Thus He asserts the superiority of His own person, and this as the rejected man; and therefore the title,

Son of Man,
is especially brought in here.

But, then, there is more which comes out on the second sabbath day. There was the presence of utter helplessness among men. It was not merely that the disciples of Jesus were in want, the witness of His own rejection, but in the synagogue He enters next was a man with a withered hand. How came this to pass? What was the feeling that could plead the law of the sabbath to keep from healing a miserable human sufferer? Had Jesus no heart, because their eyes were only open to find in His love an occasion to accuse Him who felt for every sorrow of man upon the earth? He was there with adequate power to banish all sorrow with its source. And therefore it is that our Lord Jesus, in this case, instead of merely pleading the case of the guiltless, goes boldly forward; and in the midst of a full synagogue, as He sees them watching that they might accuse Him, He answers the wicked thought of their heart. He gives them the opportunity they desired.

And he said to the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth [Mark 3:3].

There was no concealment for a moment.

He saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? [Mark 3:4].

Was He not the perfect servant of God, that knows so well the times? Here, then, instead of merely defending disciples, He challenges their wicked and evil thoughts in open congregation, and bore His witness that God’s delight is not in holding to rules, when it would be for the hindrance of the displays of His goodness. Contrariwise, His act declares that no rules can bind God not to do good; His nature is goodness; let man pretend ever such zeal for His own law to keep man wretched and hinder the flow of grace. God’s laws were never intended to bar His love. They were intended, no doubt, to put a restriction upon man’s evil, never to forbid God from doing His own good will. Alas! they had no faith that God was there.

And it is remarkable, though not noticed at the beginning of Mark 1, that Mark does not enter upon the service of our Lord Jesus before presenting Him in Mark 1:1 as the Son of God, followed by the application of the prophetic oracle, that

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2. Here is found one of the few exceptional dislocations, if not the only one, in Mark; for it would appear from Matt. 9:18, that while the Lord was speaking of the wine and the bottles the ruler Jarius came about his daughter. This is only given in chap. 5 by Mark.
He was really Jehovah. The only true servant was truly divine. What an illustrious testimony to His glory! At the start this was well, and rightly ordered, and in place most suitable; the more so as it is an unusual thought in Mark. And here let me make the remark in passing, that we have hardly any quotation of Scripture by the evangelist himself. I am not aware that any positive case can be adduced, except in these prefatory verses of the Gospel; for Mark 15:28 rests on too precarious authority to be fairly regarded as an exception. There are some not unfrequent quotations either by our Lord or to our Lord; but the application of Scripture about our Lord by the evangelist himself, so frequent in the Gospel of Matthew, is almost, if not entirely, unknown to the Gospel of Mark. And the reason, I think, is very plain. What he had in hand was not the accomplishment of Scriptural marks or hopes, but the fulfilment of the Lord’s ministry. What he therefore dwells on was not what others had said of old, but what the Lord Himself did. Hence it is that application of Scripture, and accomplishments of prophecy, naturally disappear where such is the theme of the Gospel.

However, again returning to the conclusion of the second sabbath day. Our Lord looks round about on these Sabbatarians with anger, being distressed, as it is said, at the hardness of their hearts, and then bids the man stretch forth his hand, which was no sooner done than it was restored. This goodness of God, so publicly and fearlessly witnessed by Him who thus served man, at once goads on to madness the murderous feeling of the religious leaders. It is the first point where, according to Mark’s account, the Pharisees, taking counsel with the Herodians, conceived the design of killing Jesus. It was not fit that One so good should live in their midst. The Lord withdraws to the sea with His disciples; and subsequent to this it is that, while He heals many, and casts out unclean spirits, He also goes up into a mountain, where He takes a new step. It is one point of change in Mark’s Gospel, a step in advance of all He had hitherto done. Following upon the design of the Pharisees with the Herodians to destroy Jesus, the new measure He adopts is the sovereign call and appointment of the twelve, that He might in due time send them forth. Thus, He not merely calls them to be with Him, but He appoints them in a formal manner to the great mission on which they were to be sent out. The Lord now takes the conspiracy of two great enemies in Israel, the Pharisees and the Herodians, as an opportunity to provide for His work. He sees well in their hatred what was before Him; indeed, He knew it from the first, it need hardly be said. Still, the manifestation of their murderous hatred becomes the signal for this fresh step, the appointment of those that were to continue the work when the Lord should be no longer here in bodily presence Himself to carry it on. And so we have the twelve; He ordains them, that they might be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, &c. {Mark 3:14, 15}.

Ministry in the word has always the highest place in Mark -- not miracles, but preaching. The healing of sickness and the casting out of the devils were signs accompanying the preached word. Nothing could be more complete. There is not only evidence that we see the servant depicted here, but that the servant was the Lord Himself, even as we saw in the beginning of this Gospel.

Thus there was the appointment of those He pleased to call for the due execution of His mighty work on the earth. At this juncture it is that we find His relatives so greatly moved when they heard of all -- the crowds -- no time to eat, &c. It is a remarkable and characteristic fact mentioned by Mark only.

When his friends heard it, they went out to lay hold of him: for they said, He is beside himself {Mark 3:21}.

It was mainly, I suppose, because of an entire devotedness which they could not appreciate; for just before we are told, that

the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread {Mark 3:20}.

To His friends it was mere infatuation. They thought He must be out of His mind. It must be so, more particularly to one’s relatives, where the powerful grace of God calls out and abstracts its objects from all natural claims. Such it always is in this world, and the Lord Jesus Himself, as we find, had no immunity from the injurious charge on the part of His friends. But there is more; we have His enemies now, even the scribes that came from Jerusalem.

He hath Beelzebul, say they,

and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils {Mark 3:21}.

The Lord condescends to reason with them --

How can Satan cast out Satan? And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand {Mark 3:23, 24}.

But thereon our Lord most solemnly pronounces their doom, and shows that they were guilty -- not of sin, as men say, but of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. There is no such phrase as sin against Him in this sense. People often speak thus. Scripture never. What the Lord denounces is blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. Keeping that distinctly in view would save many souls a great deal of needless trouble. How many have groaned in terror through fear of being guilty of sin against the Holy Ghost! That phrase admits of vague notions and general reasoning about its nature. But our Lord spoke definitely of blasphemous unforgivable sin against Him. All sin, I presume, is sin against the Holy Ghost, who has taken His place in Christendom, and, consequently, gives all sin this character. Thus, lying in the Church is not mere falsehood toward man, but unto God, because of the great truth that the Holy Ghost is there. Here, on the contrary, the Lord speaks of unforgivable sin (not that vague sense of evil which troubled souls dread as “sin against the Holy Ghost,” but blasphemy against Him). What! is this evil never to be forgiven? It is attributing the power that wrought in Jesus to the devil. How many troubled souls would be instantly relieved, if they laid hold of that simple truth! It would dissipate what really is a delusion of the devil, who strives
hard to plunge them into anxiety, and drive them into despair, if possible. The truth is, that as any sin of a Christian may be said to be sin against the Holy Ghost, what is especially the sin against the Holy Ghost, if there be anything that is so, is that which directly hinders the free action of the Holy Ghost in the work of God, or in His Church. Such might be said to be the sin, if you speak of it with precision. But what our Lord referred to was neither a sin nor the sin, but blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. It was that which the Jewish nation was then rapidly falling into, and for which they were neither forgiven then, nor will ever be forgiven. There will be a new stock, so to speak; another generation will be raised up, who will receive the Christ whom their fathers blasphemed; but as far as that generation was concerned, they were guilty of this sin, and they could not be forgiven. They began it in the lifetime of Jesus. They consummated it when the Holy Ghost was sent down and despised. They still carried it on persistently, and it is always the case when men enter upon a bad course, unless sovereign grace deliver. The more that God brings out of love, grace, truth, wisdom, the more determinedly and blindly they rush on to their own perdition. So it was with Israel. So it ever is with man left to himself, and despising the grace of God.

He that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness {Mark 3:29}.

It is the final stage of rebellion against God. Even then they were blaspheming the Son of Man, the Lord Himself; even then they attributed the power of the Spirit in His service to the enemy, as afterwards still more evidently when the Holy Ghost wrought in His servants; then the blasphemy became complete.

And this is, I suppose, what is referred to in principle in Heb. 6. Heb. 10 seems to be different. There it is the case of a person who had professed the name of the Lord utterly abandoning Him, and giving loose rein to sin. This is another form of sin and destruction.

In the case before us in the Gospel of Mark, the enemies had shown their uncontrollable fury and hatred after the fullest evidence, and cast the worst imputation on the power they could not deny, but endeavoured to discredit to others by attributing it to Satan. It was clear that any, all other testimony after this was utterly vain. Hence our Lord then turns to introduce the moral ground for a new call and testimony. The real object of God, the ulterior object in the service of Jesus, comes out. There was a testimony, and righteousness, to that people in the midst of whom the Lord had appeared, where His ministry had displayed the mighty power of God in grace here below. Now our Lord intimates that it must be no longer a question of nature, but of grace, and this because of His mother and His brethren, who had been pointed out by some.

Behold,
said they,
thy mother and thy brethren without see thee. He answered them, saying, Who is my mother, or my brethren? And he looked round about on them that sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother {Mark 3:32-35}.

In short, He owns no one henceforth because of any connection with Himself after the flesh. The only ground of relationship is the supernatural tie in new creation. Doing the will of God is the point. For this only grace avails:
the flesh profiteth nothing {John 6:63}.

Therefore, in Mark 4, we are given a sketch of His ministry from that time down to the very end. Such is the bearing of this chapter. It is the Lord’s ministry in its great principles under that aspect, and viewed not only as a fact going on (as we have had ministry in general before this), but now in its connection with this special work of God.

Of his own will begat he us by the word of truth {James 1:18}.

Hence we see Him forming a people, founded upon submission to the will of God, and therefore by the preached word of God; and this pursued to the very close of all, with a view of the difficulties of those engaged in that work, or in the midst of the trials from this world which always attend such a ministry. Such is the fourth chapter. Accordingly the first parable (for He speaks in parables to the multitude) is of a sower. This we have very fully given us with its explanation. Then follow some moral words of our Lord.

Is a candle,
He says in Mark 4:21,
brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed?
and not to be set on a candlestick?

It is not only that there is a word that acts upon the heart of man, but there is a light given (that is, a testimony in the midst of darkness). The point here is not merely the effect on man, but the manifestation of the light of God. This, therefore, should not be put under a bed to be concealed. God does not in ministry merely consider the effect upon the heart of man; there is much besides done for His own glory. There is the need not only of life, but of light; and this is what we have first of all -- light that germinates far and wide, and seed producing fruit. Part of the scattered seed was picked up by the enemy, or in some other way less openly hostile it comes to nothing. But after the necessity of life is shown in order to fruit-bearing, we have then the value of light; and this not only for God’s glory, though the first consideration, but also for man’s guidance in this dark world.

Take heed what ye hear {Mark 4:24}.

Not only is there thus the word of God sown everywhere, but take heed what ye hear.

There is a mingling of what is dark and what is light, a mingling of a false testimony with a true, more particularly to be remembered when the question is raised whether there is a light from God. These Christians in particular have need to take care what they hear. They only have discerning power, and this, therefore, is brought in most appropriately after the first foundation is settled.

In the next place comes a parable peculiar to Mark.
There is no part of his Gospel which more thoroughly illustrates it than this:

So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come {Mark 4:26-29}.

It is the Lord manifesting Himself at the beginning of the work of God in the earth, and then coming at the end of it, all the intermediate state where others appear being left out. It is the perfect servant inaugurating and consummating the work. It is the Lord Jesus at His first advent and at His second, in connection with ministry. He commences and crowns the work that had to be done. Where is anything like this to be found in other Gospels? Turn to Matthew, for instance, and what a difference! There we have, no doubt, the Lord represented as sowing (Matt. 13); but when in the next parable the harvest at the end of the age is brought before us, He says to the reapers, &c. It is not Himself who is said to do this work, but in that Gospel the design requires us to hear of the authority of the Son of man. He commands His angels. They are all under His orders. He gives them the word, and they reap the harvest. Of course, this is perfectly true, as well as in keeping with God’s aim in Matthew; but in the Gospel of Mark the point is rather His ministry, and not authority over angels or others. The Lord is viewed as coming, and He does come; so that the one is just as certain as the other. Supposing, then, you take this parable out of Mark and put it into Matthew, what confusion! And suppose you transplant what is in Matthew into Mark, evidently there would not only be the rent of the one, but also the introduction of that which never would amalgamate with the other. The fact is, that all, as God has written it, is perfect; but the moment these portions are confounded, you lose the special bearing and appropriateness of each.

After this we hear of the grain of mustard seed, which was merely to show the great change from a little beginning into a vast system. That intimation was all-important for the guidance of the servants. They were thereby taught that material magnitude would be the result, instead of the work of the Lord retaining its primitive simplicity and small extent, spiritual power being the real greatness and the only true greatness in this world. The moment anything, no matter what it may be, in the Lord’s work becomes naturally striking before men’s eyes, you may rely on it that false principles have somehow got a footing within. There is more or less that which savours of the world. And therefore was it of great importance that, if their worldly greatness was to come, there should be a sketch of the great changes to follow; and this you find given in such an orderly manner in Matthew. This was not Mark’s object, but just enough for the guidance of the servants, that they should know that the Lord would surely accomplish His work, and do it perfectly; as He began it well, so would He end it well. But at the same time there would be no small change effected here below, when the little sowing of the Lord should grow into an aspiring object before men, as man loves to make it.

And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: but when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it {Mark 4:30-32}.

This, therefore, is the only parable that is added here; but the Spirit of God lets us know that the Lord on the same occasion spoke a great many more. Others we have in Matthew, where full dispensational light was specially called for. It was sufficient for the object of our Gospel to give what we have seen here. Not even the leaven follows, as in Luke.

But then, in the end of the chapter, we have another instructive appendix. It is no new thing for man’s work to mar, as far as can be, the Lord’s work -- to turn service into a means of lordship here below, and make great that which at the present time has its worth in refusing to part from the scorn and reproach of Christ. For the flock is not great, but little: till He return it is a despised work of a despised Master. We have the dangers to which those engaged in His work would be exposed. This, I think, is the reason why the record is here given of the tempest-tossed vessel in which the Lord was, and the disciples, full of anxiety, trembled at the winds and the waves around them, thinking of themselves much more than of their Master. Indeed they reproachfully turn to Him and say,

Master, carest thou not that we perish? {Mark 4:38}.

Such, alas! are the servants -- apt to be heedless of His honour, abundantly careful for themselves.

Master, carest thou not that we perish?

It was little faith; but was it not little love too? It was an utter forgetfulness of the glory of Him who was in the vessel. It did, however, bring out the secret of their hearts -- they at least cared for themselves: a dangerous thing in the servants of the Lord. Oh, to be self-sacrificing! to care for nothing but Him! At any rate the comfort is this -- He does care for us. The Lord accordingly rises at that call, selfish as it might be, of glaring unbelief: yet His ear heard it as the call of believers, and He pitied them.

He arose and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still {Mark 4:39}.

The wind ceased, and there was a great calm; so that even the shipsmen feared exceedingly in the presence of such power, and said one to another,

What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him? {Mark 4:41}.

The next chapter (Mark 5) opens with a highly important incident connected with ministry. Here it is a single case of a demoniac, which makes the details all the more striking. In point of fact, we know from elsewhere that there were two. The Gospel of Matthew, not in this only, but in various other cases, speaks of two persons; as, I suppose, because this fact
fell in with his object. It was a recognized principle in the law, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word should be established; and he among the evangelists on whom, so to speak, the mantle of the circumcision fell -- he it was who, speaking in view of the circumcision, gives the required testimony for the guidance of those in Israel that had ears to hear. Nothing of the kind was before Mark. He wrote not with any special aim of meeting Jewish saints and Jewish difficulties; but, in truth, rather for others that were not so circumscribed, and might rather need to have their peculiarities explained from time to time. He evidently had humanity before him as wide as the world, and therefore singles out, as we may fairly gather, the more remarkable of the two demoniacs. There is, again, no thought here of delineating the destinies of Israel in the last days, without denying an allusion typically here to which is fully drawn out there. But I apprehend the special object of this chapter is to trace the moral effects of Christ's ministry, where it is brought home in power to the soul. We have, therefore, the most desperate case possible. It is neither a leper nor a paralytic, nor is it simply a man with an unclean spirit. Here is the minute specification of a case more appalling than any we can find elsewhere in the Gospels, and none describes it with such power and intense naturalness, or so circumstantially, as our evangelist.

When he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains {Mark 5:2, 3}.

All human appliances but proved the superior might of the enemy.

Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him {Mark 5:4}.

What a picture of dreary wretchedness, the companion of desolation and of death!

And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones {Mark 5:5}.

Utter degradation, too, weighed him down, the cruelty of degradation such as Satan loves to inflict upon man that he hates.

But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him, and cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not. For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit. And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many {Mark 5:6-9}.

Again the same trait, one may just remark, appears here as before -- a most singular identifying of the evil spirit with the man. Sometimes it would seem as if it was but one, sometimes a kind of manifold personality.

He besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country {Mark 5:10}.

And the Lord accordingly casts the unclean spirits into the swine, which were destroyed.

However, it is not only deliverance, as we saw in Matthew, but there is the moral result on the soul. The people of the country come -- for now it is the testimony of the effects of ministry; they come to Jesus, and seeing him that was possessed of the devil and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind, they were afraid; and they that saw it told them how it befell him that was possessed of the devil, and also concerning the swine. Mark their unbelief! Man showed that he cared less for Jesus than for Satan or the swine.

When he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him {Mark 5:18} -- the natural impulse of a renewed heart, true of every saint of God. There is no believer, I care not how feeble he may be, who does not know this desire, unless he lose the sweet simplicity of truth, or, it may be, stifled by bad doctrine, such as putting him under law, which always produces fear and anxiety. But when a man is not poisoned by misuse of law, or other corrupt teaching, the first simple impulse of him who knows the love of Jesus is to be with Him. This is one reason why all Christians are spoken of as loving His appearing (2 Tim. 4). Nor is it only a desire to be with Him, but that His glory should be made good everywhere. The soul right well knows that He who is so precious to the heart only needs to be known to others, only needs to be manifested before the world, to bring in the only power of blessing that can avail for such a world as this.

In the case before us, however, our Lord suffers him not. He shows that, no matter how true and right and becoming might be this sentiment of grace in the heart of the delivered man, still there is a work to be done. Those that are delivered are themselves to be deliverers. Such is the beneficent character and aim of the ministry of Jesus. If Jesus does His work, if He breaks the power of Satan that none else can touch, it is not merely that the delivered one should have his heart with Him, and forthwith desire to go and be with Him. In itself, indeed, it is due to His love, and it could not but be that he who has been taught of God what Jesus is, should long to be where He is. But as Jesus pleased not Himself, coming to serve God here below, so his sphere of service is in the place where he could tell others the great things which had been done for him. Accordingly the Saviour meets him with the words,

Go home to thy friends {Mark 5:19}.

Mark it well, dear brethren; we are apt to forget the injunction. It is not mere, Go to the world, or, Go to every creature; but,

Go home to thy friends.

How comes it that there is such difficulty often in speaking to our friends? Why is it that persons who are bold enough with strangers are so timid before their household, relatives, connections? It often tells a tale which it is well to bear in

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mind. We shrink from the comparison which our friends are so apt and sure to make; who test our words -- however clear, and good, and sweet -- by that which they have such abundant means of ascertaining in our daily ways. An inconsistent walk makes a coward, at least, before our friends.

It would be well if it really had the effect of humbling us before all. Were there genuine lowliness with fidelity before God, there would be courage, not only before strangers, but before our friends.

Here, however, the point simply amounts to this: The Lord would spread the message of grace, would send him to make it known to his friends; for it was clearly they who had best known in his case the awful and degrading power of Satan. They would, of course, be most interested in the men who were his familiar; and therefore there were special reasons, I doubt not, for it. For us, too, it is a good thing to bear it in mind. Not that a saved soul should only go to his friends; but it remains ever true and good that the secret of grace in the heart should send us to our friends to make it known to those who have known our folly and sins, that they may hear of the mighty Saviour we have found.

Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee. And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him [Mark 5:19, 20].

How sweet this identification of Jesus {Mark 5:20}

with

the Lord {Mark 5:19},

How great things the Lord hath done for him.

The Saviour put it forth in the most general way, I believe, in uttering these words without special allusion to Himself. The man, on the other hand, I cannot doubt, was perfectly right. How often, when it may appear that there is a want of literal exactitude, in interpreting the Lord of Jesus,

there is in truth a better carrying out of the mind of God. Mere literalism would have held slavishly to the letter of the Lord's language. But oh! how much deeper, and, withal, more glorifying to God, it was when the man saw underneath that great mystery of godliness -- the Lord in the servant's garb. He who was pleased to take the form of a servant was none the less the Lord.

He went and told, how great things Jesus had done for him.

Then follows the account of the Jewish ruler of the synagogue who fell at the feet of Jesus and besought Him greatly to heal his dying daughter. Having dwelt on the scene elsewhere, I need say the less here. The Lord goes with him, intimating His specified ministry in Israel -- a work which goes down to the reality of death, under which they would be shown really to lie. But the Shepherd of Israel could raise from the dead. This seems to be the bearing of the case before us, and not a mere general inroad upon Satan's power, which became the occasion and justification, if one may so speak, of carrying victoriously the glad tidings of God's kingdom and goodness to man. This was true of the Lord's ministry even while on the earth, the place where Satan reigns. His temptation in the wilderness proved Him stronger than the strong man, and therefore He spoils his goods, delivering the poor victims of Satan, and making them to be the captors of him whose captives they were. But here we find that his heart, far from being turned away from Israel, yearned over their need, deep as it was. The call of Jairus is no sooner made than He goes to answer it. He alone could wake out of death's sleep the daughter of Zion; yet, ineffable grace! while on the road He is open to everybody. In the throng through which He had to pass was a woman having an issue of blood. It was a desperate case; for she had suffered much, and tried many physicians in vain. Such is the hapless lot of man away from God; human aid avails not. Where is the man who has had to do with what is in the world, and would not at once acknowledge the justice of the picture, the powerlessness of man in the presence of the deepest wants? But this was just the opportunity for One who, even as man ministering here below, wielded the power of God in His love. Jesus was the true and unfailing servant of God, and the woman, instead of seeking good from man as he is, and thus suffering more and more by the very efforts made to benefit her, unseen in the press behind, touches the garment of Jesus.

For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole. And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague {Mark 5:28, 29}.

To have banished her ailment would have been too little for Jesus; for He is a perfect Saviour, and therefore is a Saviour not only for the body that had suffered so long, but for the soul's affections and peace. She got a better blessing than she sought. He not only staunched the issue of blood, but filled her trembling heart with confidence instead of the fear that had possessed her before. Nothing would have been morally right had she gone away with the reflection that she had stolen some virtue from Jesus. Emphatically banishing, then, all dread from her spirit, He says to her,

Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole: go in peace, and be whole of thy plague {Mark 5:34}.

That is, He seals to her with His mouth the blessing which, as it were, her hand would else have seemed to have taken surreptitiously from Him.

Then, in the end of the chapter, the Lord is in the presence of death; but He will not allow death to abide in His presence.

The damsel,
said He, (and how true it was!)
is not dead, but sleepeth {Mark 5:39}.

Just so the Spirit says believers are asleep; as,
Those that sleep in Jesus God brings with him {1 Thess. 4:14}.

Here typically Israel is viewed according to the mind of God. Unbelief may weep, and wail, and create all sorts of tumult, and with little feeling after all; for it can equally even then laugh Jesus to scorn. But as for Him, He suffers none to enter but chosen ones -- Peter, and James, and John, along with the parents.

And when he was come in, he saith unto them, Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn {Mark 5:39, 40}.

So the Lord takes the damsel by the hand, after He had turned the others out, and straightway at His word she arises and walks.

And they were astonished with a great astonishment.
And he charged them straitly that no man should know it; and commanded that something should be given her to eat {Mark 5:42, 43}.

Why in this Gospel more than any other does the Lord Jesus thus enjoin silence? I conceive it is because Mark's is the Gospel of service. The truth is, brethren, service is not a thing to be trumpeted by those engaged in it, or their friends. Whatever is from God, and is done toward God, may be safely left to tell its own tale. It is what God gives and does, not what man says, that is the real point of holy service. Observe here, too, how the Lord, at least perfect in every thing, not only does the work, but besides tenderly cares for her. There is the considerate goodness of the Lord to be remarked, that something should be given her to eat.

In every matter, even in what might seem the smallest, Jesus took an interest. Thus He bore in mind that the maiden had been in this state of trance and was exhausted. Whatever be the occasion that calls it forth, is it not the greatest of all things for our hearts to know how Jesus cares for us?

In Mark 6 we have our Lord again -- now thoroughly despised. Here He is:

the carpenter {Mark 6:3}.
It was true; but was this all? Was it the truth {John 14:6}?

Such was man's estimate of the Lord of glory; not merely the carpenter's son, but here, and here only, He is Himself the carpenter, --
the son of Mary, and the brother of James, and Joses, and Judah, and Simon. Are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him {Mark 6:3}.

Beautifully, too, you may remark that, where there was this unbelief, our Lord would not remove it by dazzling feats of power, because there would have been no moral worth in a result so produced. He had given already abundant signs to unbelief; but men had not profited by them, neither was the word that he spake mixed with faith in them that heard it. The consequence is, that he could there do no mighty work {Mark 6:5}; as here only it is recorded -- yes, of the man before whom no power of Satan, no disease of man, nothing above, or below, or beneath, could prove the very smallest difficulty. But God's glory, God's will governed all; and the display of perfect power was in perfect lowliness of obedience. Therefore this blessed One could there do no mighty work. It is needless to say that it was no question of power as to Himself. It was not in any wise that His saving arm was shortened; not that there was no virtue in Him longer, but there was the lovely blending of the moral glorifying of God with all that was wrought for man. In other words, we have not here the mere setting forth of the power of Jesus, but the Gospel of His ministry. Therefore it is a weighty part of this, that because of unbelief He could do no mighty work there. He was really serving God; and if man only was seen, not God, no wonder that He could do no mighty work there. Thus, that which at first sight seems strange, the moment you take it in connection with the object of God in what He is revealing, all becomes striking, plain, and instructive.

And now He proceeds to act upon that appointment of the twelve, whom we saw, in Mark 3, He had ordained.

He called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth {Mark 6:7}.

It was in presence of the thorough contempt which had just shown itself that He gives them their mission. It was only when the extremest scorn fell on Him, so that He could do no mighty work there. He replies, as it were, in the most gracious and also conclusive manner, that it was from no lack of virtue, because He sends them two and two on their new and mighty errand. He that could communicate power, then, to a number of men -- the twelve -- to go forth and do any mighty work, certainly did not Himself want intrinsic energy, nor was it from any want of power to draw upon in God. Jesus invests them with His own power, as it were, and sends them out in all directions as witnesses, but witnesses of the ministry of Jesus. They were servants called after His own fashion; and so He commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; they were to go forth in the faith of His resources. Therefore, anything of human means would have been contrary to the very intention. In a word, we must remember that this was a special form of service suitable to that moment, and, in point of fact, resinded by our Lord afterwards in very important particulars. In the Gospel of Luke, we have carefully given us the change that takes place when the Lord's hour was come. It was not only that it was an hour come for Him, but it was a crisis for them, too. They had then forward to encounter a great change, because of the character of utter rejection, and, indeed, of suffering, on which the Lord was entering. He therefore cast them upon the ordinary resources of faith, using such things as they had; but as yet it was not so. On the contrary, the witnesses of Jesus to Israel were then going forth. It was in the face of unbelief against Himself, but unbelief answered by the fresh outflow of grace on His part, sending out messengers with extraordinary powers from Himself all over the land. And so He told them where to go, and
what place soever ye enter into an house, there abide till ye depart from that place. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city. And they went out, and preached that men should repent {Mark 6:10-12}

-- a very important feature here added. John preached repentance; Jesus preached repentance, as did these apostles. And be assured, beloved friends, that repentance is an eternal truth of God for this time as much as for any other. There is no greater mistake than to suppose that the change of dispensation weakens (I will not say merely the place of repentance for every soul that is brought to God, but) the duty of preaching repentance. We are not to leave it after a perfunctory sort,内容自己与之匹配的，确保，那些已经教授的人，其中一些教授，and theасtles were to do and did the same.

They preached that men should repent, and they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them {Mark 6:12, 13}.

Then we have Herod appearing upon the scene; and Herod, I take it, represents in Israel the power of the world -- its usurping power, if you please. However this be, there he was in point of fact, the holder of the world's power in the land, and ever, though not without qualms and struggles in the end, thoroughly opposed to the testimony of God. He was really hostile to it, not merely in its fullest forms, but at bottom also, in its first appearance and most elementary presentation. He had no love for the truth; he might like the man who preached it well enough, and at first hear him gladly; he might have many anxieties about his soul before God, and know perfectly well that he was doing wrong in his ordinary life; but, still, the devil managed to play the game so well, that although there was personal affection, or respect, at least, for the servant of God, the disastrous end comes, as it always will, when there is a fair trial in this world. No respect, no kindly feeling for any one or anything that is of God, will ever stand when Satan is allowed to work, and is thus free to accomplish his own deadly plan of ruining or thwarting the testimony of God. This is what those engaged in the ministry of Christ must expect to see attempted, and will do well to resist. If this be the point, as I apprehend, the reason of its introduction here is not obscure. The Lord was sending out these chosen vessels. In the presence of this new action of His in the work, we learn how the world feels about it; not merely the ignorant world, nor the religious parties with their chiefs, but the highly cultivated profane world. And this is the way in which they treat it. They have the outward power which Satan finds means to make them use. They kill the witness of God. It may be only a wicked woman who stirs them up to do the deed; but be not deceived. It was not a question of Herodias merely. She was but the tool by which the devil brought it about; he has his own particular way; and in this case we have not only the circumstances, solemn as they are, but the spring of all in the opposition of Satan to God's testimony. The issue of it is, that if wicked men have power to kill, even if reluctant, he whose they are somehow compels them to use their power, when the opportunity arises. Fear of man, and notions of honour, are strong where God is unheeded: what may not follow where there is no conscience? That old serpent can manage to entrap the most prudent, just as Herod here fell into the trap. For his word to a wicked woman, passed in presence of his lords, John's head was struck off, and produced in a charger.

The apostles come to our Lord after their mission, and tell Him the result of their mission; or as it is said here, told him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught {Mark 6:30}.

It was not very safe ground; it were better to have spoken of what He had taught, and what He was doing. As, however, the Lord corrects all most graciously, He takes them away into a desert place, and there He is found unwarried in His love. A hungry multitude was there. These disciples, only a little while before so full of what they had taught, and what they had done -- was it not a worthy emergency for their labours now? Could they not help in the present distress? They seem not so much as to have thought of it. Alone, at any rate, in this scene, our Lord Jesus brings out in the plainest possible manner their utter failure. Mark the lesson well. It is especially, when there was somewhat of boastfulness, after they had been occupied with their own doings and teachings. Then it is that we find them thus powerless. They were at their wit's end. They did not know what to do. Strange to say, they never thought of the Lord; but the Lord thought of the poor multitudes, and in His richest grace not only spread a table and fed the people, but makes the feeble disciples themselves to be the dispensers of His bounty, as afterwards they must gather up what remained.

After this, again, we find them exposed to a storm, and the Lord, joining them in their troubles, brings them safely and at once to the desired haven. Therein follows the scene of joy where Jesus is recognised, and the abundant blessing that attended His every footstep where He moved. As surely as Jesus thus blessed the poor world then, such and far more will He prove Himself at His return after the world will have done its worst. I do not doubt that this carries us to the end, when the Lord Jesus will rejoin His people after their manifold and sore troubles, after all their proved weakness, as well as exposure to outward storms. As He was in the place He had visited, so He will be in the universal diffusion of power and blessing, when the tempest-tost disciples shall have come safe to land.

But then there is another view necessary also in connection with ministry; we need to learn the prevalent feeling of the religious powers. Accordingly we have the traditionist in collision with Christ, as we had in the last chapter Herod with John the Baptist. Here it is the accredited leaders from Jerusalem, the scribes, before whom our Lord
brings the most convincing evidence, that the principle and practice of their cherished traditions demoralise man and dishonour the word of God. The reason of the evil is manifest -- it is from man. This is enough; for man is a sinner. There is nothing really good but what is from God. Show me anything from fallen man which is not evil. Tradition, as being man’s supplement, is always and necessarily evil. The Lord puts it together with what He afterwards brings out -- the condemnation of man’s heart in all its depravity. There it is not only the mind of man, but the working of his corrupt feelings. This is not the time to dwell on this well-known chapter, and the contrast it furnishes of Christ’s display of God’s all-perfect grace toward the greatest possible need -- the woman who came to Him on account of her demoniac daughter. The woman was a Greek, a Syrophengician by nation, who besought Him to cast forth the devil out of her daughter. But the Lord, trying her faith in order to give her a richer blessing, not only accomplishes what she desires, but puts the seal of His approval in the most striking manner upon her personal faith.

And he said unto her, For this saying go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter. And when she was come to her house, she found the devil gone out, and her daughter laid upon the bed {Mark 7:29, 30}.

Next we come to another tale, finishing the chapter, and strikingly characteristic of our Gospel -- the case of one deaf and dumb, whom Jesus met as He departed from these quarters into Galilee.

And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him {Mark 7:32}.

Here again the Lord shows us a beautiful sample of considerateness and tender goodness in the manner of His cure. It is not only the cure, but the manner of it, that we have so strikingly brought out here. Our Lord takes the man aside from the multitude. Who could intermeddle with that scene between the perfect servant of God and the needy one?

He puts his fingers into his ears.

What would He not do to prove His interest?

And he spit, and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, he sighed {Mark 7:33, 34}.

As He weighed the distressing results of sin, what a burden was upon His heart! It is a particular instance of the great truth we saw in Matthew the other night. With Jesus it was never bare power relieving man, but always His Spirit entering into the case, feeling its character in God’s sight, and its sad consequences for man too. The whole was borne upon His heart, and so, as here, He sighs, and bids the ears be opened.

And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain. And he charged them that they should tell no man: but the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it; and were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well {Mark 7:35-37}.

Such might be the motto of Mark. The utterance of the multitude, of those that saw the fact, is just what is illustrated throughout the entire Gospel.

He hath done all things well.

It was not only that there was the power fully adequate to accomplish all He undertook, but

He hath done all things well.

He is the perfect servant everywhere, and under all circumstances, whatever may be the need.

He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak [Mark 7:37].

The next (Mark 8) must be our last chapter now, on which I will just say a word or two before closing. We have once more a great multitude fed; not the same, of course, as before. Here, not five thousand were fed, but four thousand; not twelve baskets of fragments remained over, but seven. There were outwardly less limits, and a less residue; but observe that seven, the normal number of perfection spiritually, is here. I consider, therefore, that contrariwise, and viewed as a figure, this was still more important than the other. There is no greater mistake in Scripture -- and, indeed, it is true in moral questions -- than to judge of things by their mere appearances. The moral bearing of anything you please is always of more importance than its physical aspect. In this second miracle the number fed was less, while the original supply was greater, yet the remainder gathered up was less. Apparently, therefore, the balance was greatly in favour of the former miracle. The truth is really this, that in the former case the intervention of men was prominent; here, though He may employ men, the great point is the perfection of His own love, sympathy, and provision for His people, no matter what the need. It appears, therefore, that the seven has a deeper completeness than the twelve, both being significant in their place.

After this our Lord rebukes the disciples for unbelief, which comes out strongly now. The greater His love and compassion, the more perfect His care, the more painfully, alas! unbelief betrays itself even in the disciples, and yet more in others. But our Lord performs another cure, the record of which is peculiar to Mark. At Bethsaida, a blind man was brought. The Lord, for the express purpose, it seems to me, of showing the patience of ministry according to His mind, first touches his eyes, when partial sight follows. The man confesses in reply, that

he saw men like trees walking {Mark 8:24};

and the Lord applies His hand a second time. The work is done perfectly. Thus, not only did He heal the blind, but He did it well -- a further illustration of what has been already before us. If He puts His hand to accomplish, He does not take it away until all is complete, according to His own love. The man then saw with perfect distinctness. Thus all is in season. The double action proved the good physician; as His acting so effective, whether by word or hand, whether by one application or by two, proved the great Physician.

The close of the chapter begins to open the faith of Peter in contrast with the unbelief of men, and even with what had
been working among the disciples before. Now, things were
hurrying on rapidly to the worst. Peter’s confession was
therefore the more seasonable. The account differs very
strikingly from what is found in Matthew. Peter is
represented by Mark as saying simply,

Thou art the Christ {Mark 8:29};
while in Matthew the words are,

Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God
{Matt. 16:16}.

Hence you have no such thing in Mark as,

Upon this rock I will build my church {Matt. 16:18}.

The Church is built not exactly on the Christ or Messiah as
such, but on the confession of

the Son of the living God.

Hence we may see how beautifully the omissions of Scripture
hang together. The Holy Ghost inspired Mark to notice no
more than a part of the confession of Peter, and thus there is
only a part of the blessing mentioned by our Lord. The
highest homage to our Lord in Peter’s confession being
omitted, the great change then at hand, which displays itself
in the building of the Church, is consequently quite left out of
Mark. There our Lord simply charges them that they were
not to tell any man of Him, the Christ. What an end of the
testimony of His presence! The reason, too, is most affecting:

The Son of man must suffer many things, &c.
{Mark 8:31}.

Such is the portion of Him, the true servant. He is the Christ,
but it is no use to tell the people so any more; they have heard
often, and will not believe it. Now He is going to enter upon
another work: He is going to suffer. It is His portion.

The Son of man must suffer many things, and be
rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and
scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again
{Mark 8:31}.

After this point, He begins, in view of the
transfiguration, to announce His approaching death. He gives
it most circumstantially. He would guard His servants from
supposing that He was in any wise taken by surprise by His
death. It was an expected thing. It was what He knew,
perfectly and circumstantially, before the elders and scribes
did. The very people that were going to cause it knew nothing
about it. They planned rather the reverse of the actual
circumstances of His death. Still less did they know anything
about His resurrection; they did not believe it when it came
to pass; the Jews covered it up by a lie. But Jesus knew all
about both, and now first breaks the tidings to His disciples,
imitating that their path must lie through the same pathway
of suffering. Christ’s suffering is here viewed as the fruit of
the sin of man, which accounts for the fact, that there is not
a word said about atonement here. There never was a greater
misconception in looking at Scripture than to limit our Lord’s
sufferings to atonement: I mean upon the cross, and in death.
Certainly, atonement was the deepest point in the sufferings
of Christ, and one can understand how even Christians are
apt to overlook all else in atonement. The reason why
believers make atonement everything is because they make

 ihnenselfs everything. But if they were not unbelieving
believers, they would see that there is a great deal more in the
cross than the atonement; and surely they would not think less
of Jesus if they were to see more the extent of His grace, and
the profundity of His sufferings. Our Lord does not speak of
His death here as expiating sins. In Matthew, where He
speaks of giving His life a ransom for many, of course there
is atonement substantially. Christ expiates their sins, and this
I call atonement. But here, where He speaks of being killed
by men, is that atonement? It is painful that Christians should
be so shut up and confused. Were not God dealing in
judgment with the Saviour of sinners, there would have been
no atonement. His rejection by men, though taken from God,
is not the same thing. And, beloved friends, this is a more
important and more practical question than many might be apt
to think; but I must defer further remarks for the present. We
have before us a new subject — the glory which our Lord
immediately after speaks of in connection with His rejection
and sufferings.

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Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Gospels

Lecture 5

Mark 9 – 16

The transfiguration, as a matter of fact witnessed by the eyes of chosen witnesses, introduces naturally the great change that was about to be effected by the mighty power of God; for that wondrous scene was the passing vision of a glory that shall never pass away. Therein certain disciples were admitted to a sight of the kingdom of God coming with power, founded upon the rejection of Christ by man, and the maintenance and manifestation by and by of the power of that Jesus rejected of man, but glorified by God. Of course, our Lord's ministry had this double character. It was, as is everything in Scripture, presented to human responsibility before its result is established on God's part. There was every evidence and proof that man could ask; there was every moral manifestation of God; but man had no heart for it. Hence the only effect of such a witness was the rejection of Christ and of God Himself as thus morally represented here below. What, then, will God do? Surely He will make good His counsel by His own power; for nothing fails that is of Him, and every testimony of His must accomplish its aim. But then God waits; and, even before He lays the foundation for that great work of establishing His own kingdom and power, He gives a sight of it to those whom He is pleased to elect. Hence it is that the transfiguration was a kind of bridge, so to speak, between the present and the future, confronting men even now with God's plans. It is really the introduction, as far as a testimony and even a sample could go with believers, of that kingdom which should be set up and displayed in due time. Not that the rejection of Christ ceases after this, but, on the contrary, goes on up to the cross itself. But in the cross, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, we see, by faith, the issue complete; man's rejection on the one side, and God's foundation actually laid on the other. Notwithstanding a testimony to it was on this holy mount brought before the sight of the disciples according to the sovereign choice of our Lord, He takes even out of the chosen twelve a chosen few to be the witnesses of His glory. But this gives it a very important and emphatic place in the synoptic Gospels, which bring before us the Galilean progress of Christ; more particularly in the point of view of ministry we have this in our Gospel.

The Lord having then taken up James and John, as well as Peter, was transfigured before these disciples. The glorified men, Elias with Moses, are seen talking with Him. Peter lets out his lack of appreciation of the glory of Christ, and the more remarkably, because only in the scene immediately before Peter had in striking terms testified to Jesus. But God must show that there is but One faithful witness; and the very soul that stood out brightly, we may say, for a little moment in the scene that preceded the transfiguration, is the same that manifests the earthen vessel more than any other in the transfiguration.

It is good,
says Peter,

for us to be here. Let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias {Mark 9:5}.

It is evident, that although he might put the Saviour at the head of the three, he counted the others to be in a measure on a level with Him. At once we see the cloud overshadowing, and hear the voice out of it which maintains supreme undivided glory for the Son of God.

This
(says the Father; for He it was who spoke) --

this is my beloved Son: hear him {Mark 9:7}.

You will observe that in Mark there is an omission. We have not here the expression of complacency. In Matthew this was made prominent, as we know. In Matt. 17:5 it is,

This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him.

I apprehend the reason was to set this in the most absolute contrast with His rejection by the Jewish people. So again, in the Gospel of Luke, we have the testimony of Christ being God's Son on the ground of hearing Him rather than Moses or Elias.

This is my beloved Son,
he says:

hear him {Luke 9:35},

omitting the expression of the Father's complacency in Him.
Assuredly He was always the object of the Father's delight; but still there is not always the same reason for asserting it. Whereas, on comparing the testimony in 2 Pet. 1, there is an omission of

hear him
found in the three Gospels.

This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased
{2 Pet. 1:17}.

It is evident that the superiority of the Lord Jesus Christ over
the law and the prophets is not the point in Peter. The reason, I think, is obvious. That question had been already decided: Christianity had come in. It was not the point here to claim for Christ a place above the law and the prophets, but to show simply the glory of the Son in the eyes of the Father, and His delight or loving satisfaction in Him: just as afterwards he makes it plain that in all the word of God the one object of the Holy Ghost is Christ's glory; for holy men of old spake as they were moved of Him. Scripture was not written by man’s will; rather, God had a great purpose in His word, which was not met by the transient application of certain parts of it to isolated facts, to this person or to that. There was one grand uniting bond throughout all prophecy of Scripture. The object of it all was this -- the glory of Christ. Separate prophecy from Christ, and you divert the stream of the testimony from the person of Him to whom that testimony is most due. It contains not mere warnings about peoples, nations, tongues, or lands; about facts providential, or otherwise; about kings, empires, or systems in the world; Christ is the Spirit’s object. So on the mount we hear the Father there testifying to Christ, who supremely was the object of His delight. The kingdom was ensigned there; Moses also, and Elias; but there was One object pre-eminently before the Father, and that object was Jesus.

This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased

{2 Pet. 1:17}.

The point was not exactly hearing Christ, but hearing the Father about Him, so to speak. Such was the emphatic object here; and therefore, as I believe, are the words

hear him

omitted. In Matthew we have the fullest form of all, which the more enforces the call to hear Him. Luke gives the

hear him {Luke 9:35},

but the expression, both in Mark and Luke, of personal complacency was not so much the ruling aim. Of course, there were common points in all, but I just notice this for a little passing moment to illustrate their differences.

Then we find, without dwelling upon all the particulars; that our Lord tells the disciples that the vision was to be kept hid till the rising from the dead. His own resurrection would introduce an entirely new character of testimony. Then it was that the disciples could make manifest, without hindrance, this great truth. The Lord was thus teaching them their total incapacity, until that great event brought in a new work of God, the basis of a new and unrestricted testimony, old things being passed away, and all things made new to the believer.

This, I think, was very important, if we look at the disciples here as called to service. It is not in man's power to take up the service or the testimony of Christ as he will. From this is evident the weighty place that the rising from the dead holds in Scripture. Outside Christ sin reigned in death. In Him was no sin; but, until the resurrection, there could not be a full testimony rendered to His glory or His work. And so in point of fact it was. After this follow, passing, a notice of the difficulties, which shows how truly our Lord had measured their incapacity; for the disciples were really under the influence of the scribes themselves at this time.

At the foot of the mountain another scene opens. At the top we have seen, not the kingdom of God only, but the glory of Christ; and, above all, Christ as the Son, whom the Father proclaimed now as the One to be heard beyond the law or the prophets. This the disciples never did understand till the resurrection; and very manifest is the reason, because the law had naturally its place till then, and the prophets came in as corroborating the law and maintaining its just authority. The raising from the dead does not in any wise weaken either the law or the prophets, but it gives occasion to the display of a superior glory. However, at the foot of the mountain there is an awful evidence to present facts, just after the sample of what is to come. Meanwhile, before the kingdom of God is established in power, who is the potentate that influences men and that reigns in this world? It is Satan. In the case before us most manifest was his power -- a power that the disciples themselves could not eject from the world because of their unbelief. Here, again, we see how manifestly service is the great thought all through this Gospel. The father is in distress, for it was an old story; it was no new thing for Satan to exercise this power over man in the world. From his childhood such was the case; even as from the earliest day it was the history of man. In vain had the father appealed to those that bore the name of the Lord in the world; for they had wholly failed. This drew out from our Lord Jesus a severe reproof of their unbelief, and especially for the reason that they were His servants. There was no strictness in Him; no stint of power on His part. It was really unbelief in them. Hence He could only say, when this manifestation of the weakness of the disciples was brought before Him,

O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me. And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming {Mark 9:19, 20}.

For the Lord would not hide the full extent of the power of Satan, but allows the child to be torn by his power before their eyes. There could be no question that the spell was unbroken up to this. The disciples had in no way subdued, suppressed, or crushed the power of Satan over the child.

And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child {Mark 9:21}.

It was really the history of this world in contrast with the new creation. Of the world, or rather kingdom, of God, a vision at least had just been seen in the transfiguration.

Thus the chapter is first of all founded upon the announced death of Christ in utter rejection, and the certainty of God’s introducing His kingdom of glory for the Christ rejected of men. In the next place, the uselessness or impossibility, of testifying the transfiguration till the rising from the dead is affirmed: then it would be most timely. Lastly follows the evidence of what the power of Satan really is before the kingdom of God finally comes in power, where the testimony of it even was unknown. The fact is, that under the surface of this world viewed by the disciples, and brought
to light by the presence of our Lord Jesus, there is this complete subjection of man from his earliest days, as it is said. The power of Satan over man is too plain, and the servants of the Lord only proved how powerless they were, not from any defect of power in Christ, but because of their own lack of faith to draw it out. The Saviour at once proceeds to act, letting the man see that all turns on faith. In the meantime, what Christ brings into evidence is the power that deals with Satan before the kingdom is established. Such is the testimony at the foot of the mountain. The kingdom will surely in due time be established, but meanwhile faith in Christ defeats the enemy's power. It is beyond doubt that this was the true want and only remedy. Faith in Him alone could secure a blessing; and so, accordingly, the father tremblingly appeals to the Lord in his distress.

Lord,

he says,

I believe; help thou mine unbelief \{Mark 9:24\}.

When Jesus then saw the people running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee come out of him, and enter no more into him \{Mark 9:25\}.

The work was done. Apparently the child was no more; but the Lord took him by the hand, lifted him up, and he arose \{Mark 9:27\}.

In the house He gave the disciples another profitable lesson in the way of ministry.

Such, then, it is easy to see, is the point that comes out here. The Lord shows that, along with the unbelief, is the lack of the sense and confession of dependence on God. This alone also judges the energy of nature.

This kind,

He says,

\[ \text{goes not forth, but by prayer and fasting} \] \{Mark 9:29\}.

While the power is in Jesus, faith alone draws it out; but that faith is accompanied by the sentence of death upon nature, as well as the looking up to God, the only source of power.

Next, we have another lesson, still connected with the service of the Lord, while the power of Satan is at work in the world, before the kingdom of God is established. We must learn the state of these servants' own hearts. They desire to be something. This falsifies their judgments. They departed thence, and passed into Galilee; and He would not that any man should know it. For He taught His disciples, and said unto them,

The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day. But they understood not that saying \{Mark 9:31, 32\}.

At first sight how singular, yet how frequent, is this lack of ability to enter into the words of Jesus! To what is it owing? To self unjusted. They were ashamed to let the Lord know what the true reason was; but the Lord brings it out. He came to Capernaum, and being in the house He asked them,

What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? \{Mark 9:33\}.

But they held their peace; for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest \{Mark 9:34\}.

No wonder there was little power in the presence of Satan; no wonder there was little understanding in presence of Jesus. There was a dead weight behind -- this spirit of thinking of themselves, of desiring some distinction to be seen and known of men now. It was evident unbelief of what God feels, and is going to display, in His kingdom. For there is but one thought before God -- He means to exalt Jesus. They were thus quite out of communion with God about the matter. Not only had those failed who were not on the mount, but just as plainly James, Peter, and John, all had failed. How little has special privilege or position to do with the humility of faith! This, then, is the true secret of powerlessness, either as against Satan, or for Jesus. Further, the connection of all this with the service of the Lord must, I think, be manifest.

But there is another incident, too, peculiar to Mark, of which we hear directly after this. The Lord rebukes them by taking a child, and thence reading them humility. What a withering censure of their self-exaltation! Even John proves how little the glory of Christ, which makes one content to be nothing, had entered into his heart now. The day is coming when it would all take deep root there -- when they would really gather everlasting profit from it; but for the present it was the painful demonstration that there is something more needed than the word even of Jesus. So it is, then, that John immediately after this turns to our Lord, complaining of some one that was casting out demons in His name -- the very thing they had failed to do.

Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name.

Was not this, then, a matter for thankfulness of heart to God? Not a bit of it! Self in John took fire at it, and became the mouthpiece of the strong feeling which animated them all.

Master, we saw

\[ \text{not} \]

I merely; he spake for all the rest.

We saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followed not us: and we forbade him, because he followeth not us \{Mark 9:38\}.

It is evident, then, that no previous reproof had in any way purged out the self-exalting spirit, for here it was again in full force; but Jesus said,

\[ \text{Forbid him not} \] \{Mark 9:39\}.

Another most weighty lesson in the service of Christ is this. The question here is not one of dishonour done to Christ. None in this case contemplates or allows any act whatever contrary to His name. On the contrary, it was a servant going forward against the enemy, believing in the efficacy of the Lord's name. Had it been a question of enemies or false friends of Christ, overthrowing or undermining His glory, he
that

is not for him is against him; and he that gathereth not with him scattereth abroad {Matt. 12:30}.

Wherever it is a question of a true or a false Christ, there cannot be a compromise of one jot of His glory. But where, on the contrary, it was one who may have been unintelligent, perhaps, and who certainly had not been so favoured in point of circumstances as the disciples, yet who knew the value and efficacy of His name, Jesus graciously shields him.

Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is on our part {Mark 9:39, 40}.

He certainly had faith in the Lord's name; and by faith in that name he was mighty to do what, alas! disciples were feeble to do. It was evident that there was a spirit of jealousy, and that the power which manifestly wrought in one who had never been so privileged outwardly as they, instead of humbling the disciples to think of their own shortcoming and lack of faith, led even John to cast about for some fault to find, some plea for restraining him whom God had honoured.

Hence, our Lord here brings out an instruction, not of course at variance with, but totally different from what we had in Matt. 12:30. Their distinctive use in the right time and circumstances, I cannot but hold to be by no means unimportant. Mark's, you will remember, is the Gospel of service; and it is the question of ministry here. Now the power of God in this does not depend upon position. No matter how right (that is, according to God's will) the position may be, that will not give ministerial power to the individuals who are in the truest position. The disciples, of course, were in an unimpeachable place as following Christ -- there could be nothing more certainly right than theirs; for it was Jesus that had called them, gathered them round Himself, and sent them out clothed with a measure of His own power and authority. For all that, it was evident that there was weakness in practical manifestation. There was a decided want of faith in drawing upon the resources of Christ, as against Satan. They were, then, quite right in cleaving to Christ, and in following none other; they were right in abandoning John for Jesus; but they were not right in letting any reason hinder their acknowledgment of God's power, which wrought in another who was not in that blessed position which was their privilege. Accordingly our Lord rebukes this narrow spirit sternly, and lays down a principle seemingly counter, but really harmonious. For there is no contradiction in the word of God here, or anywhere else. Faith may rest assured that nothing in Matt. 12 opposes Mark 9. No doubt at first sight there might appear to be such a difference; but look, read again, and the difficulty vanishes.

In Matt. 12:30 the question was totally different.

He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.

There it was a question of Christ Himself -- of the glory and the power of God in Jesus here below. The moment it comes to be a question of His person, assailed by adversaries, then he that is not with Christ is against Christ. Do persons allow anything to lower His person now? All questions are secondary in comparison with this, and any one who is indifferent to it would deliberately take the part of the enemy against Christ. He who would sanction the dishonour of Jesus proves, no matter what his pretensions may be, that he is no friend of the Lord, and that his work of gathering can but scatter.

But in the mind of the Lord given in Mark, wholly different matter was before them. Here it was a question of a man who was exalting Christ according to the measure of his faith, and certainly with no inconsiderable power. The disciples, therefore, in this case ought to have acknowledged and delighted in the testimony to Christ's name. Granted that the man was not so favoured as they; but surely the name of Christ was exalted in desire and in fact. Had their eye been single, they would have owned that, and thanked God for it. And here, therefore, the Lord impresses on them a lesson of another kind altogether:

He that is not against me is for me {Mark 9:40}.

Thus, wherever it is a question of the Spirit's power put forth in Christ's name, it is evident that he who is thus used of God is not against Christ; and if God answers that power, and uses it for the blessing of man and the defeat of the devil, we ought to rejoice.

Need I say how applicable both these lessons are? We know, on the one hand, that in this world Christ is rejected and despised. Such is the main groundwork of Matthew. Accordingly, in Matt. 12, we have Him not merely the object of loathing, but this even to those who had the outward testimony of God at that time. Hence, no matter what may be the reputation, the traditional respect or reverence of men: if Christ be dishonoured, they that prize and love Him can have no fellowship for an instant. On the other hand, take the service of Christ, and in the midst of all that bears the name of Christ around, there may be those whom God employs for this or that important work. Am I to deny that God makes use of them in His service? Not for an instant. I acknowledge the power of God in them, and thank Him; but this is no reason why one should abandon the blessed place of following Jesus. I say not, "following us," but "following Him." It is evident that the disciples were occupied with themselves, and forgot Him. They were wishing ministry to be their monopoly, instead of a witness to Christ's name. But the Lord puts everything in its place; and the same Lord who in Matt. 12 insists on decision for Himself, where His enemies had manifested their hatred or contempt of the glory, is no less prompt in the Gospel of Mark to indicate the power that had wrought in the ministry of His unnamed servant.

Forbid him not,

says He;

for he that is not against me is for me {Mark 9:40}.

Was he against Christ who used, on John's own showing, His name against the devil? The Lord thus honours, in any quarter or measure, the faith that knows how to make use of His name, and gain victories over Satan. Hence, therefore, if
God employs any man -- say, in winning sinners to Christ, or delivering saints out of the bondage of wrong doctrine, or whatever else the snare may be -- Christ owns him, and so should we. It is a work of God, and homage to Christ's name, though not a ground, I repeat, for making light of following Christ, if He have graciously accorded such a privilege. It is a most legitimate ground, no doubt, for humbling ourselves, to think how little we do as entrusted with the power of God. Thus we have to maintain Christ's own personal glory, on the one hand, always holding that fast; we have, on the other hand, to acknowledge whatever ministerial power God is pleased in His own sovereignty to employ, and by whomsoever. The one truth does not in the slightest degree interfere with the other.

Further: let me draw your attention now to the appropriateness of the place of the incident in this Gospel. You could not transpose either it or the solemn word in Matthew. It would altogether mar the beauty of the truth in both. On the one hand, the day of despising and rejecting Christ is the day for faith to assert His glory; on the other hand, where there is the power of God, I must acknowledge it. I may have been myself rebuked for my own lack of power just before; but, at least, let me own God's hand wherever it is manifest.

Our Lord follows this up with a remarkably solemn instruction, and in His discourse shows that it was no question merely of "following us," or of anything else, for a time. Now, no doubt, the disciple follows Him through a world where stumbling-blocks abound, and dangers on every side. But more than that, it is a world into the midst of whose snares and pitfalls He deigns to cast the light of eternity. Hence it was not a mere question of the moment; it was far beyond the objects of party strife. Our Lord, therefore, strikes at the root of what was at work in the mistaken disciples. He declares that whosoever gives a cup of water in His name -- the smallest real service rendered to need -- because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward [Mark 9:41].

Yet more, it was not merely a question of rewards on the one side, but of eternal ruin on the other. They had better look to themselves while they yet may. Flesh is a bad and ruinous thing. No matter who or what the person may be, man is not safe in himself, especially, let me add, when in the service of Christ. There is no ground where souls are more apt to get astray. It is not merely in questions of moral evil. There are men that pass us, and that, so to speak, run the gauntlet of such seductions unscathed; but it is quite another and a very much more dangerous thing, where, in the professed service of the Lord, there is the nursing of that which is offensive to Christ, and grieves the Holy Ghost. This lesson comes out, not merely for saints, but also for those that are still under sin.

If thy hand offend thee, cut it off: if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out [Mark 9:43-48].

Deal unsparingly with every hindrance, and this on the simplest moral ground; most urgent, personally, and imminent is the peril they entail. These things would test a man, and sift whether there be anything in him Godward.

The end of Mark 9 reminds one of the end of 1 Cor. 9, where the apostle Paul, no doubt also speaking about service, deepens in his tone of warning, and intimates that service may often become a means of detecting not state only, but unreality. There may not be open immorality in the first instance, but where the Lord is not before the soul in constant self-judgment, evil grows apace out of nothing more than ministry, as indeed the fact proved among the Corinthians; for they had been thinking much more about gift and power than about Christ; and with what moral results? The apostle begins by putting the case in the strongest way to himself: he supposes the case of his own preaching ever so well to others, but abandoning all care about holiness. Occupied with his gift and others, such an one yields without conscience to that which the body craves after, and the consequence is total ruin. Were it Paul, he must become a castaway, or reprove (i.e. disapproved of God). The word is never used for a mere loss of reward, but for absolute rejection of the man himself. Then, in 1 Cor. 10, he applies the ruin of the Israelites to the danger of the Corinthians themselves.

Our Lord in this very passage of Mark similarly warns. He deals with the slight which John put upon one that was manifestly using the name of Christ to serve souls, and defeat Satan. But John had unwittingly ignored, if not denied, the true secret of power altogether. It was really John that needed to take care -- holy and blessed man as he was. There was an evident mistake of no ordinary gravity, and the Lord proceeds from this to the most solemn warning that He ever gave in any discourse that is recorded of Him. No other sets eternal destruction more manifestly before us in any part of the Gospels. Here, above all, we are admitted to hear continually ringing in our ears the awful dirge, if I may so call it, over lost souls:

Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched {Mark 9:48}.

On the other hand, our Lord turns the occasion also to the profit of His own, though this too be a solemn warning. Hence observe, before the subject closes, how He lays down grand principles that involve the whole of this question. Thus we are told,

Every one shall be salted with fire {Mark 9:49}.

It is well to remember that grace does not hinder this universal test of every soul here below.

Every one, says He,

shall be salted with fire;

but besides that,

Every sacrifice shall be salted with salt {Mark 9:49}.

These are two distinct things.

No child of man, as such, can escape judgment.

It is appointed unto man once to die, but after that the judgment {Heb. 9:27}.

The judgment, in one form or another, must be the portion of
the race. Whenever you look at what is universal, man, being a sinner, is an object for divine judgment. But this is far from the whole truth. There are those here below who are delivered from God’s judgment even in this world -- who have even now access into His favour, and rejoice in hope of His glory. What then of them? They that hear Christ’s word, and believe Him who sent the Saviour, have eternal life, and enter not into judgment. But are they not put to the proof? Assuredly they are; but it is upon another principle altogether.

Every sacrifice shall be salted with salt.

It is clearly not a question there of a mere sinful man, but of that which is acceptable to God; and, therefore, not salted with fire, but salted with salt. Not that there is not that which tests and proves the ground of the heart in those that belong to God; but even so their special nearness to Him is borne in mind.

Thus, whether it be the general dealing in a judicial manner with man, with every soul as such; whether it be the special case of such as belong to God (i.e. every sacrifice acceptable to God, as brought in by Christ on the foundation of His own great sacrifice), the principle is as clear as it is comprehensive and sure for every one; not only for every sinner, but for every believer, however truly acceptable to God by Jesus Christ our Lord. With the glorified saints, although it be not, of course, the judgment of God, certainly there is no concealment of the truth, though there is that also which God in His grace makes to be mighty to preserve; not pleasant, it may be, but the preservative energy of divine grace with its sanctifying effects. This, I think, is what is meant by being

salted with salt.

The figure of that well-known antiseptic does not leave room for the pleasant things of nature with all their evanescence.

Salt, says our Lord,

is good.

It is not an element which excites for a moment, and passes away; it has the savour of God’s covenant.

Salt is good; but if the salt have lost its saltiness, wherewith will ye season it? [Mark 9:50].

How fatal is the loss! How dangerous to go back!

Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another [Mark 9:50];

that is, have purity first, then peace mutually, as the apostle James, too, exhorts in his epistle. Purity deals with nature, and resists all corruption; it preserves by the mighty power of God’s grace. Following this, but of no worth without it, is

peace one with another [Mark 9:50].

May we possess this peace also, but not at the cost of intrinsic purity, if we value God’s glory!

This closes, then, our Lord’s ministry -- the connection of ministry, as it appears to me, with the transfiguration. That manifestation of the power of God could not but impress a new and suited character upon those concerned.

In the next chapter {Mark 10} our Lord introduces other topics, and very strikingly, because it might be hastily gathered that if all is founded upon death and resurrection, and is in view of the coming glory, such a ministry as this must take no account of relationships which have to do with nature. The very reverse is the case. It is precisely when you have the highest principles of God brought in, that everything God has ever owned on the earth finds its right place. It was not when God gave the law, for instance, that the sanctity of marriage was vindicated most. Every one ought to know there is no relationship so fundamental for man on earth -- there is nothing that so truly forms the social bond -- as the institution of marriage. What is there naturally in this world so essential for domestic happiness and personal purity, not to speak of the various other considerations, on which all human relationships so much depend? And yet it is remarkable that, during the legal economy, there was the continual allowance of that which enfeebled marriage. Thus, the permission of divorce for trivial reasons, I need not say, was anything but a maintenance of its honour. Here, on the contrary, when in Christ the fulness of grace came, and, more than that, when it was rejected, when the Lord Jesus Christ was announcing that which was to be founded upon His approaching humiliation unto death, and when He was expressly teaching that this new system could not be, and was not to be, proclaimed until His own rising from the dead, He also insists on the value of the various relations in nature. I admit the connection with the resurrection is only shown in Mark; but, then, this points out the true import of it, because Mark naturally indicates the importance of that epoch and glorious fact, for the service of Christ in testimony, for bringing the truth out to others.

Here, however, the Lord having disposed of that which was eternally momentous, having traced it up to the end of all this passing scene, having shown the results for those that have no part nor lot in the matter, as well as for such as enjoy the grace of God in its preservative force, namely, those that belong to Christ, now takes up the relation of these new principles to nature, to what God Himself acknowledged in what you may call the outside world.

The Lord here, then, stands up as the vindicator, first of all, of the relationship of marriage. He teaches that in the law, important as it was, Moses did not assert the vital place of marriage for the world. On the contrary, Moses permitted certain infractions of it because of Israel’s state.

For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother {Mark 10:5-7}.

That is, even the nearest other relationship, so to speak, disappears before this relationship.

For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What, therefore, God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.
To this it came; but for this more simple yet thorough exposition of God’s mind, we are indebted to the Lord Jesus, the great witness of grace, and of eternal things, now connected with His own rejection and the kingdom of God coming with power, and the setting aside of the long spell of the devil. It is the same Jesus who now clears from the dust of ruin God’s institutions even for the earth.

A similar principle runs through the incidents that follow here.

They brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them [Mark 10:13].

Had His followers drank deeply into that grace of which He was full, they would, on the contrary, have estimated very differently the feeling that presented the infants to their Master. The truth is that the spirit of self was yet strong; and what so petty and narrow? Poor, proud Judaism had tinctured and spoilt the feelings, and the little ones were despised by them. But God, who is mighty, despiseth not any; and grace, understanding the mind of God, becomes an imitator of His ways. The Lord Jesus rebuked them; yea, it is said,

He was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God [Mark 10:14].

In both these particulars, so all-important for the earth, we find the Lord Jesus Christ proving that grace, far from not giving nature its place, is the only thing that vindicates it, according to God.

Another lesson follows, in a certain sense even more emphatic, because more difficult. It might be thought that God’s mercy occupies itself specially with a child. But let us suppose an unconverted man, and one, too, living according to the law, and in great measure satisfied with his fulfilment of its obligations, what would the Lord say of him? How does the Lord Jesus Christ feel about such a one?

When he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and knelt to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God [Mark 10:17, 18].

The man was totally in the dark; he had no saving knowledge of God; he had no knowledge really of man; he had no sense of the true glory of Christ; he did honour Him, but merely as one differing in degree from himself. He owned Him to be a good Master, and he wanted to glean what he could from Him as a good disciple. He put himself, therefore, so far on a level with Jesus, assuming his competency to carry out the words and ways of Jesus. It is evident, therefore, that sin was unjudged, and that God Himself was unknown in the heart of this young man. The Lord, however, brings out his state fully.

Thou knowest the commandments [Mark 10:19], He says, putting expressly forward those duties that touch human relations.

He answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth [Mark 10:20].

The Lord does not refuse his statement — raises no question how far he had fulfilled the second table. On the contrary, it is added, that

Jesus, beholding him, loved him [Mark 10:21].

Many find a serious difficulty in that assertion of the Spirit of God. To my own mind it is as instructive as it is beautiful. Not that the man was converted, for he was clearly not; not that he knew the truth, for the difficulty arises from the fact that he was a stranger to it; not that the man was following Jesus, for, on the contrary, we are told that he went away from Jesus; not that his heart was made happy in God’s grace, for in truth he turned back sorrowing. There was the deepest reason, therefore, to regard him with pain and anxiety, if you judged the man according to what was eternal. Nevertheless, it remains true that Jesus looked upon him, and beholding him, loved him.

Is there nothing in this which traverses ordinary evangelicalism? An important lesson for us, I cannot doubt. The Lord Jesus, from the very fact of His perfect perception of God and His grace, and the infinite value of eternal life before His Spirit, was free enough, and above all that crowds human judgment, to appreciate character and conduct in nature, to weigh what was conscientious, to love what was lovable in man simply as man. So far from grace weakening, I am persuaded it always strengthens such feelings. To many, no doubt, this might seem strange; but they are themselves the proof of the cause that hinders. Let them examine and judge whether the word does not reveal what is here drawn from it. And let it be noted that we have this emphatic statement, too, in the Gospel which reveals Christ as the perfect servant; which gives us, therefore, to know how we are to serve wisely as we follow Him. Nowhere do we see our Lord bringing it out so distinctly as here. The same truth substantially is given in Matthew and in Luke: but Mark gives us the fact that He loved him.

Nor do Matthew and Luke say a word about there being the perception of the reason why the Lord thus loved the young man: only Mark tells us that,

beholding him,

Christ loved him. Of course, that is the great point of the case. The Lord did admire what there was naturally lovely in a man that had been preserved providentially from the evil of this world, and sedulously trained in the law of God, in which he had hitherto walked blamelessly, even desiring to learn from Jesus, but without divine conviction of his own sinful lost estate. Certainly the Lord did not deal with either the narrowness or the roughness which we so often betray. Indeed we are, alas! poor servants of His grace. The Lord far better knew, and far more deeply felt than we, the state and danger of the young man. Nevertheless there is much for us to weigh in this, that Jesus, beholding him, loved him.
But, further,

He said unto him, One thing thou lackest {Mark 10:21}.

But what a thing it was!

One thing thou lackest.

The Lord denies nothing that He could in any way or ground command: He owns everything that was naturally good. Who could blame, for instance, an obedient child? a beneficent and conscientious life? Am I, therefore, to attribute all this to divine grace? or to deny the need of it? No! these things I own as a boon belonging to man in this world, and to be valued in their place. He says that they have no value whatever, to my mind, evidently, the wisdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. At the same time, he who would make this, or any thing of the sort, a means of eternal life, evidently knows nothing as he ought to know. Thus the subject calls, no doubt, for much delicacy, but for what will find a true recognition in Jesus, and in the blessed word of God, and nowhere else. Our Lord therefore says,

One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor {Mark 10:21}.

Is not this what Jesus had done, though in an infinitely better way? Certainly He had given up all things, that God might be glorified in the salvation of lost man. But if He had emptied Himself of His glory, how infinite were the results of that humiliation unto death itself?

The young man wanted to learn something of Jesus; but was he prepared to follow even in the earthly path of the Crucified? was he willing only to have the thing he lacked supplied? to be a witness of divine self-renunciation in grace to the wretched? to abandon treasures on earth, content to have treasure in heaven? If he had done this, however, Christ could not but ask more; even as here He adds,

And come, take up the cross, and follow me {Mark 10:21}.

The Saviour, as we may thus see, goes not before the light of God; He does not anticipate what would be brought out in a day that was at hand. There is no premature announcement of the astonishing change which the Gospel in due time made known; but the heart was fully tested. Man in his best estate is proved to be lighter than vanity, compared with Him who alone is good; and this revealed in Christ, His only adequate image and expression. Yet could He who thus (not to speak of the unfathomable depth of His cross) distanced man look on this young man with love, as He beheld him; spite of evident shortcoming. Still, whatever he was, this did not in the smallest degree take the man out of the world. His heart was in the creature, yea, even in the unrighteous mammon: he loved his property, i.e. himself, and the Lord in His test dealt with the root of the evil. And so the result proved. For it is said,

He was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions {Mark 10:22}.

Now, it appears to me that our Lord's way of dealing is the perfect pattern; and first in this, that He does not reason from that which was not yet revealed by God. He does not speak of His own bloodshedding, death, or resurrection. They were not yet accomplished, and it would have been quite unintelligible. Not one of the disciples themselves knew anything really, though the Lord had repeatedly spoken of it to the twelve. How was this man to understand? Our Lord did what was of all-importance -- He dealt with the man's own conscience. He spread before him the moral value of what He had done Himself, giving up all that one had. This was the last thing the young man thought of doing. He would have liked to have been a benefactor -- a generous patron; but to give up everything, and to follow Christ in shame and reproach, he was in no way prepared to do. The consequence was, that on his own ground the man was left perfectly convicted of stopping short of good brought before him in the good Master to whom he had appealed. What the Lord may have done for him afterwards is a matter for the Lord to tell. As it is not revealed in the word, it is not for us to know; and it would be vain and wrong to conjecture. What God has shown us here is, that no matter what the extent of moral following the law, even in a most remarkable case of outward purity and of apparent subjection to the requirements of God, all this does not deliver the soul, does not make a man happy, but leaves him perfectly miserable and far from Christ. Such is the moral of the rich young ruler, and a very weighty one it is.

Next, our Lord applies the same principle to the disciples; for now He has done with the outward question. We have seen nature in its best estate seeking Christ in a sense; and here is the result of it: after all the man is unhappy, and leaves Jesus, who now looks upon His disciples in their utter bewilderment, and enlarges on the hindrance of wealth in divine things. Alas! this they had thought to be an evidence of God's blessing. And if they were only rich, how much good might they not do!

How hardly, says Christ,

shall they that have riches enter the kingdom of God! {Mark 10:23}

He further says to them, already astonished;

Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God {Mark 10:24, 25}.

The Lord insists only the more solemnly on this lesson, so little understood even by disciples. They, beyond measure surprised, say among themselves,

Who, then, can be saved? {Mark 10:26},

which gives the Lord the opportunity to explain what lies at the bottom of the whole question; that salvation is a question of God, and not of man at all. Law, nature, riches, poverty -- no matter what, that man loves or fears -- has nothing in the least to do with the saving of the soul, which rests entirely on the power of God's grace, and nothing else: what is impossible for man is possible with God. All turns, therefore, on His grace. Salvation is of the Lord. Blessed be His name!
with God all things are possible: otherwise how could we, how could any, be saved?

Peter then begins to boast a little of what the disciples had given up, whereon the Lord brings in a very beautiful word, peculiar to Mark.

There is no man, that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake and the gospel's, but he shall receive a hundredfold [Mark 10:29, 30].

Be it noted that only Mark mentions
and the gospel's.

It is service that is so prominent here. Others may say, for His sake;

but here we read,
for my sake, and the gospel's.

Thus the value of Christ personally is, as it were, attached to the service of Christ in this world. Whosoever, then, is thus devoted, He says,

shall receive an hundredfold now in this time,
houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life {Mark 10:29, 30}.

It is a wonderful conjunction, but most true, because it is the word of the Lord and the reckoning of faith.

All things that Christ possesses are ours who believe in Him. No doubt such a tenure does not satisfy the covetous heart; but it is a deep and rich satisfaction to faith, that instead of wanting something to distinguish self by, one has the comfort of knowing that all the Church of God possesses on the earth belongs to every saint of God on the earth. Faith does not seek its own, but delights in that which is diffused among the faithful. Unbelief counts nothing its own, save what is for selfish use. If, on the contrary, love be the principle that animates me, how different! But then there is an accompaniment -- with persecutions.

These you must have somehow, if you are faithful. They that will live godly cannot escape it. Am I only to have it in that way because they have it? It is better to have it myself in the direct following of Christ. In His warfare, what can be so honourable a mark? But it is a mark that is found especially in the service of Christ. Here, again, we see how thoroughly Mark’s character is preserved throughout.

But many that are first shall be last, and last first,
{Mark 10:31},

we find solemnly added here as in Matthew. It is not the beginning of the race that decides the contest; the end of it necessarily is the great point. In that race there are many changes, and withal not a few slips, falls, and reverses.

The Lord then goes on to Jerusalem, that fatal spot for the true prophet. Man was wrong in averring that never a prophet had arisen in Galilee; for, indeed, God left Himself not without witnesses even there. But assuredly the Lord was right, that no prophet should perish out of Jerusalem. The religious capital is exactly the place where the true witnesses of God’s grace must die. Jesus, therefore, in going up to Jerusalem was well understood by the disciples, and so, amazed, they follow Him. Little were they prepared for that course of persecution which was to be their boast in a day that was coming, and for which they would be surely strengthened by the Holy Ghost. But it was not so yet.

Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid. And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him, saying, Behold, we go up (how gracious! not only “I,” but we, go up)
to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles {Mark 10:32, 33}.

Then we have the persecution unto death (and what a death!) fully laid before us. James and John at this critical time show how little flesh, even in the servants of God, ever enters into His thoughts.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh {John 3:6}, no matter in whom. Again, it was not in obscure ones, but in those that seemed to be somewhat, that the ugliness of the flesh especially betrayed itself; and therefore it is these who furnish the lesson for us.

Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire {Mark 10:35}.

Their mother appears in another Gospel -- in the Gospel where we might expect such a relationship after the flesh to appear; but here, alas! it is the servants themselves, who ought to have known better. As yet their eyes were holden. They turned the very fact of their being servants into a means of profiting the flesh even in the kingdom of God itself. They seek to gratify the flesh here by the thought of what they would be there. So the Lord brings out the thought of their heart, and answers them with a dignity peculiar to Himself.

Ye know not.

He says,

what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?
and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: but to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but [it shall be given] to them for whom it is prepared {Mark 10:38-40}.

He is the servant; and even in view of the time of glory He preserves the same character. A high place in the kingdom is only for those
for whom it is prepared.

But it was not merely that these two disciples betrayed themselves; the ten made the secret of their heart manifest enough. It is not alone by the fault of one or another that the
flesh becomes apparent; but how do we behave ourselves in presence of the displayed faults of others? The indignation which broke out in the ten showed the pride of their own hearts, just as much as the two desiring the best place. Had unselfish love been at work, their ambition would assuredly have been a matter for sorrow and shame. I do not say for lack of faithfulness in resisting it; but I do say, that the indignation proved that there was a feeling of self, and not of Christ, strongly at work in their hearts. Our Lord, therefore, reads a rebuke to the whole, and shows them that it was but the spirit of a Gentile that animated them against the sons of Zebedee; the very reverse of all He could not but look for in them, even as it opposed all that was in Himself. Intelligence of the kingdom leads the believer into contentedness with being little now. The true greatness of the disciple lies in the power of being a servant of Christ morally, going down to the uttermost in the service of others. It is not energy that ensures this greatness in the Lord’s estimate now, but contentedness to be a servant -- yea, to be a slave in the lowest or least place. As for Himself, it was not merely that Christ did come to minister, or be a servant; He had that which He alone could have -- the title, as the love, to give His life a ransom for many.

* * *

From Mark 10:48 comes the last scene -- the Lord presenting Himself to Jerusalem, and that too, as we are all aware, from Jericho. We have His progress to Jerusalem, beginning with the cure of the blind man. I need not dwell on the details, nor on His entrance on the colt of the ass into the city as the King. Neither need I say more about the fig tree (one day cursed, the next day seen to be thoroughly withered up), nor the Lord’s call to faith in God, and its effect in and on prayer. Nor need we enter particularly into the question of authority raised by the religious leaders.

The parable of the vineyard, with which Mark 12 opens, is very full on that which concerns the servants responsible to God. Then we hear of the rejected stone that was afterwards made the head of the corner. Again, we have the various classes of Jews coming before Him with their questions. Not that there are not important points in every one of these scenes that pass before our eyes; but the hour will not permit me to touch upon any of them at length. I therefore pass by these particulars. We have the Pharisees and the Herodians rebuked; we have the Sadducees refuted; we have the scribe manifesting what the character of the law is; and, indeed, in answer to his own question, the Lord shed the full light of God upon the law, but at the same time accompanied by a remarkable comment on the lawyer.

When Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God (Mark 12:34).

It is a beautiful feature in our Lord’s service -- this readiness to own whatever was according to truth, no matter where He found it. Then our Lord puts His own question, as to His own person, according to the Scripture, gives a brief warning as to the scribes, and marks in contrast the poor blessed widow, His own pattern of true devotedness and of real faith in this most spiritually destitute condition of the people of God on earth. How He passes completely by the wealth that merely gave what it felt not, to single out, and for ever consecrate, the practice of faith where it might be least expected! The widow that had but the two mites had cast in all her living into the treasury of God, and this at a time decrepit and selfish beyond all precedent. Little did that widow think that she had found even upon earth an eye to own, and a tongue to proclaim, what God could form for His own praise in the heart and by the hand of the poorest woman in Israel!

Then our Lord instructs the disciples in a prophecy strictly conformned to the character of Mark. This is the reason why here alone, where you have the service of the Lord, the power by which they could answer in times of difficulty is introduced into this discourse. Hence our Lord passes by all distinctive reference to the end of the age -- an expression which does not here occur. The fact is that, although it be the prophecy which in Matthew looks to the end of the age, still the Spirit does not so specify here; and for the simple reason, that a prophecy which was forming them for their service accounts for what is left out and what is put in, as compared with Matthew. Another thing I may notice is, that in this prophecy alone He says, that not only the angels, but even the Son does not know that day (Mark 13:32). The reason of this peculiar, and at first sight perplexing, expression seems to me to be, that Christ so thoroughly takes the place of One who confines himself to what God gave to Him, of One so perfectly a minister -- not a master, in this point of view -- that, even in relation to the future, He knows and gives out to others only what God gives Him for the purpose. As God says nothing about the day and the hour, He knows no more. Remark also how characteristically here our Lord describes both Himself, and the workmen, and their work. There is no such dispensational description, as in Matthew’s parable of the talents, but simply this:

The Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch (Mark 13:34).

The features of difference in Matthew are plain. There is far greater augustness. He who goes a long way provides as it were for the length of His absence. Here, no doubt, He goes; but He gives authority to his servants.

Who can fail to note the suitability for the purpose of Mark? Again, He gives to every man his work.

Why, may we not ask, are these expressions found here? Surely, because in Mark it is the very subject-matter of the Gospel all through; for even in a prophecy the Lord would never abandon the great thought of service. Here it is not so much the question of giving gifts or goods as of work to be done. Authority is given to His servants. They wanted it. They do not take it without a title. It is doing His will, rather than trading with His gifts. We find this last most appropriately in Matthew; because the point in the earlier
Gospel was the peculiar change to follow the Lord's leaving the earth, and the Jewish hopes of Messiah, for the new place He was going to take on ascending to heaven. There He is the giver of gifts -- a thing quite distinct in its character from the ordinary principle of Judaism; and the men trade with them, and the good and faithful enter finally into the joy of their Lord. Here it is simply the service of Christ, the true servant.

In Mark 14 come the profoundly interesting and instructive scenes of our Lord with the disciples, not now predicting, but vouchsafing the last pledge of His love. The chief priests and scribes plot in corruption and violence for His death; at Simon's house in Bethany a woman anoints His body to the burying, which discurs many hearts among the disciples, and draws out the Master's, who next is seen, not accepting an offering of affection, but giving the great and permanent token of His love -- the Lord's Supper. The state of Judas's heart appears in both cases -- conceiving his plan in the presence of the first, and going out to accomplish it from the presence of the last. Thence our Lord goes forth; not yet to suffer the wrath of God, but to enter into it in spirit before God. We have seen all through the Gospel that such was His habit, to which I merely call attention now in passing. As the cross was of all the deepest work and suffering, so most assuredly the Lord did not enter upon Calvary without a previous Gethsemane. In its due season comes the trial before the high priest and Pilate.

The crucifixion of our Lord is in Mark 15, with the effect upon those that followed Him, and the grace that wrought in the women -- men betraying their abject fear in the presence of death, but women strengthened, the weak truly made strong.

Finally, in Mark 16, we have the resurrection, but this, too, strictly in keeping with the character of the Gospel. Accordingly, then we have the Lord risen, the angel giving the word to the women --

Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter {Mark 16:6, 7}

-- a word found only in Mark. The reason is manifest. It is a mighty consideration for the soul. Peter, despising the word of the Lord really, though not intentionally; Peter, not receiving that word mixed with faith into his heart, but, on the contrary, trusting himself, was pushed into a difficulty where he could not stand, even before man or woman, because he had never borne the temptation upon his spirit before God. So it was then that Peter broke down shamefully. From the Lord's look he began to feel his conduct acutely; but while the process went on he needed to be comforted, and our Lord therefore expressly named Peter in His message -- the only one who was named. It was an encouragement to the faint heart of His fallen servant; it was an acting of that same grace which had prayed for him even before he fell; it was the Lord effecting for him a thorough restoration of his soul, which mainly consists of the application of the word to the conscience, but also to the affections. Peter's was the last name, according to man, that deserved to be then named; but it was the one who needed most, and that was enough for the grace of Christ. Mark's Gospel is ever that of the service of love.

On the cross and resurrection, as here presented, I need not speak now. There are peculiarities both of insertion and of omission, which illustrate the difference in scope of what is here given us from that which we find elsewhere. Thus we have the reviling of the very thieves crucified with Him, but not the conversion of one. And as in the seizure of Jesus we hear of a certain young man who fled naked when laid hold of by the lawless crowd that apprehended the Saviour, so before the crucifixion they compel in their wanton violence one Simon a Cyrenian to bear His cross. But God was not forgetful of that day's toil for Jesus, as Alexander and Rufus could testify at a later day. Not a word here of the earth quaking, either at the death of Christ, or when He rose; no graves are seen opened; no saints risen and appearing in the holy city. But of the women we hear who had ministered to Him living and would have still ministered when dead, but that the resurrection cut it short, and brought in a better and enduring light, the Lord employing angelic ministry, to chase away their fright by announcing that the crucified Jesus of Nazareth was risen. How admirably this is in keeping with our Gospel need scarcely be enlarged on.

I am aware that men have tampered with the closing verses of Mark 16:9-20, as they have sullied with their unholy doubts the beginning of John 8. In speaking of John, it will be my happy task to defend that passage from the rude insults of men. Assured they are wrong, I care not who they may be nor what their excuses. God has given the ampest array of external vouchers; but there are reasons far weightier, internal grounds of conviction, which will be appreciated just in proportion to a person's understanding of God and His word. Impossible for man to coin a single thought, or even a word fit to pass. So it is in this scene.

I also admit that there are certain differences between this portion and the previous part of Mark 16. But, in my judgment, the Spirit purposely put them in a different light. Here, you will observe, it is a question of forming the servants according to that rising from the dead for which He had prepared them. Had the Gospel terminated without this, we, must have had a real gap, which ought to have been felt. The Lord had Himself, before His resurrection, indicated its important bearing. When the fact occurred, had there been no use made of it with the servants and for the service of Christ, there had been, indeed, a grievous lack, and this wonderful Gospel of His ministry would have left off with as impotent a conclusion as we could possibly imagine. Mark 16 would have closed with the silence of the women and its source, for they were afraid {Mark 16:8}.

What conclusion less worthy of the servant Son of God! What must have been the impression left, if the doubts of some learned men had the slightest substance in them? Can any one, who knows the character of the Lord and of His ministry, conceive for an instant that we should be left with nothing but a message baulked through the alarm of women? Of course, I assume what is indeed the fact, that the outward
evidence is enormously preponderant for the concluding verses. But, internally also, it seems to me impossible for one who compares the earlier close with the Gospel's aim and character throughout, to accept such an ending after weighing that which is afforded by the verses from 9 to 20 [Mark 16]. Certainly these seem to me to furnish a most fitting conclusion to that which otherwise would be a picture of total and hopeless weakness in testimony. Again, the very freedom of the style, the use of words not elsewhere used, or so used by Mark, and the difficulties of some of the circumstances narrated, tell to my mind in favour of its genuineness; for a forger would have adhered to the letter, if he could not so easily catch the spirit of Mark.

I admit, of course, that there was a particular object in the earlier verses as they now stand, and that the providence of God wrought therein; but surely the ministry of Jesus has a higher end than such providential ways of God. On the other hand, if we receive the common conclusion of the Gospel of Mark, how appropriate all is! Here we have a woman, and no ordinary woman, Mary Magdalene, out of whom Jesus, who was now dead and risen, had once cast seven devils; and who, therefore, so fit a witness of the resurrection-power of God's Son? The Lord had come to destroy the works of the devil; she knew this, even before His death and resurrection: who then, I ask, so suitable a herald of it as Mary of Magdala? There is a divine reason, and it harmonizes with this Gospel. She had experimentally proved the blessed ministry of Jesus before, in delivering herself from Satan's power. She was now about to announce a still more glorious ministry; for Jesus had now by dying destroyed Satan's power in death.

She went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept [Mark 16:10].

This was untimely sorrow on their part: what a thrill of joy that ought to have sent to their hearts. Alas! Unbelief left them still sad and unblesed. Then

he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country. And they went and told it unto the residue: neither believed they them [Mark 16:12, 13].

Here was an important practical element to remember in the service of the Lord -- the dulness of men's hearts, their consequent opposition and resistance to the truth. Where the truth does not concern men much, they slight without fear, hatred, or opposition. Thus, the very resistance to the truth, while it shows in a certain sense, no doubt, man's unbelief, demonstrates at the same time that its importance leads to this resistance. Supposing you tell a man that a certain chief possesses a great estate in Tartary; he may think it all very true, at any rate he does not feel enough about the case to deny the allegation; but tell him that he himself has such an estate there: does he believe you? The moment something affects the person, there is interest enough to resist stoutly. It was of practical moment that the disciples should be instructed in the feelings of the heart, and learn the fact in their own experience. Here we have it so in the case of our Lord. He had told them plainly in His word; He had announced the resurrection over and over and over again; but how slow were these chosen servants of the Lord! what patient waiting upon others should there not be in the ministry of those with whom the Lord had dealt so graciously! There again we find, that if it be of moment, it is most especially so in the point of view of the Lord's ministry.

After this the Lord appears Himself to the eleven as they sat at meat, and

upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen [Mark 16:14].

Yet a most gracious Master He proves Himself -- one that knew well how to make good ministers out of bad ones; and so the Lord says to them, immediately after upbraiding them with their incredulity,

Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved [Mark 16:15, 16].

There is the importance not only of the truth, but of its being openly and formally confessed before God and man; for clearly baptism does symbolically proclaim the death and resurrection of Christ; that is the value of it.

He that believeth and is baptized.

Do not you pretend that you have received Christ, and then shirk all the difficulties and dangers of the confession. Not so:

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned [Mark 16:16].

There is not a word about baptism in this last case. A man might be baptized; but without faith, of course it would not save him.

He that believeth not shall be damned.

Believing was the point. Nevertheless, if a man professed ever so much to believe, yet shrank from the publicity of owning Him in whom he believed, his profession of faith was good for nothing; it could not be accepted as real. Here was an important principle for the servant of Christ in dealing with cases.

Further, outward manifestations of power were to follow:

These signs shall follow them that believe: in my name shall they cast out devils [Mark 16:17].

By and by the power of Satan is to be shaken thoroughly. This was only a testimony, but still how weighty it was! The Lord in this case does not say how long these signs were to last. When He says,

Teach [make disciples of] all nations [or the Gentiles], baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them all things whatsoever I have commanded you,

He adds,

And, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world [or age] [Matt. 28:19, 20].

That is, He does connect His continuance with their discipling, baptizing, and teaching all the Gentiles what He
had enjoined. This work was thus to go on till the end of the age; but as for the signs of Mark 16, with marvellous wisdom He omits all mention of a period. He does not say how long these signs were to follow them that believe. All He said was, that these signs were to follow; and so they did. He did not promise that they were to be for five, or fifty, for a hundred, or five hundred years. He simply said they were to follow, and so the signs were given; and they followed not merely the apostles, but them that believe. They confirmed the word of believers wherever they were found. It was but a testimony, and I have not the slightest doubt, that as there was perfect wisdom in giving these signs to accompany the word, so also there was not less wisdom in cutting the gift short. I am assured that, in the present fallen state of Christendom, these outward signs, so far from being desirable, would be an injury. No doubt their cessation is a proof of our sin and low estate; but at the same time there was graciousness in His thus withholding these signs towards His people when their continuance threatened no small danger to them, and might have obscured His moral glory.

The grounds of this judgment need not be entered into now; it is enough to say that undoubtedly these signs were given.

They shall cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover {Mark 16:17, 18}.

Thus there was a blow struck at the prolific source of evil in the world; there was the expression of God's rich grace now to the world; there was the active witness of the beneficence of divine mercy in dealing with the miseries everywhere occurred in the world. These are, I think, the characteristics of the service, but then there remains a striking part of the conclusion, which I venture to think none but Mark could have written. No doubt the Holy Ghost was the true author of all that Mark wrote; and certainly, the conclusion is one that suits this Gospel, but no other. If you cut off these words, you have a Gospel without a conclusion. Accepting these words as the words of God, you have, I repeat, a termination that harmonizes with a truly divine Gospel; but not merely that -- here you have a divine conclusion for Mark's Gospel, and for no other. There is no other Gospel that this conclusion would suit but Mark's; for observe here what the Spirit of God finally gives us. He says,

After the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven {Mark 16:19}.

You might have thought, surely, that there was rest in heaven now that Christ's work on earth was done, and so perfectly done; more particularly as it is here added,

and he sat on the right hand of God {Mark 16:19}.

If there is such a session of Christ spoken of in this place, the more it might be supposed that there was a real rest, now that all His work was over; but not so. As the Gospel of Mark exhibits emphatically Jesus the workman of God, so even in the rest of glory He is the workman still. Therefore, it seems written here that, while they went forth upon their mission, they were to take up the work which the Lord had left them to do.

They went forth and preached everywhere -- for there is this character of largeness about Mark.

They went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following {Mark 16:20}.

Thus Mark, and no one else, gives us the picture most thoroughly, the whole consistent up to the last. Would a forger have kept up the bold thought of the Lord working with them,

while every other word intimates that He was then at least quiescent?

Thus have we glanced over the Gospel of Mark, and have seen that the first thing in it is the Lord ushered into His service by one who was called to an extraordinary work before Him, even John the Baptist. Now, at last, when He is set down at the right hand of God, we find it said that the Lord was working with them. To allow that verses 9 to the end {Mark 16:9-20} are authentic Scripture, but not Mark's own writing, seems to me the lamest supposition possible.

May He bless His own word, and give us here one more proof that, if there be any portion in which we find the divine hand more conspicuous than another, it is precisely where unbelief objects and rejects. I am not aware that in all the second Gospel there is a section more characteristic of this evangelist than the very one that man's temerity has not feared to seize upon, endeavouring to root it from the soil where God planted it. But, beloved friends, these words are not of man. Every plant that the heavenly Father has not planted shall be rooted up. This shall never be rooted up, but abides for ever, let human learning, great or small, say what it will.

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Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Gospels

Lecture 6

Luke 1 – 8

The preface of Luke’s Gospel is as instructive as the introduction of either of the two preceding Gospels. It is obvious to any serious reader that we enter a totally different province, though all be equally divine; but here we have a stronger prominence given to human motive and feeling. To one who needed to learn more of Jesus, writes another godly man, inspired of God, but without drawing particular attention to the fact of inspiration, as if this were a doubtful matter; but, on the contrary, assuming, as all Scripture does, without express statement, that the written word is the word of God. The purpose is, to set before a fellow Christian -- a man of rank, but a disciple -- an account, full, accurate, and orderly, of the Lord Jesus, such as one might give that had thorough acquaintance with all the truth of the matter, but in fact such as none could give who was not inspired of God for the purpose. He lets us know that there were many of these memoirs formed on the tradition of those who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and servants of the word. These works have departed; they were human. They were, no doubt, well-intentioned; at least there is here no question of heretics perverting the truth, but of men attempting in their own wisdom to set forth that which only God was competent rightly to make known.

At the same time Luke, the writer of this Gospel, apprises us of his motives, instead of presenting a bare and needless statement of the revelation he had received.

It seemed good to me also, &c. {Luke 1:3, 4}, is in contrast with these many that had taken it in hand. They had done the work in their fashion, he after another sort, as he proceeds next to explain. Clearly he does not refer to Matthew or Mark, but to accounts that were then handed about among Christians. It could not be otherwise than that many would essay to publish a relation of facts so weighty and engrossing, which, if they had not themselves seen, they had gathered from eye-witnesses conversant with the Lord. These memoirs were floating about. The Holy Ghost distinguishes the writer of this Gospel from these men quite as much as joins him with them. He states that they depended upon those who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word. He says nothing of the kind about himself, as has been rashly inferred from the phrase

to me also {Luke 1:3};

but, as is evident, proceeds to give a wholly different source for his own handling of the matter. In short, he does not intimate that his account of these things was derived from eye-witnesses, yet speaks of his thorough acquaintance with all from the very first, without telling us how he came by it. As for the others, they had taken in hand to

set forth in order a declaration of these things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses {Luke 1:1, 2}.

He does not impute falsehood; he affirms that their histories were derived from the traditions of men who saw, heard, and waited on Christ here below; but he attributes no divine character to these numerous writers, and intimates the need of a surer warrant for the faith and instruction of disciples. This he claims to give in his Gospel. His own qualification for the task was, as one that had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto Theophilus in order that he might

know the certainty of those things wherein he had been instructed {Luke 1:4}.

In that expression,

from the very first,

he lets us into a difference between his own Gospel and the memoirs current among Christians.

From the very first,

means that it was an account from the origin or outset, and is fairly rendered in our version. So it is that we find in Luke that he traces things with great fulness, and lays before the reader the circumstances that preceded and that accompanied the whole life of our Lord Jesus Christ up to His ascension to heaven.

Now, he does not enter more than other inspired writers do into an assertion or explanation of his inspired character, which Scripture assumes everywhere. He does not tell us how it was he acquired his perfect understanding of all he communicates. It is not the way of inspired writers to do either. They speak

with authority,

even as our Lord taught

with authority {Mark 1:27; Luke 4:36};

not as the scribes {Matt. 7:29; Mark 1:22}
or tradition-mongers. He claims indeed the fullest acquaintance with the subject, and the statement of which would not suit any other evangelist but Luke. It is one who,
though inspired like the rest, was drawing his friend and brother with the cords of a man. Inspiration does not as a rule in the least degree interfere with the individuality of the man; still less would it here where Luke is writing of the Son of God as man, born of a woman, and this to another man. Hence he brings out in the preface his own thoughts, feelings, materials for the work, and the blessed aim contemplated. This is the only Gospel addressed to a man. This naturally fits, and lets us into the character of the Gospel. We are here about to see our Lord Jesus pre-eminently set forth as man, man most really as such -- not so much the Messiah, though, of course, that He is; nor even the minister; but the man. Undoubtedly, even as man He is the Son of God, and so He is called in the very first chapter of this Gospel. The Son of God He was, as born into the world; not only Son of God before He entered the world, but Son of God from everlasting. That holy thing which should be born of the virgin was to be called the Son of God {Luke 1:35}. Such was His title in that point of view, as having a body prepared Him, born of a woman, even of the Virgin Mary. Clearly, therefore, this indicates, from the beginning of the Gospel, the predominance given to the human side of the Lord Jesus here. What was manifest in Jesus, in every work and in every word of His, displayed what was divine; but He was none the less man; and He is here viewed as such in everything. Hence, therefore, it was of the deepest interest to have the circumstances unerringly marked out in which this wondrous man entered the world, and walked up and down here. The Spirit of God deigns by Luke to open the whole scene, from those that surrounded the Lord with the various occasions that appealed to His heart, till His ascension. But there is another reason also for the peculiar beginning of St. Luke. Thus, as he of the evangelists most of all approaches the great apostle of the Gentiles, of whom to a certain extent he was the companion, as we know from the Acts of the Apostles, counted by the apostle one of his fellow-labourers, too, we find him acting, by the Holy Ghost’s guidance, upon that which was the great distinguishing character of the apostle Paul’s service and testimony --

To the Jew first, and also to the Gentile {Rom. 2:10}.

Accordingly our Gospel, although it is essentially Gentile, as it was addressed to a Gentile and written by a Gentile, begins with an announcement that is more Jewish than any other of the four Gospels. It was precisely so with Paul in his service. He began with the Jew. Very soon the Jews proceeded to reject the word, and prove themselves unworthy of eternal life. Paul turned to the Gentiles. The same thing is true of our Gospel, so akin to the apostle’s writings, that some of the early Christian writers imagined that this was the meaning of an expression of the apostle Paul, far better understood of late. I refer to it now, not because of any truth in that notion, for the remark is totally false; but at the same time, it shows that there was a kind of feeling of the truth underneath the error. They used to imagine that Paul meant the Gospel of Luke when he said,

My [or our] Gospel {Rom. 2:16, 16:25; 2 Tim. 2:8}.

Happily most of my hearers understand the true bearing of the phrase enough to detect so singular an error; but still it does show that even the dullest of men could not avoid perceiving that there was a tone of thought, and current of feeling, in the Gospel of Luke which harmonized very largely with the apostle Paul’s testimony. Yet it was not at all as bringing out what the apostle Paul calls his Gospel, or the mystery of the Gospel, &c. {Eph. 6:19}; but certainly it was the great moral groundwork through which it lay -- at any rate, which most thoroughly accorded with, and prepared for it. Hence it is, after presenting Christ in the richest grace to the godly Jewish remnant, that we have first and fully given by Luke the account of God’s bringing the first-begotten Son into this world, having it in His purpose to put in relation with Him the whole human race, and most especially preparing the way for His grand designs and counsels with regard to the Gentiles. Nevertheless, first of all, He justifies Himself in His ways, and shows that He was ready to accomplish every promise that He had made to the Jews.

What we have, therefore, in the first two chapters of Luke, is God’s vindication in the Lord Jesus presented as the One in whom He was ready to make good all His old pledges to Israel. Hence the whole scene agrees with this feeling on God’s part towards Israel. A priest is seen righteous according to the law, but his wife without that offspring which the Jews looked for as the mark of God’s favour towards them. Now God was visiting the earth in grace; and, as Zechariah ministered in the priest’s office, an angel, even there a stranger, except for purposes of pity towards the miserable betimes (John 5), but long unseen as the witness of the glorious ways of God, announced to him the birth of a son, the forerunner of the Messiah. The unbelief even of the godly in Israel was apparent in the conduct of Zacharias; and God reproved it with inflicted dumbness, but failed not in His own grace. This, however, was but the harbinger of better things; and the angel of the Lord was despatched on a second errand, and re-announces that most ancient revelation of a fallen paradise, that mightiest promise of God, which stands out from all others to the fathers and in the prophets, and which, indeed, was to compass within itself the accomplishment of all the promises of God. He makes known to the virgin Mary a birth no way connected with nature, and yet the birth of a real man; for that man was the Son of the Highest -- a man to sit upon the throne, so long vacant, of His father David.

Such was the word. I need not say that there were truths still more blessed and profounder than this of the throne of Israel, accompanying that announcement, on which it is impossible to dwell now, if we are tonight to traverse any considerable part of our Gospel. Suffice it to say, we have thus all the proofs of God’s favour to Israel, and faithfulness to His promises, both in the forerunner of the Messiah, and in the birth of the Messiah Himself. Then follows the lovely burst of praise from the mother of our Lord, and soon after, when the tongue of him that was smitten dumb was loosed, Zacharias speaks, first of all to praise the Lord for His
infinite grace.

The second chapter {Luke 2} pursues the same grand truths: only there is more at hand. The opening verses bring this before us. God was good to Israel, and was displaying His faithfulness according to, not the law, but His promises. How truly the people were in bondage! Hostile Gentiles had the upper hand. The last great empire predicted in Daniel was then in power.

It came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed [or enrolled]. (And this taxing [or enrolment] was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one to his own city {Luke 2:1-3}.

Such was the thought of the world, of the imperial power of that day, the great Roman beast or empire. But if there was a decree from Cæsar, there was a most gracious purpose in God. Cæsar might indulge his pride and count the world his own, in the exaggerated style of human ambition and self-complacency; but God was now manifesting what He was, and oh, what a contrast! The Son of God, by this very deed, providentially enters the world at the promised place, Bethlehem. He enters it after a different sort from what we could have ever drawn from the first Gospel, where we have Bethlehem still more significantly mentioned: at any rate, prophecy is cited on the occasion as to the necessity of its being there. That information even the scribes could render to the Magi who came to adore. Here there is nothing of the sort. The Son of God is found not even in an inn, but in the manger, where the poor parents of the Saviour laid him. Every mark follows of the reality of a human birth, and of a human being; but it was Christ the Lord, the witness of the saving, healing, forgiving, blessing grace of God. Not only is His cross thus significant, but His birth, the very place and circumstances being all most evidently prepared. Nor this only; for although we see not here Magi from the East, with their royal gifts, their gold, and frankincense, and myrrh, laid at the feet of the infant King of the Jews, here we have, what I am persuaded was yet more beautiful morally, angelic converse; and suddenly, with the angel (for heaven is not so far off), the choirs of heaven praising God, while the shepherds of earth kept their flocks in the path of humble duty.

Impossible, without ruining, to invert these things! Thus you could not transplant the scene of the Magi into Luke, neither would the introduction of the shepherds, thus visited by the grace of God by night, be so proper in Matthew. What a tale this last told of where God's heart is! How evident from the very first it was, that to the poor the Gospel was preached, and how thoroughly in keeping with this Gospel! And we might truly affirm the same -- I will not say of the glory that Saul saw and taught -- but most certainly of the grace of God which Paul preached also. This does not hinder that still there is a testimony to Israel; although sundry signs and tokens, the very introduction of the Gentile power, and the moral features of the case, also make it evident that there is something more than a question of Israel and their King.

Nevertheless, there meets us here the fullest witness of grace to Israel. So even in the words, somewhat weakened in our version, where it is said,

Fear not: for, behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be

not to all people, but
to all the people {Luke 2:10}.

This passage does not go beyond Israel. Manifestly this is entirely confirmed by the context, even if one did not know a word of that language, which, of course, proves what I am now advancing. In the next verse it is,

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord {Luke 2:11}.

It is evident that, as far as this goes, He is introduced strictly as the One who was to bring in His own person the accomplishment of the promises to Israel.

The angels go farther when they say,

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will in men {Luke 2:14}.

It is not exactly good will toward men, which is here the point. The word expresses God's good will and complacency in men; it does not say exactly in man, as if it were only in Christ, though surely this was true in the very highest sense. For the Son of God became, not an angel, but really a man, according to Heb. 2. It was not the cause of angels that He undertook, or was interested about: it was men He took up. But here appears a good deal more: it is God's delight in man now that His Son is become a man, and witnessed by that astonishing truth. His delight in men, because His Son becoming a man was the first immediate personal step in that which was to introduce His righteousness in justifying sinful men by the cross and resurrection of Christ, which is at hand. Thereby in virtue of that ever-accepted person, and the efficacy of His work of redemption, He could have also the selfsame delight in those that were once guilty sinners, now the objects of His grace for ever. But here, at any rate, the person, and the condition of the person too, by whom all this blessing was to be procured and given, were before His eyes. By the condition of the person is meant, of course, that the Son of God was now incarnate, which even in itself was no small proof, as well as pledge, of the complacency of God in man.

Afterwards Jesus is shown us circumcised, the very offering that accompanied the act proving also still more the earthly circumstances of His parents -- their deep poverty.

Then comes the affecting scene in the temple, where the aged Simeon lifts up the child in his arms; for it had been revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ {Luke 2:26}.

So he goes by the Spirit into the temple at this very time.

And when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,
according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy 

It is evident that the whole tone is not what we may call 
formal; it was not that the work was done; but undoubtedly 
there was virtually in Christ 
God's salvation 
-- a most suitable truth and phrase for the companion of him 
whose fundamental point was 
God's righteousness.

The Spirit might not yet say 
God's righteousness, 
but He could say 
God's salvation.

It was the person of the Saviour, viewed according to the 
prophetic Spirit, who would, in due time, make good 
everything as to God and man.

Thy salvation which thou hast prepared before the 
face of all people: a light to lighten 
-- or rather to reveal 
the Gentiles; 
a light for the revelation of the Gentiles -- 
and the glory of thy people Israel {Luke 2:30-32}.

I do not regard the former as a millennial description. In the 
millennium the order would be exactly inverse; for then God 
will assuredly assign to Israel the first place, and to the 
Gentiles the second. The Spirit gives Simeon a little advance 
upon the terms of the prophetic testimony in the Old Testament. The babe, Christ, was a light, he says, for the 
revelation of the Gentiles, and for the glory of His people 
Israel. The revelation of the Gentiles, that which was about 
to follow full soon, would be the effect of the rejection of 
Christ. The Gentiles, instead of being hidden as they had been in 
the Old Testament times, unnoticed in the dealings of God, 
and instead of being put into a subordinate place to that of 
Israel, as they will be by and by in the millennium, were, 
quite distinctly from both, now to come into prominence, as 
no doubt the glory of the people Israel will follow in that day. 
Here, indeed, we see the millennial state; but the light to 
lighten the Gentiles far more fully finds its answer in the 
remarkable place which the Gentiles enter now by the 
excision of the Jewish branches of the olive tree. This, I 
think, is confirmed by what we find afterwards. Simeon does 
not pretend to bless the child; but when he blesses the 
parents, he says to Mary,

Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again 
of many in Israel {Luke 2:34}.

It is plain that the Spirit gave him to set forth the Messiah cut 
off, and the effect of it, 
for a sign, 
he adds, 
that shall be spoken against. Yea, a sword shall 
pierce through thy own soul also {Luke 2:34-35} 
-- a word that was accomplished in the feelings of Mary at the 
cross of the Lord Jesus. But there is more: Christ’s shame 
acts as a moral probe, as it is said here -- 

That the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed 
{Luke 2:35}.

May I not ask, where could we find such language, except in 
Luke? Tell me, if you can, any other of the evangelists, 
whom it would suit for a moment?

Nor is it only to these words I would call your attention, 
as eminently characteristic of our Gospel. Take the mighty 
grace of God revealed in Christ, on the one hand; on the 
other, take the dealing with the hearts of men as the result of 
the cross morally. These are the two main peculiarities which 
distinguish the writings of Luke. Accordingly also we find 
that, the note of grace being once struck in the heart of 
Simeon, as well as of those immediately connected with our 
Lord Jesus in His birth, it extends itself widely, for joy 
cannot be stifled or hid. So the good news must flow from 
one to another, and God takes care that Anna the prophetess 
should come in; for here we have the revival, not only of 
angel visits, but of the prophetic Spirit in Israel.

And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter 
of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great 
age, 
and had waited long in faith, but, as ever, was not 
disappointed.

She was a widow of about fourscore and four years, 
which departed not from the temple, but served God 
with fastings and prayers night and day. And she 
coming in that instant, etc. {Luke 2:37}.

How good the Lord is in thus ordering circumstances, no less 
than preparing the heart!

She, coming in that instant, gave thanks likewise 
unto the Lord, and spake of Him to all them that 
looked for redemption in Jerusalem {Luke 2:38}.

Nor is this all the Spirit gives here. The chapter closes 
with a picture of our Saviour that is admirably consonant to 
this Gospel, and to no other; for what Gospel would it suit to 
speak of our Lord as a youth? to give us a moral sketch of 
this wondrous One, now no longer the babe of Bethlehem, 
but in the lowly company of Mary and Joseph, grown up to 
the age of twelve years? He is found, according to the order 
of the law, duly with His parents in Jerusalem for the great 
feast; but He is there as one to whom the word of God was 
most precious, and who had more understanding than His 
teachers. For Him, viewed as man, there was not only the 
growth of the body, but also development in every other way 
that became man, always expanding yet always perfect, as 
truly man as God.

He increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour 
with God and man {Luke 2:52}.

But there is more than this; for the inspired writer lets us 
know how He was reproached by His parents, who could but 
little understand what it was for Him even then to find His 
meat in doing the will of God. As they journeyed from 
Jerusalem, missing Him, they return, and find Him in the 
midst of the doctors. A delicate place it might seem for a
youth, but in Him how beautiful was all! and what propriety!

Both hearing them,

it is said,

and asking them questions {Luke 2:46}.

Even the Saviour, though full of divine knowledge, does not take the place now of teaching with authority -- never, of course, as the scribes. But even though consciously Son and the Lord God, still was He the child Jesus; and as became One who deigned to be such, in the midst of those older in years, though they knew infinitely less than Himself, there was the sweetest and most comely lowliness.

Both hearing them, and asking them questions.

What grace there was in the questions of Jesus! -- what infinite wisdom in the presence of the darkness of these famous teachers! Still, which of these jealous rabbis could discern the smallest departure from exquisite and absolute propriety? Nor this only; for we are told that

his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And He said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? {Luke 2:48-49}.

The secret thus early comes out. He waited for nothing. He needed no voice from heaven to tell Him that He was the Son of God; He needed no sign of the Holy Ghost descending to assure Him of His glory or mission. These were, no doubt, seen and heard; and it was all right in its season, and most important in its place; but I repeat that He needed nothing to impart the consciousness that He was the Son of the Father. He knew it intrinsically, and entirely independent of a revelation from another.

There was, no doubt, that divine gift imparted to Him afterwards, when the Holy Ghost sealed the man Christ Jesus.

Him hath God the Father sealed {John 6:27}, as it is said, and surely quite right. But the notable fact here is, that at this early age, when a youth twelve years old, He has the distinct consciousness that He was the Son, as no one else was or could be. At the same time He returns with His parents, and is as dutiful in obedience to them as if He were only an unblemished child of man -- their child. The Son of the Father He was, as really as the Son of man.

He came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them {Luke 2:51}.

It is the divine person, but the perfect man, perfect in every relation suitable for such a person. Both these truths, therefore, prove themselves to be true, not more in doctrine than in fact.

Then a new scene opens in Luke 3,

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar (for men soon pass away, and slight is the trace left by the course of earth's great ones),

Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and

Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness {Luke 3:1, 2}.

How strange is this state of things! Not only have we the chief power of the world passed into another hand; not only do we see the Edomite -- a political confusion in the land, but a religious Babel too. What a departure from all divine order! Who ever heard of two high priests before? Such were the facts when the manifestation of the Christ drew near,

Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests.

No changes in the world, nor abasement in the people of the Lord, nor strange conjunction of the priests, nor mapping out of the land by the stranger, would interfere with the purposes of grace; which, on the contrary, loves to take up men and things at their worst, and shows what God is towards the needy. So John the Baptist goes forth here, not as we traced him in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, but with a special character stamped upon him akin to the design of Luke.

He came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins {Luke 2:3}.

Here we see the remarkable largeness of his testimony.

Every valley shall be filled,

he says,

and every mountain and hill shall be brought low {Luke 3:5}.

Such a quotation puts him virtually in connection with the Gentiles, and not merely with the Jew or Jewish purposes.

All flesh, it is therefore added,

shall see the salvation of God {Luke 3:6}.

It is evident that the terms intimate the widening of divine grace in its sphere. This is apparent in the manner in which John the Baptist speaks. When he addresses the multitude, observe how he deals with them. It is not a question now of reproving Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, as in Matthew, but while he here solemnly warns the multitude, the evangelist records his words to each class. They were the same as in the days of the prophets; they were no better after all. Man was far from God: he was a sinner; and, without repentance and faith, what could avail their religious privileges? To what corruption had they not been led through unbelief?

O generation of vipers,

he says,

who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father {Luke 3:7, 8}.

This, again, accounts for the details of the different classes that come before John the Baptist, and the practical dealing with the duties of each -- an important thing, I believe, for us to bear in mind; for God thinks of souls; and whenever we have real moral discipline according to His mind, there is a dealing with men as they are, taking them up in the
circumstances of their every-day life. Publicans, soldiers, people -- they each hear respectively their own proper word. So in that repentance, which the Gospel supposes as its invariable accompaniment, it is of moment to bear in mind that, while all have gone astray, each has also followed his own way.

But, again, we have his testimony to the Messiah. And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ or not; John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable. And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people {Luke 3:15-18}.

And here, too, you will observe an evident and striking illustration of Luke's manner. Having introduced John, he finishes his history before he turns to the subject of the Lord Jesus. Therefore he adds the fact, that

Herod the tetrarch, being reproved by him, added yet this above all the evil that he had done, that he shut up John in prison {Luke 3:19-20}.

Hence it is clear that the order of Luke is not here, at any rate, that of historic fact. This is nothing peculiar. Any one who is at all acquainted with historians, either ancient or modern, must know that they do the same thing. It is common and almost inevitable. Not that they all do so, any more than all the evangelists; but still it is the way of many historians, who are reckoned amongst the most exact, not to arrange facts like the mere chroniclers of an annual register, which confessedly is rather a dull, rude way of giving us information. They prefer to group the facts into classes, so as to bring out the latent springs, and the consequences even though unsuspected, and, in short, all they desire of moment in the most distinct and powerful manner. Thus Luke, having introduced John here, does not care to interrupt the subsequent account of our Lord, till the embassy of John's messengers fell into the illustration of another theme. There is no room left for misunderstanding this brief summary of the Baptist's faithful conduct from first to last, and its consequences. So true is this, that he records the baptism of our Lord by John immediately after the mention that John was put in prison. Chronological sequence here manifestly yields to graver demands.

Next comes the baptism of those who resorted to John, and above all of Christ.

And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, &c. {Luke 3:23-38}.

Now, at first sight, the insertion of a pedigree at this point seems irregular enough; but Scripture is always right, and wisdom is justified of her children. It is the expression of a weighty truth, and in the most fitting place. The Jewish scene closes. The Lord has been fully shown to the righteous remnant, i.e. what He was to Israel. God's grace and faithfulness to His promises had presented to them an admirable testimony; and the more so, as it was in the face of the last great, or Roman, empire. We have had the priest fulfilling his function in the sanctuary; then the angel's visits to Zechariah, to Mary, and, finally, to the shepherds. We have had also the great prophetic sign of Immanuel born of the virgin, and now the forerunner, greater than any prophet, John the Baptist, the precursor of the Christ. It was all vain. They were a generation of vipers, even as John himself testified about them. Nevertheless, on the part of Christ, there was ineffable grace wherever any heeded the call of John, albeit the faintest working of divine life in the soul. The confession of the truth of God against themselves, the acknowledgment that they were sinners, drew the heart of Jesus to them. In Him was no sin, no, not the smallest taint of it, nor connection with it: nevertheless, Jesus was with those who repaired to the baptism of John. It was of God. No necessity of sin brought Him there; but, on the contrary, grace, the pure fruit of divine grace in Him. He who had nothing to confess or repent was none the less the One that was the very expression of the grace of God. He would not be separated from those in whom there was the smallest response to the grace of God. Jesus, therefore, does not for the present take people out of Israel, so to speak, any more than from among men severally into association with Himself; He associates Himself with those who were thus owning the reality of their moral condition in the sight of God. He would be with them in that recognition, not, of course, for Himself, as if He personally needed, but their companion in His grace. Depend upon it, that this same truth connects itself with the whole career of the Lord Jesus. Whatever the changes may have been before or at His death, they only illustrated increasingly this mighty and fruitful principle.

Who, then, was the baptised man on whom, as He prayed, heaven opened, and the Holy Ghost descended, and a voice from heaven said.

Thou art my beloved Son: in thee I am well pleased {Luke 3:22}.

It was One whom the inspiring Spirit here loves to trace finally up thus:

Which was the Son of Adam, which was the Son of God {Luke 3:38}.

One that was going to be tried as Adam was tried -- yea, as Adam never was tried; for it was in no Paradise that this Second Adam was going to meet the tempter, but in the wilderness. It was in the wreck of this world; it was in the scene of death over which God's judgment hung; it was under such circumstances where it was no question of innocence, but of divine power in holiness surrounded by evil, where One who was fully man depended on God, and, where no food, no water was, lived by the word of God. Such, and far, far more, was this man Christ Jesus. And hence it is that the genealogy of Jesus seems to me precisely where it ought to be in Luke, as indeed it must be, whether we see it or not. In Matthew its insertion would have been strange and
inappropriate, had it there come after His baptism. It would have no suitableness there, because what a Jew wanted first of all to know was the birth of Jesus according to the Old Testament prophecies. That was everything, we may say, to the Jew in the first place, to know the Son that was given, and the child that was born, as Isaiah and Micah predicted. Here we see the Lord as a man, and manifesting this perfect grace in man -- a total absence of sin; and yet the very One who was found with those who were confessing sin!

The Son of Adam, who was the Son of God.

That means, that He was One who, though man, proved that He was God's Son.

The fourth chapter {Luke 4} is grounded upon this; and here it is not merely after the dispensational style of Matthew that we find the quotation given, but thoroughly in a moral point of view. In the Gospel of Matthew, in the first temptation, our Lord owns Himself to be man, living not by mere natural resource, but by the word of God; in the second He confesses and denies not Himself further to be Messiah, the temptation being addressed to Him as in this capacity; the last clearly contemplates the glory of the

Son of man.

This I clearly call dispensational. No doubt it was exactly the way in which the temptation occurred. The first temptation was to leave the position of man. This Christ would not do.

Man,

He says,

shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God {Matt. 4:4}.

It is much more important to keep God's word than to live; and, at any rate, the only living He valued was living as man by God's word. This is perfection. Faith holds it for certain that God knows how to take care of man. It was man's business to keep God's word: God would not fail to watch over and protect him. Satan, therefore, was foiled. Then Satan tempted by a quotation from Psa. 91, which clearly describes the Messiah; assuredly Jesus was not going to deny that. He believed and acted upon it. If He were the Messiah, why not, according to this word, prove God? But the Lord Jesus equally refuted him here, though I need not enter now into the particulars of that which we have already looked at. Then came the last temptation addressed to Him, not as Messiah according to a psalm that refers to it, but rather in His quality of the Son of man about to have all the kingdoms of the world. Here Satan's temptation was, “Why do you not come into their possession and enjoyment now?” Jesus would take them only from God, as he rejected of man, and the sufferer for sin, too; not as the living Messiah here below, as if in a hurry to have the promises fulfilled to Him. In vain was the snare spread in His sight; God alone could give, whoever might actually hold, the kingdoms of the world. The price was too dear to pay, the price of worshipping the devil. Jesus thereon denounces the tempter as Satan.

But this is not what we have in our Gospel. Here there is no dispensational order of the temptation suitable to the Gospel of Matthew. Such an order, which is here that of the facts also, is exactly according to the design of the Holy Spirit in Matthew. But it suits no other Gospel. Mark was not called to furnish more than the record of the temptation, with a graphic touch which reveals its dreary scene, and passes on to the active ministry of our blessed Lord. On the other hand, Luke purposely changes the order -- a bold step, in appearance, to take, and the more if he knew, as I suppose, what was given by the evangelists who preceded him. But it was necessary to his design, and God, I hope to show; puts His own seal upon this deviation from mere time. For, first of all, we have Jesus tried here as man. This must be in every account of the temptation. It is, of course, as man that even the Son of God was tempted of Satan. Here, however, we have, in the second place, the offer of the kingdoms of the world. This, it will be perceived, does not give prominence, like Matthew, to that momentous change of dispensation which ensued on His rejection by the Jew; it does illustrate what the Holy Ghost here puts forward -- the temptations rising one above the other in moral weight and import. Such I believe to be the key to the changed order of Luke. The first was a temptation to His personal wants -- Hath God said you shall not eat of any thing? Surely you are at liberty to make the stones bread! Faith vindicates God, remains dependent on Him, and is sure of His appearing for us in due time. Then comes the offer of the kingdoms of the world. If a good man wants to do good, what an offer! But Jesus was here to glorify God. Him He would worship, Him only would He serve. Obedience, obeying God's will, worshipping Him -- such is the shield against all such overtures of the enemy. Lastly comes the third temptation, through the word of God, on the pinnacle of the temple. This is not the worldly appeal, but one addressed to His spiritual feeling. Need I remark, that a spiritual temptation is to a holy person far subtler and deeper than anything which connected itself with either our wants or our wishes as to the world? Thus there was a personal or bodily, a worldly, and a spiritual temptation. To attain this moral order Luke abandons the sequence of time. Occasionally Matthew, and indeed no one more than he, deserts the simple order of fact whenever it is required by the Spirit's purpose; but in this case Matthew preserves that order; for it is that by this means he gives prominence to dispensational truth; while Luke, by arranging the acts of temptation otherwise, brings out their moral bearing in the most admirable and instructive way. Accordingly, from Luke 4:8, "Get thee behind me, Satan: for" disappears in the best authorities. The change of order necessitates the omission. The copyists as often added to Luke what is really the language of Matthew; and even some critics have been so indiscreting as not to detect the imposition. As it stands in the received Greek text and the English version, Satan is told to go, and seems to stand his ground and again tempt the Lord, stultifying His command. But the clause I have named (and not merely the word "for," as Bloomfield imagines) is well known to have no claim to stand, as being destitute of adequate authority. There are good manuscripts that contain the clause, but the weight, for antiquity and character of MSS., and for variety of the old versions, is on the other side, not to speak of the internal evidence, which would be
decisive with much inferior external evidence. Hence, too, Satan could hardly be spoken of here as going away like one driven off by indignation, as in Matthew.

And when the devil had ended all the [every] temptation, he departed from him for a season {Luke 4:13}.

This lets us into another very material truth, that Satan only went off till another season, when he should return. And this he did for a yet severer character of trial at the end of the Lord’s life, the account of which is given us with peculiar elaborateness by Luke: for it is his province above all to show the moral import of the agony in the garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus then returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee. Man was victor over Satan. Unlike the first Adam, the Second Man comes off with energy proved triumphant in obedience. How does He use this power? He repairs to His despised quarters.

And there went out a fame of him to all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up {Luke 4:14-16}.

The fact that follows is mentioned here, and here only, with any detail; whatever allusion there may be to it elsewhere, it is here only we have, by the Spirit of God, this most living and characteristic portrait of our Lord Jesus entering upon His ministry among men according to the purpose and ways of divine grace. Deeds of power are but the skirts of His glory. It is not, as Mark opens it out to us, teaching as nobody ever taught, and then dealing with the unclean spirit before them all. This is not the inauguration we have in Luke, any more than a crowd of miracles, at once the herald and the seal of His doctrine, as in Matthew. Neither is it individual dealing with souls, as in John, who shows Him attracting the hearts of those that were with the Baptist or at their lawful occupations, and calling them to follow Him. Here He goes into the synagogue, as His custom was, and stands up to read.

And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias {Luke 4:17}.

What a moment! He who is God was become man, and deigns to act as such among men.

And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it is written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor {Luke 4:17, 18}.

It is the man Christ Jesus. The Spirit of the Lord was not upon Him as God, but as man, and so anointed Him to preach the Gospel to the poor. How thoroughly suitable to what we have already seen.

He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears {Luke 4:18-21}.

A real man was there and then the vessel of the grace of God upon the earth, and the Scripture designates this most fully. But where could we find this most apt application of the prophet except in Luke, to whom in point of fact it is peculiar? The entire Gospel develops or, at least, accords with it.

They all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth, but immediately they turn to unbelief, saying,

Is not this Joseph’s son? {Luke 4:22}

And he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country {Luke 4:23}.

He had been already at work in what Matthew calls his city {Matt. 9:1};

but the Spirit of God here passes over entirely what had been done there. He would thus ensure the fullest lustre to the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we, through his poverty, might be made rich {2 Cor. 8:9}.

This is what we have in Luke. Our Lord then shows the moral root of the difficulty in their minds.

Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow {Luke 4:24-26}.

Our Lord does not yet call a publican or receive a Gentile, as in Luke 5, 7; but He tells of the grace of God in that word which they read and heard, but understood not. It was His answer to the incredulity of the Jews, His brethren after the flesh. How solemn are the warnings of grace! It was a Gentile, and not a Jewish widow, who during the days of Israel’s apostasy became the marked object of God’s mercy. So, too,

many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet, and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian {Luke 4:27}.

At once the hostile rage of the natural man is roused, and his jealousy of divine goodness to the stranger. Those that wondered the moment before at His gracious words are now filled with fury, ready to rend Him.

And they rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill wherein their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. But he, passing through the midst of them, went his way, and came down to Capernaum, and taught them on the Sabbath days. And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power {Luke 4:29-32}.

It is the word that has especial prominence in Luke; and justly
so, because the word is the expression of what God is to man, even as it is the word which tries him.

These are the two qualities, therefore, of the gospel: what God is towards man; and what man is, now revealed and proclaimed and brought home by the word of God. Thereby God’s grace shines out; thereby, too, the evil of man is morally proved — not merely by the law, but yet more by the word that comes in, and by the person of Christ. Man, however, hates it, and no wonder; for, however full of mercy, it leaves no room for the pride, the vanity, the self-righteousness, in short, the importance of man in any way. There is one good, even God.

But this is not all the truth; for the power of Satan is active on the earth. It was then too plain, too universal, to be overlooked; and if man was so unbelieving as to the glory of Jesus, Satan at least felt the power. So it was with the man who had an unclean spirit.

He cried out with a loud voice, saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God [Luke 4:33, 34].

Remark here how Jesus, the fulfilment and fulfilment of God’s word, accomplishes law and promise, the prophets and the Psalms. Devils own Him as the Holy One of God, and again, we shall see presently, as the Anointed (Christ), the Son of God. In Luke 5 He is seen acting rather as Jehovah.

And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not [Luke 4:35].

This proves, therefore, that there was in Christ not only grace towards man’s necessities, but power over Satan. He had vanquished Satan, and proceeds to use His power in behalf of man.

He then enters into Simon’s house, and heals his wife’s mother.

Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him; and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them. And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God. And he rebuking them suffered them not to speak: for they knew that he was Christ [Luke 4:40, 41].

Here we coalesce with the earlier Gospels. When this attracted the attention of men He departs. Instead of using what people call “influence,” He will not hear of the people’s desire to retain Him in their midst. He walks in faith, the Holy One of God, content with nothing that made man an object to obscure His glory. If followed into a desert place, away from the crowd that admired Him, He lets them know that He must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also; for therefore was He sent.

And he was preaching in the synagogues of Galilee {Luke 4:44}.

And now we have, in the beginning of Luke 5, a fact taken entirely out of its historical place. It is the call of the earlier apostles, more particularly of Simon, who is singled out, just as we have seen one blind man, or one demoniac, brought into relief, even though there might be more. So the son of Jonas is the great object of the Lord’s grace here, although others were called at the same time. There were companions of his leaving all for Christ; but we have his case, not theirs, dealt with in detail. Now, from elsewhere, we know that this call of Peter preceded the Lord’s entrance into Simon’s house, and the healing of Simon’s wife’s mother. We also know that John’s Gospel has preserved for us the first occasion when Simon ever saw the Lord Jesus, as Mark’s Gospel shows when it was that Simon was called away from his ship and occupation. Luke had given us the Lord’s grace with and towards man, from the synagogue at Nazareth down to His preaching everywhere in Galilee, casting out devils, and healing diseases by the way. This is essentially a display in Him of the power of God by the word, and this over Satan and all the afflictions of men. A complete picture of all this is given first; and in order to leave it unbroken, the particulars of Simon’s call are left out of its time. But as the way of the Lord on that occasion was of the deepest value as well as interest to be given, it was reserved for this place. This illustrates the method of classifying facts morally, instead of merely recording them as they came to pass, which is characteristic of Luke.

It came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, and he saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon’s, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship. Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net {Luke 5:1-5}.

It is plain that the word of Jesus was the first great trial. Simon had already and long toiled; but the word of Jesus is enough.

And when they had this done, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink {Luke 5:6, 7}.

Next, we have the moral effect.

When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord {Luke 5:8}.

It was the most natural thing possible for a soul arrested, not merely by the mighty deed which the Lord had wrought, but by such a proof that His word could be trusted implicitly — that divine power answered to the word of the man Christ Jesus. His sinfulness glared on his conscience. Christ’s word let the light of God into his soul:
Depart from me; for I am a sinful man.

There was real sense of sin and confession; yet the attitude of Peter at the feet of Jesus shows that nothing was farther from his heart than that the Lord should leave him, though his conscience felt that so it ought to be. He was convicted more deeply of his sinful state than he had ever been before. Already a real attraction had knit Simon’s heart to Christ. He was born of God, as far as we can judge, before this. He had really for some while known and heard the voice of Jesus. This was not the first time, as John gives us to see. But now the word so penetrated and searched him out, that this utterance was the feeling of his soul -- an apparent contradiction to draw near to the feet of Jesus, saying, Depart from me, but not in the root of things -- an inconsistency only on the surface of his words; for his innermost feeling was one of desire after and delight in Jesus, clinging to Him with all his soul, but with the strongest conviction that he had not the slightest claim to be there -- that he could even pronounce condemnation on himself otherwise in a certain sense, though quite contrary to all his wishes. The more he saw what Jesus was, the less fit company he felt himself to be for such an One as He. This is precisely what grace does produce in its earlier workings. I say not, in its earliest, but in its earlier workings; for we must not be in too great a hurry with the ways of God in the soul. Astonished at this miracle, Peter thus speaks to the Lord; but the gracious answer sets him at ease.

Fear not, says Christ;

from henceforth thou shalt catch men [Luke 5:10].

My object in referring to the passage is for the purpose of pointing out the moral force of our Gospel. It was a divine person who, if He displayed the knowledge and power of God, revealed Himself in grace, but also morally to the conscience, though it cast out fear.

Then follows the cure of the leper, and subsequently the forgiveness of the palsied man: again the exhibition that Jehovah was there, and fulfilling the Spirit of Psal. 103; but He was the Son of man too. Such was the mystery of His person present in grace, which was proved by the power of God in one wholly dependent on God. Finally, there is the call of Levi the publican; the Lord showing, also, how well aware He was of the effect on man of introducing among those accustomed to law the reality of grace. In truth, it is impossible to mingle the new wine of grace with the old bottles of human ordinances. The Lord adds what is found in no Gospel but Luke’s, that man prefers, in presence of the new thing from God, the old religious feelings, thoughts, ways, doctrines, habits, and customs.

No man, He says,

having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better [Luke 5:39].

Man prefers the dealing of law with all its dimness, uncertainty, and distance from God, to that divine grace infinitely more blessed, which in Christ displays God to man, and brings man, by the blood of His cross, to God.

In Luke 6 this is followed up. We see the Lord on the two Sabbath days: the defence of the disciples for plucking the ears of corn, and the well-nigh defiant cure of the withered hand in the synagogue. The Lord does not pluck the ears of corn Himself; but He defends the guiltless, and this on moral ground. We do not here meet with the particulars set forth dispensationally as in Matthew’s Gospel: though the reference is to the same facts, they are not so reasoned upon. There the object is much more the approaching change of economy: here it is more moral. A similar remark applies to the case of healing the withered hand. The Sabbath, or seal of the old covenant, was never given of God, though abused by man, to hinder His goodness to the needy and wretched. But the Son of man was Lord of the Sabbath: and grace is free to bless man and glorify God. Immediately after this, clouds gather over the devoted head of our Lord;

They were filled with madness; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus [Luke 6:11].

The Lord retires to a mountain, continuing all night in prayer to God. On the next day, out of the disciples He chooses twelve who were pre-eminently to represent Him after His departure. That is, He nominates the twelve apostles. At the same time He delivers what is commonly called the sermon on the mount. But there are striking differences between the manner of Luke and Matthew, in conveying that sermon to us; for Luke brings two contrasts together; one of which was dropped by Matthew -- at any rate in this, the beginning of his Gospel. Luke couples the blessings and the woes; Matthew reserves his woes for another occasion. Not that one would affirm that the Lord did not proclaim the woes of Matt. 23 on another and later occasion; but it may be safely said, that the first evangelist passed by all questions of woes for the discourse on the mount. Luke, on the contrary, furnishes both. Who can fail to recognize in this circumstance a striking mark both of the evangelists, and of the special designs of Him who inspired them? Luke does not confine himself to the bright side, but adds also the solemn. There is a warning for conscience, as much as there is grace which appeals to the heart. It is Luke that gives it, and most gloriously. Besides, there is another difference. Matthew presents Christ more as the-lawgiver. No doubt greater than Moses He was; for He was Jehovah, Emmanuel. Therefore He takes the place of deepening, enlarging, and ever bringing in principles so infinitely better as to eclipse what was said to them of old. Thus, while the authority of the law and prophets is maintained, there is now an incalculable change, in advance of all before, suitably to the presence of His glory who then spoke, and to the revelation of the Father’s name. More even was yet to be; but this was reserved for the presence in power of the Holy Ghost, as we are told in John 16.

Here, in the Gospel of Luke, another course is pursued. It is not as One who lays down principles, or describes the classes that can have part in the kingdom, as

Blessed the poor, &c. [Matt. 5:3];
but the Lord views, and speaks to, His disciples, as those immediately concerned;

Blessed ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God
{Luke 6:20}.

It is all personal, in view of the godly company that then surrounded Him. So He says,

Blessed ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled.
Blessed ye that weep now, &c. {Luke 6:21, 22}.

It was sorrow and suffering now; for He who fulfilled the promises, and psalms, and prophets was rejected; and the kingdom could not yet come in power and glory.

First must he suffer many things {Luke 17:25}.

Thus all through it is not description alone, but a direct address to the heart. In Matthew it was most appropriately a general discourse. Here it is made immediately applicable. That is, He looks at the persons then before Him, and pronounces a blessing upon them distinctly and personally.

For that reason, as also for others, He says nothing about suffering for righteousness' sake here. In Matthew there are the two characters -- those blessed when persecuted for righteousness' sake, and yet more those who were persecuted for His name's sake. Luke omits the righteousness: all persecution here noticed is on account of the Son of man. How blessed it is in Luke to find that the great witness of grace acts Himself in the spirit of that grace, and makes this to be the one distinguishing feature! Both sufferers are surely blessed; each is in his own season precious; but the least portion is not that which characterizes the word of the Lord in his Gospel who has mainly in view us who were poor sinners of the Gentiles.

In Luke the points pressed are not detailed contrasts with the law, nor the value of righteousness in secret with the Father, nor trust in His loving care without anxiety, but practical grace in loving our enemies, merciful as our Father is merciful, and so children of the Highest, with the assurance of corresponding recompense. Then comes the warning parable of the blindness of the religious world's leaders, and the value of personal reality and obedience, instead of moralising for others, which would end in ruin. In the chapter that follows (Luke 7) we shall see the Lord still more evidently proving that grace cannot be tied to Jewish limits, that His was a power which the Gentile owns to be absolute over all -- yea, over death as well as nature.

But before we pass on, let me observe that there is another feature also that strikes us in Luke, though it does not call for many words now. It appears that various portions of the sermon on the mount were reserved for insertion here and there, where they would fit in best for comment on or connection with facts. The reason is, that moral grouping of conversations which has been already shown to be according to the method of Luke. Here there is not at all the same kind of formal order of discourse as in Matthew. There were, I doubt not, questions asked during its course; and the Holy Ghost has been pleased to give us specimens of this in the Gospel of Luke. I may show on another occasion, that this which occurs not unfrequently throughout the whole central part of Luke is found in him only. It is for the most part made up of this association of facts, with remarks either growing out of what has occurred, or suitable to them, and therefore transplanted from elsewhere.

In Luke 7 the healing of the centurion’s servant is recounted, with very striking differences from the form in which he had it in Matthew. Here we are told that the centurion, when he heard of Jesus, sent unto Him the elders of the Jews. The man who does not understand the design of the Gospel, and has only heard that Luke wrote especially for the Gentiles, is at once arrested by this. He objects to the hypothesis that this fact is irreconcilable with a Gentile bearing, and is, on the contrary, rather in favour of a Jewish aim, at least here; because in Matthew you find nothing about the embassy of the Jews, while here it is in Luke. His conclusion is, that one Gospel is as much Jewish or Gentile as another, and that the notion of special design is baseless. All this may sound plausible to a superficial reader; but in truth the twofold fact, when duly stated, remarkably confirms the different scope of the Gospels, instead of neutralizing it; for the centurion in Luke was led, both being Gentiles, to honour the Jews in the special place God has put them in. He therefore sets a value on this embassy to the Jews. The precise contrast of this we have in Rom. 11, where the Gentiles are warned against highmindedness and conceit. It was because of Jewish unbelief, no doubt, that certain branches were broken off; but the Gentiles were to see that they abode in God’s goodness, not falling into similar and worse evil, or else they also should be cut off. This was most wholesome admonition from the apostle of the uncircumcision to the saints in the great capital of the Gentile world. Here the Gentile centurion shows both his faith and his humility by manifesting the place which God’s people had in his eyes. He did not arrogantly talk of looking only to God.

Allow me to say, brethren, that this is a principle of no small value, and in more ways than one. There is often a good deal of unbelief -- not open, of course, but covert -- which cloaks itself under the profession of superior and sole dependence on God, and boasts itself aloud of its leaving any and every man out of account. Nor do I deny that there are, and ought to be, cases where God alone must act, convince, and satisfy. But the other side is true also; and this is precisely what we see in the case of the centurion. There was no proud panacea of having to do only with God, and not man. On the contrary, he shows, by his appeal to and use of the Jewish elders, how truly he bowed to the ways and will of God. For God had a people, and the Gentile owned the people as of His choice, spite of their unworthiness; and if he wanted the blessing for his servant, he would send for the elders of the Jews that they might plead for him with Jesus. To me there seems far more of faith, and of the lowliness which faith produces, than if he had gone personally and alone. The secret of his action was, that he was a man not only of faith, but of faith-wrought humility; and this is a most precious fruit, wherever it grows and blooms. Certainly the good Gentile centurion sends his ambassadors of Israel, who go and tell what was most true and proper (yet I can hardly
think it what the centurion ever put in their mouth).

And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: for he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue {Luke 7:4, 5}.

He was a godly man; and it was no new thing, this love for the Jews, and the practical proof of it.

It will be observed, again, that Matthew has not a word about this fact; and I cannot but feel how blessed is the omission there. Had Matthew been writing merely as a man for the Jews, it was just the thing he would have surely fastened on; but the inspiring power of the Spirit wrought, and grace, I do not doubt, also, in Matthew as well as in Luke, and thus only have we the fruit now apparent in their accounts. It was fitting that the evangelist for the Jews should both leave out the Gentile’s strong expression of respect for Israel, and dwell upon the warning to the proud children of the kingdom. Equally fitting was it that Luke, in writing for Gentile instruction, should especially let us see the love and esteem for God’s sake which a godly Gentile had for the Jews. Here was no scorn for their low estate, but so much the more compassion; yea, more than compassion, for his desire after their mediation proved the reality of his respect for the chosen nation. It was not a new feeling; he had long loved them, and built them a synagogue in days when he sought nothing at their hands; and they remember it now. The faith of this Gentile was such, that the Lord avows He had not seen the like in Israel. Not only does Matthew report this -- a weighty admonition even for the believers of Israel -- but also Luke, for the encouragement of the Gentiles. This common point was most worthy of record, and attached to the new creation, not to the old. How beautiful the scene is in both Gospels! how much is that beauty increased when we more closely inspect the wisdom and grace of God shown out in Matthew’s presentation of Gentile blessing and Jewish warning for the Israelites; and withal, in Luke’s presentation of respect for the Jews, and the absence here of all notice of Jewish excision, which might so easily be perverted to Gentile self-complacency!

The next scene (Luke 7:11-17) is peculiar to Luke. The Lord not only heals, but with a grace and majesty altogether proper to Himself, brings in life for the dead, yet with remarkable consideration for human woe and affection. Not only did He, in His own quickening power, cause the dead to live, but He sees in him, whom they were even then carrying out to burial, the only son of his widowed mother; and so He stays the bier, bids the deceased to arise, and delivers him to his mother. No sketch can be conceived more consonant with the spirit and aim of our Gospel.

Then we have the disciples of John introduced, for the special purpose of noting the great crisis that was at hand, if not come. So severe was the shock to antecedent feeling and expectation, that even the very forerunner of the Messiah was himself shaken and offended, it would seem, because the Messiah did not use His power on behalf of Himself and His own followers -- did not protect every godly soul in the land -- did not shed around light and liberty for Israel far and wide. Yet who could gainsay the character of what was being done? A Gentile had confessed the supremacy of Jesus over all things: disease must obey Him absent or present! If not the working Of God’s own gracious power, what could it be? After all, John the Baptist was a man; and what is he to be accounted of? What a lesson, and how much needed at all times! The Lord Jesus not only answers with His wonted dignity, but at the same time with the grace that could not but yearn over the questioning and stumbled mind of His forerunner -- no doubt meeting, too, the unbelief of John’s followers; for there need be little doubt, that if there was weakness in John, there was far more in his disciples.

Thereupon our Lord introduces His own moral judgment of the whole generation. At the close of this is the most remarkable exemplification of divine wisdom conferred by grace where one might least look for it, in contrast with the perverse folly of those who thought themselves wise.

But wisdom is justified of all her children {Luke 7:35}, no matter who or what they may have been, as surely as it will be justified in the condemnation of all who have rejected the counsel of God against themselves. Indeed, the evil side as well as the good are almost equally salient at the house of Simon the Pharisee; and the Holy Ghost led Luke to furnish here the most striking possible commentary on the folly of self-righteousness, and the wisdom of faith. He adduces exactly a case in point. The worth of man’s wisdom appears in the Pharisee, as the true wisdom of God, which comes down from above, appears where His own grace alone created it; for what depository seemed more remote than a woman of ruined and depraved character? yea, a sinner whose very name God withholds? On the other hand, this silence, to my mind, is an evidence of His wonderful grace. If no worthy end could be reached by publishing the name of her who was but too notorious in that city of old, it was no less worthy of God that He should make manifest in her the riches of His grace. Again, another thing: not only is grace best proved where there is most need of it, but its transforming power appears to the greatest advantage in the grossest and most hopeless cases.

If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature {2 Cor. 5:17}.

Such is the operation of grace, a new creating, no mere change or bettering of the old man according to Christ, but a real life with a new character altogether. See it in this woman, who was the object of grace. It was to the house of the Pharisee who had invited Jesus that this woman repaired -- attracted by the Saviour’s grace, and truly penitent, full of love to His person, but not yet with the knowledge of her sins forgiven; for this was what she needed, and what He meant her to have and know. It is not the exhibition of a soul starting upon the knowledge of forgiveness, but the ways of grace leading one into it.

What drew her heart was not the acceptance of the gospel message, nor the knowledge of the believer’s privilege. That was what Christ was about to give; but what won her, and drew her so powerfully even to that Pharisee's house, was
something deeper than any acquaintance with conferred blessings: it was the grace of God in Christ Himself. She felt instinctively that in Him was not more truly all that purity and love of God Himself, than the mercy she needed for herself. The predominant feeling in her soul, what rivetted her was, that, spite of the sense she had of her sins, she was sure she might cast herself on that boundless grace she saw in the Lord Jesus. Hence she could not stay away from the house where He was, though she well knew she was the last person in the town the master of it would welcome there. What excuse could she make? Nay, that sort of thing was over now; she was in the truth. What business, then, had she in Simon’s house? Yes, her business was with Jesus, the Lord of glory for eternity, albeit there; and so complete was the mastery of His grace over her soul, that nothing could keep her back. Without asking Simon’s leave, without a Peter or a John to introduce her, she goes where Jesus was, taking with her an alabaster box of ointment,

and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment {Luke 7:38}.

This drew out the religious reasoning of Simon’s heart, which, like all other reasoning of the natural mind on divine things, is only infidelity.

He spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet .

How hollow the fair-looking Pharisee was! He had asked the Lord there; but what was the value of the Lord in Simon’s eyes?

This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner {Luke 7:39}.

Indeed, she was a sinner. This was not wrong, but that. The root of the worst wrong is just that depreciation of Jesus. Simon within himself doubted that He was even a prophet. Oh, how little thought he that it was God Himself in the person of that lowly man, the Son of the Highest! Herein was the starting-point of this most fatal error. Jesus, however, proves that He was a prophet, yea, the God of the prophets; and reading the thoughts of his heart, He answers his unuttered question by the parable of the two debtors.

I will not dwell now on that which is familiar to all. Suffice it to say, that this is a scene peculiar to our Gospel. Might I not ask, where possibly could it be found harmoniously except here? How admirable the choice of the Holy Ghost, thus shown in displaying Jesus according to all we have seen from the beginning of this Gospel! The Lord here pronounces her sins to be forgiven; but it is well to observe, that this was at the close of the interview, and not the occasion of it. There is no ground to suppose that she knew that her sins were forgiven before. On the contrary, the point of the story appears to me lost where this is assumed. What confidence His grace gives the one that goes straight to Himself! He speaks authoritatively, and warrants forgiveness. Till Jesus said so, it would have been presumption for any soul at this time to have acted upon the certainty that his sins were forgiven. Such seems to me the express object of this history -- a poor sinner truly repenting, and attracted by His grace, which draws her to Himself, and hears from Him His own direct word,

Thy sins are forgiven thee {Luke 7:48}.

Her sins, which were many, were forgiven. There was no hiding, therefore, the extent of her need; for she loved much. Not that I would explain this away. Her loving much was true before, as well as after, she heard the forgiveness. There was real love in her heart already. She was transported by the divine grace in His person, which inspired her by the Spirit’s teaching with love through His love; but the effect of knowing from His own lips that her sins were forgiven must have been to increase that love. The Lord is here before us as One that thoroughly sounded the evil heart of unbelief, that appreciated, as truly as He had effected, the work of grace in the believer’s heart, and speaks out before all the answer of peace with which He entitled such an one to depart.

In the last chapter (Luke 8) on which I am to speak to-night, the Lord is seen not only going forth now to preach, but with a number of men and women in His train, children of wisdom surely, the poor but real witnesses of His own rich grace, and thus devoted to Him here below.

And the twelve were with him. And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance {Luke 8:1-3}.

Here, too, is it not a wonderfully characteristic picture of our Lord Jesus, and so only found in Luke? Entirely above the evil of men, He could and did walk in the perfect calm of His Father’s presence, but withal according to the activity, in this world, of God’s grace.

Hence, He is here presented in our Gospel as speaking of the sower, even as He was then scattering the seed of the word of God {Luke 8:11};

for so it is called here. In the Gospel of Matthew, where the same parable appears as introducing the kingdom of heaven, it is called

the word of the kingdom {Matt. 13:19}.

Here, when the parable is explained, the seed is

the word of God.

Thus it is not a question of the kingdom in Luke; in Matthew it is. Nothing can be more simple than the reason of the difference. Remark that the Spirit of God in recording does not limit Himself to the bare words that Jesus spoke. This I hold to be a matter of no little importance in forming a sound judgment of the Scriptures. The notion to which orthodox men sometimes shut themselves up, in zeal for plenary inspiration, is, to my mind, altogether mechanical: they think that inspiration necessarily and only gives the exact words that Christ uttered. There seems to me not the slightest necessity for this. Assuredly the Holy Spirit gives the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. The differences are owing to no infirmity, but to His design; and what He has
given us is incomparably better than a bare report by so many hands, all meaning to give the same words and facts. Take the chapter before us to illustrate what I mean. Matthew and Luke alike give us the same parable of the sower; but Matthew calls it

the word of the kingdom;

while Luke calls it

the word of God.

The Lord Jesus may have employed both in His discourse at this time. I am not contending that He did not; but what I affirm is, that, whether He did or did not employ both, the Spirit of God did not give us to have both in the same Gospel, but acts with divine sovereignty. He does not lower the evangelists into mere literal reporters, such as may be found by dint of skill among men. No doubt their object is to get the precise words which a man utters, because there is no such power or person to effect the will of God in the world. But the Spirit of God can act with more freedom, and can give this part of the utterance to one evangelist, and that part to another. Hence, then, the mere mechanical system can never explain inspiration. It finds itself entirely baffled by the fact that the same words are not given in all the Gospels. Take Matthew, as we have just seen, saying,

Blessed are the poor {Matt. 5:3},

and Luke, saying,

Blessed are ye poor {Luke 6:20}.

This is at once an embarrassing difficulty for the mechanical scheme of inspiration; it is none at all for those who hold to the Holy Ghost’s supremacy in employing different men as the vessels of His various objects. There is no attempt in any of the Gospels to furnish a reproduction of all the words and works of the Lord Jesus. I have no doubt, therefore, that although in each Gospel we have nothing but the truth, we have not all the facts in any Gospel, or in all of them. Hence, the richest fulness results from the method of the Spirit. Having the absolute command of all truth, He just gives the needed word in the right place, and by the due person, so as the better to display the Lord’s glory.

After this parable we have another, like Matthew’s, but not relating to the kingdom, because this is not the point here; for dispensation is not the topic before us as in Matthew. Indeed, this parable is one not found in Matthew at all. What Matthew gives is complete for the purposes of his Gospel. But in Luke it was of great importance to give this parable; for when a man has been laid hold of by the word of God, the next thing is testimony. The disciples, not the nation, were given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God. Enlightened themselves, the next thing was to give light to others.

No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed; but setteth it on a candlestick, that they which enter may see the light. For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither anything hid, that shall not be known and come abroad. Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have {Luke 8:16-18}.

Thus responsibility in the use of light is enforced.

What follows here is the slight of natural ties in divine things, the approval of nothing but a relationship founded on the word of God heard and done. Flesh is valueless; it profits nothing. So when people said unto Him,

Thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to see thee; he answered and said unto them, My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it {Luke 8:20, 21}.

Still it is the word of God. It is not as Matthew puts it, after the formal giving up the nation to apostasy, and a new relationship brought in; here it is simply God’s approval of those who keep and value His word. The place that the word of God has morally meets the mind of Christ.

But Christ does not exempt His witnesses from troubles here below. The next is the scene on the lake, and the disciples manifesting their unbelief, and the Lord His grace and power. Passing to the other side we see Legion, who, spite of this awful evil, has a deep divine work wrought in his soul. It is not so much a question of making him a servant of God. That we have in Mark, and much detailed. Here we have him rather as a man of God; first, the object of the delivering power and favour of the Lord; then, delighting in Him who thus made God known to him. No wonder, when the devils were cast out, the man besought that he might be with Jesus. It was a feeling natural, so to speak, to grace and to the new relationship with God into which he had entered.

But Jesus sent him away saying, Return to thine own house, and show how great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his way and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him {Luke 8:38-39}.

The account of Jairus’s appeal for his daughter follows. While the Lord is on His way to heal the daughter of Israel, who meanwhile dies, He is interrupted by the touch of faith; for whoever went to Him found healing. The Lord, however, while He perfectly meets the case of any needy soul at the present time, does not fail in the long run to accomplish the purposes of God for the revival of Israel. He will restore Israel; for in God’s mind they are not dead but sleep.
Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Gospels

Lecture 7

Luke 9 – 16

The ninth chapter opens with the mission -- not the setting apart, but the circuit -- of the twelve sent out by the Lord, who therein was working after a fresh sort. He communicates power in grace to men, chosen men, who have to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick; for in this Gospel, although it be at first in Israel, it is the working of divine grace that is evidently destined for an incomparably larger sphere and yet deeper objects. This mission of the twelve in the Gospel of Matthew has a decidedly Jewish aspect, even to the very end, and contemplates the messengers of the kingdom occupied with their work till the Son of man come, and therefore entirely leaves out what God is now doing in the call of the Gentiles. Here we have clearly the same mission presented in a wholly different point of view. What is peculiarly Jewish, though all was then to the Jew, disappears; what makes known God, and this, too, in mercy and goodness towards needy man -- this we have fully in our Gospel. It is said here,

Preach the kingdom of God {Luke 9:2}.

Instead of leaving man to himself, the intervention of divine power is the central thought of God's kingdom; and instead of man being left to his resources and wisdom to take and keep the upper hand in the world by the providence of God, as if he had a certain vested right in the realm of nature, God will Himself take up this scene for the purpose of introducing His own power and goodness into it in the person of Christ, the Church being thus associated, and man thus exalted truly, and blessed more than ever. This will be displayed in what we commonly call the millennium. But meanwhile the twelve were to go out as Christ's messengers; for God always gives a testimony before He brings in the thing that is testified of. Attached to this apostolate was power over all demons, and the cure of diseases. But this was only accessory. The chief and evident aim was no display of deeds, though He did arm the messengers of the kingdom with such energy as that the powers of Satan should be defied, as it were, though this is more detailed in Matthew. Not, of course, that there is silence here as to the miraculous powers of healing. But we do not find in Luke the especial details of Jewish appeal up to the end of the age, nor the vacuum as to intermediate dealings with Gentiles. What the Holy Ghost singles out and brings into prominence here is all that manifests the goodness and compassion of God towards man in both soul and body.

We have along with this the solemnity of refusing the testimony of Christ. Indeed, this is true even of the gospel now, where it is not merely the kingdom preached, but the grace of God; and, in my opinion, it is an accompaniment of the gospel that never can be severed from it without loss. To preach love alone is defective. Love is essential to the gospel, which assuredly is the very brightest manifestation of God's grace to man in Christ; for it is a message of love which not only gave the only begotten Son of God, but dealt with Him unspARINGLY on the cross in order to save sinners. To preach love alone is another and serious thing, a different gospel which is not another. Yea, to keep back the awful and ruinous consequences of indifference to the gospel, I do not mean absolutely rejecting it, but even making light of the gospel, is fatal. Never is it real love to keep back or hide that man is already lost and must be cast into hell, unless he be saved through believing the gospel. To occupy men with other things, however seemingly or really good in their place, is no proof of love to man, but insensibility to the grace of God, the glory of God, the evil of sin, the truest deepest need of man, the sureness of judgment, the blessedness of the gospel. This neglected, God in vain is otherwise shown out in His goodness. To return, however, we see that in this part of our Gospel the Lord is testifying to the Jews in view of His rejection, the disciples being invested with the powers of the world to come.

Then we have the working of conscience shown out in a bad man. Herod even, far removed as he was from such a testimony, still was so far moved by it as to enquire what it all meant, and whose power it was that thus wrought. He had known John the Baptist as a great personage, who struck the attention of all Israel in his day. But John was gone. Herod had good reason to know how it was an evil conscience that troubled him, particularly as he heard what was going on now, when men pretended, among various rumours, that John was risen from the dead. This did not satisfy Herod: he had no sense of the power of God, but, at least, he was disturbed and perplexed.

The apostles tell the Lord on their return what they had done, and He takes them into a desert place, where, on their failure to enter into the character of Christ, He displays Himself as not only a man who was the Son of God, but as God, Jehovah Himself. There is no Gospel where the Lord Jesus does not show Himself thus. He may have other objects, He may not always manifest Himself in the same elevation; but there is no Gospel that does not present the Lord Jesus as the God of Israel upon earth. And hence this is a miracle found in all the Gospels. Even John, who ordinarily does not give the same sort of miracles as the others, presents
this miracle along with the other evangelists. Hence, it is plain, that God was showing His presence in beneficence to His people on the earth. The very character of the miracle speaks it. He who once rained the manna is here; once more He feeds His poor with bread. It was the Jew particularly, but still the poor and despised, who were like sheep ready to perish in the wilderness. Thus we find that, while it is perfectly in harmony with the character of Luke, it nevertheless comes within the range of all the Gospels, some for one reason and some for another.

Matthew was given, I suppose, to illustrate the great dispensational change then imminent; because Christ is there shown us as dismissing the multitude, and going to pray on high, while the disciples toil on the troubled sea. There was no real faith in the poor Jews; they only wanted Jesus for what He could give them, not for His own sake. Whereas faith receives God in Jesus; faith sees the supreme glory of a rejected Jesus: no matter what the outward circumstances may be, still it owns Him; the multitude did not. They would have liked such a Messiah as their eyes saw in His power and beneficence; they would have liked such an One to provide and fight their battles for them; but there was no sense of God’s glory in His person. The consequence is, the Lord, though He feeds them, goes away; the disciples are meanwhile exposed to toil and tempest, and the Lord Jesus rejoins them, calling out the energy of one who symbolises the bolder ones in the last days. For even the godly remnant in Israel will not then have precisely the same measure of faith. Peter appears to represent the more advanced, going forth out of the ship to meet the Lord, but like him, no doubt, ready to perish for their boldness. Although there was the work of affection, and so far of confidence, to abandon all for Jesus, still Peter was occupied with the troubles, as they undoubtedly will be in that day. As for him, so for them will the Lord mercifully interpose. Thus it is evident that Matthew has in view the complete change that has taken place: the Lord gone away and taking another character altogether above, and then rejoicing His people, working in their hearts, and delivering them in the last days. Of this we have nothing in Mark or Luke. The scope of neither admitted of such a sketch of circumstances as could become a type of the events of the last days in connection with Israel, any more than of the present separation of the Lord to be a Priest on high, before He returns to the earth and especially to Israel. We can easily understand how perfectly all this suits Matthew.

But again, in John 6, the miracle furnished the occasion for the wonderful discourse of our Saviour, occupying the latter part of the chapter, which will be touched on another occasion. At present my point is simply to show, that while we have it in all, the setting, so to speak, of the jewel differs, and that particular phase is brought out which suits the object of God’s Spirit in each Gospel.

After this, as indeed is found everywhere, our Lord calls out the disciples more distinctly into a separate place. He had shown what He was, and all the blessings reserved for Israel, but there was no real faith in the people. There was, to a certain extent, a sense of need; there was willingness enough to receive what was for the body and the present life, but there their desires stop; and the Lord proved this by His questions, because these revealed the agitation of men’s minds, and their want of faith. Hence, therefore, the reply of the disciples to the Lord’s question,

Whom say the people that I am? They answering said, John the Baptist; but some say Elias; and others say that one of the old prophets is risen again [Luke 9:18, 19].

Whether it were Herod and his servants, or Christ with the disciples, the same tale meets the ear of varying uncertainty but constant unbelief.

But now we find a change. In that little group which surrounded the Lord, there were hearts to whom God had unveiled the glory of Christ; and Christ loved to hear the declaration, not for His own sake, but for God’s, and for theirs too. In divine love He heard their confession of His person. No doubt it was His due; but in truth His love desired rather to give than to get, to seal the blessing that had been already given of God, and to pronounce a fresh blessing. What a moment in God’s eyes! Jesus said unto them, But whom say ye that I am? {Luke 9:20}.

Peter then answers, unequivocally,


At first sight it might seem remarkable that, in the Jewish Gospel of Matthew, we have a far fuller acknowledgment. Here he owns Him not only to be the Christ, but the Son of the living God {Matt. 16:16}.

This is left out here. Along with the acknowledgment of that deeper glory of Christ’s person, the Lord is reported as saying,

Upon this rock I will build my Church {Matt. 16:18}.

As the expression of the divine dignity of Christ is left out here, so the building the Church is not found. There is only the acknowledgment of Christ as the true Messiah, the anointed of God; not one anointed by human hands, but the Christ of God. The Lord, therefore, entirely omits all intimation of the Church, that new thing which was going to be builded, just as we have here the omission of Peter’s brightest confession.

And He straitly charged them, and commanded them to tell no man that thing {Luke 9:21}.

It was no use to proclaim Him as the Messiah. After prophecies, miracles, preaching, the people had been altogether at fault. As the disciples themselves told the Lord, some said one thing, some said another, and no matter what they said, it was all wrong. No doubt there was this handful of disciples who followed Him; and Peter, speaking for the rest, knows and confesses the truth. But it was in vain for the people, as a whole; and this was the question for the Messiah, as such. The Lord accordingly, at this point of time, introduces that most solemn change, not dispensational, not the cutting off of the Jewish system, and the Church building
coming into view. That, we have seen, comes in the Gospel where we have ever found the question of dispensational crisis discussed. In Luke it is not so; for there is found the great moral root of the matter; and after such a full -- I would not say adequate, but abundant testimony had been rendered to Christ, not merely by His intrinsic energy, but even by communicated power to His servants, it was altogether in vain to proclaim Him any longer as the Messiah of Israel. The manner in which He had come as Messiah was foreign to their thoughts, their feelings, their preconceptions, their prepossessions; the lowness, the grace, the path of suffering and contempt -- all this was so hateful to Israel, that such a Messiah, though He were the Christ of God, they would have nothing to do with. They wanted a Messiah to gratify their national ambition, and to meet their natural wants. Earthly glory, as a present thing too, they desired, being simply men of the world; and whatever struck a blow at this, whatever brought in God and His ways, His goodness, His grace, His necessary judgment of sin, His introduction of that for faith now, which would, and alone could, stand throughout eternity, was abhorrent to them. Of all this they had no sense of want, and One who came for these ends was altogether odious to them. Hence, then, our Lord acts upon this at once, and announces the grand truth that it was no longer a question of the Christ accomplishing what had been promised to the fathers, and which, no doubt, would yet be made good to the children in another day. Meanwhile He was going to take the place of a rejected, suffering man -- the Son of man; not only One whose person was despised, but who was going to the cross: His testimony thoroughly discredited, and Himself to die. This, then, He first announced.

The Son of man,
says He,

must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes [it is not here the Gentiles, but the Jews], and be slain, and be raised the third day {Luke 9:22}.

On that, I need not say, hangs not merely the glorious building of the Church of God, but the ground on which any sinful soul can be brought to God. But here it is presented, not in the view of atonement, but as the rejection and suffering of the Son of man at the hands of His own people, that is, of their leaders.

One must carefully remember that the death of Christ, infinite in value, accomplishes many and most worthy ends. To reduce ourselves to a single particular view of Christ’s death, is no better than voluntary poverty in the presence of the inexhaustible riches of the grace of God. The sight of other objects met there does not in the least degree detract from the all-importance of atonement. I can perfectly understand, that when a soul is not thoroughly free and happy in peace, the one thing desired is that which will set such an one at ease. Hence, even among saints, the tendency to shut oneself up to the atonement. The looking for nothing else in the death of Christ is the proof that the soul is not satisfied -- that there is still a void in the heart, which craves what has not yet been found. Hence, therefore, persons who are more or less under the law restrict the cross of Christ only to expiation, i.e. the means of pardon. When it is a question of righteousness, so thoroughly dark are they, that anything beyond the remission of sins they must look somewhere else for. What is it to them that the Son of man was glorified, or God glorified in Him? In every respect, save that there is a place left for atonement in the mercy of God, the system is false.

Our Saviour speaks not as putting away man’s guilt, but as rejected and suffering to the utmost because of man’s or Israel’s unbelief. It is here not a revelation of the efficacious sacrifice on God’s part. The heads of earthly religion kill Him; but He is raised the third day. Then comes in, not a development of the blessed results of the atonement, however surely this was what God was going to effect at that very time; but Luke, as his manner is, insists, in connection with Christ’s rejection and death, on the great moral principle:

If any man will come after me, let him deny himself.

The Lord will have the cross true, not only for a man, but in him too. Blessed as it is to know what God has wrought in the cross of Christ for us, we must learn what it writes on the world and human nature. And that is what our Lord presses:

If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father’s, and of the holy angels {Luke 9:23-26}.

We have here a remarkable fulness of glory spoken of in connection with that great day when eternal things begin to be displayed.

But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God {Luke 9:27}.

Here, therefore, as in the first three Gospels, we have the scene of the transfiguration. The only difference is, that in Luke’s Gospel it appears to come a great deal earlier than in the others. In Matthew’s case there is the waiting, as it were, till the last. I need not say that the Spirit of God had the exact point of time just as clearly before His mind in one as in another; but the ruling object necessarily brought in other topics in one Gospel, as it put them aside in another. In a word, the point in Matthew was to show the fulness of testimony before that which was so fatal for Israel. God, I may say, exhausted every means of warning and testimony to His ancient people, giving them proof upon proof, all spread out before them. Luke, on the contrary, brings in a special picture of His grace
to the Jew first
at an early time; and then, that rejected, turns to larger principles, because in point of fact, whatever might be the means through the responsibility of man, it was all a settled thing with God.
John does not introduce the details of the offer to the Jews at all. From the very first chapter of John's Gospel the trial is closed, and all decided. From the first it was apparent that Christ was thoroughly rejected. Therefore most consistently the particulars of the testimony and the transfiguration itself find no place in John: they are not in the line of his object. What answers to the transfiguration, as far as anything can be said so to do in the Gospel of John, is given in the first chapter, where it is said,

We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth {John 1:14}.

Even if this be conceived to be an allusion to what was beheld on the holy mount, it is here mentioned only in a parenthetical way. The object was not to speak of the glory of the kingdom, but to show that there was a glory deeper far in His person: the kingdom is abundantly spoken of elsewhere. The theme of this Gospel is to show man completely worthless from the very first, the Son all that was blessed, not only from the beginning, but from everlasting. Hence it is that there is no room for the transfiguration in the Gospel of John.

But in Luke, the effect being that He displays the moral roots of things, we have it put much earlier as to its place. The reason is manifest. From the time of the transfiguration, or immediately before it, Christ made the announcement of His death. There was no question any longer about setting up the kingdom in Israel at that time; no object consequently in preaching Messiah as such or the kingdom now. The point was this: He was going to die; He was about shortly to be cast off by the chief priests, and elders, and scribes. What was the use then of talking about reigning now? Hence there is gradually made known in prophetical parables another kind of manner in which the kingdom of God was to be meanwhile introduced. A sample of the kingdom as it will be seen was seen on the mount of transfiguration; for the system of glory is only postponed, and in no wise given up. Thus that mount discloses a picture of what God had in His counsels. Before this, as is manifest, the preaching even of Christ was of One presented on the footing of man's responsibility. That is, the Jews were responsible to receive Him and the kingdom that He came with title to set up. The end of this was -- what is seen uniformly in such moral tests -- man, when tried, always found wanting. In his hands all comes to nothing. Here, then, He shows that it was all known to Him. He was going to die. This, of course, closes all pretension of man to meet his obligation on the ground of the Messiah, as before on that of law. His duty was plain, but he failed miserably. Consequently we are at once brought here in view of the kingdom, not provisionally offered, but according to the counsels of God, who had of course before Him the end from the beginning.

Let us then look at the peculiar manner in which the Spirit of God presents the kingdom through our evangelist.

And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray {Luke 9:28}.
The very mode of presenting the time differs from the others.

All may not be aware that some men have found a difficulty here: where will they not? It seems to me a small difficulty this, between

after six days {Matt. 17:1; Mark 9:2},

and

about an eight days after {Luke 9:28}.

Clearly, the one is an exclusive statement of time as the other is inclusive: a person has only to think in order to see that both were perfectly true. But I do not believe that it is without a divine reason that the Spirit of God was pleased to use the one in Matthew and Mark, and the other only in Luke. There appears to be a connection between the form,

about an eight days after,

with our Gospel rather than the others; and for this simple reason, that this notation of time brings in that which, spiritually understood, goes beyond the work-a-day world of time, or even the kingdom in its Jewish idea and measure. The eighth day brings in not only resurrection, but the glory proper to it. Now this is what connects itself with the glimpse of the kingdom we catch in Luke, more than any other. No doubt there is that understood in the others, but it is not so openly expressed as in our Gospel, and we shall find this confirmed as we pursue the subject.

And as he prayed, [that is, when there was the expression of His human perfectness in dependence upon God, of which Luke often speaks.,] the, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening {Luke 9:29}.

The appearance set forth that which will be wrought in saints when they are changed at the coming of Christ. So even in our Lord's case; though Scripture is most guarded, and it becomes us to speak reverently of His person, yet surely was He sent in the likeness of sinful flesh; but could He be so described when it was no longer the days of His flesh -- when risen from the dead, when death has no more dominion over Him -- when received up in glory? What then was seen on the holy mount, I judge to be rather the anticipatory semblance of what He is as glorified -- the one being but temporary, while His present condition will endure for ever.

And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease [departure] which he should accomplish at Jerusalem {Luke 9:30, 31}.

Other elements of the deepest interest crowd on us; companions of the Lord, men familiarly talking with Him, yet appearing in glory. Above all, note that when the full character of the change or resurrection is more clearly attested, and even beheld more distinctly than anywhere else, the all-importance of the death of Christ is invariably felt just as the value of the resurrection rises. Nor is there any better device of the enemy for weakening the grace of God in Christ's death than to hide the power of His resurrection. On the other hand, he who speculates on the glory of the resurrection, without feeling that the death of Christ was the only possible ground of it before God, and the only way open to us whereby we could have a share with Him in that
glorious resurrection, is evidently one whose mind has taken in but a part of the truth. Such an one wants the simple, living faith of God’s elect; for if he had it, his soul would be keenly alive to the claims of God’s holiness and the necessities of our guilty condition, which the resurrection, blessed as it is, could in no way meet, nor righteously secure any blessing for us, save as founded upon that departure which He accomplished at Jerusalem.

But here no such thoughts or language appear. Not only is the glorious result before our eyes, the veil taken away, that we might see (as it were in company with these chosen witnesses) the kingdom as it will be, shown us here in a little sample of it, but we are admitted to hear the converse of the glorified saints with Jesus on its yet more glorious cause. They talked with Him, and the subject was His departure, which He should accomplish at Jerusalem. How blessed to know that we have that same death, that same most precious truth, nearest of all for our hearts, because it is the perfect expression of His love, and of His suffering love; that we have it now; that it is the very centre of our worship; that it is what habitually calls us together; that no joy in hope, no present favour, no heavenly privilege can ever obscure, but only give a fuller expression to our sense of the grace of His death, as, in truth, they are its fruits. Peter, and they that were with him, were asleep even here; and Luke mentions the circumstance, as especially introducing to our notice the moral state. Such, then, was the condition of the disciples, yea, of those who seemed to be pillars; the glory was too bright for them -- they had scanty relish for it. The same disciples, who afterwards slept in the garden of agony, then slept in the mount of glory. And I am persuaded that the two tendencies are very closely akin, insensibility -- indifference; he who is apt to go asleep in the presence of the one indicates too plainly that you cannot expect from him any adequate sense of the other.

But there is more for us to see, however passing.

And when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him. And it came to pass, as they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias; not knowing what he said {Luke 9:32, 33}.

How little human, natural honour for Christ can be trusted even in a saint! Peter meant to magnify his Master. Let us trust God for it. His word brings in not now glorified men, but the God of glory. The Father could not suffer such a speech to come from Peter without a rebuke. No doubt Peter sincerely meant by it to honour the Lord on the mount, as Matthew and Mark relate how he failed similarly just before; it was the indulgence of traditional thoughts and human feeling in view both of the cross and the glory. So many now, too, like Peter, intend nothing but honour to the Lord by that which would really deprive Him of a special and blessed part of His glory. The word of God alone judges all things; but man, tradition, heeds it little. So it was with Peter; the same disciple who would not have the Lord to suffer, now proposes to put the Lord on a level with Elias or Moses. But God the Father speaks out of the cloud -- that well-known sign of Jehovah’s presence, of which every Jew, at least, understood the meaning.

There came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him {Luke 9:35}.

Hence, whatever might be the place of Moses and Elias in the presence of Christ, it is no question of giving signal and like dignity to them all three, but of hearing the Son of God. As witnesses, they vanish before His testimony who was the object testified of. They were of the earth, He of heaven, and above all. To the Christ as such had they borne witness, even as the disciples hitherto; but He was rejected; and this rejection, in God’s grace and wisdom, opened the way and laid the ground for the higher dignity of His person to shine as the Father knew Him, the Son, for the Church to be built thereon, and for communion with the heavenly glory. The Son has His own sole claim as the One to be heard now. So God the Father decides. What, in effect, could they say? They could only speak about Him, whose own words best declare what He is, as they only reveal the Father; and He was here to speak without their aid: He was here Himself to make known the true God; for this He is, and eternal life.

This is my beloved Son: hear him. Such is what the Father would communicate to the disciples upon earth. And this is most precious.

Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ {1 John 1:3}.

For it is not merely the glorified speaking with Jesus, but the Father communicating about Him, the Son, to saints on earth; not to saints glorified, but to saints in their natural bodies, giving them a taste of His own delight in His Son. He would not have them weaken the glory of His Son. No effulgence which shone out from the glorified men must be allowed for a moment to cause forgetfulness of the infinite difference between Him and them.

This is my beloved Son. They were but servants, their highest dignity at best to be witnesses of Him.

This is my beloved Son: hear him. And when the voice was past, Jesus was found alone. And they kept it close {Luke 9:35, 36}.

Yet have I omitted another point that ought not to be left without special notice. While Peter spake, even before the Father’s voice was heard, there came a cloud and overshadowed them, and they feared as they entered the cloud. And no wonder; because this was something entirely distinct from and above the glory of the kingdom for which they waited. Blessed as the kingdom is, and glorious, they did not fear when they saw the glorified men, nor Jesus Himself, the centre of that glory; they did not fear when they beheld this witness and sample of the kingdom; for every Jew looked for the kingdom, and expected the Messiah to set it up gloriously; and they knew well enough that, somehow or another, the saints of the past will be there along with the Messiah when He reigns over His willing people. None of these things produced terror; but when the excellent glory
came, overshadowing with its brightness (for light was there, and no darkness at all) the Shechinah of Jehovah’s presence, and when Peter, James, and John saw the men with the Lord Jesus entering that cloud, this was something entirely above all previous expectation. No person from the Old Testament would gather such a thought as man thus in the same glory with God. But this is precisely what the New Testament opens out; this is one large part of what was hidden in God from ages and generations before. Indeed, it could not be disclosed till the manifestation and rejection of Christ. Now, it is that which forms the peculiar joy and hope of the Christian in the Son of God. It is not at all the same as the promised blessing and power when the kingdom dawns upon this long enlightened earth. As star differs from star, and there is a celestial glory as well as a terrestrial, so there is that which is far above the kingdom -- that which is founded upon the revealed person of the Son, and in communion with the Father and the Son, now enjoyed in the power of the Spirit sent down from heaven. Accordingly we have, immediately after this, the Father proclaiming the Son; because there is no key, as it were, to open that cloud for man, except His name -- no means to bring Him there save His work. It is not the Messiah as such. Had He been merely the Messiah, into that cloud man never could have entered. It is because He was and is the Son. As He therefore came, so to speak, out of the cloud, so it was His to introduce into the cloud, though for this His cross too is essential, man being a sinner. Thus the fear of Peter and James and John at this particular point, when they saw men entering into and environed by Jehovah’s presence-cloud, is, to my own mind, most significant. Now, that is given us here; and this, one may see, is connected very intimately with, not the kingdom, but the heavenly glory -- the Father’s house as entered in communion with the Son of God.

The Lord comes down from the mountain, and we have a picture, morally, of the world.

A man of the company cried out, saying, Master, I beseech thee, look upon my son: for he is mine only child. And, lo, a spirit taketh him, and he suddenly crieth out; and it teareth him that he Foameth again, and bruising him hardly departeth from him [Luke 9:38, 39].

It is a picture of man as now the object of Satan’s continual assault and possession; or, as elsewhere described, led captive of the devil at his will.

And I besought thy disciples to cast him out; and they could not [Luke 9:40].

It grieves the Lord deeply, that though there was faith in the disciples, that faith was so dormant before difficulties, that it so feebly knew how to avail itself of the power of Christ on the one hand, for the deep distress of man on the other. Oh, what a sight this was to Christ! what feeling to His heart, that those who possessed faith should at the same time so little estimate the power of Him who was its object and resource! It is exactly what will be the ruin of Christendom, as it was the ground of the Lord closing all His dealings with His ancient people. And when the Son of man comes, will He find faith on the earth? Look at all now, even at the present aspect of that which bears His name. There is the recognition of Christ and of His power, no doubt. Men are baptized in His name. Nominal His glory is owned by everybody but open infidels; but where is the faith He looks for? The comfort is this, however, that Christ never fails to carry on His own work; and, therefore, though we find the very gospel itself made merchandise of in the world, though you may see it prostituted in every way to minister to the vanity or pride of men, God does not therefore abandon His own purposes. Thus He does not forego the conversion of souls by it, even though grievously fettered and perverted. Nothing is more simple. It is not that the Lord approves of the actual state of things, but that the grace of the Lord never can fail, and the work of Christ must be done. God will gather out of the world; yea, out of its worst. In short, the Lord shews here that the unbelief of the disciples was manifested by their little power to draw upon the grace that was in Him, to apply it to the case in hand.

And Jesus answering said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you, and suffer you? Bring thy son hither [Luke 9:41].

And so after a manifestation of Satan’s power, the Lord delivers him again to his father.

And they were all amazed at the mighty power of God [Luke 9:43].

But Jesus at once speaks about His death. Nothing can be sweeter. There was that done which might well make Jesus appear great in their eyes as a matter of power. At once He tells them that He was going to be rejected, to die, to be put to death.

Let those sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men [Luke 9:44].

He was the Deliverer from Satan’s power. The disciples were as nothing in the presence of the enemy: this was natural enough; but what shall we say when we hear that the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men? Here unbelief is ever at fault -- never knows how to put these two things together: it does seem such a moral and mental contradiction, that the mightiest of deliverers should be apparently the weakest of all beings, delivered into the hands of men, His own creatures! But so it must be. If a sinner was to be saved for eternity -- if the grace of God was to make a righteous basis for justifying the ungodly, Jesus, the Son of man, must be delivered into the hands of man; and then an infinitely fiercer fire must burn -- the divine judgment when God made Him sin for us; for all that men, Satan, even God Himself could do, comes upon Him to the uttermost.

The Lord, then, having Himself shown what He was, not only in His power which vanquished Satan, but also in that weakness in which He was crucified of men, now reads a lesson to the disciples on the score of their reasoning; for the Spirit of God brings this in now, their discussion which of them should be greatest -- a vain, unworthy contest at any time, but how much more so in the presence of such a Son of man! It is thus, one can see, that Luke brings facts and
principles together in his Gospel. He makes a child, despised of those who would be great, to be a rebuke to the self-exalting disciples. They had been little enough against Satan's power: would they be great in spite of their Master's humiliation? Again, He lays bare what manner of spirit was in John, though not giving it in the point of view of service, as we saw in Mark. It may not have been forgotten, that there we had it very particularly as the vehicle for instructing us in the weighty duty that we are to acknowledge the power of God in the service of others, though they may not be with us {Luke 9:49}.

But that point does not appear in Luke -- at least not its details, but simply the moral principle.

Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us {Luke 9:50}.

Then, again, we have His censure of the spirit of James and John in consequence of the affront the Samaritans put on our Lord. It was the same egotism in another form, and the Lord turns and rebukes them, telling them that they knew not what manner of spirit they were of; for the Son of man was not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. All these lessons are plainly impressions, so to speak, of the cross -- its shame, rejection, anguish, whatever men chose to put on the name of Jesus, or on those that belong to Jesus -- Jesus who was on His way to the cross; for so it is expressly written here. He was steadfastly setting His face to go to Jerusalem, where His departure was to be accomplished.

Accordingly we have given here another set of lessons closing the chapter, but still connected with what went before -- the judgment of what should not work, and the indication of that which ought to work, in the hearts of those that profess to follow the Lord. These are brought together after a notable manner. First,

A certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest {Luke 9:57}.

Here it is the detection of what was cloaked under an apparent frankness and devotedness; but these seemingly fine fruits were entirely after the flesh, utterly worthless, and offensive to the Lord, who at once puts His finger upon the point. Who is the man that is really ready to follow the Lord whithersoever He goes? The man that has found all in Him, and wants not earthly glory from Him. Jesus was going to die Himself; here He had not a place where to lay His head. How could He give anything to him?

And he said to another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God {Luke 9:59, 60}.

Now, here is real faith; and where this exists, it is more than a theory -- difficulties are felt. Thus the man begins to make excuse, because he feels, on the one side, the attraction of the word of Jesus; but at the same time he is not freed from the force that drags him into nature; he is alive to the seriousness of the matter in conscience, but realises the obstacles in the way. Hence, he pleads the strongest natural claim upon his heart, a son's duty to a dead father. But the Lord would have him leave that to those who had no such call of the Lord.

Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.

To another, who says,

Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home in my house {Luke 9:61}.

The Lord replies that the kingdom of God is necessarily paramount, and its service all-engrossing; so that if a man has put his hand to the plough, woe to him if he look back! He is unfit for the kingdom of God. Throughout who can fail to see the judgment of the heart, man's nature proved, however fair the form? What death to self the service of Christ implies! Otherwise, what personal faithlessness, even if one escape the evil of bringing in rubbish into God's house, and, it may be, of defiling His temple! Such is the fruit of self-confidence where Satan acquires a footing.

* * *

Next comes before us the remarkable mission of the seventy, which is peculiar to Luke. This has, indeed, a solemn and final character, with an urgency beyond that of the twelve, in Luke 9. It is an errand of grace, sent out as they were by One whose heart yearned over a great harvest of blessing; but it is clothed with a certain last warning, and with woes here pronounced on the cities where He had wrought in vain.

He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me {Luke 10:16}.

This gives it, therefore, a serious and peculiar force, yet withal suitable to our Gospel. Without dwelling upon the particulars, I would simply remark that, when the seventy returned, saying,

Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name {Luke 10:17},

the Lord (while he saw in clear vista before Him Satan fallen from heaven, the casting out of devils by the disciples being but the first blow, according to that power which will utterly put down Satan at the end) at the same time states that this is not the better thing, the proper subject for their joy. No power over evil, however true now, however in the end displaying in full the glory of God, is to be compared to the joy of His grace, the joy of not merely seeing Satan turned out, but of God brought in; and meanwhile of themselves, in the communion of the Father and of the Son, having their portion and their names enrolled in heaven. It is a heavenly blessedness, as it becomes more and more manifest that is to be the place of the disciples, and that in Luke's Gospel more than in any other of the synoptists.

Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven {Luke 10:20}.

Not that it is the Church which is here revealed, but at the least a very characteristic feature of the Christian place which is breaking through the clouds. In that hour, Jesus
accordingly rejoiced in spirit, and said,

I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight {Luke 10:21}.

Here you will observe it is not, as in Matthew, in connection with the break up of Judaism. Not only was the total destruction of Satan's power before Him, the woman's Seed, by man, for man; but, diving deeper than the kingdom, He explains those counsels of the Father in the Son, to whom all things are delivered, and whose glory was inscrutable to man, the key to His present rejection, and the secret and best blessing for His saints. It is not so much here the Christ-rejected and suffering Son of man: but the Son, the revealer of the Father, whom the Father alone knows. And with what delight He congratulates the disciples privately on that which they saw and heard (Luke 10:23, 24), though we find some declarations coming out more emphatically afterwards; but still it was all clear before Him. Here it is the satisfaction of the Lord in the bright side of the subject, not merely the contrast with the dead body of Judaism, as it were, which was completely judged and left behind.

What we find after this is an unfolding of the Sabbath-days, in which the Lord demonstrated to the unwilling Jews that the bond between God and Israel was broken (see Matt. 11, 12): for this was the meaning of the apparent breach of the Sabbaths, when He vindicated the disciples in eating of the corn on the one, and healed the withered hand publicly on the other. But here we meet with another line of things; we have, according to Luke's manner, one who was instructed in the law weighed and found wanting morally. A lawyer comes and says,

Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour? {Luke 10:25-29}.

This sets forth, then, the difficulties of the legal mind; it is a technicality: he cannot understand what is meant by his neighbour.

Intellectually it was no such feat to penetrate the meaning of that word, neighbour.

But the consequences morally were grave; if it meant what it said, had he ever in his life felt and acted as if he had a neighbour? He gave it up, therefore. It was a mysterious something that the elders had nowhere solved, a case that was not yet ruled in the Sanhedrin, -- what was meant by this inscrutable neighbour.

Alas! it was the fallen heart of man that wanted to get out of a plain duty, but a duty which demanded love, the last thing in the world he possessed. The great difficulty was himself; and so he sought to justify himself -- an utter impossibility! For in truth he was a sinner; and the thing for him is to confess his sins. Where one has not been brought to own himself, and to justify God against himself, all is wrong and false; everything of God is misunderstood, and His word seems darkness, instead of light.

Mark how our Lord puts the case in the beautiful parable of the good Samaritan. It was, if I may so say of Him as a man, the single eye and the heart that perfectly understood what God was, and enjoyed it; that never, therefore, had difficulty in finding out who was his neighbour. For, in truth, grace finds a neighbour in every one that needs love. The man that needs human sympathy, that needs divine goodness and its clear testimony, though it be through a man upon the earth, he is my neighbour. Now, Jesus was the only man who was walking in the whole power of divine love, though, I need not say, this was but a little part of His glory. As such, therefore, He found no riddle to solve in the question, Who is my neighbour?

Evidently it is not the mere dispensational setting aside of the ancient people of God, but the proving of the heart, the will of man detected where it used the law to justify itself, and to get rid of the plain demand of duty to one's fellows. Where in all this was love maintained, thatnecessary answer in man to the character of God in an evil world? Certainly not in the lawyer's question, which betrayed the duty unknown; as surely was it in Him whose parabolic reply most aptly imaged His own feelings and life, the sole perfect exhibition of God's will in love to a neighbour, which this poor world has ever had before it.

The rest of the chapter belongs to the eleventh, properly and naturally following up this truth. What a mercy that, through us then, in Jesus, there is active goodness here below, which, after all, is the only thing that ever accomplishes the law! It is very important to see that grace really does fulfil God's will in this:

That the righteousness of the law, as it is said,
might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh,
but after the Spirit {Rom. 8:4}.

The lawyer was walking after the flesh: there was no perception of grace, and consequently no truth in him. What a miserable life he must have been living, and he a teacher of God's law, without even knowing who was his neighbour! At least, so he pretended.

On the other hand, as we are next taught, where there is grace, everything is put in its place, and it shows itself in two forms. The first is the value for the word of Jesus. Grace prizes it above all things. Even if you look at two persons who may both be objects of Christ's love, what a difference it makes for the one whose heart delights most in grace! And where there is the opportunity of hearing the word of God from Jesus, or of Jesus, this is the chief jewel at the feet of Jesus. Such is the true moral posture of the one who knows
grace best. Here it was Mary who was found sitting at the feet of Jesus, to hear His word. She had decided rightly, as faith (I say not the believer) always does. As for Martha, she was distracted with bustle. Her one thought was what she could do for Jesus, as One known after the flesh, not without a certain thought, as ever, of what was due to herself. No doubt it was meant for, and after a certain style was, honour to Him; but still it was honour of a Jewish, carnal, worldly sort. It was paid to His bodily presence there, as a man, and the Messiah, with a little bit of honour to herself, no doubt, and to the family. This naturally comes out in Luke, the delineator of such moral traits. But as for Mary’s conduct, it seemed to Martha no better than indifference to her many anxious preparations. Vexed at this, she goes to the Lord with a complaint against Mary, and would have liked the Lord to have joined her, and set His seal to its justice. The Lord, however, at once vindicates the hearer of His word.

But one thing is needful {Luke 10:42}. Not Martha, but Mary, had chosen that good part which should not be taken away from her. When grace works in this world, it is not to bring in what suits a moment of passing time, but that which ensures eternal blessing. As part of God’s grace, therefore, we have the word of Jesus revealing and communicating what is eternal, what shall not be taken away.

Remark another thing next. It is not only the all-importance of the word of Jesus, not man’s misuse of the law (which we have seen but too clearly in the lawyer, who ought to have taught, instead of asked, who my neighbour is), but now we have the place and value of prayer. This is equally needful in its season, and is found here in its true place. Clearly I must receive from God before there can be the going out of my heart to God. There must first be what is imparted by God -- His revelation of Jesus. There is no faith without His word (Rom. 10). My thoughts of Jesus may be ruin to me; indeed, I am very sure, if they were only my thoughts of Jesus, they must deceive and destroy my soul, and be injurious to everybody else. But here we find the weighty intimation, that it is not enough that there should be the reception of the word of Jesus, and even at the feet of Jesus. He looks at the disciples’ need of the exercise of heart with God. And this is shown in more ways than one.

First of all we have prayer, according to the mind of Jesus, for the disciples in their actual wants and state; and a most blessed prayer it is, leaving out the millennial allusions of Matt. 6, but retaining all the general and moral petitions. The Lord next insists on the importunity or perseverance of prayer, with the blessing attached to earnestness with God. Thirdly, it may be added, that the Lord touches on the gift of the Spirit, and in connexion with this only in our Gospel --

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give [not merely good things, but] the Holy Spirit [the best gift] to them that ask him? {Luke 11:13}.

Thus the great characteristic blessing to the Gentiles (compare Gal. 3), and of course to the believing Jew also, was this gift which the Lord here instructs the disciples to ask for. For the Holy Ghost was not yet given. There was exercise of heart Godward. They were really disciples; they were born of God, yet had they to pray for the Holy Spirit to be given them. Such was the state going on while the Lord Jesus was here below. It was not only (as in John 14) that He would ask the Father, and the Father would send; but they too were to ask the Father, who would assuredly, as He did, give the Holy Spirit to them that asked Him. And I am far from denying that there might be cases at this present time, of what some might call an abnormal kind, where persons were really convinced of sin, but without the settled peace which the gift of the Holy Ghost imparts. Here, at the very least, the principle of this would apply; and for this it might be of moment, therefore, that we should have it plainly in the Gospel of Luke; because this was not the dispensational instruction as to the great change that was coming in, but rather filled with profound moral principles of larger import, though to be influenced, no doubt, by the development of the great facts of divine grace. Thus the sending down of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost brought in an immense modification of this truth. His presence from that moment undoubtedly involved greater things than the heavenly Father giving the Spirit to the individuals who sought it of Him. And there was the grand point of the Father’s estimate of the work of Jesus, to which the Spirit’s descent was an answer. Therefore, a person might be brought in, so to speak, all at once; he might be converted and rest upon the redemption of Jesus, and receive the Holy Ghost, practically, all at once. Here, however, it is the case of the disciples taught to ask before the blessing had ever been given. Certainly, at that time, we see the two things distinctly. They were born of the Spirit already, but were waiting for the further blessing -- the gift of the Spirit; a privilege given them in answer to prayer. Nothing can be plainer. There is no good in enfeebling Scripture. Evangelical tradition is as false to the Spirit, as popish is to Christ’s work and its glorious results for the believer even now on earth. What we need is, to understand the Scriptures in the power of God.

After this, the Lord cast out a dumb devil from one who, when delivered, spoke. This kindles into a flame the hatred of the Jews. They could not deny the power, but wickedly impute it to Satan. In their eyes or lips it was not God, but Beelzebub, the chief of the devils, who cast them out. Others, tempting Him, sought for a sign from heaven. The Lord thereon spreads out the awful consequence of this unbelief and imputation of God’s power in Him to the Evil One. In Matthew, it is a sentence on that generation of the Jews; here on wider grounds for man, whoever and wherever he may be; for all here is moral, and not merely the question of the Jew. It was folly and suicidal for Satan to cast out his own. Their own sons condemned them. The truth was, the kingdom of God was come upon them; and they knew it not, but rejected it with blasphemy. Finally He adds,

When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept
and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first [Luke 11:24-26].

There is no application specially to the Jew, as in Matthew; it is left general to man. Hence,

So shall it be with this wicked generation disappears.

Thus, although the Lord was as yet dealing with a remnant, and was here in view of the doom of that Christ-rejecting generation of the Jews, for this very reason the Spirit of God makes His special design by Luke the more apparent and undeniable. It would have been natural to have left these instructions within those precincts. Not so: Luke was inspired to enlarge their bearing, or rather record what would deal with any soul in any place or time. It is made a question here of man, and of the last state of him whom the unclean spirit has somehow left for a season, but without salvation, or the positive new work of divine grace. He may be a changed character, as men say; he may become moral, or even religious; but is he born again? If not, so much the more sorrowful -- so much the worse is his last state than the first. Supposing you have that which is ever so fair, if it be not the Holy Ghost's revelation to, and the life of Christ in, your soul, every privilege or blessing short of this will surely be proved to fail. And this the Lord follows up afterwards, when a woman, hearing Him, lifts up her voice and says,

Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked.

Immediately He answers,

Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it [Luke 11:27-28].

It is evidently the same great moral lesson: no natural link with Him is to be compared with hearing and keeping God’s word; and so our Lord pursues next. Were they asking for a sign? They proved their condition, and lowered themselves morally beneath the Ninivites, who repented at Jonah's preaching. Did not the report of Solomon’s wisdom draw from the utmost parts of the earth a queen of the south? Jonah is here a sign, not of death and resurrection, but by his preaching. What sign had the queen of Sheba? What sign had the men of Nineveh? Jonah preached; but was not Christ preaching? That queen came from afar to hear the wisdom of Solomon; but what was the wisdom of the wisest to compare with Christ’s wisdom? Was He not the wisdom and the power of God? Yet, after all they had seen and heard, they could ask a sign! It was evident that there was no such guilt of old; but, on the contrary, these Gentiles, whether in or from the ends of the earth, spite of their gross darkness, rebuked the unbelief of Israel, and proved how just would be their doom in the judgment.

Our Lord here adds an appeal to conscience. The light (set in Himself) was not secret, but in the right place: God had failed in nothing as to this. But another condition was requisite to see -- the state of the eye. Was it simple, or evil?

If evil, how hopeless the darkness before that light! If received with simplicity, not only is light enjoyed, but shines all around, with no part dark. To the Pharisees, who wondered that the Lord washed not His hands before dining, He pronounces a most withering rebuke upon their care for exterior cleanliness, and indifference to their inward corruption, their jealousy for details of observance, and forgetfulness of the great moral obligations, their pride, and their hypocrisy. To one of the lawyers, who complained that thereby He reproached them, the Lord utters woe upon woe for them also. Tampering with the law and holy things of God, where there is no faith, is the direct road to ruin, the sure occasion of divine judgment. A like doom awaits Babylon as then was about to fall on Jerusalem (Rev. 18).

In Luke 12 the Lord furnishes the disciples with the path of faith in the midst of men's secret evil, open hatred, and worldliness. On His rejection their testimony must go on. First, they were to beware of the Pharisees' leaven, which is hypocrisy, and to cherish the consciousness of the light of God to which the believer belongs (Luke 12:1-3). This, then, is the preservative power. Satan works by deceit as well as by violence (Luke 12:4). God works not only in light, as we have seen, but by love (Luke 12:5-7), and the confidence He invites to in Himself.

But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell: yea, I say unto you, Fear him [Luke 12:5].

Then immediately (guarding against the abuse of this, which is always true, and true for a believer, although it be, so to speak, the lower end of the truth) the Lord brings in the love of the Father, asking,

Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows [Luke 12:6, 7].

He shows next the all-importance of the confession of His name, with the consequence of denying Him; then, the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, which would not be forgiven, whatever grace is shown to those who blasphemed the Son of man; and in contrast with this the promised succour of the Spirit in presence of a hostile world-church (Luke 12:8-12). Then a person appeals to the Lord to settle a question of this world. This, however, is not His work now. Of course, as Messiah, He will have to do with the earth, and will set the world right when He comes to reign; but His actual task was dealing with souls. For Him, and for men too, did not unbelief shroud their eyes, it was a question of heaven or hell, of what is eternal and of another world. Hence He absolutely refuses to be a judge and divider of what appertained to the earth. It is that which many a Christian has not learned of his Master.

Next the Lord exposes the folly of man in his covetous desire after present things. In the midst of prosperity, suddenly, that very night, God requires of the rich fool his soul.
So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God {Luke 12:21}.

The Lord then shows the disciples where their true riches should lie. Faith is meant to deliver from anxiety and lust. It is not food and raiment. He who fed the uncareful ravens would not fail His children, who were far more to Him than the birds. Such care, on the contrary, is the plain evidence of poverty God-ward. Why are you so busy providing? It is the confession that you are not satisfied with what you have got.

And what does it all come to? The lilies outshine Solomon in all his glory: how much does God interest Himself in His children? What occupies the nations who know Him not is unworthy of the saint who is called to seek God's kingdom, sure that all these things shall be added.

Your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things {Luke 12:30}.

Again, this leads me to notice briefly the way in which this ineffable love is shown, not only by the Father, but by the Son, and that in two forms -- the Son's love to those that wait for Him, and to those that work for Him. The waiting for Him we have in Luke 12:35, 36:

Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately.

It is the heart filled with Christ; and the consequence is, Christ's heart goes out towards them. When He comes, He seats them, so to speak, at table, does everything for them even in glory. But then there is working for the Lord: this comes in afterwards.

Then Peter said unto him, Lord, speaketh thou this parable unto us, or even to all? And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath {Luke 12:41-44}.

It is not "so watching"; but so doing.

It is a question of working for Him and this has its own sweet and needed place. Still remark that it is secondary to watching: Christ Himself always, even before His work. Nevertheless He is pleased to associate the Gospel with Himself, very graciously, as we know in the Gospel of Mark; and it is exactly there we might expect it, if we knew its character: He binds up the work, so to speak, with Himself. But when we come in Luke to moral analogies, if I may so term it, instead of giving it all together, like the Gospel devoted to the workman and the work, here we listen to One who unfolds to us distinction of heart and hand in relation to His coming. Blessed he who shall be found working for the Lord when He comes: surely he shall be made ruler over all that the Son of man has. Yet mark the difference. This is exaltation over His inheritance. As for those that are found watching for Him, it will be association -- joy, rest, glory, love -- with Himself.

Observe another thing in this part of Luke, and strikingly characteristic too. Blessed as all we have heard is for those that are His, what will it be for those that believe not? Accordingly, and in a form that commends itself to the conscience, we see the difference between the servant who knew his master's will and did it not, and the servant who knew not his master's will {Luke 12:47, 48}. Neither Matthew, nor Mark, nor John, of course, say anything like this. Luke here sheds the light of Christ on the respective responsibility of the Gentile grafted into the olive tree and of the Pagan world. As there is in Christendom the servant cognizant of his Master's will, but indifferent or rebellious, so on the other hand, outside Christendom there is the servant wholly ignorant of His will, and, of course, lawless and evil. They are both of them beaten; but he that knew His Master's will and did it not shall be beaten with more stripes. To be baptized, and to call on the Lord's name in outward profession, instead of lightening the burden in the day of judgment for the hypocrites, will, on the contrary, bring on them so much more severity. The righteousness and the wisdom of this dealing is so much the more remarkable, as it is the exact opposite of the early doctrine of Christendom. A notion prevailed, perhaps universally after the first century or two, that, while all persons dying in sin would be judged, the baptized would have a far better portion in hell than the unbaptized. Such was the doctrine of the fathers; Scripture is dead against it. In what we have just had before us, Luke gives the Lord Jesus not only anticipating, but completely and for ever excluding, the folly.

Next, whatever may be the fulness of Christ's love, the effect would now be to kindle a fire. For that love came with divine light which judged man; and man would not bear it. The consequence is, that the fire was already kindled. It did not merely await another day or execution from God, but even then was it at work. Assuredly the love of Christ was not produced by His sufferings, any more than God's love. Ever was it there, only awaiting the full expression of man's hatred before it would burst all bounds, and flow out freely in every direction of need and misery. Such is our Lord's wonderful opening out of great moral principles in this chapter. Men, professors, heathen, saints, in their love for Christ, and service too, all have their portion.

The state, then, was the worst possible -- utter, hopeless, social ruin, which His coming and presence had brought to light. How was it they had not discerned this time? Why even of themselves did they not judge aright? It was from no lack of evil in His adversaries, or of grace in Him. The close of the chapter takes up the Jew, showing that they then were in imminent danger, that a great question pressed on them. In their suit with God, the Lord advised them, as it were, to use arbitration while He was in the way: the result of despising this would be their committal to prison till the uttermost farthing was paid. Such was the admonition to Israel, who are now, as all know, under the consequence of neglecting the word of the Lord.

Luke 13 insists on this, and shows how vain it was to talk.
of the objects of signal judgments. Except they repented, they
must likewise perish. Judgments thus misused lead men to
forget their own guilty and ruined condition in the sight of
God. He urges, therefore, repentance strongly. He admits, no
doubt, that there was a term of respite. Indeed, it was
Himself, the Lord Jesus, who had pleaded for a further trial.
If after this the fig tree should be unfruitful, it must be cut
down. And so it was: judgment came after grace, not law.
How little they felt that it was a most true picture of
themselves, Christ and God Himself so dealing with them
because of Him. But the Lord subsequently lets us see that
grace could act in the midst of such a state. Accordingly, in
His healing of the woman bowed down with the spirit of
infirmity, He displays the goodness of God even in such a
day when judgment was at the doors, and rebuked the hypocritical
wickedness of the heart that found fault with His goodness,
because it was the sabbath day.

Ought not this woman, being a daughter of
Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen
years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?
And when he had said these things, all his
adversaries were ashamed: and all the people
rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by

As ever, the heart is made manifest in Luke -- the adversaries
of the truth on the one hand, and those on the other whom
grace made the friends of Christ or the objects of His bounty.
But the Lord also shows the form that the kingdom of God
would take. It would not have power now, but rather from a
little beginning become great in the earth, with noiseless
progress, as of leaven conforming to itself till the three
measures were leavened. And such, in point of fact, has been
the character of the kingdom of God presented here below. It
is here no question of seed, good or bad, but of the spread of
doctrine nominally, at least, Christian. How far such a
progress meets the mind of God, we must compare facts with
Scripture in order to judge aright. If Israel was then in danger
of a judgment which would surely come, what would be the
case with the kingdom of God outwardly in the world? In
truth, instead of occupying themselves with the question
whether those destined to salvation (or the godly Jews) were
few, it would be well to think of the only way in which any
one could be put morally right before God; it was by striving
to enter in at the strait gate: without the new birth none can
enter. Many might seek to enter in, but would not be able.
What is here meant? Is it a difference between striving and
seeking? I doubt that this covers the true bearing of our
Lord's language; for thus he who throws the stress upon
striving or seeking, makes it a question of energy, greater or
less. This does not seem to me what our Lord meant; but that
many would seek to enter into the kingdom, not at the strait
gate, but by some other way. They might seek to enter in by
baptism, by law-keeping, by prayer, or some vain plea of
God's mercy: all these unbelieving resources dishonour
Christ and His work.

The striving to enter in at the strait gate implies, to my
mind, a man brought to a true sense of sin, and casting
himself upon God's grace in Christ -- repentance towards

God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ Himself is the
strait gate -- at least, Christ Himself received thus by faith
and repentance. So our Lord, in opening out this, proclaims
the judgment of Israel -- indeed, of any who would like well
the blessing, but refuse God's way, even Christ. He presents,
accordingly, the Jewish people cast aside, the Gentiles
coming from east, west, north, and south, and brought into
the kingdom of God.

Behold, there are last which shall be first, and first
which shall be last {Luke 13:30}.

And then the chapter closes with the Pharisees pretending
zeal for Him:

Get thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill
thee {Luke 13:31}.

But the Lord proclaims in their ears that He would not be
hindered in His service till His hour was come; and that it
was not a question of Herod and Galilee, but of Jerusalem,
the proud city of solemnities; it was there the prophet of God
must fall. No prophet should be cut off except at Jerusalem;
such is its painful, fatal peculiarity, the honour of providing
a grave for God's rejected and slain witness. Men might say,
as they did, that no prophet arose out of Galilee; and it was
false; but certainly this was true, that if a prophet fell, he fell
in Jerusalem. Yet the Lord then mourned over such a
Jerusalem, and does not leave the Jews absolutely desolate,
except for a time, but holds out the hope that the day would
come when their heart should turn to Him (2 Cor. 3), saying,

Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord
{Luke 13:35}.

This closes, then, the Lord's dealings in reference to
Jerusalem, in contrast with the heavenly light in the disciples'portion. He depicts grace from first to last, save only in those
that had no faith in Him; and on the other hand, He lets us
know, that whatever might be the yearnings of grace over
Jerusalem, this is the end of it all in man's hands.

The Lord is seen, in Luke 14, resuming the ways of
grace. Once more He shows that, spite of those who
preferred the sign of the Old covenant to Messiah in the grace
of the New, the sabbath day furnished Him an opportunity for
illustrating the goodness of God. In Luke 13 it was the spirit
of infirmity -- the power of Satan; here it was a simple case
of human malady. The lawyers and Pharisees were then
watching Him, but Jesus openly raises the question; and as
they held their peace, He takes and heals the man with the
dropsy, and lets him go, answering their thought by an
irresistible appeal to their own ways and conscience. Man
who seeks to do good to what belongs to himself, is not
titled to dispute God's right to act in love to the miserable
objects that He deigns to count His.

Then the Lord takes notice of another thing, not man's
hypocritical selfishness, which would not have God to gratify
His love to suffering wretchedness, but man's love of being
somebody in this world. The Lord brings into evidence
another great principle of His own action -- self-abasement in
contrast with self-exaltation. If a man desires to be exalted,
the only way, according to God, is to be lowly, to abase
himself; it is the spirit that suits the kingdom of God. So He
tells the disciples that, in making a feast, they were not to act on the principle of asking friends, or men who could return it, but as saints called to reflect the character and will of God. Therefore it should be rather those that could make no present requital, looking to the day of recompense, on God’s part, at the resurrection of the just.

On some one crying out, What a blessed thing it must be to eat bread in the kingdom of God! the Lord shews the fact to be quite the contrary. For what is it that the Lord has been doing ever since? He is inviting men to eat bread, as it were, in His kingdom. But how do they treat the invitation of grace in the gospel?

A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: and sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse {Luke 14:18}.

Difference is observable. In Luke there is the omission of Matthew’s first message. But, besides that, the excuses are gone into individually. One person says,

I have bought a piece of ground {Luke 13:16-18}, which he must go and see; another man says he has bought five yoke of oxen, which he has to prove; another says he has married a wife, and on this account he cannot come. That is, we have the various decent plausible reasons that man gives for not submitting to the righteousness of God, for delaying his acceptance of the grace of God. So the servant comes and reports to his lord, who thereupon, being angry, says,

Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room {Luke 14:21, 22}.

Thus the persistence of grace, spite of just displeasure, is a characteristic and beautiful feature of this Gospel. The lord sent his servant thereupon to the highways and hedges (or enclosures), compelling them to come in, that, as it is said, my house may be filled {Luke 14:23}.

Of this we hear nothing in Mark and Matthew. Indeed, Matthew gives us quite a different aspect from that which we have here. There the king is seen sending forth his armies, and burning up the city. How marvellous the wisdom of God, both in what He inserts, and in what He leaves out! Matthew adds also the judgment of the robed guest at the end -- the man who had intruded, trusting to his work, or to any or all ordinances, or to both, but who had not put on Christ. This was peculiarly in its place, because this Gospel attests the dealings of grace which would take the place of Judaism, both externally and internally.

After this the Lord turns to the multitude. As He had shown the hindrance on man’s part to coming, so He gravely warns those that were following Him in great numbers, and says,

If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple {Luke 14:26}.

The moral difficulties are most earnestly pressed upon those who were so ready to follow Him. Would it not be well and wise to sit down first and count the cost of building the tower completely? to consider whether, with the strength they had, they could cope with the vastly greater forces against them? Yet is it no question of mustering resources after a human way, but of forsaking all one’s own, and so being Christ’s disciple. There is such a thing as persons beginning well, and turning out good-for-nothing.

Salt is good {Luke 14:34};

but what if it becomes savourless? Wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is fit neither for land nor dunghill. They cast it out (or, it is cast out).

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear {Luke 14:35}.

Then follows a profound and lovely unfolding of grace in Luke 15. In the close of the preceding chapter, the impossibility for man in flesh to be a disciple was made evident. Such was the great lesson there. But now we have the other side of grace. If man failed in attempting to be a disciple, how is it that God makes disciples? Thus we have the goodness of God to sinners brought out in three forms. First, the shepherd goes after the wandering sheep. This is very clearly grace as shown in Christ the Son of man, who came to seek and to save that which was lost.

The next parable is not of the Son who bears the burden; for there is but one Saviour, even Christ. Nevertheless the Spirit of God has a part, and a very blessed part, in the salvation of every soul brought to God. It is not as the Good Shepherd who lays down His life, nor as the Great Shepherd brought again from the dead through the blood of the everlasting covenant, laying the sheep once lost, now found, on His shoulders rejoicing, as it is presented in Luke only. What we have here is the figure of a woman that lights a candle, sweeps the house, and uses the most diligent exertion till the lost thing is found. Is not this in beautiful harmony with the function of the Spirit as to the sinner’s soul? I cannot doubt this is seen in the woman’s part (not, if I may so say, the prominent public actor, who is ever Christ the Son). The Spirit of God has rather the energetic agency, comparatively a hidden power, however visible the effects. It is not One that acts as a person outside; and this therefore was most fitly set forth by the woman inside the house. It is the Spirit of God working within, His private and searching operation in secret with the soul, however truly also the candle of the word is made to shine. Need I remark that it is the Spirit of God’s part to cause the word to bear on men as a shining light? It is not the Shepherd who lights the candle, but He bears the stray sheep on His shoulders. We know very well that the Word of God, the Shepherd, is looked at elsewhere as the true light Himself; but here it is a candle which is lit, and therefore quite inapplicable to the person of Christ. But it is precisely that which the Spirit of God does. The word of God preached, the Scripture, may have been read a hundred times before; but at the critical moment it is light to the lost one. Diligence is used in every way; and we know how the Spirit of God condescends to this, what painstaking He uses in pressing the word home upon the soul, and causing the light
to shine exactly at the right moment where all before was dark. In this second parable, accordingly, it is not active going away from God which is seen; a condition worse than this appears -- a dead thing. It is the only parable of the three which presents the lost one not as a living creature, but as dead. From elsewhere we know that both are true; and the Spirit of God describes the sinner both as one alive in the world going away from God (Rom. 3), and as dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2). We could not have a proper conception of the sinner's condition unless we had these two things. One parable was needed to shew us a sinner in the activities of life departing from God, and another to represent the sinner as dead in trespasses and sins. Here exactly these two things are seen, the lost sheep shewing the one, and the lost piece of money the other.

In addition to these, there is a third parable necessary: not only a strayed sheep and a lost inanimate piece of money, but, besides, the moral history of man away from the presence of God, but coming to Him again. Hence the parable of the lost son takes man from the very first, traces the beginning of his departure, and the course and character of the misery of a sinner on the earth, his repentance, and his final peace and joy in the presence of God, who Himself rejoices as truly as man objects. Practically this is true of every sinner. In other words, there is a little yielding to sin, or desire to be independent of God -- a farther and farther depth of evil in every person's history. I do not believe that the chapter discusses the question of a backsliding child of God, though a common principle of course, here and there, would apply to the restoration of a soul. This is a favourite idea with some who are more familiar with doctrine than with Scripture. But there are objections, plain, strong, and decisive, against understanding the chapter thus. First, it does not suit, in the smallest degree, what we have just seen in the parables of the lost sheep and the lost piece of money. Indeed it seems to me impossible to reconcile such an hypothesis even with the simple and repeated expression "lost." For who will affirm that, when a believer slips away from the Lord, he is lost? The most opposed to this, singular to say, is the very school most prone to that misinterpretation. When a man believes, he is a lost sheep found; he may not run well, no doubt; but never does Scripture view him afterwards as a lost sheep. Just so is it with the lost drachma; and so, finally, with the lost son. The prodigal was not, in the first instance, an unfaithful saint; he was not a backslider merely, but lost and dead [Luke 15:24].

Are these strong figures ever true of him who is a child of God by faith? They are precisely true, if we look at Adam and his sons, viewed as children of God in a certain sense. So the apostle Paul told the Athenians, that we are also his offspring [Acts 17:28].

Men are God's offspring, as having souls and moral responsibility to God, made after His similitude and His image here below. In these and other respects men differ from the beast, which is merely a living creature that perishes in death. A beast, of course, has a spirit (else it could not live); but still, when it dies, the spirit goes down to the earth, even as its body; whereas a man's spirit, when he dies (no matter as to this whether lost or saved), goes to God, as it came directly from God. There is that which, either for good or evil, is immortal in the spirit of man, as being breathed directly and immediately from God in the nostrils of man. Of the evangelists, Luke is the one who most speaks of man in this solemn light; and this, not only in his Gospel, but in the Acts of the Apostles. It connects itself with the large moral place he gives man, and as the object of divine grace.

A certain man had two sons [Luke 15:11];
so that man is looked at from his very origin. Then we have this son going farther and farther away from God, till he comes to the worst. There lay the opportunity of grace; and God brought him to a sense, not perhaps deep but most real, of his distance from God Himself as well as his degradation, sin, and ruin. It was by the pinch of want he was brought to himself -- by intense personal misery; for God deigns to use any and every method in His grace. It was shame, and suffering, and wretchedness, which led him to feel he was perishing; and wherefore? He looks back to Him from whom he departed, and grace puts into his heart the conviction of goodness in God as of badness in himself. This was really wrought in him; it was repentance -- repentance towards God; for it was not a mere conscientious judgment upon himself and his past conduct, but self-judgment from God, to which His goodness led him -- led him by faith back to Himself.

I will arise,
then he says,
and go to my father, and say, Father, I have sinned
against heaven, and in thy sight [Luke 15:18].

However there is no need at present to dwell on this, which no doubt, is familiar to most here. This only it may be well to add, that we have here evidently a moral history; but then there is another side, and that is, the ways of Christ, and the Father's grace with the returned prodigal. Accordingly we have this in two parts: first, the reception of the prodigal; next, the joy and love of God the Father, and the prodigal's communion with it when he had been received. The father receives him with open arms, ordering the best robe, everything worthy of himself, to be brought out in honour of the prodigal. Afterwards, we see the son in the father's presence. It sets forth the joy of God reproducing itself in all that are there. It is not a sketch of what we shall taste when we go to heaven, but rather the spirit of heaven made good now on earth in the worship of those who are brought to God. It is not at all a question of what we were, save only to enhance that which grace gives and makes us. All turns on the excellent efficacy of Christ and the Father's own joy. This forms the material and the character of the communion, which is in principle Christian worship.

On the other hand, it was too true that the joy of grace is intolerable to the self-righteous man; he has no heart for God's goodness to the lost; and the scene of joyful communion with the Father provokes in him outrageous opposition to God's way and will. For he is not a self-righteous Christian, any more than the prodigal
represents a believer overtaken in a fault. No Christian is contemplated as cherishing such feelings as these; though I deny not that legalism involves the principle. But here it is one who would not come in. Every Christian is brought to God. He may not fully enjoy or understand his privileges, but he has a keen sense of his short-comings, and feels the need of divine mercy, and rejoices in it for others. Would the Lord describe the Christian as outside the presence of God? Accordingly, the elder brother here, I have no doubt, represents such as condemned Jesus for eating with sinners; the self-righteousness more particularly of the Jew, as indeed of any denier of grace.

The next chapter (Luke 16) opens out distinct and weighty instruction for the disciples, and this in reference to earthly things. First of all, our Lord explains here that the tenure of earthly things is now gone. It was no longer a question of holding a stewardship, but of giving it up. The steward was judged. Such was the truth manifest in Israel. Continuance in his old earthly position was now closed for the unjust steward; and for him it was simply a question of his prudence in present opportunities, with a view to the future. The unjust steward is made the vehicle of divine teaching to us how to make the future our aim. He, being a prudent man, thinks of what is to become of him when he loses his stewardship; he looks before him; he thinks of the future; he is not engrossed in the present; he weighs and considers how he is to get on when he is no longer steward. So he makes a wise use of his master’s goods. With people indebted to his master, he strikes off a great deal from this bill and a great deal from that, in order to make friends for himself. The Lord says this is the way we are to treat earthly things. Instead of tenaciously clutching at what you have not yet got, and keeping what you have, on the contrary, regard them as your master’s goods, and treat them as the unjust steward in the parable. Rise above the unbelief which looks at money, or other present possessions, as if they were your own things. It is not so. What you have after an earthly sort now belongs to God. Show that you are above a Jewish, earthly, or human feeling about it. Act on the ground that all belongs to God, and thus secure the future.

This is the grand point of our Gospel, from the transfiguration more particularly, but indeed all through. It is the slight of present treasure on earth, because we look on to the unseen, eternal, and heavenly things. It is the faith of disciples acting on the prudence of the far-seeing steward, though of course hating his injustice. The principle to act on is this, that what nature calls my own is not my own, but God’s. The best use to make of it is, treating it as His, to be as generous as may be, looking out against the future. It is easy to be generous with another’s goods. This is the way of faith with what flesh counts its own things. Do not count them your own, but look at and treat them as God’s. Be as generous as you please: He will not take it amiss. This is evidently what our Lord insists on; and here is the application to the disciples:

Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail [or, it fails], they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

{Luke 16:9}.

You are not going to be on the earth long; other habitations are for ever. Sacrifice what nature calls its own, and would always hold fast if it could. Faith counts these things God’s; freely sacrifice them, in view of what shall never pass away. Then he adds the pregnant lesson --

He that is faithful in that which is least [after all it is only the least things now] is faithful also in much {Luke 16:10}.

Indeed there is more than this. It is not only the littleness of the present compared with the greatness of the future, but besides --

If, therefore, ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another’s [I leave out the word “man’s,” it is really God who is meant by it], who shall give you that which is your own? {Luke 16:11, 12}.

What can be of its kind a more wonderfully divine touch than this? Exactly where man counts things his own, faith admits God’s claim, another’s; exactly where we might count things only God’s, it sees one’s own. Our own things are in heaven. He that is faithful in the little now will have much entrusted then; he that knows how to use the unrighteous mammon now, whose heart is not in it, who does not value it as his treasure, on the contrary, will have then the true riches. Such is the Lord’s remarkable teaching in this parable.

Next, He gives us the rich man and Lazarus; which brings all out to view, the bright and dark side, in appearance and in reality, of the future as well as of the present. See one sumptuously faring every day, attired in fine linen and purple, a man living for self; near whose door lies another, suffering, loathsome, so abjectly in want and so friendless that the dogs do the service which man had no heart for. The scene changes suddenly. The beggar dies, and angels carry him into Abraham’s bosom. The rich man died, and was buried (we hear not that Lazarus was); his funeral was as grand as his life; but in hell he lifted up his eyes, being tormented. There and then he sees the blessedness of him he had despised in presence of his own grandeur. It is the solemn light of eternity let into the world; it is God’s estimate underneath outward appearances. The truth is for souls now. It is given not to think of in hades, but here; and yet we have, as most fitly winding up the tale, the earnest pleadings of the man who never before thought in his life seriously of eternal things. Hear now his anxiety for his brothers. There was no real love for souls, but a certain anxious desire for his brothers. At least one learns how real a thing his anguish was. But the Lord’s comment is decisive. They had Moses and the prophets; if they heard not them, neither would they hear if one rose from the dead. What a truth, and how thoroughly about to be verified in His own rising from the dead, not to speak of another Lazarus raised in witness of His glory as the Son of God! Those who believed not Moses rejected Christ’s resurrection, as they consulted to put Lazarus also to death, and sunk themselves under their own base lie (Matt. 28:11-15) even to this day.
Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Gospels

Lecture 8

Luke 17 – 24

The last chapter gave, in the judgment of present things, another world, and eternal things in good and evil, the Lord’s instruction for the disciples after the dealings of grace in John 15, and this as the only true power of estimating the present world (that is to say, by the standard of the future -- the eternal future of God). In order to complete that picture, our Lord gave a sight not only of one blessed man who had lived in what is eternal, while experiencing the bitterness of this evil age, but of another who lived only for the present, despising God’s message about eternity.

In Luke 17 there follow further lessons communicated still to the disciples; and, first of all, a solemn warning as to stumbling-blocks. It is possible that offences will come; but woe to him through whom they come! Next, while there is a strong exhortation against stumbling others, there is an equally urgent call to forgive others. We are to be firm against ourselves; we are to be firm for our brethren, even where they touch ourselves. Therefore the apostles, feeling the difficulty, as indeed it is impossible to nature so to walk, ask of the Lord to increase their faith. The Lord intimates in reply that faith grows, and even in the presence of difficulty. It seeks what belongs not to nature, but to God. On the other hand, in the midst of any answers that God may vouchsafe, and of all service rendered to Him, the admonitory word is added, that when we have done all things -- not when we have failed -- we are unprofitable servants. Such is the true language and feeling for a disciple’s heart. This closes the direct teaching here addressed to His followers (Luke 17:1-10).

Our Lord is next (Luke 17:11-19) presented in a very characteristic way, showing that faith does not necessarily wait for a change of dispensation. He had been laying down the duty of faith in many various forms in the early verses of this chapter. It is here shewn that faith always finds its place of blessing with God, and proves Him superior to forms; but God is only found in Jesus.

In the ten lepers this blessed principle is brought out clearly. The healing of the Lord was equally manifest in all; but there is a power superior to that which cleanses the body, even were it desperately leprous. The power that belongs to and comes out from God is but a small thing in comparison with the knowledge of God Himself. This alone brings to God in spirit (as it did really by the cross of Christ). Observe, that he who exemplifies this action of divine grace was one that knew not traditional religion as the others did, that had no great privileges to boast of in comparison with the rest. It was the Samaritan in whom the Lord illustrated the power of faith. He had told the ten equally to go and show themselves to the priest; and as they went they were cleansed. One only, seeing he was cleansed, turns back, and with a loud voice glorified God. But the way in which he glorified God was not by merely ascribing the blessing to God.

He fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan {Luke 17:16}.

Apparently this was disobedience; and the others could well reproach their Samaritan fellow that he was unfaithful to Jesus. But faith is always right, whatever appearances may say: I speak not now of a fancy, of course, -- not of any eccentric humour or delusion too often covered over with the name of faith. Real faith which God gives is never so far wrong: and he who, instead of going on to the priest, recognizes in Jesus the power and goodness of God upon earth, (the instincts of that very faith that was of God working in his heart and carrying him back to the source of the blessing,) -- he, I say, was the only one of the ten who was in the spirit, not only of the blessing, but of Him who gave the blessing. And so our Lord Jesus vindicates him.

Were there not ten cleansed?
said the Saviour;

but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger {Luke 17:17, 18}.

Faith invariably discovers the way to give glory to God. It matters not whether it be in Abraham or in a Samaritan leper, its path is entirely outside the ken of nature, yet faith does not fail to discern it; the Lord assuredly puts His seal upon it, and grace supplies all needed strength to follow.

But this was in its principle the judgment of the Jewish system. It was the power of faith leaving Judaism to itself, mounting in Jesus to the source of both law and grace, but not putting the legal system down. This was for other hands. Faith does not destroy; it has no such commission: angels will have that province another day. But faith finds its own deliverance now, leaving those who are under the law, and love not grace, to the law which condemns. For itself it discovers the blessedness of freedom from the law, yet is not lawless to God, but, on the contrary, legitimately bound (Δι' Νομοσύνος) to Christ, really and duly subject to Him, and so much the more because not under law. In the present case,
the cleansed Samaritan in going to Jesus was very simply under grace, in the spirit that animated his heart and formed his path, as Luke the evangelist here records.

How admirably this tale is adapted to the whole tone and character of the Gospel, I need not delay to prove. It must be plain enough, I think, even to a superficial reader, that as Luke alone gives the account, so to Luke it is most especially adapted for the purpose that the Holy Ghost had in hand in this Gospel, and also in this particular context.

We have further, in our Lord’s answer to the Pharisees, who demanded when the kingdom of God should come, a striking revelation, and most suitable to Luke’s purpose.

The kingdom of God cometh not with observation {Luke 17:20}.

It is not a question of signs, wonders, or outward show. It is not that God did not accompany His message with signs. But the kingdom of God, revealed in the person of Christ, went deeper, appeals to faith (not sight), and demands the Holy Ghost’s action in the soul to give the sinner to see and enter it. Here it is not a question exactly of entering or seeing, as in John 3, but rather the moral character of the entrance of God’s kingdom among men. It does not address itself to the senses or the mere mind of man; it carries its own evidence with it to the conscience and the heart. As being the kingdom of God, it is impossible that His kingdom should come, without adequate testimony in love to man, who is sought for it. At the same time man, having a bad conscience and a depraved heart, slights God’s word as well as kingdom, and looks for that which would please himself by gratifying his feelings, mind, or even lower nature. Our Lord, however, first of all lays down this great principle: it is no question of a

Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you {Luke 17:21}.

The kingdom was actually there; for He, God’s King, was there. Then, after settling this moral truth which was fundamental for the soul, He turns to His disciples, and tells them that the days would come when they should desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and should not see it; for the kingdom will be displayed by and by.

When they shall say to you, See here; or, see there: go not after them, nor follow them. For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day. But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation {Luke 17:22-25}.

This is the necessary moral order of God. Jesus must first suffer; so

the sufferings of Christ,
as Peter said afterwards,

and the glories that should follow {1 Pet. 1:11}.

Such is the invariable method of God in dealing with a sinful world, where He brings in, not a test of man, but the effectual work of His own grace. But this presentation to faith now, as we have seen, does not hinder the Lord from speaking of another day, when the kingdom of God would be manifest. Before that day of His appearing there might be a premature

Lo here! or, lo there!

The godly must not follow men’s cries, but count on the Lord. He compares it to the days of Noe (that is, to the day of God’s past judgment of man and his ways); then to the days of Lot.

First of all, then, we have, for the disciples, God’s ways in grace, in the Son of man that first suffers, and finally will appear in power and glory. As for the world, careless indifference and enjoyment of present things will characterise the future as the past; but they will be surprised by the Lord in the midst of heedless folly. To this the Lord appends a peculiar, but not less solemn, though brief word:

Remember Lot’s wife {Luke 17:32}!

Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it {Luke 17:33}.

Apparently the wife of Lot was rescued by angelic power; she was certainly brought out of the doomed city; but it was only the more strikingly to be the monument of God’s all-searching judgment. There she stands alone. The others perished; but she abode a pillar of salt, when Moses wrote the (morally speaking) imperishable memorial of God’s hatred of a false heart, which, spite of outward deliverance, gave its affections still to a scene devoted to destruction. And so our Lord adds here what touched, not merely the Jewish system, but the condition and doom of the world at large. He lets us know that in that night two should be in one bed; one taken, and the other left. So two women at the mill; for here we have not to do with human judgments. God will then judge the quick; and so, no matter what the association, the employment, or the sex, whether within doors or without, there can be no shelter or exemption. Two might be ever so closely knit together, but God would discriminate according to the nicety of His own discernment of their state: one should be taken, and the other left.

And they answered, and said unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together {Luke 17:37}.

Wherever there is that which is dead, and consequently offensive morally unto God, there unquestionably will His judgments fall.

But along with this we have also prayer (Luke 18), not merely as suitable to a soul’s need, and in connection with the word of God received from Jesus, which we have seen in Luke 11. Here it is prayer out of the midst of circumstances of desolation and deep trial -- prayer with evil near at hand, as well as divine judgment. Consequently its ultimate bearing is in connection with the tribulation of the last days. But, at the same time, Luke never confines his view to outward facts. Hence, it is said,

He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray {Luke 18:1}.

It is the more striking, because the circumstances are
evidently limited; while that which He draws from them is
universal. The Lord is exhorting to prayer, in view of the
final trial; nevertheless, He prefaces it with a plain moral
precept on the value of prayer at all times --
that men *ought always* to pray, and not to faint
{Luke 18:1}.

Certainly God will not be heedless to the continual cry of His
own seemingly desolate elect in their fiery trial, where all the
might of man is against them; but still the duty always
remains true.

Now, it is Luke alone who thus treats the matter; the
great moral value attached to prayer, at the same time
connected, it may be, with general circumstances of sorrow,
but bearing on the circumstances of the last day. The parable
is intended to give or increase confidence in the heed God
pays to the prayer of distress. Spite of indifference, an unjust
judge yields to the importunity of a poor widow. If a bad man
so acted, not because of his hatred of the wrong done to her
that was oppressed, but to get rid of being always troubled by
her cries for justice -- if it be so even with the unjust, would
not God take up the cause of His own elect, that cried unto
Him day and night? It could not but be. He will avenge them
speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall
He find faith on the earth? (Luke 18:1-8.)

Then follows another parable of a very different
character. It is not the value of persistent prayer, and the
certainty of God appearing even for the weakest, no matter
how apparently deserted (indeed, so much the more, *because*
of it in His own). We have, further, the moral condition of
man illustrated in two ways -- a broken spirit with little light
but a real sense of sin, and another soul satisfied with itself
in the presence of God.

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted
in themselves that they were righteous, and despised
others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the
one a Pharisee, and the other a publican
{Luke 18:9, 10}.

Not that the Pharisee represents a man who denies God, or
who is not a religious man. He is religious, but such religion
is the most damning thing about him. The evil is not merely
his sins, but his religion: nothing more blinding to himself
and other men, nothing more dishonouring to God. On the
other hand, the poor publican has neither clear light nor
peace, but at least he realises the commencement of all true
light -- he has learned enough of God to condemn himself.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom
{Psa. 11:10; Prov. 9:10}.

He alone of the two judged things according to his little light.
He judged himself truly, and, therefore, was in a moral
condition to see other things aright, as God should bring them
before him. There was as yet no such privilege known as a
purged worshipper having no more conscience of sins.
Therefore, the convicted publican is found outside, beating
his breast, and standing at a distance, not so much as looking
up. It was suitable that it should be so; for Christ's work was
not yet wrought, still less applied to his soul. It would have
been not faith, but presumption, I do not doubt, at such a
time, and under such circumstances, for him to have come
nigh. All was in its season. But if God invites a believer now
to draw near into the holiest of all, is it not equal presumption
for that soul to quarrel with the grace of God displayed in
Christ's work of redemption, and to raise questions about its
effects for itself? God may, and does, bear with the wound to
His own grace; and He has His way of correcting such
wrong; but there is no ground in the parable to warrant what
is too often founded upon it. We owe it to Christ to resent
every misinterpretation which goes to undo what He has done
on the cross. The publican before us was not meant to give us
a full view of the Christian state, or of the blessings of the
gospel, but of a man taught of God to feel his own
nothingness as a sinner before Him; and God's estimate of
him, in comparison with the man who was satisfied with his
state. It is humility, founded upon the sense of unworthiness,
which is always right, as far as it goes (Luke 18:9-14).

Next is set forth humility, founded on our littleness
(Luke 18:15-17). Many a man is consciously unworthy,
because he feels himself a sinner who has no just sense of his
littleness in the presence of God. Our Lord here gives this
further lesson to the disciples, and uses a child as the text.
We shall find how much it was needed if we look into the

Then we have the ruler, to whom our Lord shows that all
was wrong, where a soul is not brought to know that there is
none good but God. Had he really known how good God is he
would have soon seen God in Jesus. He saw nothing of the
sort. He knew neither God nor good. He looked upon the
Lord merely as good after a human fashion. If He was but a
man, there was no goodness in Him; it is only in God: God
alone is good. If Jesus were not God, He was not good. The
young ruler had no right, no just title to say,

   Good Master {Luke 18:18},

unless that master were God. This he saw not; and, therefore,
the Lord proves him, and searches the ground of his heart,
and demonstrates that after all he valued the world more than
God and eternal life. This he had never suspected in himself
before. He loved his natural position; he loved to be a ruler,
though a young one; he loved his possessions; he loved what
he had of present advantages in the world. He really clave to
all these things without knowing it himself. The Lord,
therefore, calls upon him to give them up, and follow Him.
He thought there was no demand of goodness but what he was
able to meet; but the trial was too much for him. Man was
not good -- God only. Jesus, who was God, had given up
beyond all comparison more, yea, infinitely.

What had He not given up, and for whom? He was God,
and proved it not least in a self-abnegation truly divine

Then we have the hearers and disciples disclosing their
thoughts. They began to claim something of credit for what
they had given up. The Lord admits that there is no
abandonment of faith but what will meet with a most adequate
remembrance from the Lord another day.

But, at the same time, He takes unto Him the twelve, and
says,
Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished.

This is what He was looking for, whatever they were.

For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on; and they shall scourge him, and put him to death; and the third day he shall rise again; and they understood none of these things. And this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken (Luke 18:31-34).

It is an important lesson, and not the first time we find it in Luke, and, indeed, in other Gospels also. Nor can it be too often repeated, that lack of intelligence in Scripture does not depend upon the obscurity of the language, but because the will does not like the truth that is taught. This is the reason why difficulties are felt and abound. When a man is made willing to receive the truth, his eye is single and his whole body full of light. The will is the real hindrance. The mind will be clear, if the conscience and the heart be set right. Where, on the contrary, God breaks down the believer, and sets him free in the liberty wherewith the Son makes free, the conscience is purged, and the heart turned towards Himself. All then becomes right: he is brought into the light of God; he sees light in God's light. Was this the condition of the disciples as yet? Were they not still cleaving to their own cherished expectations of Messiah, and an earthly kingdom? They could not understand Him, no matter how plain the words employed. The hardness of His saying lay not in any lack of perspicuity. Never man spake as this man, His enemies themselves being judges; neither was it from any defect in their natural understanding that the disciples were thus slow. The state of the heart, as ever, was in question; the will was at fault, even though they were regenerate. It was their reluctance to receive what Jesus taught that made the difficulty; and it is the same thing still with believers, as with others.

In Luke 18:35 we enter on the closing section of all the historical Gospels, as is well known, that is to say, the entrance into Jerusalem from Jericho. Only there is a difficulty here to some -- that Luke appears to contradict what we have in the other accounts of this part of Christ's progress.

It came to pass, that as he came nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the wayside begging (Luke 18:35).

From the other Gospels we know it was when He went out of Jericho, not when He came in. The truth is, that our English version, excellent as it is, goes a little beyond the word of Luke; for our evangelist does not say “When he was come nigh unto Jericho,” but when he was nigh.

It is not necessarily a question of coming near, but simply of being in the neighbourhood. The utmost, which can or ought to be allowed is, that if the context so required, it might bear the translation (a paraphrase rather) of coming nigh; but this case demands the very reverse. It is evident, whether you go into a place or whether you come out of it, you are equally nigh on one side of the town or on the other. The truth is, that Luke merely states the fact of vicinity here. Further, we know that just as Matthew, for his design, so he displaces facts historically for the purpose of giving a more forcible moral picture of the truth in hand. I have little doubt that in this case the reason for putting the blind man here rather than in leaving the town was, that for Jericho He reserved the wonderful call of Zaccheus, with the object of bringing that tale of grace, characteristic of His first advent, into juxtaposition with the question and parable of the kingdom, which illustrates His second advent; for immediately afterwards we have His correction of the disciples' thoughts, that the kingdom of God was immediately going to appear, because He was going up to Jerusalem. They expected that He was going to take the throne of David at once. Accordingly, Luke puts together those two features -- the grace that illustrates His first coming, and the real nature of the second coming of Christ, as far as regards the appearing of God's kingdom. Now, had the story of the blind man healed at Jericho been left for its historical place, it would have cut the thread of these two circumstances. There is, therefore; in this, as it appears to me, an ample and divine reason why the Spirit of God led the writer to present the cure of the blind man as we find it. But then he does not say what the English version makes him say, “As he was come nigh,” but simply,

When he was nigh to Jericho,
leaving it open to other Scriptures to define the time with more precision. He only states that it was while the Lord was in the neighbourhood. The other Gospels positively tell us it was as He went out. Clearly, therefore, we must interpret the general language of Luke by the exacter marks of the time and place of those who declare it was as He was going out. Nothing can be simpler. The healing of the blind man was a kind of final testimony that Messiah was there. He was coming in the way; not of the power that once overthrew Jericho, but of grace that showed and could meet the real condition of Israel. They were blind. Had they possessed the faith only to cry to Messiah about their blindness; He was there with power and willingness to heal them. There was none but a blind man or two to own real need, but our Lord at least healed all who cried (Luke 18:35-43).

Then, as He entered Jericho, Zaccheus, the chief of the tax-gatherers, was mightily stirred with the desire to see this wondrous man, the Son of man. Hence he lets nothing stand in the way. Neither personal deficiency, nor the crowd that was there, is allowed to hinder his intense purpose of heart to see the Lord Jesus. He therefore climbs up a sycamore tree by the way; and Jesus knowing well the desire of Zaccheus, and the faith that was at work there however feebly, at once, to his joy and astonishment, invites Himself to his house.

Zaccheus, make haste, and come down; for to-day I must abide at thy house. And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully (Luke 19:5, 6).
All fell to murmuring. It was the same tale at the end as at the beginning.

And Zaccheus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold {Luke 19:8}.

He had been really a conscientious man. He was a man thus characterised; for it is no promise of what he is going to do, but he mentions that which was no doubt a fact about himself at that very moment. He was what men call a just and good man, yet a chief tax-gatherer and a wealthy one, though they be hard things to put together. Here was a tax-gatherer who, if through incautiousness or any defect guilty of wrong to another, needed no pressure to restore fourfold. Such was his habit. Our Lord, however, cuts it all short. As a matter of human righteousness, it was well; it was the proof that Zaccheus exercised himself as a man to have a conscience void of offence in his own way. Nor is this out of keeping with the tenor of Luke's Gospel, as, indeed, it is only here that we have the story at all. Our Lord, however, shows that it was not the time to think or speak of such matters.

This day is salvation come to this house, inasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost {Luke 19:9, 10}.

How infinite the blessing! Was it a fitting time for speaking of himself? It was not a question of man's walking righteously, or of talking about it. In truth, man was lost; but the Son of man was there to bear his burden. This great and glorious fact superseded all others. Whatever there had been working in him at any time, all was now swallowed up in the presence of the Son of man seeking and saving the lost. What can give us a more vivid, true, and blessed representation of the Lord Jesus Christ in His first coming with the grace of God that brings salvation? {Luke 19:1-10}.

Immediately after (and, if I mistake not, expressly put in close conjunction with this) is the parable of the nobleman who goes into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. They were all wrong, therefore, in looking for the kingdom of God immediately to appear. Not so. Christ was going away to heaven to receive the kingdom from God there -- not about to take it from man now and in this world. It is evidently, therefore, a picture of the Lord's return at the second advent, after having received a kingdom. It was not a question of human willingness or power, but of receiving from God. But then, further, He shows that meanwhile His servants are called to occupy themselves till He come. He called His servants, and delivered to them ten pounds; and said unto them,

Occupy till I come {Luke 19:13}.

Then we find another picture -- His citizens hating Him; for nothing can be more elaborate than this parable. The Lord's relation to the kingdom at the second advent is contrasted with the grace that flows out in the former part of the chapter. This is the main subject with which the parable opens. Next, we have the place of the servants responsible to use what the Lord gives. Such is another great point shown out here. It is not, as in the Gospel of Matthew, the Lord giving different gifts to different servants, which is equally true; but here it is the moral test of the servants carried out by each having the same sum. This proves yet more than in the other case how far they laboured. They started with similar advantages. What was the result? Meanwhile hatred became apparent in the citizens, who represent the unbelieving Jews settled down in the earth.

When he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded those servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy mina hath gained ten minas {Luke 19:15, 16};

and so with the other; and then we hear of the one who says,

Lord, behold, here is thy mina, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: for I feared thee {Luke 19:20, 21}.

There was no confidence in His grace. The consequence is, that, treating the Lord as a froward man, he finds Him froward. Unbelief finds its own response as truly as faith does. As

it is unto thee according to thy faith {Matt. 9:29},

so alas! the converse proves true. It is to man according to his unbelief.

Further, we have a remarkable difference in the rewards here. It is not,

Enter into the joy of thy Lord {as in Matt. 25:21, 23};

but one receives ten cities, another five, and so on. He that was fearful and unbelieving, on the contrary, has his mina taken from him. Again, then enemies are brought forward. The unfaithful servant is not called an enemy, though, no doubt, he was no friend of the Son, and dealt with righteously. But the open adversaries are called into the scene; and as the Lord here pronounces those men His enemies which would not that He should reign over them, He says,

Bring them hither, and slay them before me {Luke 19:27}.

Thus the parable is a very complete sketch of the general results of the Lord's second advent for the citizens of the world, as well as of the occupation and reward of the servants who serve Him faithfully meanwhile. {Luke 19:11-27.}

Next, we have the entrance into Jerusalem. We need not dwell on the scene of the riding in on the colt; but that which is peculiar to Luke claims our attention for a moment.

And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen: saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest {Luke 19:37, 38}.

Thus the Spirit of God works to give them a step, and a great
step, in divine intelligence beyond the song of the angels at the beginning. What they justly sang at the birth of Jesus was,

Peace on earth: good will [that is, God's good will] in men {Luke 2:14},

ushered in by glory to God in the highest. Here we have a signal change or converse.

Glory in the highest

is the result, not the introduction; and instead of

peace on earth,

(which will, no doubt, be the fruit by and by, as it is according to God's mind, the anticipation from the beginning,) the disciples meanwhile, and most appropriately, sing,

Peace in heaven.

It was not a question of peace on earth now. The reason was manifest: the earth was unready, was about to judge unjustly, and to be judged. Jesus was on the very point of being cast out and cut off. He was really in heart thoroughly rejected already; but He was shortly to enter on other sufferings, even to the death of the cross. The effect, then, of that which was imminent was not peace for the earth yet, but peace in heaven most assuredly; and therefore we can comprehend how the Lord guided by His Spirit the song of the disciples at the close just as much as at the beginning; that of the angels expressed the general idea of God's purposes -- the moral effects to spring from the death of the incarnate Son.

After this we hear the murmuring Pharisees rebuked, who would have had the disciples rebuked for their song: if they had not sung it, the stones must have cried out; and the Lord vindicates the blameless (Luke 19:39, 40).

Then follows that most touching scene, peculiar to and characteristic of Luke -- Jesus weeping over Jerusalem. It was not at the grave of the one He loved, though about to call from the grave. The weeping in John is in the presence of death, which had touched Lazarus. It is therefore infinitely more personal, though it be also the wondrous sight of One who, coming with the consciousness of divine power to banish death and bring life into the scene, yet in grace nevertheless did not one whit the less, but the more, feel the power of death as no mere man ever felt, yet as none but a real man could feel. There never was any one that had such a sense of death before as Jesus, just because He was life, the energy of which, combined with perfect love, made the power of death to be so sensible. Death does not feel death, but life did. Therefore He that was (and not merely had) life, as no one else, weeps in the presence of death, groaning in spirit at the grave. His having power to banish death weakened His sense of it in no respect. If poor dying man felt it somewhat, the Word made flesh, the God-man, entered into it in spirit the more because He was God, though man. But here we have another scene, His weeping over that very city that was about to cast Him out and crucify Him. Oh, it is a truth for us to treasure in our hearts -- His weeping in divine grace over guilty Jerusalem, forsaking its own mercies, rejecting its own Saviour -- the Lord God. Its desolation He predicts, and destruction, because the time of its visitation was unknown (Luke 19:41-44). His visit to the temple and its cleansing are mentioned summarily; as also His teaching there daily the chiefs of priest and people, with their desire to destroy Him, but hardly knowing how, for all the people hung on Him to hear.

In Luke 20 we have the various classes of religionists and worldly men trooping one after another, hoping somehow to ensnare or accuse the Lord of glory. Each of them falls into the trap which they had made for Him. Accordingly they do but discover and condemn themselves. We have the priests with their question of authority (Luke 20:1-8), then the people hearing the history of God's dealings with them, and their moral condition fully brought out (Luke 20:9-19). We have further the crafty spies, hired by the chief priests and scribes, that feigned themselves just, and thought to take hold of His words, and embroil Him with the earthly powers (Luke 20:20-26).

We have, after these, the Sadducees denying the resurrection (Luke 20:27-38). But here we may pause for a moment; for there are special and profoundly instructive touches peculiar to Luke. More particularly remark this -- that he alone, of all the evangelists, here characterizes men, in the activities of this life, as

the children of this world {Luke 20:34}
or age. They are persons who live merely for the present.

The children of this world [age] marry, and are given in marriage; but they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world [age], and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage, neither can they die any more; for they are equal unto the angels {Luke 20:34-36}.

In the resurrection state there will be no such relations. The difficulty existed for, or rather was made by, unbelief only. Indeed, what else can incredulity ever pretend to? It imagines difficulties, and nowhere so much as in the most certain truth of God. The resurrection is the great truth to which all things turn -- which the Lord has shown in its final form, too, in His own person now raised from the dead, then just about to follow. This truth was combatted and refused by the most active sect among the Jews at that time, the most intellectual and the best informed naturally. These were the persons who most of all set themselves against it.

But our Lord brings in another remarkable point here. Not only is God not the God of the dead, but of the living; but


Two great truths are here present -- living unto God after death, and future resurrection, when Jesus comes and brings in the new age. This was especially of value for Gentiles, because it was one of the great problems for the heathen mind, whether the soul existed after death, not to speak of the resurrection of the body. Naturally the Jews, save the unbelieving portion of them, looked for resurrection; but for the Gentiles the Spirit of God gives us our Lord's answer to the Sadducees, both proving the resurrection which is common to all the Gospels, and bringing in the living of dead
men in the separate state. It peculiarly fell within the domain of Luke.

This truth is not confined to the present portion of our Gospel. We have similar teaching elsewhere. Does not the account of the rich man and Lazarus intimate the same thing? Yea, more; not only the existence of the soul separate from the body, after death, of course, but also blessedness and misery at once. They are not absolutely dependent on the resurrection. Besides, there is the final publicly adjudicated portion of misery for body and soul before the great white throne. But, in Luke 16, blessedness and misery at once are felt by the soul in the dissolution of the link with the body.

The figures, no doubt, are taken, as they must be, from the body. Thus we find the desire for cooling of the tongue, which men of speculative mind use to prove that it was the time of being clothed with a real body. Nothing of the sort. The Spirit of God speaks to be understood, and (if He is to be understood by men) He Must deign to use language adapted to our comprehension. He cannot give us the understanding of a state which we have never experienced, unless it be by figures taken from the present state. A similar truth appears also later on in the case of the converted thief. The point there is just the same -- immediate blessedness, and not merely when the body is raised from the dead by and by. That is what he looked for, when he sought to be remembered, when Jesus comes in His kingdom. But the Lord adds more -- immediate blessedness now:

This day shalt thou be with me in paradise.

{Luke 23:43}.

Depend upon it, we cannot be too stringent in maintaining the importance both of the resurrection, and of the immediate blessedness or misery of the soul separate from the body before the resurrection. To give up the reality of the soul’s existence in either misery or blessedness at once is only a stepping-stone to materialism; and materialism is but a prelude to giving up both the truth and the grace of God, and all the awful reality of man’s sin and Satan’s power. Materialism always is essentially infidel, though far from being the only form of infidelity.

Towards the end of the chapter (Luke 20:39-44) our Lord puts the great question of His own person and the position He was just going to take, not on the throne of David, but on the throne of God. Was not He Himself, David’s son, owned as his Lord by David? On the person and position of Christ depends the whole of Christianity. Judaism, lowering the person, sees not, or denies the position. Christianity is based, not on the work only, but on the glory of the person and place of Him who is glorified in God. He takes that place as man. He who humbled Himself as man in suffering, is exalted as man to the glory of God on high.

Then follows the judgment -- but very briefly -- on the scribes; and in contrast with their selfish hypocrisy,

(which devour widows’ houses, and for a show make long prayers {Luke 20:47}),

the Lord’s estimate of real devotedness is the widow’s mites (Luke 21:1-4). Mark notices it as the service of faith, and so brings it into his Gospel of service. Luke shows it as a question of the heart’s state and trust in God. It fell, therefore, within the domain of these two.

We have after this the hearts of the disciples proved to be still earthly and Jewish; but the Lord brings before them, not the glory and beauty yet in store for Jerusalem, but it is judgment specially on the temple (Luke 21:5-36). At the same time we have particulars which demonstrate the weighty difference between this description of the judgment of the Jews and Jerusalem, and mark it off from the accounts of either Matthew or Mark. Observe more especially this, that here the Lord Jesus brings before us a very direct and immediate picture of the destruction of Jerusalem that was then imminent. Matthew passes by the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans {ep. Matt. 22:7}, and fixes attention upon that which will take place in the end of the age. Luke gives us this last also -- closes, at any rate, with the future crisis; but the main point in the central portion of Luke is to point out the destruction then actually at hand as a distinct state of things and time from the circumstances of the Son of man’s day. This is made perfectly plain to any one who considers it patiently. He says,

When ye shall see Jerusalem

-- not

the abomination of desolation {Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14}

(not a word about it here, for it belongs to the last days exclusively; but

when ye shall see Jerusalem) -- compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh.

Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains {Luke 21:20, 21}.

Not a word about the great tribulation, such as never was since time was; it is simply
days of vengeance.

These be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled {Luke 21:22}.

There is retributive severity, but not a sign appears of its being anything unparalleled.

There shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people {Luke 21:23}.

So there was.

And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations {Luke 21:24}.

This is a matter of fact description of what was really fulfilled to the letter in the capture of Jerusalem by the Romans under Titus. Thus there is no exaggerated description. The pretence of commentators, who rush to hyperbole as a cover for their misapplication, is cut off. Not that I allow it any more in Matthew. The only reason why men have so spoken of that evangelist is, because they turn aside his prophecy of the end of the age to that which has been already accomplished. When the last days come, be assured they will learn too late that there is no hyperbole with God or His word.

And Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the
Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled {Luke 21:24}.

Not only is there the sack of the city, the slaughter and captivity of the people, but continual occupation by their enemies till the termination of the period God allows the nations to have the supremacy over Israel. These times are going on now. Jerusalem has been trodden down of the Gentiles for many centuries, as every one knows, throughout mediavel and modern history. It seems particularly thus expressed, in order not to confuse the phrase to the Romans or previous imperial powers from Babylon downwards. Thus at the present time the Turks are the actual holders of it. The fact is notorious, that Jerusalem has been in the hands of many masters who have dealt hardly with the Jews. So He closes this matter.

Next, He introduces the last days.

And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars {Luke 21:25}.

There was not a word of all this when He spoke of the siege and capture of the city under Titus. After the Gentile domination is over (which clearly it is not yet), there shall be signs in the sun, and moon, and stars, and distress of nations; men’s hearts failing them for fear; for the powers of heaven shall be shaken; and then shall they see -- not when the Romans of old took the city, but, in the future crisis, when these astonishing tokens, heavenly and earthly, are given by God --

then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh {Luke 21:27, 28}.

He gives then a parable, but not of the fig tree only: this would not be suitable to the largeness of Luke’s scope.

Behold the fig tree, and all the trees {Luke 21:29}.

The difference between Luke and the others is this -- not that you have not the Jewish portion in his Gospel, but that, moreover, all the Gentiles are brought in. How perfect it all is! If it be but a parabolic description, the evangelist for the Gentiles not only gives the fig tree which is in Matthew, but the Gentile trees which are heard of nowhere else. That one tree notoriously applies to the Jews as a nation; the other figure

(all the trees)

adds the rest, so as to be universal.

Then the Lord adds some moral considerations for the heart:

Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come upon all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth {Luke 21:34, 35}.

Need it be remarked here that this again falls in with our evangelist beyond all others? So too the brief picture of His daily occupation in the temple, and of His nights apart at Olivet, which in no way precluded the people from coming to hear early in the morning. What unwearied travail of love!

In Luke 22 we see our Lord with the disciples, not now as a prophet, but about to become a sacrifice, meanwhile giving them the sweetest pledge of His love. On the other hand, there is the hatred of man, the weakness of the disciples, the falsehood of Peter, the treachery of Judas, the subtlety and terrors of the enemy who had the power of death. The day of unleavened bread comes on, and the passover must be killed; and Peter and John go to prepare it. According to the Lord’s word, the place was given.

And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: for I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God {Luke 22:14-16}.

It was the last act of communion of Christ with them. He eats with them: He will not drink. Another cup was before Him. As for this cup, they were to take it, and divide it among themselves. It was not the Lord’s Supper, but the paschal cup. He was about to drink of a far different cup, which His Father would give Him -- the anti-type of the passover, and the basis of the Lord’s Supper. But as to the cup before them, He says,

I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come {Luke 22:18}.

It was about to come morally; for Luke holds to that great principle -- the kingdom of God was about to be established in what you may call the Christian system. The phrase in Luke does not import some future dispensation or state of things about to be above or below, in visible power, but an imminent coming of God’s kingdom, really and truly here. The other Gospels connect it with the future; Luke speaks of what was to be made good shortly --

righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost {Rom. 14:17}.

Meanwhile, He gives them also a new thing. He took bread with thanksgiving, brake it, and gave to them, saying,

This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant 3 of my blood, which is shed for you {Luke 22:19, 20}.

It was not the point with Luke to say “for many,” while this was most appropriate in the Gospel of Matthew, because it intimates the extending of the efficacy of Christ’s blood beyond the Jew. The old covenant which condemned was limited. The new covenant (or, rather, the blood of the rejected Christ, the Son of man, on which it was based) refused such narrow barriers. In Luke the same thing occurs here, as we said applied to His account of the sermon on the mount. It is more personal, and hence deals more closely with

the heart and conscience. How many a man acknowledges justification by faith in a general sense, who, the moment you make it personal, would shrink from taking the place of a justified man, as if this would be too much for God to give him! But, in truth, it is impossible to go on with God aright, until the personal question is settled by divine grace. So the Lord here settles it for them personally.

This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you.

And truly the Son of man goeth, . . . but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed! {Luke 22:22}.

An awful moral contrast rises before the spirit of the Saviour. Thus He felt it: as it is said elsewhere,

He was troubled {John 13:21}.

There is much vagueness in minds as to this, merging all in the atonement, to the great detriment of their distinctness even in holding the atonement itself. To me it is a grievous thing, this denial practically of a large part of the sufferings of Christ. Pushed out, it rests on a want of faith in the real humanity of the Lord. I take for granted now that there is a firm hold of His bearing God’s wrath on the cross. But even where that is maintained in a general way, at least, it is an awful thing to deny any part of His moral glory; and what is it but denying this, to shut out those real sufferings which prove the extent and character of His humiliation, exalt and endear Himself in our eyes, and issue in the richest streams of comfort for His saints, who can afford to lose none of His sympathy?

Now, the Lord Jesus did feel the traitor’s heartless ways (and we may learn it yet more from Psa. 109). Surely also we ought to feel it, instead of merely treating it as a thing that must be, and which Scripture prepares us for, or which God’s goodness turns to gracious ends. All true enough: but are these the plaudities that content us before His troubled spirit? Or is not the sense of His sorrow to fill the heart in presence of this ineffable love, which endured all things for the elect’s sake? Yea, it was from all: our Lord has to meet shame in those He loved best.

They began to enquire among themselves which of them it was that should do this thing (Luke 22:23).

There was honesty in these hearts; but what ignorance! what unbrokenness of self!

There was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted greatest {Luke 22:24}.

Other evangelists, as well as Luke, mention that, when He was in the midst of His miracles and teaching, they were full of their unseemly rivalry; Luke mentions it where it was beyond comparison most painful and humiliating -- in presence of the communion of His body and His blood, and when they had just heard of the presence of the traitor in their midst, who was offering to sell their Master for thirty pieces of silver!

And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth (Luke 22:35-27).

What grace! what a pattern! But forget not the warning. The patronizing of the lordly benefactor has no place in Christ’s mind for His followers. To serve was the Lord’s place: may we prize it! (Luke 22:24-27).

Another touching and beautiful trait in our Lord’s dealing is here worthy of remark. He tells the disciples that it was they who had continued with Him in His temptations. In Matthew and Mark, and even in John, their forsaking of Christ is very conspicuous a little later. Luke alone tells how graciously He noticed their perseverance with Himself in His temptations. Both, of course, were perfectly true. In Luke it was the reckoning of grace. It was really the Lord who had designed to continue with them, and had sustained their faltering steps; but He could say,

Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel {Luke 22:28-30}.

It is always thus in grace. Matthew and Mark tell us the sad truth that, when He needed the disciples most, they all forsook Him and fled. His rejection was complete; and Old Testament Scripture was amply fulfilled. But, in view of the Gentile calling, New Testament grace has here a happier task.

Again, it is a scene peculiar to Luke, that, in the presence of the Saviour’s death, Satan sifts one of the chief followers that belonged to the Saviour. But the Lord turns the sifting, and even the downfall of the saint, to ultimate and great blessing, not for that soul only, but for others. How mighty, and wise, and good the ways of grace! not only its reckoning, but its experiences and its end! It was Simon that furnished the material.

Simon, Simon, says the Lord,

Satan hath desired [demanded] to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren {Luke 22:31, 32}.

Simon, sadly ignorant of himself, is full of bold promises to go to prison or to death; but, says the Lord,

Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me {Luke 22:34}.

All the evangelists record the fall: Luke alone records Christ’s gracious prayer for, and purpose in, his restoration.

Then comes in another communication of our Saviour not more interesting than full of instruction. It is the contrast of the condition of the disciples during His ministry, and that which must be now that He was going to die. It was indeed
concurrent with a change of vast import for Himself -- not awaiting His death, but in many respects beginning before it. The sense of His rejection and His approaching death not only pressed on the Saviour's spirit, but more or less also affects the disciples, who were under the pressure especially of what was done by men.

When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye anything? And they said, Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one. For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors [or, rather, lawlessness -- ἀνόμων]: for the things concerning me have an end. And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough [Luke 22:25-38].

It is not surprising that the disciples at that time failed to seize His meaning. Though all the rest of His teaching might have taught them better, they took His words in a material sense, and conceived that He urged them to take a literal sword. It is evident He took up the figure of a sword and purse to show, that instead of counting any more on miraculous resources, they must in future use, according to the measure of their personal faith, whatever God furnished them with; that is, they must employ natural things for the Lord, instead of being, as hitherto, shielded by supernatural power in the midst of their foes. We find them afterwards using miracles; but it was for others. In their earlier mission it was never needed. No blow fell upon them. No prison closed its doors upon one of the twelve, or of the seventy. They traversed the length and breadth of the land, everywhere bearing their plain, solemn testimony, ever guarded by God's power: just like their Master Himself. We see how truly miraculous this power was apart from any exertion of it on their own behalf. But now all was to change; and the disciple must be as His Master. Jesus was going to suffer. They must make up their minds to the same thing. Of course, they are not excluded from, but exhorted to, the looking up to God, and using faithfully whatever means the Lord gave them.

This, I apprehend, is the clear meaning of His altered language here. The Messiah was about to be openly cut off. The arm that had upheld them, and the shield that had been over them, are removed. So it was with Him. He was now about to face death; first in spirit, then in fact. Such was ever His way. Everything was in that order. He was surprised by nothing. He was not like a mere man who waited till he could not help following, and then went in steel, through the trouble. This may be the way of men, to avoid what they can, and think as little as possible of what is painful and disagreeable. It may even be according to men's ideas of a hero, but it is not the truth of Christ. On the contrary, though the true God, He was a true man, and a holy sufferer, having a heart that felt everything: this is the truth of Christ as man. Therefore He takes all from God, and feels all, as it really was for His glory.

Accordingly our Saviour, at the mount of Olives, (Luke 22:39-46) shows how true what I have just asserted is; for there it is that He is found first of all telling them to pray, lest they should enter into temptation. Temptation may come and test the heart; but our entering into it is quite another thing.

Pray that ye enter not into temptation. And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done [Luke 22:40-42].

Still farther to show its character, and His unimpeachable relation to God, as well as how really He was a suffering man,

there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground [Luke 22:43, 44].

So difficult is the path of faith for men in one direction or another, that (in earlier days when, in the midst of adversaries and full of superstition, men yet clung to the stainless honour of the Son of God) the timid orthodox ventured on the bold step of expunging verses 44, 45; for what, after all, is so adventurous as this Uzzah-like anxiety for the ark of God? They thought it impossible that the Lord Jesus could suffer thus. Little did they estimate the depth unfathomable of the cross, when God hid His face from Him. Had they discerned this better, and been simple in the faith of His real manhood, and held to the written word about His sufferings on and before the cross, they had not been so easily stumbled. But they were not simple, understood ill the Scriptures, and accordingly dared, some to stigmatize these verses, others to strike them out. In modern days they manage things both more prudently and more effectually. They may not obelize or obliterare; but they do not believe them. Men pass them over as if there was nothing for the soul in them, as if the Saviour Son of God condescended to a show, a pantomime, instead of enduring the severest conflict and anguish that ever had been the portion of a human heart on this earth. Never was any thing but reality in Jesus; but if in the days of His flesh there was one passage more affecting than another, any thing which more than another presents to us His sorrows clearly, graphically, and with solemn instruction for us, anything for God Himself above all glorifying (the cross alone excepted), it was this very scene where Jesus avoids and wards off no suffering, but bends to every stroke, (and what was He spared?) seeing God's hand in all. Now their hour was come, and the power of darkness. Before this they could not lay hands upon Him; but now, the active work done, and Himself definitively refused, Jesus accepts all humiliation, shame, and suffering. But He does not see man merely. He does not look at the devil, or Jews, or Gentiles. He feels all man did and said, and owns His Father. He knew full well that His Father could have hindered every pang, had He been so pleased -- could have turned Israel's heart -- could have broken the nations. But now the Jew is left to abhor Him, the Gentile to despise and
crucify Him. Against the holy servant Jesus whom God had anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathering together; but was it not to do whatsoever God’s hand and God’s counsel determined before to be done? He saw God His Father above and behind all the secondary instruments, and bowed and blessed, even while He prayed with blood-sweat. He would erect no barricade of miracles to shelter Himself. To weigh before God such circumstances as then surrounded Jesus, to anticipate in His presence what was coming, did not lessen, but rather increased the depth of all; and so we find Him praying earnestly to His Father that, if it were possible, the cup should pass away from Him. But it was not possible; and so He adds,

Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done {Luke 22:42}.

Both were perfect. It would have been hardiness, not love, had the cup been treated as a light thing: but this could never be with Jesus. It was part of the very perfection of Jesus that He felt and deprecated the awful cup. For what was in that cup? The wrath of God. How could He wish for the wrath of God? It was right to deprecate it: it was like Jesus, notwithstanding, to say,

Thy will be done.

Both the deprecation and the acceptance were thoroughly perfect -- both equally in their due place and season. Who fails to see it, or would harbour a doubt, that knows who Jesus was, and what the glory of His person? It is not a question, however, of His merely being God; and you destroy the value of the suffering if you do not give full place to His humanity.

Not that His Godhead ever made His suffering less; else the result would have been some nondescript estate, which was neither Godhead nor manhood, but somewhat made up of both. It was an early error to suppose an impassible Christ. There is no worse invention against the truth, unless it be the lie which denies Him to be God the Son. An unsuffering impassible Christ is of Satan, not the true God and eternal life. It is a false chimera of the enemy. Be assured, that if the suffering be so real and precious to God, it is a dangerous thing to pare down, fritter away, or deny any part of it. For us it is the question of what God tells us in His word of the sufferings of Christ -- not whether we understand all He says about them. Be assured that we know but in part, and have much much to learn, especially of that which does not touch our own immediate necessities; but there is one thing we are always responsible for, and that is, to submit to God, to believe Him, even though we enter very little into the depths of all that He has written for us of Jesus.

Only this I would add. It does not become such as say they do not understand this or that, to take the place of being judges. It is intelligible that those who know should judge; not so, as it appears to me, that people should take the place of judging who confessedly do not know. It were wise, not to say becoming humility, to wait and learn.

Next we see Judas, who approaches and kisses Christ:

the Lord of glory is betrayed by the apostle. The final scene comes on apace; and not more surely, according to the word of Christ, the murderous malice of the priests, than the energy of Peter, so fatal to himself, who could not face the difficulty into which his self-confidence carried him. He that could not pray with his Master, but slept in the garden, breaks down without his Master before a servant girl. The rest fled. John tells the tale of his own shame, with Peter’s. The scene is complete. There is not a witness for Jesus now. He is alone. Man has it apparently all his own way, in mockery, blows, and blasphemy; but yet he is only accomplishing the will, the purpose, and the grace of God (Luke 22:63-65). The chapter closes with Jesus before the council of elders, chief priests, and scribes.

Art thou the Christ? {Luke 22:67} was too late now: they had proved that they would not believe. From henceforth {not “hereafter,” as in the A. V.} shall the Son of man be sitting on the right hand of the power of God. It is the well-known transition, we see everywhere, on the rejection of the Messiah.

Art thou then the Son of God? {Luke 22:70} said they all. He owns to the truth; and they need no more to condemn Him.

In Luke 23 Jesus is found not before Pilate only, but Herod; and the two men who heretofore hated each other are here reconciled, now that it is a question of rejecting Jesus. It is only Luke who gives us this touch. What a league of peace over the rejection of the Saviour! At any rate the scorn of Jesus proceeds; and Pilate, carried away against his conscience by the will of the people, gave sentence that it should be as they required. Jesus is led away to the cross, and Simon is compelled to bear it after Jesus; for now man shows his needless cruelty in every form.

The women that were there lamented with the crowd after Jesus: there was much of human feeling in this, though not faith or real love. Why not lament for themselves; for in truth there were days of sorrow coming, when they should say,

Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps that never gave suck {Luke 23:29}.

Then they shall begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry? {Luke 23:30, 31}.

Jesus was the green tree; and if Jesus was so treated, what should be their fate, as set forth fully by that dry tree, which was Israel? Undoubtedly Israel ought to have been the green tree of promise; but it was only a dry tree waiting for judgment. But Jesus, the green tree (where there was all the vigour of holy ways and obedience), was far from honour, and now on His way to the cross. Such was man, to whom He had been delivered! What would be God’s judgment of man? (Luke 23:27-31). And they crucified Jesus between two malefactors -- the one on the right hand, and the other on the left; and Jesus says,
Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do {Luke 23:34}.

They part His raiment, and cast lots for it. The people behold, the rulers deride, and the soldiers mock; but a superscription was written over Him in Greek, and Roman, and Hebrew letters --

This is the King of the Jews (Luke 23:32-38).

Jesus works the great work of salvation in the heart of one of the malefactors. It was a real work within; it was not merely a work ever so perfectly done outside. Most assuredly there never was a soul saved but the work was done for him -- done alone by Jesus -- He alone suffering, the sinner saved. But where the heart knows the work done for the soul, there is a work done in that very soul. So it was here: and it is of great importance that those who maintain the work for, should equally maintain the work in. Even in this case, where the effect was produced rapidly, the Spirit of God has given us the great moral traits of it. First of all appears a hatred of sin in the fear of God; then the repentant heart rebukes the shameless evil of his fellow, who feels not that it is, least of all, a time thus to sin boldly in the presence of death, and of God’s judgment.

We indeed justly; but this man hath done nothing amiss {Luke 23:41}.

Evidently there was more than righteousness here. There was a sense of grace, as well as of sin, and sensitiveness about God’s will. There was delight in

this man,

Jesus, whose holiness made such an impression, that the poor felon, now a believer, could challenge all the world, and feel no more doubt of the Lord’s blameless life than if he had witnessed it all through. How great is the simplicity and assurance of faith! Who was he that could correct the judgment of priests or governor?

This man hath done nothing amiss.

It was a crucified robber! He forgot himself in Christ the Lord thus vindicated. Then he turns to Jesus, and says,

Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom {Luke 23:42}.

Yes! and Jesus will remember -- could not put him aside. He never cast out either a soul that came to Him, or a prayer that was founded on His glory, and desired association with Him. It could not be. He came down to associate with the poorest and feeblest on earth. He is now gone on high to associate with Himself there those who were once, possibly, the worst on the earth, now with Himself above, cleansed, of course (need we say it?) -- cleansed by water and blood. And so with this soul whom grace had now touched.

Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.

What more convincing proof that the man had not an anxiety about his sins? for if he had, he would, of course, have put it forward. He would have said, “Lord, do not remember my sins.” Nothing of the sort was uttered, but

Lord, remember me.

What would Christ’s kingdom be to him, if his sins were not blotted out? He so counted on His grace, that no doubt or question remained, and he asks to be remembered by Jesus at His advent, ascribing the kingdom to Him who was hanging on the cross. He was right; and Jesus replies with ineffable grace, and according to that style so worthy of God (compare Psa. 132), which not only answers the prayer of faith, but invariably surpasses it. God must be God in His recognition of faith, as everywhere else. We saw on the mount of transfiguration that there is a blessedness beyond that of the kingdom, where government is not in question. This is not the theme predicted by prophets, but a glory which the person of Jesus alone can account for, and His grace alone introduce to. So here Jesus says to the converted robber,

This day shalt thou be with me in paradise {Luke 23:43}.

-- at once, by virtue of His blood, the companion of Christ in the garden of divine joy and delight (Luke 23:39-43).

* * *

Then the Spirit of God notices the darkness which reigned, and not merely in the lower air around the earth; for the sun was darkened, the splendid orb of natural light, which rules the day. The veil of the temple, too, which characterized the whole system of the Jewish religion, was rent from top to bottom. This was not the effect of an earthquake, nor of other physical causes. The natural light disappeared, and Judaism vanished, that a new and true light might shine, making him who saw it free of the holiest of all. Luke groups the external facts together, and leaves the Lord’s death more alone with its moral adjuncts.

And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said,

Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost {Luke 23:46}.

Here there is no cry to God in the sense of being forsaken, when His soul was made an offering for sin. This was given appropriately by Matthew and Mark. Nor is it as the consciously divine person, the Son, pronouncing the work finished for which He had come. It is the ever perfect man, Christ Jesus, with unwavering confidence committing His spirit into His Father’s keeping. (Compare Psa. 16, 31.) It was the atoning One. On the cross, and nowhere else, was expiation effected; there was His blood shed; there His death, who thought it not robbery to be equal with God, yet knew what it was to have the face of God hid from Him in judgment of sin -- our sin. But the words here are no expression of His suffering, as thus abandoned and atoning, but of the peaceful departure of His spirit, as man, into the hands of God the Father. He is drinking the cup in Matthew and Mark; He, the true, but rejected Messiah, the faithful servant, now suffering for sin, who had laboured in grace here below. But here the Saviour is viewed in His absolute dependence and trust in Him whom He had set before Him, as in life always, so with equal affiance of heart in death. It was the province of John to show Him even then above all circumstances in personal glory. It is beyond all controversy, that here the human side of Christ’s death is more vividly portrayed than in any of the Gospels -- perfect, but human;
just as in John it is the divine side, though care is taken to prove particularly there its reality, as well as the witness of its efficacy for sinful man. The consistency of this with all we have seen in Luke, from first to last, is unquestionable: Son of God -- of the Highest, as of David also; but He is emphatically, and in every detail, the Son of man.

Remark here the absence of a crowd of circumstances of the deepest interest to the Jew, when grace makes him meek, and obedient in heart -- of solemn warning to him, whatever the unbelief which shuts up his heart, and seals his ears, to the truth. Here is no dream and message from Pilate’s wife; here no awful episode of Judas in remorse and despair, casting the price of innocent blood into the very sanctuary, and going away to hang himself; here no imprecation of His blood on them and on their children; here no detail of the guilty people’s unconscious accomplishment of the living oracles of God in the Psalms and Prophets; nor here any allusion to the earthquake, and the rent rocks, and opened graves, or the subsequent appearing of risen saints to many in the holy city. All this has its due place in the Gospel for the circumcision. Luke tells us what had the largest bearing on the Gentiles, on the heart, its wants, and its affections. We see the people beholding, the rulers also with their sneering, the soldiers mocking with vulgar brutality, but Jesus dealing in ineffable grace with a justly crucified malefactor. No doubt there was the deepest of suffering for Himself. Certainly, too, His suffering, though not confined to the cross, there culminated, as there alone was sin judged; there God’s necessary intolerance of it was proved, when only, but most really, imputed to Christ. Thus, the only perfect man, the last Adam, who was there rejected of the Jews, and despised of men, with a loud voice, which denied the exhaustion of nature in His death, commended His spirit, as man, to His Father. It is not here, therefore, One speaking in the sense of God’s abandonment (as we saw in Matthew and Mark), though this cup He had, indeed, drank to the dregs. But in this Gospel the last words are of One who, whatever the forsaking of God for sin, was perfectly tranquil, and peacefully committed Himself to His Father. It is the act and language of Him whose confidence was unlimited in the One He was going to. He had come to do His will, and had done it in the face of growing scorn and rejection; and God had not guarded Him from the murderous hate of man, but contrariwise, delivered Him into their hands, greater things being in counsel and accomplishment than if He had been received. The truth is the sum of what all tell us. Those who believe God, instead of being fettered to the traditions of a school, good or bad, must open their mouth wide for Him to fill with His good things old and new. He who on the cross tasted, for expiation, the unutterable woe of which Matthew and Mark speak, is the same Jesus who, Luke tells us, never wavered for a moment, not merely in His obedience, but in unreserved confidence in God; and the expression of this, not of atonement, I read in the precious words,

Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit (Luke 23:44-46).

Accordingly, the centurion is mentioned here as owning Jesus to be a righteous man {Luke 23:47},

whatever man might have judged or done. The people seem conscious that it was all over with them -- stricken in heart over a deed they could not but feel to be dreadful, though hardly defined. God does not leave man without witness. But, as usual, with men without the revealed light of God, though conscious when sin is done that there is something utterly wrong, it is soon forgotten; so here, though not without the sense that the case was desperate, they go not only as sheep without a shepherd, but stumble in the dark night. All His acquaintances and the women are seen in their sorrow -- not vain, surely not; but still they stood far off (Luke 23:46-49).

Yet was this the moment when, spite of a traitorous disciple, spite of another too confident that denied Him with oaths, spite of all who ought to have been faithful forsaking and fleeing, spite of the distant and saddened lookers on who had once followed Him devotedly, God emboldens a man of high station, who might have been then the least expected by us (and, as we are told elsewhere, Nicodemus). Joseph of Arimathea was a man that had waited for the kingdom of God for some time, a good man and just, and a real believer, though he had shrank from open confession of the Lord Jesus; but now, when fear might naturally have more than ever operated to keep him back, grace made him bold. This, at least, was quite right, and like the God of all grace. If the death of our Lord does not unlock a man’s heart and tongue, I do not know what will. So this timid Joseph waxes valiant in fight. The honourable counsellor renounced the expediency and prudence of the past, horrified, no doubt, at their counsel and deed to which he had not assented. But now he does more: he adds to his faith virtue. He goes boldly to Pilate, and begs the body of Jesus, which, being obtained, is worthily laid in the rock-hewn sepulchre, wherein never had man been laid (Luke 23:53).

And that day was the preparation; and the sabbath drew on. And the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid. And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment (Luke 23:54-56).

It was affection, but with little intelligence. Their love lingered over the scene of His death and burial, without for the present in the least realizing that life which was to be put forth soon so gloriously. Had they not heard His words? Would He, would God, not make them good?

On the morrow of the sabbath, very early indeed in the morning; these Galilean women were there, and some others with them (Luke 24:1). And they found the stone rolled away, but not the body of Jesus. They were not alone; angels appeared. Two men in shining array stood by these perplexed saints.

And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, [what a rebuke to their unbelief!] Why seek ye the living (One) among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how
he spake unto you while he was yet in Galilee, saying; The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And they remembered his words (Luke 24:5-8).

This last is ever a great point with Luke -- the emphatic value always of any part of God's word, but especially of the words of Jesus.

Accordingly, after this was duly reported to the apostles and the rest, one like another incredulous, we have the visit of Peter (accompanied, as John lets us know, by himself), who sees confirmation enough, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass (Luke 24:9-12).

Luke then ushers in another scene, still more precious, peculiar in its details at least to himself -- the journey to Emmaus, where Jesus joins Himself to the two downcast disciples, who discoursed, as they went, on the irreparable loss they had sustained. Jesus hears this tale of sorrow from their lips, brings out the state of their hearts, and then opens the Scriptures, instead of merely appealing to the facts in the way of evidence. This employment of the Scriptures by our Lord is very significant. It is the word of God which is the truest, deepest, weightiest testimony, even though the risen Jesus Himself were there, and its living demonstration in person. But it is the written word which, as the apostle himself shows, is the sole adequate safeguard for the perilous times of the last days. Here, too, the loved companion of Paul proves, in the history of the resurrection, the value of the Scriptures. The word of God -- here the Old Testament interpreted by Jesus -- is the most valuable means for ascertaining the mind of God. Every Scripture is inspired of God, and is profitable -- yea, able to make us

wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus [2 Tim. 3:15].

Hence our Lord expounds to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. What a sample that day was of the walk of faith! Henceforth it was not a question of a living Messiah on the earth, but of Him that was dead and risen, now seen by faith in the word of God. On the face of the account, this was the great living lesson that our Lord was teaching us through the two disciples (Luke 24:13-29).

But there was more. How is He to be known? There is but one way that can be trusted in which we can know Jesus. There are those in Christendom that despise upon Jesus as ignorant of His glory as a Jew or a Mahometan. Our own day has seen how men can speak and write eloquently of Jesus as a man here below, all the while serving Satan -- denying His name, His person, His work, when they flatter themselves they are honouring Him, like the weeping women (Luke 23:27), without a grain of faith in His glory or His grace. Hence was it of all importance that we should learn wherein He is to be known. Thus Jesus sets forth the only way in which He can be rightly known, or that can be confided in. On this alone God can put His seal. The seal of the Holy Ghost is unknown until there is the submission of faith to the death of Jesus. And so our Lord breaks bread with the disciples. It was not the Lord’s Supper; but Jesus made use of that act of breaking the bread significantly, which the Lord’s Supper brings before us continually. In it, as we know, bread is broken -- the sign of His death. Thus Jesus was pleased, Himself with them, that the truth of His death should flash upon the two souls at Emmaus. He was made known unto them in the breaking of bread -- in that most simple but striking action which symbolises His death. He had blessed, broken, and was giving the bread to them, when their eyes were opened, and they recognised their risen Lord (Luke 24:30, 31).

There is a third supplemental point, which I only touch on -- His instant disappearance after He was made known to them in the sign of His death. This is also characteristic of Christians. We walk by faith, not by sight (Luke 24:31).

Thus the great evangelist, who exhibits what is most real for man’s heart now, and what most of all maintains the glory of God in Christ, binds these things together for our instruction. Though Scripture was perfectly expounded by Jesus, and though hearts burned as they heard of these wondrous things, still it must be shown in concentrated form that the knowledge which alone can be commended by God or trusted by man is this -- Jesus known in that which brings His death before the soul. The death of Jesus is the sole foundation of safety for a sinful man. This is the true way of knowing Jesus for a Christian. Anything short of this, anything other than this, whatever supplants it as fundamental truth, is false. Jesus is dead and risen, and so must be known, if He is to be known aright.

Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more [2 Cor. 5:16].

And so, that same hour, we see the disciples returning to Jerusalem, and finding the eleven there, who say, The Lord hath risen, and appeared unto Simon (Luke 24:32-34).

Here we have nothing about Galilee. In Matthew, Galilee is the quarter especially noticed. A rejected Messiah, fitly and according to prophecy, finds Himself in Galilee, the despised place. It was so during His life and public ministry (and hence it figures in Mark so prominently). He takes the same place now after His death and resurrection, there resuming relations with His disciples. The godly remnant of the Jews must know the rejected Messiah there. His resurrection did not terminate their path of rejection. The Church knows Him yet more blessedly as ascended, and itself one with Him on high; and its rejection is even more decided. However, in Matthew, Galilee is the sign for a converted Jewish remnant till He come to reign in power and glory. The remnant of the last days will know what it is to be cast outside Jerusalem also, and it is as outcasts that they will find real deepening of faith and due preparation of heart for receiving the Lord when He appears in the clouds of heaven. This Galilean resort Luke does not give here. Substantially Mark gives Galilee for the active life of the Saviour like Matthew, because, as has been said, there His ministry was chiefly exercised, and only occasionally in Jerusalem or elsewhere.
Therefore the evangelist of the ministry of Jesus draws attention to the place in which He had ministered most -- Galilee; but even He does not speak of it exclusively. Luke, on the contrary, says nothing of Galilee at this point. The reason seems to me manifest. His theme is the moral state of the disciples, the way of Christ's grace, the Christian path of faith, the place of the word of God, and the person of Christ, only known safely, according to God, in that which sets forth His death. This at least must be the basis.

There is another truth necessary to be known and proved, His real resurrection, who stood in the midst of them with a Peace to you {Luke 24:36}; not without His death, but founded on it, and thus declared. So, in the next scene at Jerusalem, this finds its full display; for the Lord Jesus comes into their midst, and partakes of food before their eyes. There was His body; it was risen. Who could longer doubt that it was really the same Jesus who died, and will yet come in glory?

Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself {Luke 24:39}!

As we know, the Lord deigns to go yet farther in John; but there it was to convict Thomas's unbelief, as well as with a mysterious typical meaning behind. He would correct the previously absent and still doubting disciple; it is the sight that is the point there. This is not the question here, but rather the reality of the resurrection, and the identity of Jesus risen, with Him they had known as their Master, and withal as still man, not a spirit, but having flesh and bones, and capable of eating with them {Luke 24:36-43}.

After this our Lord speaks once more of what was written in Moses and prophets and psalms concerning Him (Luke 24:44). It is the word of God again brought out; not merely to two of them, but its unspeakable value for them all.

Further, He opens their understanding to understand the Scriptures, and gives them their great commission, but bids them remain in Jerusalem till endued with power from on high, when He sends them the promise of the Father (Luke 24:45-49). Here the Lord does not say,

Make disciples of all the Gentiles, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you {as in Matt. 28:19, 20}.

This most fitly has its place in Matthew, spite (yea, because of) His rejection. The suffering but now risen Son of man takes the universal field of the world, and sends His disciples among all the nations to make disciples, and baptize them into the name of the Trinity. It is not, therefore, the old limits of Israel and the lost sheep, but He extends the knowledge of His name and mission outside. Instead of bringing Gentiles to see the glory of Jehovah shining on Zion, they are to be baptized into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, as now revealed fully; and (instead of what Moses commanded)

  teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you {Matt. 28:20}.

In Luke we have not the charge of the work committed to the workmen, as in Mark, with signatures of God's gracious power accompanying; but here it is the message of a Saviour dead and risen, the Second Man, according to Scripture, and the moral need of man and the grace of God, who proclaims in His name repentance and remission to all the nations or Gentiles. Therefore, just as we have seen the resurrection of our Lord in connection with Jerusalem, where He had been crucified, so He would have the preaching begun there, not going away, as it were, from the guilty city -- alas! the holy city, and only the more guilty, because such was its name and privilege. But here, on the contrary, by virtue of Christ's death who put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, all disappears in the presence of the infinite grace of God -- all blessing secured, if there be but the acceptance of Christ and His work. Hence He says,

Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer {Luke 24:46}.

No doubt man was guilty beyond measure, and without excuse. There were mighty purposes of God to be accomplished; and not only must He rise on the third day, but He enjoins that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name -- repentance necessarily showing the great moral work in man, remission of sins being God's great provision of grace through redemption to clear the conscience. Both were to be preached in His name. Who that believes and understands the cross could dream longer of man's worthiness? Repentance, so far from allowing it, is the perception and confession that there is no good in man, in me; it is wrought by grace, and is inseparable from faith. It is man giving up himself as altogether bad, man resting upon God as altogether good to the bad, and both proved in the remission of sins by Jesus, whom man, Jew and Gentile, crucified and slew. Remission of sins therefore, with repentance, was to be preached in His name. This was the sole warrant and ground. They were to be preached to all the nations, beginning with Jerusalem.

In Matthew the point appears to be the rejection of Jerusalem, the rejecter, because of its Messiah, the discipular remnant starting from the mountain in Galilee; and the presence of the Lord being guaranteed till the end of the age, when other changes come. In Luke all disappears, except grace, in presence of sin and misery. Absolute grace begins, therefore, with the spot which needed it most, and Jerusalem is expressly named.

We have seen how this chapter settles, if I may so express it, the Christian system on its proper basis, bringing out its chief peculiarities with striking force and beauty. More remains of similar character, especially the very distinct privileges of the understanding opened to understand, and the power of the Holy Ghost; the one given then, the other not till Pentecost.

Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day. . . . And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry
Thus the Holy Ghost was not given yet as an indwelling person, but rather a reiteration of the Father’s promise. Remaining in Jerusalem, they should be clothed with power -- an essential thing for Christianity, and quite distinct from spiritual intelligence already conferred, as is apparent also in Peter’s word and way in Acts 1. In the Gospel of John, where the person of Jesus shines so conspicuously, the Holy Ghost is set forth personally, with equal distinctness at least, in John 14, 16. But here this is not the point, but His power, although He be, of course, a person. It is rather the promise of the Spirit’s power to act in man that is brought before us. They, like Christ, must be

anointed with the Holy Ghost, and with power

{Acts 10:38};

they must wait for

power from on high {Luke 24:49}

from the risen and ascended Man.

But even so, the Lord Himself would not terminate the Gospel thus.

And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them {Luke 24:50}.

It was a spot that used to be most precious to Him, and, observe it well, was not less precious to Him after He rose from the dead. There is no greater mistake than to suppose, that an object of affection to Him before He died ceases to be such to Him when risen. Hence it would seem to give an open contradiction to those that deny the reality of the resurrection body, and of its proper affections. He was indeed a real man, albeit the Lord of glory. He led them out, then, as far as Bethany, the retreat of the Saviour, to which His heart turned in the days of His flesh.

And he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven {Luke 24:50, 51}.

He that filled with blessing the hearts devoted to Him in His life, was still blessing them when He was separated from them for heaven.

And they worshipped him {Luke 24:52}.

Such was the fruit of His blessing, and of His great grace.

And they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God {Luke 24:52, 53}.

It was meet it should be so. He that blesses us not only communicates a blessing, but gives the power that returns to God a blessing -- the power of real worship communicated to human hearts on the earth, by the Lord Jesus now risen from the dead. They

were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God;

but they were associated in life and love with One whose glory was far above them or any conceivable precincts of the earth, and were soon to be made one with Him, and to be the vessels of His power by the energy of the Holy Ghost, who would make this evident in due time.

May the Lord be pleased to bless His own word, and to grant that those who love Him and it may approach the Scripture with still more confidence! If aught which has been said here tends to remove somewhat of mist from any eyes, encourages, simplifies, or otherwise helps in reading God’s word, surely my little labour will not have been in vain, either now or for eternity. The Lord alone can make His own word sanctifying. But it is much to believe it to be what it really is, not (as unbelief thinks) a field of darkness and uncertainty, requiring light upon it, but a light itself, which communicates light to the dark, through the power of the Holy Ghost revealing Christ. May we prove that it is indeed like Christ, of whom it speaks, needed, real, and unerring light to our souls; that it is also the sole, adequate, and irrefragable witness of divine wisdom and grace, but this only as revealed in and by Christ! I take it to be a token of great good that, as in early days, the person of Christ was not only the fiercest battle-ground and prime object of the final struggle of the apostles on the earth, but was the means whereby the Spirit of God wrought to give a deeper and deepening enjoyment of the truth and grace of God (more profoundly searching, no doubt, but at the same time more invigorating for the saints), so no otherwise, unless I be greatly mistaken, is it now. I remember the time, though unable to boast of any very lengthened scene to look back on as a Christian, when at least almost all -- for I will not say all -- were more engaged in attacking ecclesiastical error, and spreading much of kindred and other truth (and, in its place and time, important truth). But it was truth that did not so directly build up the soul, nor did it so immediately concern the Lord Himself. And although not a few, who then seemed strong and courageous enough, are gone to the winds (and a similar sitting still goes on, and will to the end), yet sure am I that in the midst of all these troubles and humiliations God has been elevating the standard of Christ for those who are firm and faithful. God has shown that His name is, as ever, a stumbling-stone for unbelief; but for the simple and spiritual a sure foundation, and most precious. The Lord grant that even these our studies of the Gospels, which have been necessarily curt and cursory, may nevertheless give an impulse not only to younger saints, but to those who may be ever so old; for assuredly there is no one, whatever may be his maturity, who will not be all the better for a fuller acquaintance with Him who is from the beginning.
Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Gospels

Lecture 9

John 1 – 7

The opening verses (John 1:1-18) introduce the most glorious subject which God Himself ever gave in employing the pen of man; not only the most glorious in point of theme, but in the profoundest point of view; for what the Holy Ghost here brings before us is the Word, the everlasting Word, when He was with God, traced down from before all time, when there was no creature. It is not exactly the Word with the Father; for such a phrase would not be according to the exactness of the truth; but the Word with God. The term God comprehends not only the Father, but the Holy Ghost also. He who was the Son of the Father then, as I need not say always, is regarded here as the revealer of God; for God, as such, does not reveal Himself. He makes His nature known by the Word. The Word, nevertheless, is here spoken of before there was any one for God to reveal Himself to. He is therefore, and in the strictest sense, eternal.

In the beginning was the Word [John 1:1],

when there was no reckoning of time; for the beginning of what we call time comes before us in the third verse.

All things,
it is said,

were made by Him [John 1:3].

This is clearly the origination of all creaturehood, wherever or whatever it be. Heavenly beings there were before the earthly; but whether -- no matter of whom you speak, or of what -- angels or men, whether heaven or earth, all things were made by Him.

Thus He, whom we know to be the Son of the Father, is here presented as the Word -- who subsisted personally in the beginning (ἐν ἀρχῇ) -- who was with God, and was Himself God -- of the same nature, yet a distinct personal being. To clench this matter specially against all reveries of Gnostics or others, it is added, that He was in the beginning with God. 4

Observe another thing:

The Word was with God [John 1:1]
-- not the Father. As the Word and God, so the Son and the Father are correlative. We are here in the exactest phrase, and at the same time in the briefest terms, brought into the presence of the deepest conceivable truths which God, alone knowing, alone could communicate to man. Indeed, it is He alone who gives the truth; for this is not the bare knowledge of such or such facts, whatever the accuracy of the information. Were all things conveyed with the most admirable correctness, it would not amount to divine revelation. Such a communication would still differ, not in degree only, but in kind. A revelation from God not only supposes true statements, but God’s mind made known so as to act morally on man, forming his thoughts and affections according to His own character. God makes Himself known in what He communicates by, of, and in Christ.

In the case before us, nothing can be more obvious than that the Holy Ghost, for the glory of God, is undertaking to make known that which touches the Godhead in the closest way, and is meant for infinite blessing to all in the person of the Lord Jesus. These verses accordingly begin with Christ our Lord; not from, but in the beginning, when nothing was yet created. It is the eternity of His being; in no point of which could it be said He was not, but, contrariwise, that He was. Yet was He not alone. God was there -- not the Father only, but the Holy Ghost, beside the Word Himself, who was God, and had divine nature as they.

Again, it is not said that in the beginning He was, in the sense of then coming into being (ἐγένετο), but He existed (ἦν). Thus before all time the Word was. When the great truth of the incarnation is noted in John 1:14, it is said -- not that the Word came into existence, but that He was made (ἐγένετο) flesh -- began so to be. This, therefore, so much the more contrasts with John 1:1, 2.

In the beginning, then, before there was any creature, was the Word, and the Word was with God. There was distinct personality in the Godhead therefore, and the Word was a distinct person Himself (not, as men dreamt, an emanation in time, though eternal and divine in nature, proceeding from God as its source). The Word had a proper personality; and at the same time was God --

the Word was God.

Yea, as the next verse binds and sums up altogether, He, the Word, was in the beginning with God. The personality was as eternal as the existence, not in (after some mystic sort) but with God. I can conceive no statement more admirably complete and luminous in the fewest and simplest words.

4. I cannot but regard John 1:2 as a striking and complete setting aside of the Alexandrian and Patristic distinction of λόγος ἐν θεῷ and λόγος πρὸφορικός. Some of the earlier Greek fathers, who were infected with Platonism, held that the λόγος was conceived in God’s mind from eternity, and only uttered, as it were, in time. This has given a handle to Arians, who, like other unbelievers, greedily seek the traditions of men. The apostle here asserts, in the Holy Ghost, the eternal personality of the Word with God.
Next comes the attributing of creation to the Word. This must be the work of God, if anything was; and here again the words are precision itself --

All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made (John 1:3).

Other words far less nervous are used elsewhere: unbelief might cavil and construe them into forming or fashioning. Here the Holy Ghost employs the most explicit language, that all things began to be, or received being, through the Word, to the exclusion of one single thing that ever did receive being apart from Him; language which leaves the fullest room for Uncreate Beings, as we have already seen, subsisting eternally and distinctly, yet equally God. Thus the statement is positive that the Word is the source of all things which have received being (γενόμενα); that there is no creature which did not thus derive its being from Him. There cannot, therefore, be a more rigid, absolute shutting out of any creature from origination, save by the Word.

It is true that in other parts of Scripture we hear God, as such, spoken of as Creator. We hear of His making the worlds by the Son. But there is and can be no contradiction in Scripture. The truth is, that whatever was made was made according to the Father’s sovereign will; but the Son, the Word of God, was the person who put forth the power, and never without the energy of the Holy Ghost, I may add, as the Bible carefully teaches us. Now this is of immense importance for that which the Holy Ghost has in view in the Gospel of John, because the object is to attest the nature and light of God in the person of Christ; and therefore we have here not merely what the Lord Jesus was as born of a woman, born under the law, which has its appropriate place in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, but what He was and is as God. On the other hand, the Gospel of Mark omits every thing of the kind. A genealogy such as Matthew’s and Luke’s, we have seen, would be totally out of place there; and the reason is manifest. The subject of Mark is the testimony of Jesus as having taken, though a Son, the place of a servant in the earth. Now, in a servant, no matter from what noble lineage he comes, there is no genealogy requisite. What is wanted in a servant is, that the work should be done well, no matter about the genealogy. Thus, even if it were the Son of God Himself, so perfectly did He condescend to the condition of a servant, and so mindful was the Spirit of it, that, accordingly, the genealogy which was demanded in Matthew, which is of such signal beauty and value in Luke, is necessarily excluded from the Gospel of Mark. For higher reasons it could have no place in John. In Mark it is because of the lowly place of subjection which the Lord was pleased to take; it is excluded from John, on the contrary, because there He is presented as being above all genealogy. He is the source of other people’s genealogy — yea, of the genesis of all things. We may say therefore boldly, that in the Gospel of John such a descent could not be inserted in consistency with its character. If it admit any genealogy, it must be what is set forth in the preface of John — the very verses which are occupying us — which exhibit the divine nature and eternal personality of His being. He was the Word, and He was God:

and, if we may anticipate, let us add, the Son, the only begotten Son of the Father. This, if anything, is His genealogy here. The ground is evident; because everywhere in John He is God. No doubt the Word became flesh, as we may see more of presently, even in this inspired introduction; and we have the reality of His becoming man insisted on. Still, manhood was a place that He entered. Godhead was the glory that He possessed from everlasting — His own eternal nature of being. It was not conferred upon Him. There is not, nor can be, any such thing as a derived subordinate Godhead; though men may be said to be gods, as commissioned of God, and representing Him in government. He was God before creation began, before all time. He was God independently of any circumstances. Thus, as we have seen, for the Word the apostle John claims eternal existence, distinct personality, and divine nature; and withal asserts the eternal distinctness of that person (John 1:1, 2).

Such is the Word Godward (πρὸς τὸν Θεόν). We are next told of Him in relation to the creature (John 1:3-5). In the earlier verses it was exclusively His being. In John 1:3 He acts, He creates, He causes all things to come into existence; and apart from Him not one thing came into existence which is existent (γέγονεν). Nothing more comprehensive, nothing more exclusive.

The next verse (John 1:4) predicts of Him that which is yet more momentous: not creative power, as in John 1:3, but life.

In him was life.

Blessed truth for those who know the spread of death over this lower scene of creation! and the rather as the Spirit adds, that

the life was the light of men {John 1:4}.

Angels were not its sphere, nor was it restricted to a chosen nation:

the life was the light of men.

Life was not in man, even unfallen; at best, the first man, Adam, became a living soul when instinct with the breath of God. Nor is it ever said, even of a saint, that in him is or was life, though life he has; but he has it only in the Son. In Him; the Word, was life, and the life was the light of men. Such was its relationship.

No doubt, whatever was revealed of old was of Him; whatever word came out from God was from Him, the Word, and light of men. But then God was not revealed; for He was not manifested. On the contrary, He dwelt in the thick darkness, behind the veil in the most holy place, or visiting men but angelically otherwise. But here, we are told,

the light shines in the darkness (John 1:5).

Mark the abstractedness of the language — it shines

(not shone). How solemn, that darkness is all the light finds! and what darkness! how impenetrable and hopeless! All other darkness yields and fades away before light; but here

the darkness comprehended it not {John 1:5}
(as the fact is stated, and not the abstract principle only). It was suited to man, even as it was the light expressly of men, so that man is without excuse.

But was there adequate care that the light should be presented to men? What was the way taken to secure this? Unable God could not be: was He indifferent? God gave testimony; first, John the Baptist; then the Light itself.

There was (ἔγευτο) a man sent from God, whose name was John (John 1:6).

He passes by all the prophets, the various preliminary dealings of the Lord, the shadows of the law: not even the promises are noticed here. We shall find some of these introduced or alluded to for a far different purpose later on. John, then, came to bear witness about the Light, that all through him might believe (John 1:7). But the Holy Ghost is most careful to guard against all mistake. Could any run too close a parallel between the light of men in the Word, and him who is called the burning and shining lamp in a subsequent chapter? Let them learn their error. He, John, was not that light {John 1:8}; there is but one such: none was similar or second. God cannot be compared with man. John came that he might bear witness about the light {John 1:8}, not to take its place or set himself up. The true Light was that which, coming into the world, lighteth every man. 5 Not only does He necessarily, as being God, deal with every man (for His glory could not be restricted to a part of mankind), but the weighty truth here announced is the connection with His incarnation of this universal light, or revelation of God in Him, to man as such. The law, as we know from elsewhere, had dealt with the Jewish people temporarily, and for partial purposes. This was but a limited sphere. Now that the Word comes into the world, in one way or another light shines for every one: it may be, leaving some under condemnation, as we know it does for the great mass who believe not; it may be light not only on but in man, where there is faith through the action of divine grace. It is certain that, whatever light in relation to God there may be, and wherever it is given in Him, there is not, there never was, spiritual light apart from Christ -- all else is darkness. It could not be otherwise. This light in its own character must go out to all from God. So it is said elsewhere,

The grace of God that bringeth salvation to all men hath appeared {Titus 2:11}.

It is not that all men receive the blessing; but, in its proper scope and nature, it addresses itself to all. God sends it for all. Law may govern one nation; grace refuses to be limited in its appeal, however it may be in fact through man's unbelief.

He was in the world, and the world was made by him (John 1:9, 10).

The world therefore surely ought to have known its Maker. Nay,

the world knew him not {John 1:10}.

From the very first, man, being a sinner, was wholly lost. Here the unlimited scene is in view; not Israel, but the world. Nevertheless, Christ did come to His own things, His proper, peculiar possession; for there were special relationships. They should have understood more about Him -- those that were specially favoured. It was not so.

He came unto his own [things], and his own [people] received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power [rather, authority, right, or title] to become children of God (John 1:11, 12).

It was not a question now of Jehovah and His servants. Neither does the Spirit say exactly as the English Bible says -- “sons,” but children. His glorious person would have none now in relation to God but members of the family. Such was the grace that God was displaying in Him, the true and full expresser of His mind. He gave them title to take the place of children of God, even to those that believe on His name. Sons they might have been in bare title; but these had the right of children.

All disciplinary action, every probationary process, disappears. The ignorance of the world has been proved, the rejection of Israel is complete; then only is it that we hear of this new place of children. It is now eternal reality, and the name of Jesus Christ is that which puts all things to a final test. There is difference of manner for the world and His own -- ignorance and rejection. Do any believe on His name? Be they who they may now, as many as receive Him become children of God. It is no question here of every man, but of such as believe. Do they receive Him not? For them, Israel, or the world, all is over. Flesh and world are judged morally. God the Father forms a new family in, by, and for Christ. All others prove not only that they are bad, but that they hate perfect goodness, and more than that, life and light -- the true light in the Word. How can such have relationship with God?

Thus, manifestly, the whole question is terminated at the very starting-point of our Gospel; and this is characteristic of John all through: manifestly all is decided. It is not merely a Messiah, who comes and offers Himself, as we find in other Gospels, with most pains-taking diligence, and presented to their responsibility; but here from the outset the question is viewed as closed. The Light, on coming into the world, lightens every man with the fulness of evidence which was in Him, and at once discovers the true state as truly as it will be revealed in the last day when He judges all, as we find it intimated in the Gospel afterwards (John 12:48).

Before the manner of His manifestation comes before us in John 1:14, we have the secret explained why some, and not all, received Christ. It was not that they were better than their neighbours. Natural birth had nothing to do with this new thing; it was a new nature altogether in those who received
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Him:

Who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God [John 1:13].

It was an extraordinary birth; of God, not man in any sort or measure, but a new and divine nature (2 Pet. 1) imparted to the believer wholly of grace. All this, however, was abstract, whether as to the nature of the Word or as to the place of the Christian.

But it is important we should know how He entered the world. We have seen already that thus light was shed on men. How was this? The Word, in order to accomplish these infinite things,

was made (ἐγένετο) flesh, and dwelt among us [John 1:14].

It is here we learn in what condition of His person God was to be revealed and the work done; not what He was in nature, but what He became. The great fact of the incarnation is brought before us --

The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father) [John 1:14].

His aspect as thus tabernacling among the disciples was full of grace and truth [John 1:14].

Observe, that blessed as the light is, being God's moral nature, truth, is more than this, and is introduced by grace. It is the revelation of God -- yea, of the Father and the Son, and not merely the detector of man. The Son had not come to execute the judgments of the law they knew, nor even to promulgate a new and higher law. His was an errand incomparably deeper, more worthy of God, and suitable to One full of grace and truth.

He wanted nothing; He came to give -- yea, the very best; so to speak, that God has.

What is there in God more truly divine than grace and truth? The incarnate Word was here full of grace and truth. Glory would be displayed in its day. Meanwhile there was a manifestation of goodness, active in love in the midst of evil, and toward such; active in the making known God and man, and every moral relation, and what He is toward man, through and in the Word made flesh. This is grace and truth. And such was Jesus.

John bare witness of him, and cried; saying, This is he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me [John 1:15].

Coming after John as to date, He is necessarily preferred before him in dignity; for He was (ἡγεμόν) [not come into being (ἐγένετο)] before him. He was God. This statement (John 1:15) is a parenthesis, though confirmatory of John 1:14, and connects John's testimony with this new section of Christ's manifestation in flesh; as we saw John introduced in the earlier verses, which treated abstractly of Christ's nature as the Word.

Then, resuming the strain of John 1:14, we are told, in John 1:16, that

of his fulness have all we received.

So rich and transparently divine was the grace: not some souls, more meritorious than the rest, rewarded according to a graduated scale of honour, but

of his fulness have all we received.

What can be conceived more notably standing out in contrast with the governmental system God had set up, and man had known in times past? Here there could not be more, and He would not give less: even

grace upon grace [John 1:16].

Spite of the most express signs, and the manifest finger of God that wrote the ten words on tables of stone, the law sinks into comparative insignificance.

The law was given by Moses.

God does not here condescend to call it His, though, of course, it was His -- and holy, just, and good, both in itself and in its use, if used lawfully. But if the Spirit speaks of the Son of God, the law dwindles at once into the smallest possible proportions: everything yields to the honour the Father puts on the Son.

The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came (ἐγένετο) by Jesus Christ (John 1:17).

The law, thus given, was in itself no giver, but an exacter; Jesus, full of grace and truth, gave, instead of requiring or receiving; and He Himself has said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. Truth and grace were not sought nor found in man, but began to subsist here below by Jesus Christ.

We have now the Word made flesh, called Jesus Christ -- this person, this complex person, that was manifest in the world; and it is He that brought it all in. Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

Lastly, closing this part, we have another most remarkable contrast:

No man hath seen God at any time: the only-begotten Son, &c. {John 1:18}.

Now, it is no longer a question of nature, but of relationship; and hence it is not said simply the Word, but the Son, and the Son in the highest possible character, the only-begotten Son, distinguishing Him thus from any other who might, in a subordinate sense, be son of God --

the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father {John 1:18}.

Observe: not which was, but which is.

He is viewed as retaining the same perfect intimacy with the Father, entirely unimpaired by local or any other circumstances He had entered. Nothing in the slightest degree detracted from His own personal glory, and from the infinitely near relationship which He had had with the Father from all eternity. He entered this world, became flesh, as born of woman; but there was no diminution of His own glory, when He, born of the virgin, walked on earth, or when
rejected of man, cut off as Messiah, He was forsaken of God for sin -- our sin -- on the cross. Under all changes, outwardly, He abode as from eternity the only-begotten Son in the bosom of the Father. Mark what, as such, He does declare Him. No man bath seen God at any time. He could be declared only by One who was a divine person in the intimacy of the Godhead, yea, was the only begotten Son in the bosom of the Father. Hence the Son, being in this ineffable nearness of love, has declared not God only, but the Father. Thus we all not only receive of His fulness, (and what fulness illimitable was there not in Him?) but He, who is the Word made flesh, is the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, and so competent to declare, as in fact He has. It is not only the nature, but the model and fulness of the blessing in the Son, who declared the Father.

The distinctiveness of such a testimony to the Saviour’s glory need hardly be pointed out. One needs no more than to read, as believers, these wonderful expressions of the Holy Ghost, where we cannot but feel that we are on ground wholly different from that of the other Gospels. Of course they are just as truly inspired as John’s; but for that very reason they were not inspired to give the same testimony. Each has its own; all are harmonious, all perfect, all divine; but not all so many repetitions of the same thing. He who inspired them to communicate His thoughts of Jesus in the particular line assigned to each, raised up John to impart the highest revelation, and thus complete the circle by the deepest views of the Son of God.

After this we have, suitably to this Gospel, John’s connection with the Lord Jesus (John 1:19-37). It is here presented historically. We have had his name introduced into each part of the preface of our evangelist. Here there is no John proclaiming Jesus as the One who was about to introduce the kingdom of heaven.

Of this we learn nothing here. Nothing is said about the fan in His hand; nothing of His burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire. This is all perfectly true, of course; and we have it elsewhere. His earthly rights are just where they should be; but not here, where the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father has His appropriate place. It is not John’s business here to call attention to His Messiahship, not even when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask, Who art thou? Nor was it from any indistinctness in the record, or in him who gave it. For he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias. And they which were sent were of the Pharisees. And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet? (John 1:20-25.)

John does not even speak of Him as one who, on His rejection as Messiah, would step into a larger glory. To the Pharisees, indeed, his words as to the Lord are curt: nor does he tell them of the divine ground of His glory, as he had before and does after. He says, One was among them of whom they had no conscious knowledge.

that cometh after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to loose (John 1:26, 27).

For himself he was not the Christ, but for Jesus he says no more. How striking the omission! for he knew He was the Christ. But here it was not God’s purpose to record it.

John 1:29 opens John’s testimony to his disciples (John 1:29-34). How rich it is, and how marvellously in keeping with our Gospel! Jesus is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world, but withal, as he had said, the eternal One, yet in view of His manifestation to Israel (and, therefore, John was come baptizing with water -- a reason here given, but not to the Pharisees in John 1:25-27. Further, John attests that he saw the Spirit descending like a dove, and abiding on Him -- the appointed token that He is who baptizes with the Holy Ghost -- even the Son of God. None else could do either work: for here we see His great work on earth, and His heavenly power. In these two points of view, more particularly, John gives testimony to Christ; He is the Lamb as the taker away of the world’s sin; the same is He who baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. Both of them were in relation to man on the earth; the one while He was here, the other from above. His death on the cross included much more, clearly answering to the first; His baptizing with the Holy Ghost followed His going to heaven. Nevertheless, the heavenly part is little dwelt on, as John’s Gospel displays our Lord more as the expression of God revealed on earth, than as Man ascended to heaven, which fell far more to the province of the apostle of the Gentiles. In John He is One who could be described as Son of man who is in heaven; but He belonged to heaven, because He was divine. His exaltation there is not without notice in the Gospel, but exceptionally.

Remark, too, the extent of the work involved in John 1:29. As the Lamb of God (of the Father it is not said), He has to do with the world. Nor will the full force of this expression be witnessed till the glorious result of His blood-shedding sweep away the last trace of sin in the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. It finds, of course, a present application, and links itself with that activity of grace in which God is now sending out the gospel to any sinner and every sinner. Still, the eternal day alone will show out the full virtue of that which belongs to Jesus as the Lamb of God, who takes away the world’s sin. Observe, it is not (as is often very erroneously said or sung) a question of sins, but of the sin (John 1:29)

of the world. The sacrificial death of Him who is God goes far beyond the thought of Israel. How, indeed, could it be stayed within narrow limits? It passes over all question of

6. The best text omits other expressions, evidently derived from vv. 15, 30.
dispensations, until it accomplishes, in all its extent, that purpose for which He thus died. No doubt there are intervening applications; but such is the ultimate result of His work as the Lamb of God. Even now faith knows, that instead of sin being the great object before God, ever since the cross He has had before His eyes that sacrifice which put away sin. Notably He is now applying it to the reconciliation of a people, who are also baptized by the Holy Ghost into one body. By and by He will apply it to 

that nation (John 11:51, 52).

the Jews, as to others also, and finally (always excepting the unbelieving and evil) to the entire system, the world. I do not mean by this all individuals, but creation; for nothing can be more certain, than that those who do not receive the Son of God are so much the worse for having heard the gospel. The rejection of Christ is the contempt of God Himself, in that of which He is most jealous, the honour of the Saviour, His Son. The refusal of His precious blood will, on the contrary, make their case incomparably worse than that of the heathen who never heard the good news.

What a witness all this to His person! None but a divine being could thus deal with the world. No doubt He must become a man, in order, amongst other reasons, to be a sufferer, and to die. None the less did the result of His death proclaim His Deity. So in the baptism with the Holy Ghost, who would pretend to such a power? No mere man, nor angel, not the highest, the archangel, but the Son.

So we see in the attractive power, afterwards dealing with individual souls. For were it not God Himself in the person of Jesus, it had been no glory to God, but a wrong and a rival. For nothing can be more observable than the way in which He becomes the centre round whom those that belong to God are gathered. This is the marked effect on the third day (John 1:29, 34) of John Baptist’s testimony here named; the first day (John 1:29) on which, as it were, Jesus speaks and acts in His grace as here shown on the earth. It is evident, that were He not God, it would be an interference with His glory, a place taken inconsistent with His sole authority, no less than it must be also, and for that reason, altogether ruinous to man. But He, being God, was manifesting and, on the contrary, maintaining the divine glory here below. John, therefore, who had been the honoured witness before of God’s call, 

the voice &c. (John 1:23),

does now by the outpouring of his heart’s delight, as well as testimony, turn over, so to say, his disciples to Jesus. Beholding Him as He walked, he says, Behold the Lamb of God! and the two disciples leave John for Jesus (John 1:35-40). Our Lord acts as One fully conscious of His glory, as indeed He ever was.

Bear in mind that one of the points of instruction in this first part of our Gospel is the action of the Son of God before His regular Galilean ministry. The first four chapters of John precede in point of time the notices of His ministry in the other Gospels. John was not yet cast into prison. Matthew, Mark, and Luke start, as far as regards the public labours of the Lord, with John cast into prison. But all that is historically related of the Lord Jesus in John 1–4 was before the imprisonment of the Baptist. Here, then, we have a remarkable display of that which preceded His Galilean ministry, or public manifestation. Yet before a miracle, as well as in the working of those which set forth His glory, it is evident that so far from its being a gradual growth, as it were, in His mind, He had, all simple and lowly though He were, the deep, calm, constant consciousness that He was God. He acts as such. If He put forth His power, it was not only beyond man’s measure, but unequivocally divine, however also the humblest and most dependent of men. Here we see Him accepting, not as fellow-servant, but as Lord, those souls who had been under the training of the predicted messenger of Jehovah that was to prepare His way before His face. Also one of the two thus drawn to Him first finds his own brother Simon (with the words, We have found the Messiah), and led him to Jesus, who forthwith gave him his new name in terms which surveyed, with equal ease and certainty, past, present, and future. Here again, apart from this divine insight, the change or gift of the name marks His glory (John 1:41-44).

On the morrow Jesus begins, directly and indirectly, to call others to follow Himself. He tells Philip to follow Him. This leads Philip to Nathaniel, in whose case, when he comes to Jesus, we see not divine power alone in sounding the souls of men, but over creation. Here was One on earth who knew all secrets. He saw him under the fig tree. He was God. Nathaniel’s call is just as clearly typical of Israel in the latter day. The allusion to the fig tree confirms this. So does his confession: Rabbi, thou art the Son of God: thou art the King of Israel (See Psa. 2). But the Lord tells him of greater things he should see, and says to him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Henceforth (not “hereafter,” but henceforth) ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of man. It is the wider universal glory of the Son of man (according to Psa. 8); but the most striking part of it verified from that actual moment because of the glory of His person, which needed not the day of glory to command the attendance of the angels of God -- this mark, as Son of man (John 1:44-51).

On the third day is the marriage in Cana of Galilee, where was His mother, Jesus also, and His disciples (John 2). The change of water into wine manifested His glory as the beginning of signs; and He gave another in this early purging of the temple of Jerusalem. Thus we have traced, first, hearts not only attracted to Him, but fresh souls called to follow Him; then, in type, the call of Israel by and by; finally, the disappearance of the sign of moral purifying for the joy of the new covenant, when Messiah’s time comes to bless the needy earth; but along with this the execution of judgment in Jerusalem, and its long defiled temple. All this clearly goes down to millennial days.

As a present fact, the Lord justifies the judicial act before their eyes by His relationship with God as His Father, and gives the Jews a sign in the temple of His body, as the witness of His resurrection power.
Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up {John 2:19}.

He is ever God; He is the Son; He quickens and raises from the dead. Later He was determined to be Son of God with power by resurrection of the dead. They had eyes, but they saw not; ears had they, but they heard not, nor did they understand His glory. Alas! not the Jews only; for, as far as intelligence went, it was little better with the disciples till He rose from the dead. The resurrection of the Lord is not more truly a demonstration of His power and glory, than the only deliverance for disciples from the thraldom of Jewish influence. Without it there is no divine understanding of Christ, or of His word, or of Scripture. Further, it is connected intimately with the evidence of man's ruin by sin. Thus it is a kind of transitional fact for a most important part of our Gospel, though still introductory. Christ was the true sanctuary, not that on which man had laboured so long in Jerusalem. Man might pull Him down -- destroy Him, as far as man could, and surely to be the basis in God's hand of better blessing; but He was God, and in three days He would raise up this temple. Man was judged: another Man was there, the Lord from heaven, soon to stand in resurrection.

It is not now the revelation of God meeting man either in essential nature, or as manifested in flesh; nor is it the course of dispensational dealing presented in a parenthesis as well as mysterious form, beginning with John the Baptist's testimony, and going down to the millennium in the Son, full of grace and truth. It becomes a question of man's own condition, and how he stands in relation to the kingdom of God. This question is raised, or rather settled, by the Lord in Jerusalem, at the passover feast, where many believed on His name, beholding the signs He wrought. The dreadful truth comes out: the Lord did not trust Himself to them, because He knew all men. How withering the words! He had no need that any should testify of man, for He knew what was in man. It is not denunciation, but the most solemn sentence in the calmest manner. It was no longer a moot-point whether God could trust man; for, indeed, He could not. The question really is, whether man would trust God. Alas! he would not.

John 3 follows this up. God orders matters so that a favoured teacher of men, favoured as none others were in Israel, should come to Jesus by night. The Lord meets him at once with the strongest assertion of the absolute necessity that a man should be born anew in order to see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus, not understanding in the least such a want for himself, expresses his wonder, and hears our Lord increasing in the strength of the requirement. Except one were born of water and of the Spirit, he could not enter the kingdom of God. This was necessary for the kingdom of God; not for some special place of glory, but for any and every part of God's kingdom. Thus we have here the other side of the truth: not merely what God is in life and light, in grace and truth, as revealed in Christ coming down to man; but man is now judged in the very root of his nature, and proved to be entirely incapable, in his best state, of seeing or entering the kingdom of God. There is the need of another nature, and the only way in which this nature is communicated is by being born of water and the Spirit -- the employment of the word of God in the quickening energy of the Holy Ghost. So only is man born of God. The Spirit of God uses that word; it is thus invariably in conversion. There is no other way in which the new nature is, made good in a soul. Of course it is the revelation of Christ; but here He was simply revealing the sources of this indispensable new birth. There is no changing or bettering the old man; and, thanks be to God, the new does not degenerate or pass away.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit (John 3:1-6).

But the Lord goes farther, and bids Nicodemus not wonder at His insisting on this need. As there is an absolute necessity on God's part that man should be thus born anew, so He lets him know there is an active grace of the Spirit, as the wind blows where it will, unknown and uncontrolled by man, for every one that is born of the Spirit, who is sovereign in operation. First, a new nature is insisted on -- the Holy Ghost's quickening of each soul who is vitally related to God's kingdom; next, the Spirit of God takes an active part -- not as source or character only, but acting sovereignly, which opens the way not only for a Jew, but for every one (John 3:7, 8).

It is hardly necessary to furnish detailed disproof of the crude, ill-considered notion (originated by the fathers), that baptism is in question. In truth, Christian baptism did not yet exist, but only such as the disciples used, like John the Baptist; it was not instituted of Christ till after His resurrection, as it sets forth His death. Had it been meant, it was no wonder that Nicodemus did not know how these things could be. But the Lord reproaches him, the master of Israel, with not knowing these things: that is, as a teacher, with Israel for his scholar, he ought to have known them objectively, at least, if not consciously. Isa. 44:3, 59:21, Ezek. 36:25-27 ought to have made the Lord's meaning plain to an intelligent Jew (John 3:10).

The Lord, it is true, could and did go farther than the prophets: even if He taught on the same theme. He could speak with conscious divine dignity and knowledge (not merely what was assigned to an instrument or messenger).

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven (John 3:11-13).

He (and He was alone here) knew God, and the things of God, consciously in Himself, as surely as He knew all men, and what was in man objectively. He could, therefore, tell them of heavenly things as readily as of earthly things; but the incredulity about the latter, shown in the wondering ignorance of the new birth as a requisite for God's kingdom, proved it was useless to tell of the former. For He who spoke was divine. Nobody had gone up to heaven: God had taken more than one; but no one had gone there as of right. Jesus not only could go up, as He did later, but He had come down
thence, and, even though man, He was the Son of man that is in heaven. He is a divine person; His manhood brought no attainer to His rights as God. Heavenly things, therefore, could not but be natural to Him, if one may so say.

Here the Lord introduces the cross. It is not a question simply of the Son of God, nor is He spoken of here as the Word made flesh. But as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must (δεῖ) the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:14, 15).

As the new birth for the kingdom of God, so the cross is absolutely necessary for eternal life. In the Word was life, and the life was the light of men. It was not intended for other beings -- it was God's free gift to man, to the believer, of course. Man, dead in sins, was the object of His grace; but then man's state was such, that it would have been derogatory to God had that life been communicated without the cross of Christ: the Son of man lifted up on it was the One in whom God dealt judicially with the evil estate of man, for the full consequences of which He made Himself responsible. It would not suit God, if it would suit man, that He, seeing all, should just pronounce on man's corruption, and then forthwith let him off with a bare pardon. One must be born again. But even this sufficed not: the Son of man must be lifted up. It was impossible that there should not be righteous dealing with human evil against God, in its sources and its streams. Accordingly, if the law raised the question of righteousness in man, the cross of the Lord Jesus, typifying Him made sin, is the answer; and there has all been settled to the glory of God, the Lord Jesus having suffered all the inevitable consequences. Hence, then, we have the Lord Jesus alluding to this fresh necessity, if man was to be blessed according to God.

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

But this, however worthy of God, and indispensable for man, could not of itself give an adequate expression of what God is; because in this alone, neither His own love nor the glory of His Son finds due display.

Hence, after having first unmistakably laid down the necessity of the cross, He next shows the grace that was manifested in the gift of Jesus. Here He is not portrayed as the Son of man who must be lifted up, but as the Son of God who was given.

For God, He says, so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16).

The one, like the other, contributes to this great end, whether the Son of man necessarily lifted up, or the only begotten Son of God given in His love.

Let it not be passed by, that while the new birth or regeneration is declared to be essential to a part in the kingdom of God, the Lord in urging this intimates that He had not gone beyond the earthly things of that kingdom. Heavenly things are set in evident contradistinction, and link themselves immediately here, as everywhere, with the cross as their correlative. (See Heb. 12:2, 13:11-13.) Again, let me just remark in passing, that although, no doubt, we may in a general way speak of those who partake of the new nature as having that life, yet the Holy Ghost refrains from predicating of any saints the full character of eternal life as a present thing, until we have the cross of Christ laid (at least doctrinally) as the ground of it. But when the Lord speaks of His cross, and not God's judicial requirements only, but the gift of Himself in His true personal glory as the occasion for the grace of God to display itself to the utmost, then, and not till then, do we hear of eternal life, and this connected with both these points of view. The chapter pursues this subject, showing that it is not only God who thus deals -- first, with the necessity of man before His own immutable nature; next, blessing according to the riches of His grace -- but, further, that man's state morally is detected yet more awfully in presence of such grace as well as holiness in Christ.

For God sent not his Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world through him might be saved (John 3:17).

This decides all before the execution of judgment. Every man's lot is made manifest by his attitude toward God's testimony concerning His Son.

He that believeth on him is not judged: but he that believeth not is judged already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:18).

Other things, the merest trifles, may serve to indicate a man’s condition; but a new responsibility is created by this infinite display of divine goodness in Christ, and the evidence is decisive and final, that the unbeliever is already judged before God.

And this is the judgment, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God (John 3:19-21).

The Lord and the disciples are next seen in the country district, not far, it would seem, from John, who was baptizing as they were. The disciples of John dispute with a Jew about purification; but John himself renders a bright witness to the glory of the Lord Jesus. In vain did any come to the Baptist to report the widening circle around Christ. He bows to, as he explains, the sovereign will of God. He reminds them of his previous disclaimer of any place beyond one sent before Jesus. His joy was that of a friend of the Bridegroom (to whom, not to him, the bride belonged), and now fulfilled as he heard the Bridegroom's voice.

He must increase, but I decrease [John 3:30].

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Blessed servant he of an infinitely blessed and blessing Master! Then (John 3:31-36) he speaks of His person in contrast with himself and all; of His testimony and of the result, both as to His own glory, and consequently also for the believer on, and the rejecter of, the Son. He that comes from above -- from heaven -- is above all. Such was Jesus in person, contrasted with all who belong to the earth. Just as distinct and beyond comparison is His testimony who, coming from heaven and above all, testifies what He saw and heard, however it might be rejected. But see the blessed fruit of receiving it.

He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true. For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him {John 3:33, 34}.

I apprehend the words the authorised version gives in italics should disappear. The addition of “unto him” detracts, to my mind, from the exceeding preciousness of what seems to be, at least, left open. For the astonishing thought is, not merely that Jesus receives the Holy Ghost without measure, but that God gives the Spirit also, and not by measure, through Him to others. In the beginning of the chapter it was rather an essential indispensable action of the Holy Ghost required; here it is the privilege of the Holy Ghost given. No doubt Jesus Himself had the Holy Ghost given to Him, as it was meet that He in all things should have the pre-eminence; but it shows yet more both the personal glory of Christ and the efficacy of His work, that He now gives the same Spirit to those who receive His testimony, and set to their seal that God is true. How singularly is the glory of the Lord Jesus thus viewed, as invested with the testimony of God and its crown! What more glorious proof than that the Holy Ghost is given -- not a certain defined power or gift, but the Holy Ghost Himself; for God gives not the Spirit by measure!

All is fitly closed by the declaration, that

the Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand {John 3:35}.

It is not merely or most of all a great prophet or witness: He is the Son; and the Father has given all things to be in His hand. There is the nicest care to maintain His personal glory, no matter what the subject may be. The results for the believer or unbeliever are eternal in good or in evil. He that believes on the Son has everlasting life; and he that disobeys the Son, in the sense of not being subject to His person,

shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him {John 3:36}.

Such is the issue of the Son of God present in this world -- an everlasting one for every man; flowing from the glory of His person, the character of His testimony, and the Father's counsels respecting Him. The effect is thus final, even as His person, witness, and glory are divine.

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The chapters we have had before us (John 1–3) are thus evidently an introduction: God revealed not in the Word alone, but in the Word made flesh, in the Son who declared the Father; His work, as God's Lamb, for the world, and His power by the Holy Ghost in man; then viewed as the centre of gathering, as the path to follow, and as the object even for the attendance of God's angels, the heaven being opened, and Jesus -- not the Son of God and King of Israel only, but the Son of man -- object of God's counsels. This will be displayed in the millennium, when the marriage will be celebrated, as well as the judgment executed (Jerusalem and its temple being the central point then). This, of course, supposes the setting aside of Jerusalem, its people and house, as they now are, and is justified by the great fact of Christ's death and resurrection, which is the key to all, though not yet intelligible even to the disciples. This brings in the great counterpart truth, that even God present on earth and made flesh is not enough. Man is morally judged. One must be born again for God's kingdom -- a Jew for what was promised him, like another. But the Spirit would not confine His operations to such bounds, but go out freely like the wind. Nor would the rejected Christ, the Son of man; for if lifted up on the cross, instead of having the throne of David, the result would be not merely earthly blessing for His people according to prophecy, but eternal life for the believer, whoever he might be; and this, too, as the expression of the true and full grace of God in His only-begotten Son given. John then declared his own waning before Christ, as we have seen, the issues of whose testimony, believed or not, are eternal; and this founded on the revelation of His glorious person as man and to man here below.

+ + +

John 4 presents the Lord Jesus outside Jerusalem -- outside the people of promise -- among Samaritans, with whom Jews had no intercourse. Pharisaic jealousy had wrought; and Jesus, wearied, sat thus at the fountain of Jacob's well in Sychar (John 4:1-6). What a picture of rejection and humiliation! Nor was it yet complete. For if, on the one side, God has taken care to let us see already the glory of the Son, and the grace of which He was full, on the other side, all shines out the more marvellously when we know how He dealt with a woman of Samaria, sinful and degraded. Here was a meeting, indeed, between such an one and Him, the Son, true God and eternal life. Grace begins, glory descends;

Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink (John 4:7).

It was strange to her that a Jew should thus humble himself: what would it have been, had she seen in Him Jesus the Son of God?

Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water (John 4:10).

Infinite grace! infinite truth! and the more manifest from His lips to one who was a real impersonation of sin, misery, blindness, degradation. But this is not the question of grace: not what she was, but what He is who was there to win and bless her, manifesting God and the Father withal, practically and in detail. Surely He was there, a weary man outside Judaism; but God, the God of all grace, who humbled Himself to ask a drink of water of her, that He might give the richest and most enduring gift, even water which, once
drank, leaves no thirst for ever and ever -- yea, is in him who
drinks a fountain of water springing up unto everlasting life.
Thus the Holy Ghost, given by the Son in humiliation
(according to God, not acting on law, but according to the
gift of grace in the gospel), was fully set forth; but the
woman, though interested, and asking, only apprehended a
boon for this life to save herself trouble here below. This
gives occasion to Jesus to teach us the lesson that conscience
must be reached, and sense of sin produced, before grace is
understood and brings forth fruit. This He does in
John 4:16-19. Her life is laid before her by His voice, and
she confesses to Him that God Himself spoke to her in His
words:

Sir [said she], I perceive that thou art a prophet
(John 4:19).

If she turned aside to questions of religion, with a mixture of
desire to learn what had concerned and perplexed her, and of
willingness to escape such a searching of her ways and heart,
He did not refrain gracioulsly to vouchsafe the revelation of
God, that earthly worship was doomed, that the Father was
to be worshipped, not an Unknown. And while He does not
hide the privilege of the Jews, He nevertheless proclaims that
the hour cometh, and now is, when the true
worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in
truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.
God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must
worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23, 24).

This brings all to a point; for the woman says,
I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things
(John 4:25).

And Jesus answers,
I that speak unto thee am he (John 4:26).

The disciples come; the woman goes into the city, leaving her
waterpot, but carrying with her the unspeakable gift of God.
Her testimony bore the impress of what had penetrated her
soul, and would make way for all the rest in due time.

Come, see a man that told me all things that ever I
did: is not this the Christ? (John 4:29).

Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born
of God (1 John 5:1).

It was much, yet was it little of the glory that was His; but at
least it was real; and to the one that shall be given.
(John 4:20-30.)

The disciples marvelled that He spoke with the woman.
How little they conceived of what was then said and done!

Master, eat,
said they.

But he said to them, I have meat to eat that ye know
not of (John 4:31, 32).

They entered not into His words more than His grace, but
thought and spoke, like the Samaritan woman, about things of
this life. Jesus explains:

My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to
finish his work. Say not ye, There are yet four
months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto
you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for
they are white already to harvest. And he that
reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life
eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth
can rejoice together. And herein is that saying true,
One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap
that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men
laboured, and ye are entered into their labours
(John 4:33-38).

Thus a despised Christ is not merely a crucified Son of
man, and given Son of God, as in John 3, but Himself a
divine giver in communion with the Father, and in the power
of the Holy Ghost who is given to the believer, the source of
worship, as their God and Father is its object for the
worshippers in spirit and truth (though surely not to the
exclusion of the Son, Heb. 1). So it must be now; for God is
revealed; and the Father in grace seeks true worshippers (be
they Samaritans or Jews) to worship Him. Here, accordingly,
it is not so much the means by which life is communicated,
as the revelation of the full blessing of grace and communion
with the Father and His Son by the Holy Ghost, in whom we
are blessed. Hence it is that here the Son, according to the
grace of God the Father, gives the Holy Ghost -- eternal life
in the power of the Spirit. It is not simply the new birth such
as a saint might, and always must, have had, in order to vital
relations with God at any time. Here, in suited circumstances
to render the thought and way of God unmistakable, pure and
boundless grace takes its own sovereign course, suitable to
the love and personal glory of Christ. For if the Son (cast out,
we may say, in principle from Judaism) visited Samaria,
and deigned to talk with one of the most worthless of that
worthless race, it could not be a mere rehearsal of what
others did. Not Jacob was there, but the Son of God in
nothing but grace; and thus to the Samaritan woman, not to
the teachers of Israel, are made those wonderful communications which unfold to us with incomparable depth
and beauty the real source, power, and character of that
worship which supersedes, not merely schismatic and
rebellious Samaria, but Judaism at its best. For evidently it is
the theme of worship in its Christian fulness, the fruit of the
manifestation of God, and of the Father known in grace. And
worship is viewed both in moral nature and in the joy of
communion -- doubly. First, we must worship, if at all, in
spirit and in truth. This is indispensable; for God is a Spirit,
and so it cannot but be. Besides this, goodness overflows, in
that the Father is gathering children, and making
worshippers. The Father seeks worshippers. What love! In
short, the riches of God's grace are here according to the
glory of the Son, and in the power of the Holy Ghost. Hence
the Lord, while fully owning the labours of all preceding
labourers, has before His eyes the whole boundless expanse
of grace, the mighty harvest which His apostles were to reap
in due time. It is thus strikingly an anticipation of the result
in glory. Meanwhile, for Christian worship, the hour was
coming and in principle come, because He was there; and He
who vindicated salvation as of the Jews, proves that it is now
for Samaritans, or any who believed on account of His word.
Without sign, prodigy, or miracle, in this village of Samaria

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Jesus was heard, known, confessed as truly the Saviour of the world (“the Christ” being absent in the best authorities, John 4:42). The Jews, with all their privileges, were strangers here. They knew what they worshipped, but not the Father, nor were they “true.” No such sounds, no such realities were ever heard or known in Israel. How were they not enjoyed in despaired Samaria — those two days with the Son of God among them! It was meet that it should be so; for, as a question of right, none could claim; and grace surpasses all expectation or thought of man, most of all of men accustomed to a round of religious ceremonial. Christ did not wait till the time was fully come for the old things to pass away, and all to be made new. His own love and person were warrant enough for the simple to lift the veil for a season, and fill the hearts which had received Himself into the conscious enjoyment of divine grace, and of Him who revealed it to them. It was but preliminary, of course; still it was a deep reality, the then present grace in the person of the Son, the Saviour of the world, who filled their once dark hearts with light and joy.

* * *

The close of the chapter shows us the Lord in Galilee. But there was this difference from the former occasion, that, at the marriage in Cana (John 2), the change of the water into wine was clearly millennial in its typical aspect. The healing of the courtier’s son, sick and ready to die, is witness of what the Lord was actually doing among the despised of Israel. It is there that we found the Lord, in the other synoptic Gospels, fulfilling His ordinary ministry. John gives us this point of contact with them, though in an incident peculiar to himself. It is our evangelist’s way of indicating His Galilean sojourn; and this miracle is the particular subject that John was led by the Holy Ghost to take up. Thus, as in the former case the Lord’s dealing in Galilee was a type of the future, this appears to be significant of His then present path of grace in that despised quarter of the land. The looking for signs and wonders is rebuked; but mortality is arrested. His corporeal presence was not necessary; His word was enough. The contrasts are as strong, at least, as the resemblance with the healing of the centurion’s servant in Matt. 13 and Luke 7, which some ancients and moderns have confounded with this, as they did Mary’s anointing of Jesus with the sinful woman’s in Luke 7.

One of the peculiarities of our Gospel is, that we see the Lord from time to time (and, indeed, chiefly) in or near Jerusalem. This is the more striking, because, as we have seen, the world and Israel, rejecting Him, are also themselves, as such, rejected from the first. The truth is, the design of manifesting His glory governs all; place or people was a matter of no consequence.

* * *

Here (John 5) the first view given of Christ is His person in contrast with the law. Man, under law, proved powerless; and the greater the need, the less the ability to avail himself of such merciful intervention as God still, from time to time, kept up throughout the legal system. The same God who did not leave Himself without witness among the heathen, doing good, and giving from heaven rain and fruitful seasons, did not fail, in the low estate of the Jews, to work by providential power at intervals; and, by the troubled waters of Bethesda, invited the sick, and healed the first who stepped in of whatever disease he had. In the five porches, then, of this pool lay a great multitude of sick, blind, lame, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. But there was a man who had been infirm for thirty and eight years. Jesus saw the man, and knowing that he was long thus, prompts the desire of healing, but brings out the despondency of unbelief. How truly it is man under law! Not only is there no healing to be extracted from the law by a sinner, but the law makes more evident the disease, if it does not also aggravate the symptoms. The law works no deliverance; it puts a man in chains, prison, darkness, and under condemnation; it renders him a patient, or a criminal incompetent to avail himself of the displays of God’s goodness. God never left Himself without witness: He did not even among the Gentiles, surely yet less in Israel. Still, such is the effect on man under law, that he could not take advantage of an adequate remedy (John 5:1-7).

On the other hand, the Lord speaks but the word:

Rise, take up thy couch, and walk [John 5:8].

The result immediately follows. It was sabbath-day. The Jews, then, who could not help, and pitied not their fellow in his long infirmity and disappointment, are scandalized to see him, safe and sound, carrying his couch on that day. But they learn that it was His divine Physician who had not only healed, but so directed him. At once their malice drops the beneficent power of God in the case, provoked at the fancied wrong done to the seventh day (John 5:8-12).

But were the Jews mistaken after all in thinking that the seal of the first covenant was virtually broken in that deliberate word and warranty of Jesus? He could have healed the man without the smallest outward act to shock their zeal for the law. Expressly had He told the man to take up his couch and walk, as well as to rise. There was purpose in it. There was sentence of death pronounced on their system, and they felt accordingly. The man could not tell the Jews the name of his benefactor. But Jesus finds him in the temple, and said,

Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee [John 5:14].

The man went off, and told the Jews that it was Jesus: and for this they persecuted Him, because He had done these things on the sabbath (John 5:13-16).

A graver issue, however, was to be tried; for Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. For this, therefore, the Jews sought the more to kill Him; -- because he added the greater offence of making Himself equal with God, by saying that God was His own Father (John 5:17, 18).

Thus, in His person, as well as in His work, they joined issue. Nor could any question be more momentous. If He spoke the truth, they were blasphemers. But how precious the grace, in presence of their hatred and proud
self-complacency!

My Father worketh hitherto, and I work (John 5:17).

They had no common thoughts, feelings, or ways with the Father and the Son. Were the Jews zealously keeping the sabbath? The Father and the Son were at work. How could either light or love rest in a scene of sin, darkness, and misery?

Did they charge Jesus with self-exaltation? No charge could be remoter from the truth. Though He could not, would not deny Himself (and He was the Son, and Word, and God), yet had He taken the place of a man, of a servant. Jesus, therefore, answered,

Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice; and shall come forth: they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment (John 5:19-29).

It is evident, then, that the Lord presents life in Himself as the true want of man, who was not merely infirm but dead. Law, means, ordinances, could not meet the need -- no pool, nor angel -- nothing but the Son working in grace, the Son quickening. Governmental healing even from Him might only end in some worse thing coming through sin (John 5:14).

And as life is in the person of the Son, so God in sending Him meant not that the smallest uncertainty should exist for ought so momentous. He would have every soul to know assuredly how he stands for eternity as well as now. There is but one unfailing test -- the Son of God -- God's testimony to Him. Therefore, it seems to me, He adds John 5:24. It is not a question of the law, but of hearing Christ's word, and believing Him who sent Christ: he that does so has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment; but is passed from death unto life. The Word, God (and only begotten Son in the Father's bosom), He was eternally -- Son of God, too, as born into the world. Was this false and blasphemous in their eyes? They could not deny Him to be man -- Son of man. Nay; therefore it was they, reasoning, denied Him to be God. Let them learn, then, that as Son of man (for which nature they despised Him, and denied His essential personal glory) He will judge; and this judgment will be no passing visitation, such as God has accomplished by angels or men in times past. The judgment, all of it, whether for quick or dead, is consigned to Him, because He is Son of man. Such is God's vindication of His outraged rights; and the judgment will be proportionate to the glory that has been set at nought.

Thus solemnly does the meek Lord Jesus unfold these two truths. In Him was life for this scene of death; and it is of faith that it might be by grace. This only secures His honour in those that believe God's testimony to Him, the Son of God; and to these He gives life, everlasting life now, and exemption from judgment, in this acting in communion with the Father. And in this He is sovereign. The Son gives life, as the Father does; and not merely to whom the Father will, but to whom He will. Nevertheless the Son had taken the place of being the sent One, the place of subordination in the earth, in which He would say;

My Father is greater than I (John 14:28).

And He did accept that place thoroughly, and in all its consequences. But let them beware how they perverted it. Granted He was the Son of man; but as such, He had all judgment given Him, and would judge. Thus in one way or the other all must honour the Son. The Father did not judge, but committed all judgment into the hands of the Son, because He is the Son of man. It was not the time now to demonstrate in public power these coming, yea, then present truths. The hour was one for faith, or unbelief. Did the dead (for so men are treated, not as alive under law) -- did they hear the voice of the Son of God? Such shall live. For though the Son (that eternal life who was with the Father) was a man, in that very position had the Father given Him to have life in Himself, and to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of man. Judgment is the alternative for man: for God it is the resource to make good the glory of the Son, and in that nature, in and for which man -- blind to his own highest dignity -- dares to despise Him. Two resurrections, one of life, and another of judgment, would be the manifestation of faith and unbelief, or rather, of those who believe, and of those who reject, the Son. They were not to wonder then at what He says and does now; for an hour was coming in which all that are in the
graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those that have done good to resurrection of life, and those that have done evil to resurrection of judgment. This would make all manifest. Now it is that the great question is decided; now it is that a man receives or refuses Christ. If he receives Him, it is everlasting life, and Christ is thus honoured by him; if not, judgment remains which will compel the honour of Christ, but to his own ruin for ever. Resurrection will be the proof; the twofold rising of the dead, not one, but two resurrections. Life-resurrection will display how little they had to be ashamed of, who believed the record given of His Son; the resurrection of judgment will make but too plain, to those who despised the Lord, both His honour and their sin and shame.

As this chapter sets forth the Lord Jesus with singular fulness of glory, on the side both of His Godhead and of His manhood, so it closes with the most varied and remarkable testimonies God has given to us, that there may be no excuse. So bright was His glory, so concerned was the Father in maintaining it, so immense the blessing if received, so tremendous the stake involved in its loss, that God vouchsafed the amplest and clearest witnesses. If He judges, it is not without full warning. Accordingly there is a fourfold testimony to Jesus: the testimony of John the Baptist; the Lord's own works; the voice of the Father from heaven: and finally, the written word which the Jews had in their own hands. To this last the Lord attaches the deepest importance. This testimony differs from the rest in having a more permanent character. Scripture is, or may be, before man always. It is not a message or a sign, however significant at the moment, which passes away as soon as heard or seen. As a weapon of conviction, most justly had it in the mind of the Lord Jesus the weightiest place, little as man thinks now a days of it. The issue of all is, that the will of man is the real cause and spring of enmity.

Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life
{John 5:40}. It was no lack of testimony; their will was for present honour, and hostile to the glory of the only God. They would fall a prey to Antichrist, and meanwhile are accused of Moses, in whom they trusted, without believing him; else they would have believed Christ, of whom he wrote.

The ship was at the land whither they went (John 6:1-21).

The Lord, in the latter part of the chapter (John 6:27-58), contrasts the presentation of the truth of God in His person and work with all that pertained to the promises of Messiah. It is not that He denies the truth of what they were thus desiring and attached to. Indeed, He was the great Prophet, as He was the great King, and as He is now the great Priest on high. Still the Lord refused the crown then: it was not the time or state for His reign. Deeper questions demanded solution. A greater work was in hand; and this, as the rest of the chapter shows us, not a Messiah lifted up, but the true bread, given -- He who comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world; a dying, not a reigning, Son of man. It is His person as incarnate first, then in redemption giving His flesh to be eaten and His blood to be drank. Thus former things pass away; the old man is judged, dead, and clean gone. A second and wholly new man appears -- the bread of God, not of man, but for men. The character is wholly different from the position and glory of Messiah in Israel, according to promise and prophecy. Indeed, it is the total eclipse, not merely of law and remedial mercies, but even of promised Messianic glory, by everlasting life and resurrection at the last day. Christ here, it will be noticed, is not so much the quickening agent as Son of God (John 5), but the object of faith as Son of man -- first incarnate, to be eaten; then dying and giving His flesh to be eaten, and His blood to be drank. Thus we feed on Him and drink into Him, as man, unto life -- everlasting life in Him.

This last is the figure of a truth deeper than incarnation, and clearly means communion with His death. They had stumbled before, and the Lord brought in not alone His person, as the Word made flesh, presented for man now to receive and enjoy; but unless they ate the flesh and drank the blood of the Son of man, they had no life in them. There He supposes His full rejection and death. He speaks of Himself as the Son of man in death; for there could be no eating of His flesh, no drinking of His blood, as a living man. Thus it is not only the person of our Lord viewed as divine, and coming down into the world. He who, living, was received for eternal life, is our meat and drink in dying, and gives us communion with His death. Thus, in fact, we have the Lord setting aside what was merely Messianic by the grand truths of the incarnation, and, above all, of the atonement, with which man must have vital association: he must eat -- yea, eat and drink. This language is said of both, but most strongly of the latter. And so, in fact, it was and is. He who owns the reality of Christ's incarnation, receives most thankfully and adoringly from God the truth of redemption; he, on the contrary, who stumbles at redemption, has not really taken in the incarnation according to God's mind. If a man looks at the Lord Jesus as One who entered the world in a general way, and calls this the incarnation, he will surely stumble over the cross. If, on the contrary, a soul has been taught of God the glory of the person of Him who was made flesh, he receives in all simplicity, and rejoices in, the glorious truth, that He who was made flesh was not made flesh only to this end, but rather as a step toward another and deeper work --
the glorifying God, and becoming our food, in death. Such are the grand emphatic points to which the Lord leads.

But the chapter does not close without a further contrast (John 6:59-71). What and if they should see Him, who came down and died in this world, ascend up where He was before? All is in the character of the Son of man. The Lord Jesus did, without question, take humanity in His person into that glory which He so well knew as the Son of the Father.

On this basis John 7 proceeds. The brethren of the Lord Jesus, who could see the astonishing power that was in Him, but whose hearts were carnal, at once discerned that it might be an uncommon good thing for them, as well as for Him, in this world. It was worldliness in its worst shape, even to the point of turning the glory of Christ to a present account. Why should He not show Himself to the world (John 7:3-5)? The Lord intimates the impossibility of anticipating the time of God; but then He does it as connected with His own personal glory. Then He rebukes the carnality of His brethren. If His time was not yet come, their time was always ready (John 7:6-8). They belonged to the world. They spoke of the world; the world might hear them. As to Himself, He does not go at that time to the feast of tabernacles; but later on He goes up,

not openly, but as it were in secret (John 7:10),

and taught. They wonder, as they had murmured before (John 7:12-15); but Jesus shows that the desire to do God's will is the condition of spiritual understanding (John 7:16-18). The Jews kept not the law, and wished to kill Him who healed man in divine love (John 7:19-23). What judgment could be less righteous (John 7:24)? They reason and are in utter uncertainty (John 7:25-31). He is going where they cannot come, and never guessed (for unbelief thinks of the dispersed among the Greeks -- of anything rather than of God) (John 7:33-36). Jesus was returning to Him that sent Him, and the Holy Ghost would be given. So on the last day, that great day of the feast (the eighth day, which witnessed of a resurrection glory outside this creation, now to be made good in the power of the Spirit before anything appears to sight), the Lord stands and cries, saying,

If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink (John 7:37).

It is not a question of eating the bread of God, or, when Christ died, of eating His flesh and drinking His blood. Here,

If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.

Just as in John 4, so here it is a question of power in the Holy Ghost, and not simply of Christ's person.

He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water (John 7:38).

And then we have the comment of the Holy Ghost:

(But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified) (John 7:39).

There is, first, the thirsty soul coming to Jesus and drinking; then there is the power of the Spirit flowing forth from the inner man of the believer in refreshment to others.

Nothing can be simpler than this: Details are not called for now, but just the outline of the truth. But what we learn is, that our Lord (viewed as having entered into heaven as man on the ground of redemption, i.e. ascended, after having passed through death, into glory) from that glory confers meanwhile the Holy Ghost on him that believes, instead of bringing in at once the final feast of gladness for the Jews and the world, as He will do by and by when the anti-typical harvest and vintage has been fulfilled. Thus, it is not the Spirit of God simply giving a new nature; neither is it the Holy Ghost given as the power of worship and communion with His God and Father. This we have had fully before. Now, it is the Holy Ghost in the power that gives rivers of living water flowing out, and this bound up with, and consequent on, His being man in glory. Till then the Holy Ghost could not be so given -- only when Jesus was glorified, after redemption was a fact. What can be more evident, or more instructive? It is the final setting aside of Judaism then, whose characteristic hope was the display of power and rest in the world. But here these streams of the Spirit are substituted for the feast of tabernacles, which cannot be accomplished till Christ come from heaven and show Himself to the world; for this time was not yet come. Rest is not the question now at all; but the flow of the Spirit's power while Jesus is on high. In a certain sense, the principle of John 4 was made true in the woman of Samaria, and in others who received Christ then. The person of the Son was there the object of divine and overflowing joy even then, although, of course, in the full sense of the word, the Holy Ghost might not be given to be the power of it for some time later; but still the object of worship was there revealing the Father; but John 7 supposes Him to be gone up to heaven, before He from heaven communicates the Holy Ghost, who should be (not here, as Israel had a rock with water to drink of in the wilderness outside themselves, nor even as a fountain springing up within the believer, but) as rivers flowing out. How blessed the contrast with the people's state depicted in this chapter, tossed about by every wind of doctrine, looking to letters {John 7:15}, rulers, and Pharisees, perplexed about the Christ, but without righteous judgment, assurance, or enjoyment! Nicodemus remonstrates but is spurned; all retire to their home -- Jesus, who had none, to the mount of Olives (John 7:40–8:1).

This closes the various aspects of the Lord Jesus, completely blotting out Judaism, viewed as resting in a system of law and ordinances, as looking to a Messiah with present ease, and as hoping for the display of Messianic glory then in the world. The Lord Jesus presents Himself as putting an end to all this now for the Christian, though, of course, every word God has promised, as well as threatened, remains to be accomplished in Israel by and by; for Scripture cannot be broken; and what the mouth of the Lord has said awaits its fulfilment in its due sphere and season.
Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Gospels

Lecture 10

John 8 – 14

The point at which we have arrived gives me an opportunity of saying a little on the beginning of this chapter, and the end of the last; for it is well known that many men, and, I am sorry to add, not a few Christians, have allowed appearances to weigh against John 7:53–8:11 -- a very precious portion of God’s word. The fact is, that the paragraph of the convicted adulteress has been either simply left out in some copies of Scripture, or a blank equivalent to it appears, or it is given with marks of doubt and a good deal of variety of reading, or it is put in elsewhere. This, with many alleged verbal peculiarities, acted on the minds of a considerable number, and led them to question its title to a place in the genuine Gospel of John. I do not think that the objections usually raised are here understated. Nevertheless, mature as well as minute consideration of them fails to raise the slightest doubt in my own mind, and therefore to me it seems so much the more a duty to defend it, where the alternative is a dishonour to what I believe God has given us.

In its favour are the strongest possible proofs from such a character in itself, and such suitability to the context; as no forgery could ever boast. And these moral or spiritual indications (though, of course, only to such as are capable of apprehending and enjoying God’s mind) are incomparably graver and more conclusive than any evidence of an external sort. Not that the external evidence is really weak, far from it. That which gives such an appearance is capable of reasonable, unforced, and even of what seems almost to amount to an historical solution. The meddling was probably due to human motives -- no uncommon thing in ancient or modern times. With good and with bad intentions men have often tried to mend the word of God. Superstitious persons, unable to enter into its beauty, and anxious after the good opinion of the world, were afraid to trust the truth which Christ was here setting forth in deed. Augustine, 7 an unimpeachable witness of facts, nearly as old as the most ancient manuscripts which omit the paragraph, tells us that it was from ethical difficulties some dropped this section out of their copies. We know for certain that dogmatic motives similarly influenced some in Luke 22:42, 43. One of the considerations, adverted to already, ought to weigh exceedingly with the believer. The account, I shall show, is exactly in harmony with the Scripture that follows it -- not less so than the Lord's refusal to go up to the feast and show Himself to the world, with His words which follow on the gift of the Holy Ghost in John 7; or, again, the miracle of the miraculous bread, with the discourse appended on the needed food for the Christian in John 6. In a word, there is here, as there, an indissoluble link of connected truth between the facts related and the communication our Lord makes afterwards in each instance respectively.

For, let me ask, what is the salient divine principle which runs through our Lord's conduct and language when the scribes and Pharisees confront Him with the woman taken in adultery? A flagrant case of sin was produced. They manifest no holy hatred of the evil, and certainly feel no pity for the sinner.

They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou. 8 This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him (John 8:4-6).

Their hope was to ensnare Christ, and to leave Him only a choice of difficulties: either a useless repetition of the law of Moses, or open opposition to the law. If the latter, would it not prove Him God's adversary? If the former, would He not forfeit all His pretensions to grace? For they were well aware, that in all the ways and language of Christ, there was that which totally differed from the law and all before Him. Indeed, they counted on His grace, though they felt it not, relished it not, in no way valued it as of God; but still they so expected grace in our Lord's dealing with so heinous a sinner as the one before them, that they hoped thereby to commit Him fatally in the eyes of men. Enmity to His person was their motive. To agree with Moses or to annul him seemed to them inevitable, and almost equally prejudicial to the claims of Jesus. No doubt, they most expected that our Lord in His grace would oppose the law, and thus put Himself and grace in the wrong.

But the fact is, the grace of God never conflicts with His law, but, on the contrary, maintains its authority in its own sphere. There is nothing which clears, establishes, and vindicates the law, and every other principle of God, so truly

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7. The suspicion that some weak believers or enemies of the faith omitted the section, as the Bishop of Hippo suggests, would expose the passage to be tampered with. It is very likely that the Christians who read the Shepherd of Hermas in their public services would omit John 8:1-11. Similar unbelief inclines critical judgment in that direction now. Judgment of facts is apt to be swayed and formed by the will.

8. It is the remark of a critic unfriendly to the passage, that this question belongs to the last days of our Lord's ministry, and cannot well be introduced chronologically here. Unconsciously, however, this is really a strong confirmation: for morally John starts with the rejection of Jesus, and gives at the beginning even (as in the cleansing of the temple) similar truths to those which the rest attest at the close.
as His grace. Even the proprieties of nature were never so made good as when the Lord manifested grace on the earth. Take, for instance, His ways in Matt. 19. Who ever developed God’s idea and will in marriage as Christ did? Who cast light on the value of a little child till Christ did? When a man left Himself, who could look so wistfully and with such love upon him as Jesus? Grace therefore is in no way inconsistent with, but maintains obligations at their true height. It is precisely thus, only still more gloriously, with our Lord’s conduct on this occasion; for He weakens not in the least either the law or its sanctions, but contrariwise sheds around divine light in His own words and ways, and even applies the law with convincing power, not merely to the convicted criminal, but to the more hidden guilt of her accusers. Not a single self-righteous soul was left in that all-searching presence -- none indeed of those who came about the matter, except the woman herself.

Choose for me in all Scripture a preface of fact so suited to the doctrine of the chapter that follows. The whole chapter, from first to last, beams with light -- the light of God and of His word in the person of Jesus. Is not this undeniably what comes out in the opening incident? Does not Christ present Himself in discourse just after as the light of the world (so continually in John), as God’s light by His word in Himself, infinitely superior even to law, and yet at the same time giving the law its fullest authority? Only a divine person could thus put and keep everything in its due place; only a divine person could act in perfect grace, but at the same time maintain immaculate holiness, and so much the more because it was in One full of grace.

This is just what the Lord does. Therefore, when the charge was brought thus heartlessly against outward evil, He simply stoops down, and with His finger writes on the ground. He allowed them to think of the circumstances, of themselves, and of Him. As they still continued asking, He lifted up Himself, and said unto them,

He that is without sin among you, let him cast the stone at her (John 8:6-8).

And again, stooping down, He writes on the ground. The first act allows the full iniquity of their aim to be realized. They hoped, no doubt, it might be an insuperable difficulty to Him. They had time to weigh what they had said and were seeking. When they continued to ask, and He lifted Himself up and spoke to them those memorable words, He again stoops, that they might weigh them in their consciences. It was the light of God cast on their thoughts, words, and life. The words were few, simple, and self-evidencing.

He that is without sin among you, let him cast the stone at her.

The effect was immediate and complete. His words penetrated to the heart. Why did not some of the witnesses rise and do the office? What! not one?

They which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last; and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst (John 8:9).

The law had never done this. They had learnt and taught and trifled with the law up to this time; they had freely used it, as men do still, to convict other people. But here was the light of God shining full on their sinful condition, as well as on the law. It was the light of God that reserved all its rights to the law, but itself shone with such spiritual force as had never reached their consciences before, and drove out the faithless hearts which desired not the knowledge of God and His ways. And this a waif tossed haphazard on the broken coast of our Gospel! Nay, brethren, your eyes are at fault; it is a ray of light from Christ, and shines just where it should.

It was not exactly, as Augustine says, “Relicti sunt duo, misera, et misericordia” (In Jo. Evang. Tr., xxxiii. 5); for here the Lord is acting as light. Therefore, instead of saying, Thy sins are forgiven, He asks,

Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more (John 8:10, 11). 9

It is not pardon, nor mercy, but light.

Go, and sin no more

(not, “Thy faith hath saved thee: go in peace”). Man invented such a story as this! Who since the world began, had he set to work to imagine an incident to illustrate the chapter, could or would have framed such an one as this? Where is there anything like it, that poet, philosopher, historian ever wrote, ever conceived? Produce the Protevangelion, the gospel of Nicodemus, or any other such early writing. These, indeed, are the genuine productions of man; but what a difference from that before us! Yet is it in the truest sense original, entirely distinct from any other fact, either in the Bible, or anywhere else, not, of course, excepting John himself. Nevertheless, its air, scope, and character can be proved, I think, to suit John, and no other; and this particular context in John, and no other. No theory is less reasonable than that this can be either a mere floating tradition stuck in here by some chance, or the work of a forger’s mind. I do not think it harsh, but charitable to speak thus plainly; for the course of incredulity is now running strong, and Christians can hardly avoid hearing of these questions. I therefore do not refuse this opportunity of leading any simple souls to see how truly divine the whole bearing of this portion is -- how exactly apposite to that which the Lord insists on throughout the chapter. For, immediately after, we have doctrine unfolded which, no doubt, goes farther, but is intimately connected, as no other chapter is, with the story. 10

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9. The fact that κεντερά ἐσθένεν is found here twice, and here only in John, is of no weight against the genuineness of the passage. It is the strict judicial term for passing an adverse sentence among men. How, where, could this be anywhere else in John? It is not true κπτένεο is ever used in this sense anywhere in John. It means, and should always be rendered, “judge,” not “condemn,” though the effect for the guilty (and man is guilty) be necessarily condemnation.

10. Among the detailed objections to the genuineness of the passage (John 7:53-8:11), it is contended that the evidence of Augustine and Nicon (who distinctly tell us that it was expunged wilfully on account of the supposed license it gave to sin) does not account for the omission of John 7:53. But this is short-sighted. For the going of each to his home is in (continued...)

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Jesus spoke again to them (the interrupters having disappeared).

I am the light of the world [John 8:12].

He had just acted as light among those who had appealed to law; He here goes on, but widens the sphere. He says,

I am the light of the world.

It is not merely dealing with scribes and Pharisees. Further, He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life [John 8:12].

The life was the light of men, the perfect display and guide of the life He was to His followers. The law never is this -- good if a man use it lawfully, but not for a righteous man whose Christ is. So Christ tells the Pharisees who objected that He knew whence He came, and whither He was going: they were in the dark, and knew nothing of it. They were in the unrelieved darkness of the world; they judged after the flesh. Not so Jesus: He did not judge. Yet, if He did, His judgment was true; for He was not alone, but His Father was with Him. And their law bid them bow to two witnesses. But what witnesses? His testimony was so decided, that the reason why they did not then lay hands on Him was simply this -- His hour was not yet come (John 8:12-20).

The Lord throughout the chapter speaks with more than usual solemnity, and with increasing plainness to His enemies, who knew neither Him nor His Father. They should die in their sins; and whither He went, they could not come. They were from beneath -- of this world; He from above, and not of this world.

The truth is, that throughout the Gospel He speaks as One consciously rejected, but morally judging all things as the Light. He therefore does not scruple to push things to an extremity, to draw out their real character and state most distinctly; to pronounce on them as from beneath, as He Himself from above; to show that there was no resemblance between them and Abraham, but rather Satan, and not the smallest communion in their thoughts with His Father's. Hence it is, too, that later on He lets them know that the time is coming when they should know who He was, but too late. He is the rejected light of God, and light of the world, from the first, and all through; but, more than this, He is the light of God; not only in deed, but in His Word; as elsewhere He let them know they would be judged by it in the last day. Hence, when they asked Him who He was, He answers them to that effect; and I refer to it the more, because the force is imperfectly given, and even wrongly, in John 8:25:

Who art thou? And Jesus saith unto them, Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning.

Not only is there no need of adding “the same,” but there is nothing that answers to “from the beginning.” And this, again, has involved our translators in a change of tense, which is not merely uncalled for, but spoils the true idea. Our Lord does not refer to what He had said at or from any starting-point, but to what He speaks always, as then also. In every respect the sense of the Holy Ghost is enfeebled, changed, and even destroyed in the common version. What our Lord did answer is incomparably more forcible, and in exact accordance with the doctrine of the chapter, and the incident that begins it. They asked Him who He was. His answer is this:

Absolutely that which I also am speaking to you

{John 8:25}. I am thoroughly, essentially what I also speak. It is not only that He is the light, and that there is no darkness in Him -- as there is none in God, so none in Him; but, as to the principle of His being, He is what He utters. And, indeed, of Him only is this true. A Christian may be said to be light in the Lord; but of none, save Jesus, could it be said, that the word he discourses is the expression of what he is. Jesus is the truth. Alas! we know that, so false is human nature and the world, nothing but the power of the Spirit, revealing Christ to us through the Word, keeps us even as believers from departure into error, misconduct, and evil of any kind. None but One could say,
I am what I speak.
And this is precisely what Christ is showing throughout the scene. He was the light to convict the doers of darkness, however hidden; He was the light which made others -- no matter what they might have been in the world -- to be light, if they followed Himself, God manifest in flesh. He manifested God, and made man manifest also. Everything was manifested by the light. Who is He?

Absolutely (τῆς ἀρχής) what I speak.

What He utters in speech is what He is. There was not the smallest deflection from the truth; His every word and way declared it. There was never the appearance of what He was not. He is always, and in every particular, what He speaks.

How entirely this falls in with what we have elsewhere, does not need to be pressed. We see farther on the same doctrine, only ever expanding; revelation clearer, and more antagonistic to more and more determined unbelief. He lets them know, that when they have lifted up the Son of man, then they shall know that Jesus is He (the truth would be thoroughly out),

and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things {John 8:28}.

It is not miracles here, but the truth. He not only is the truth in His own person, but He speaks it. He speaks it to the world also; for all through John's Gospel, although it be the eternal life that was with the Father, the Word that was with God in the beginning, still, He is also (from John 1:14) a man on earth -- a real, true man here below, however truly God. And so it is in this chapter. It began by showing that He is so in act; then it opens out that He is so in word. He said to the world what He heard from Him that sent Him -- as they rightly understood, from the Father.

He pursued the same line in dealing with the Jews who believed in Him (John 8:31):

If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed {John 8:31-36}.

Thus His word (not the law) is the sole means of knowing the truth and its liberty. It was not merely a question of commands, or of something God wanted from man. That had been given, and tried; and what was the end of it for them and Him? Now much more was at stake, even the manifestation of God in Christ to the world, and this also in His word, in the truth. It became a test, therefore, of the truth; and if they continued in His word, they should be His disciples indeed; and should know the truth, and the truth should make them free.

But then there is another thing required to set free, or rather which does dē fortiori set free. The truth learnt in the word of Jesus is the only foundation. But if received, it is not merely that I have the truth so to speak, as an expression of His mind, but of Himself -- of His person. Hence it is that He touches on this point in John 8:36:

If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

It is not merely, then, the truth making free, but the Son. He who pretends to receive the truth; but does not bow before the glory of the Son, proves that there is no truth in him. He that receives the truth might at first be very ignorant; the truth may be, then, nothing more than that which lets in the light of God graciously, but in a limited measure. It is rarely that all at once the full glory of Christ bursts in upon the soul. As with the disciples, so it might be with any soul now. There might be real, but gradual perception; but the truth invariably works thus, where God is the teacher. Then, as light increases, and the glory of Christ shines more distinctly, the heart welcomes Him; and so much the more rejoices as He is exalted. On the contrary, where it is not the truth, but theory or tradition -- a mere reasoning or sentiment about Christ, the heart is offended by the full presentation of His glory, stumbles at it, and turns away from Him, just because it cannot bear the strength and brightness of that divine fulness which was in Christ: it knows not God, nor Jesus Christ whom He has sent. Eternal life is unknown and unenjoyed.

Further, the Lord brings out here another thing worthy of all attention; especially as the same principle runs through from the incident at the beginning of the chapter. It is not merely light, truth, and the Son known in the person of Christ, but also as contrasted with the law. Did they boast in the law? What place had they under it? Slaves! Yes, and they were faithless to it; they broke the law; they were slaves of sin. It is not the slave, but the Son, who abides in the house. Thus the law is not in any way lowered, but at the same time there is the bright contrast of Christ with it. The law has its just place; it is for servants, and deals with them justly. The consequence is, there is no permanence for them, any more than liberty. Law could not meet the case; nothing, and none short of the Son.

Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin {John 8:34}.

Was not this precisely what He had brought home to the conscience at the beginning of the chapter? Before God (and He was God) it was not what the poor woman had done that was all, but what they were, and they were convicted of sin; they were not without sin. He had said,

The servant abideth not in the house {John 8:35};

and this was precisely the case with them; they were obliged to go. 11

But the Son abideth ever {John 8:35},

and so He does in the best, and highest, and truest estate. Thus the doctrine entirely harmonizes with the fact, and in a way that does not appear at first sight, but only as we look

11. “They were struck by the power of the word of Christ,” says an opponent of the chiasm of the commencing section to a genuine and divinely given place in the chapter, unconscious that he is thereby illuminating its connection with the whole current of the chapter.
into it a little more closely, and search into the depths of the living word of God, though none of us can boast of the progress we have made. Nevertheless, we may be permitted to say, that the more closely we are given of God to apprehend the truth, the more the divine perfection of the entire picture becomes manifest to our souls.

I need not go through the particulars which the Lord brings out in laying bare the condition of the Jews, the seed (not the children) of Abraham, but really of their father the devil, and manifesting it in the two characters of liar and murderer. They did not know His speech, because they could not hear His word. The truth meant is the key to the outer vehicle of it -- just the reverse of man's knowledge. In fine, all is shown in its true essential character here, the convicted one and her accusers, the Jews, the world, the disciples, the truth, the Son, Satan himself, God Himself. Not only is Abraham seen truly (not as misrepresented in his seed), but One who was greater than ours father (John 8:53)

Abraham, who would say, If I honour myself, my honour is nothing; but who could say (with a verily; verily),

BEFORE ABRAHAM WAS, I AM [John 8:58].

He is the light in deed and word. He says so. Then He deals with them, convicting them more and more. He shows that the truth is found here only in His word. He, the witness, testifies that He is the Son. But the chapter does not end before He announces His eternal Godhead. He is God Himself, yet hides Himself when they took up stones to stone Him. His hour was not yet come. This is the truth of them, as of Him. He was God. Such is the truth. Short of this, we have not the truth of Christ. But it is the growing rejection of Christ’s word that leads Him on step by step to the assertion that He was very God, though a man upon the earth.

Like the preceding, John 9 shows us the Lord rejected -- here in His work, as there in His word. The difference a little answers to what we have seen in John 5, 6. In John 5 He is the quickening Son of God; but all testimonies are vain, and judgment awaits the unbeliever -- a resurrection of judgment. In John 6 He is seen as the suffering Son of man, who takes the place of humiliation, instead of the kingdom which they wanted to force on Him. But no; this was not the purpose for which He had come, though true in its own time; but what He took, and took because His eye was ever single, viewed as man, was for God’s glory, not for His own; and the real glory of God in a ruined world is only met by the service and death of the Son of man dying for sinners and for sin. Somewhat similarly in John 8. He is the rejected Word, who confesses Himself (when most scorned and men are ready to stone Him) to be the everlasting God Himself. As man becomes more hardened in unbelief, Christ becomes more pointed and plain in the assertion of the truth. Thus the more it is pressed down, the more the brightness of the truth makes its way out, that He is God. They had fully heard now who He was, and therefore must He be ignominiously cast out. His words brought God too close, too really; and they would not bear them.

But now He is rejected in another way, and in this it is as man, though declaring Himself and worshipped as Son of God. We shall see that there is stress on His manhood, more especially as the necessary mould or form which divine grace took to effect the blessing of man, to work the works of God in grace on the earth. Accordingly, here it is not merely that man is seen to be guilty, but blind from his birth. Doubtless there is light that discovers man in his evil and unbelief; but man is sought and met by His grace; for here the man had no thought of being healed -- never asked Jesus to heal him. There was no cry here to the Son of David. This we hear most properly in the other Gospels, which develop the last offer of the Messiah to the Jews. In every one of the Gospels, indeed, we have Him finally presented as the Son of David; and therefore, although it be the proper province of Matthew, yet inasmuch as all the synoptic Gospels dwell on our Lord at the close as Son of David, all the Gospels give the story of the blind man at Jericho. Matthew, however, gives blind men over and over again, crying to Him,

Son of David [Matt. 9:27; 20:30].

The reason is, I suppose, that not merely is He so presented at the last, but all through in Matthew. In John this case does not appear at all; no blind man cries to the Son of David throughout. What is brought before us in the man, blind from his birth, is a wholly different truth. It was, indeed, the most desperate case. Instead of the man looking to Christ, it is Christ that looks at the man, without a single cry or appeal to Him. It is absolute grace. If it be not the Father seeking, at any rate it is the Son. It is One who had deigned to become man in love to man. He is seeking, though rejected, to display the grace of God toward this poor blind beggar in his abject need:

As Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? [John 9:1, 2].

They had nothing better than Jewish thoughts about the case. But all through the Gospel of John Christ is setting aside these thoughts on every side, whether in enquirers outside, or more particularly in disciples, who were under this pernicious influence like other people. Here the Lord answered,

Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents [John 9:3].

The ways of God are not as man’s; and their revelation stands in contrast with Jewish notions of retributive justice. The reason lay deeper than what his parents deserved, or the foresight of what he would do amiss. Not that the man and his parents were not sinners; but the eye of Jesus saw beyond nature, or law, or government, in the man’s blindness from his birth. To divine goodness, the inner and true and ultimate reason, God’s reason -- if one may be permitted such a
phrase -- was to furnish an opportunity for Christ to work the works of God on the earth. How blessedly grace operates in, and judges of a hopeless case! That it was wholly outside the resources of man made it just the occasion for Jesus, for the works of God. This is the point of the chapter -- Jesus working the works of God in free unconditional grace. In John 8 the prominent feature is the word of God; here, the works of God made effectual and manifest in grace.

I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day (John 9:4).

Therefore can one say, that it is unqualified grace, because it is not merely God mercifully answering man's appeal, and blessing man's work, but God sending, and Christ working.

I must work the works of him that sent me.

What grace (save in Jesus all through) can be compared with this? Jesus, then, was doing this work while it is day.

Day was while He was present with them. Night was coming, which would be for the Jew, the personal absence of the Messiah; indeed, such for any would be the departure of the Son of God.

The night cometh when no man can work (John 9:4).

Higher things might follow in their season, and brighter light suited to them when the day should dawn, and the day-star arise in hearts established with grace. But here it is the time of the absence of Jesus in contrast with His presence on earth as He then was.

As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world (John 9:5).

This establishes very plainly the fact, that these two chapters are so far linked together, in that they look at Christ as light, and the light of the world too. But, far from being confined to Israel, it rather sets aside the Jewish system, which assumes to order things justly now according to man's conduct, thus ignoring man's ruin by sin, and God's grace in Christ as the sole deliverance. Here it is not so much the light by the word convicting man, and bringing out God's nature and the reality of His own personal glory, but the light of the world as manifesting God graciously working in power contrary to nature. It was a question not of light for eyes, but of giving power to see the light to one wholly and evidently incapable of seeing as he was. Hence we do well to remark the peculiarity in the Lord's manner of working. He lays clay upon the man's eyes; an extraordinary step at first sight. In truth, it was the shadow of Himself become man, an apt figure of the human body which He took in order therein to do God's will. He was not simply Son of God, but Son of God possessed of a body prepared of God (Heb. 10). He became man; and yet the fact of the body of Christ -- of God's Son being found in fashion as a man -- only and greatly increases the difficulty at first sight, because nobody, apart from the word of God, would look for a divine person in such a guise. But when faith bows to the word, and accepts the will of God in it, how precious the grace, how wise the ordering, yea, how indispensable it is learnt to be! So with the man already blind before. Putting the plaster of clay over his eyes did not at once mend his blindness in the least; but, if anything, the contrary -- would have hindered his seeing, had he seen before. But when he goes at the word of Jesus, and washes in the pool of Siloam -- that is, when the word is applied in the Holy Ghost to his case, revealing Jesus as the sent One of God (compare John 5:24), all was so far plain. It was not a mere man who had spoken; he apprehended in Jesus One Sent (for the pool to which the Lord directed the man to wash his clay-covered eyes in was called Siloam; that is, it bore the very name of sent (John 9:7)).

It was then understood that Jesus had a mission on earth to work the works of God. Though, of course, man born of a woman, He was more than human: He was the Sent One -- the Sent of the Father in love into this world, to work effectually where man was entirely incapable even of helping in any way.

Thus the truth was in process of application, so to speak. The man goes his way, washes, and comes seeing. The word of God explains this mystery. The Son's taking humanity is ever a blinding fact to nature; but he who is not disobedient to the word will assuredly not fail to find in the acknowledgment of the truth Christ's glory under His manhood, as well as the need of his own soul met with a power and promptness which answers, as it is due, to His glory who wrought in grace here below.

Nevertheless, the word of the Lord tried him as ever; other hearts were tested by it too. The neighbours were astonished, and questions arise; the Pharisees are stirred but divided (for this miracle, also, was wrought on a sabbath). The parents being summoned, as well as himself questioned, all stand to the great and indisputable fact: the man just healed was their child, and he had been born blind. The man indeed witnessed what he believed of Jesus, and the threat of the consequences was made the clearer, even though there was a total avoidance of all dangerous answers on the parents' part, and a determination to reject Christ and those who confessed Him in the Pharisees. The work of grace was hated, and especially because it was wrought on the sabbath day. For this bare solemn witness, that in the truth of things before God there was no sabbath possible for them: He must work if man was to be delivered and blessed. Of course, there was the holy form, and there was no doubt as to the duty; but if God revealed Himself on earth, neither forms nor duties, paid after a sort by sinful men, could hide the awful reality that man was incapable of keeping such a sabbath as God could recognise. The day had been sanctified from the beginning; the duty of the Jew was unquestionable; but sin was man's state; -- after every remedial measure, he was thoroughly and only evil continually.

In fact, so far the Jew quite understood, as far as that went, the moral meaning of the Lord's working thus both on the impotent man before, and now on the blind man. For such deeds on the sabbath did pronounce sentence of death on that whole system, and on the great badge of relationship between
God and Israel. If Jesus was true God as well as man, if He was really the light of the world, yet wrought on the sabbath day, there was plain evidence on God's part of what He thought of Israel. They felt it to be a matter of life and death. But the man was led on by these conscienceless attacks; as is always the case where there is simple faith. The effort to destroy the person of Christ and to undermine His glory only developed, in the goodness of God, that divine work which had already touched his soul, as well as given him eyes to see. Thus was his faith exercised and cleared, side by side with the unbelief and hostility of the enemies of Christ. The consequence is, that we have a beautiful history in this chapter of the man led on step by step; first owning the work the Lord had wrought with simplicity, and therefore in force of truth: what he does not know he owned with just the same frankness. Then, when the Pharisees were divided, and he was appealed to once more,

He is a prophet [John 9:17]

was his distinct answer. Then, when the fact was only the more established by the parents, spite of their timidity, the hypocritical effort to honour God at the expense of Jesus draws out the most withering refutation (not without a taunt) from him who had been blind (John 9:24-33). This closed, they could not answer, and cast him out (John 9:34).

How beautiful to mark the Spirit's love, dwelling fully and minutely on a blind beggar taught of God, thus gradually and evermore beating their incredulous objections smaller than when they cast him out as dirt in the streets! What a living picture of the new witness for Christ! A character plain, honest, energetic, not always the most gracious, but certainly confronted with the most heartless and false of adversaries. But if the man finds himself out of the synagogue, he is soon in the presence of Christ. The religious world of that day could not endure a witness of divine power and grace which they themselves, feeling not the need, denied, denounced, and did all they could to destroy. Outside them, but with Jesus, he learns more deeply than ever, so as to fill his soul with profound joy and gladness, that the wondrous healer of his blindness was not merely a prophet, but the Son of God -- just object of faith and worship. Thus clearly we have in this case the rejection of Jesus viewed, not in open attack on His own person, as in the chapter before, where they took up stones to stone Him, but here rather in His friends, whom He had first met in sovereign grace, and did not let them go till fully blessed, ending in Jesus worshipped outside the synagogue as the Son of God (John 9:38-40).

Then the Lord declares the issues of His coming.

For judgment,

He says,

I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind {John 9:39}.

In this Gospel He had said before, that it was to save and give life, not to judge, that He came. Such was the aim of His heart, at all cost to Himself; but the effect was moral in one way or the other, and this now. Manifest judgment awaits the evil by and by.

And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth {John 9:40, 41}.

They were offended at the notion of their not seeing. Did they insist that they saw? The Lord admits the plea. If they felt their sin and shortcoming there might be a hope. As it was, then, sin remained. The boast, like the excuse, of unbelief is invariably the ground of divine judgment.

John 10 pursues the subject and opens out into a development, not of the spiritual history of a sheep of Christ, but of the Shepherd Himself, from first to last, here below. Hence, the Lord does not rest in a judgment extorted by their unbelief, and in contrast with the deliverance of faith, but develops the ways of grace here, as always in marked antithesis with the Jewish system, though connected with the man for His sake turned out of the synagogue, then found by Himself, and led into the fullest perception of His own glory outside the Jews, where alone real worship is possible. Accordingly our Lord traces this new history -- His own from the beginning.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber {John 10:1}.

It was not so with Jesus. He had entered in by the door, according to every requisition of the scriptures. Although Son, He had submitted to each ordinance which God had laid down for the Shepherd of His earthly people. He accomplished the work that God had marked out for Him in prophecy and type. What had been required or stipulated, according to the law, that He had not rendered in full tale? He was born at the measured time, in the due place, from the sworn stock, and of the defined mother, according to the written word. God had taken care beforehand to make each important point plain, by which the true Christ of God was to be recognised; and all had been fulfilled thus far in Jesus -- thus far; for it is quite allowed that all the prophecies of subjugation and judgment, with the reign over the earth, remain to be accomplished.

To him,

He says,

the porter openeth [John 10:3].

This had been realized. Witness the Holy Ghost's action in Simeon and Anna, not to speak of the mass; and, above all, in John the Baptist. God had wrought by His grace in Israel, and there were godly hearts prepared for Him there.

And the sheep hear his voice (John 10:3).

So we find in the Gospels, particularly Luke's, from the beginning.

And he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out {John 10:3} -- an evident allusion to what had befallen the blind man. No doubt he had been turned out of the synagogue; but Christ
imprints on this their wicked act His own interpretation, according to divine counsels. Little did that man know at that painful moment, that it was in reality grace which was leading him out. If it was a little before His own public and final rejection, it was, after all, the same principle at the bottom. The disciple is not above his master; but every one that is perfect shall be as his master.

He goeth before them {John 10:4}. This seems to refer to the manner in which it had been, and should be, accomplished. Already had the Lord tasted the enmity and scorn of man, and especially of the Jews; but He also knew the depths of shame and suffering which He must soon pass through, before there was an open separation of the sheep. Thus, whether it were done virtually or formally, in either case Jesus went before, and the sheep followed;

for they know his voice {John 10:4}. This is their spiritual instinct, as it is their security -- not skill in determining or refuting error, but simple cleaving to Christ and the truth. See this exemplified in the once blind man. What weight had the Pharisees with his conscience? None whatever. They, on the contrary, felt he taught them.

A stranger will they not follow, any more than he would follow the Pharisees. For now, by the new eyes which the Lord had given him, he could discern their vain pretensions, and their hostility against Jesus so much the worse, because coupled with

Give God the praise {John 9:24}. A stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him -- not because they are learned in the injurious jargon of strangers,

for they know not the voice of strangers {John 10:5}. They know the Shepherd's voice, and this they follow. It is the love of what is good, and not skill in finding out what is evil. Some may have power to sift and discern the unsound; but this is not the true, direct, divine means of safety for the sheep of Christ. There is a much more real, immediate, and sure way. It is simply this: they cannot rest without the voice of Christ; and that which is not the voice of Christ they do not follow. What more suitable to them, or more worthy of Him?

As these things were not understood, the Lord opens out the truth still more plainly in what follows. Here {John 10:7} He begins by taking the place of

the door of the sheep; not, be it observed, of the sheepfold, but of the sheep. He had entered in Himself by the door, not of the sheep, of course, but by the door into the sheepfold. He entered in according to each sign and token -- moral, miraculous, prophetic, or personal -- which God had given to His ancient people to know Him by. But enter as He might, the people who broke the law refused the Shepherd; and the end of it was, that He leads His own sheep outside, Himself going before them. Now, there is more, and He says,

I am the door of the sheep. The contrast of pretended or merely human shepherds is given in the next verse, which is parenthetical.

All that ever came before me [such as Theudas and Judas] are thieves and robbers [they secretly or openly enriched themselves by the sheep]; but the sheep did not hear them {John 10:8}.

In John 10:9 He enlarges.

I am the door: by me if any man enter in he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The portion He gives the sheep is a contrast with the law in another way; not as light simply, as in the beginning of John 8, in detecting all sin and every sinner. Now, it is grace in its fulness.

By me, He says -- not by circumcision, or the law --

By me if any man enter in. There was no question of entering in by the law; for it dealt with those who were already in a recognised relation with God. But now there is an invitation to those without.

By me if any man enter in, he shall be saved. Salvation is the first need of a sinner, and certainly the Gentile needs it as much as the Jew.

By me if any man -- no matter who he may be, if he enter, he shall be saved. Nevertheless, it is only for those that enter in. There is no salvation for such as abide outside Christ. But this is not all; for grace with Christ freely gives, not salvation alone, but all things. Even now too,

he shall go in and out. It is not only that there is life and salvation in Christ, but there is liberty in contrast with the law.

And he shall find pasture {John 10:9}. Besides there is food assured. Thus we have here an ample provision for the sheep. To him that enters by Christ there is salvation, there is liberty, there is food.

Again, the Lord contrasts others with Himself.

The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.

By their fruits they should know them. How could the sheep trust such shepherds as these?

I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly {John 10:10}.

There had been life when there was only a promise; there had been life all through the dealings of law. Clearly Christ had ever been the means of life from the day death entered the world. But now He was come, it was not only that they might have life, but that they might have it more abundantly.

This was the effect of the presence of God's Son in this world. Was it not right and becoming, that when the Son of God did humble Himself in this world, even to death, the death of the cross, dying also in atonement for sinners, God should mark this infinite fact and work and person by an incomparably richer blessing than ever had been diffused.
before? I cannot conceive it otherwise than the Word shows it is, consistently with the glory of God, even the Father.

Further, He was not only the door of the sheep, and then the door for others to enter in, but He says,

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep (John 10:11).

It is no longer only in contrast with a thief or a robber with murderous intent or evidently selfish purposes of the worst kind, but there might be others characterised by a milder form of human iniquity -- not destroyers of the sheep, but self-seeking men.

He that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep (John 10:12, 13).

Christ, as the good shepherd, does nothing of the kind, but remains to suffer all for them, instead of running away when the wolf came.

I am the good shepherd, and know those that are mine, and am known by mine, as the Father knoweth me, and I know the Father (John 10:14, 15).

Such is the true sense of the verse, The 14th and 15th verses really form one sentence. They are not divided as we have them in our Bibles. The meaning is, that He showed Himself as the good Shepherd because he knew the sheep, and was known of them, just as He knew the Father, and was known of the Father. The mutuality of knowledge between the Father and the Son is the pattern of the knowledge between the Shepherd and the sheep. In what a wondrous place this puts us and the character of knowledge we possess. The knowledge which grace gives to the sheep is so truly divine that the Lord has nothing to compare it with, except the knowledge that exists between the Father and the Son. Nor is it merely a question of knowledge, intimate and perfect and divine as it is; but, moreover,

I lay down my life for the sheep (John 10:15).

Other sheep, too, He intimates here, He had, who were to be brought in, that did not belong to the Jewish fold; He clearly looks out into the world, as always in the Gospel of John. There was to be one flock (not fold), one Shepherd.

Moreover, in order to open yet more the ineffable complacency of the Father in His work abstractedly, He adds,

Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life.

Not here “for the sheep,” but simply,

that I might take it again (John 10:17).

That is to say, besides laying down His life for the sheep, He laid down His life to prove His perfect confidence in His Father. Impossible for another, or on others, to give so much. Even He could not give more than His life. Any other thing would not be comparable to the laying down of His life. It was the most complete, absolute giving up of Himself; and He did give up Himself, not merely for the gracious end of winning the sheep to God from the spoiler, but with the still more blessed and glorious aim of manifesting, in a world where man had from the first dishonoured God, His own perfect confidence in His Father, and this as man. He laid it down that He might take it again. Thus, instead of continuing His life in dependence on His Father, He gives it up out of a still profounder and truly absolute dependence.

Therefore, says He,

doeth my Father love me.

This becomes a positive ground for the Father to love Him, additional to the perfection which had ever been seen in Him all His pathway through. Even more than this; although it is so expressly an act of His own, another astonishing principle is seen -- the union of absolute devotedness on His own part, in perfect freeness of His will, with obedience (John 10:18). Thus the very same act may be, and is (as we find it in all its perfection in Christ) His own will, and yet along with this simple submission to His Father’s commandment. In truth, He and the Father were one; and so He does not stop till we have this fully expressed in John 10:30. He and His Father were one -- one in everything; not only in love and gracious counsel for the sheep, but in nature, too -- in that divine nature which, of course, was the ground of all the grace.

But, besides this, the unbelief of the Jews brings out another thing; that is, the perfect security of the sheep -- a very important question, because He was going to die. His death is in view: what will the sheep do then? Would the death of Christ in any way imperil the sheep? The very reverse. The Lord declares this in a most distinct manner. He says,

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand (John 10:27, 28).

First of all, the life is everlasting. But then it is not merely that the thing itself is eternal, but they shall never perish; for it might be pretended, that though the life lasts for ever, this is conditional on something in its recipients. Nay,

they shall never perish [John 10:28]

-- the sheep themselves. Thus, not merely the life, but those who have it by grace in Christ, shall never perish. To conclude and crown all, as far as their security was concerned, the question is answered as to any hostile power. What about some one external to them? Nay; there again, as there was no internal source of weakness that could jeopard the life, so there should be no external power to cause anxiety. If there was any power that might do so righteously, surely it must be God’s own; but, contrariwise, they were in the Father’s hand, no less than in the Son’s hand -- none could pluck them out. Thus the Lord fenced them round even by His death, as well as by that eternal life which was in Him, the superiority of which over death was proved by His authority to take it again in resurrection. This was the life more abundantly which they derived from Him. Why should any one wonder at its power? He was, for the sheep, against all adversaries; and so was the Father. Yea,

I and the Father are one (John 10:29, 30).

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As there had been a division among the Jews for His sayings, and their appeal in doubt to Him had drawn out both His treatment of them as unbelievers, and the security of the sheep who heeded His voice and followed Him, as He knew them (John 10:19-30) so our Lord, in the presence of their hatred and still growing enmity (John 10:31), convicts them of the futility of their objection on their own ground. Did they find fault because He took the place of being the Son of God? Yet they must allow that kings, governors, judges, according to their law, were called gods.

If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? {John 10:35, 36}.

A fortiori had He not a place which no king ever had? Did He, on their own principles, blaspheme then, because He said He was the Son of God? But He goes far beyond this. If they regarded not God’s word, nor His words, He appeals to His works.

If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him {John 10:37, 38}.

This connects, as I apprehend, the tenth chapter with the foregoing, and is in contrast with John 8. They had thus repeatedly sought to kill Him, and He abandons them for the place in which John first baptized. In the face of total rejection, and in every point of view, both as the expression of God in the world, and of His working the works of grace in the world, the result was plain. Man, the Jew, especially, settles down in resolute unbelief and deadly hostility; but, on the other hand, the indefeasible security of the sheep, the objects of grace, only comes out with so much the greater clearness and decision.

* * *

Nevertheless, though all was really closed, God would manifest by a full and final testimony what was the glory of Christ, rejected as He was, and previous to His death. And accordingly, in John 11, 12 is given a strikingly rich presentation of the Lord Jesus, in many respects entirely differing from all the others; for while it embraces what is found in the synoptists (that is the accomplishment of prophecy in His offer of Himself to Zion as the Son of David), John brings in a fullness of personal glory that is peculiar to his Gospel.

Here we begin with that which John alone records -- the resurrection of Lazarus. Some have wondered that it appears only in the latest Gospel; but it is given there for a very simple and conclusive reason. The resurrection of Lazarus was the most distinct testimony possible, near Jerusalem, in the face of open Jewish enmity. It was the grandest demonstrative proof that He was the Son of God, determined to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead {Rom. 1:4}. Who but He on earth could say; I am the resurrection and the life? Who had ever looked for more in Messiah Himself than Martha did -- raising up the dead at the last day?

Here I may just observe, that Rom. 1:4 does not restrict the meaning to the fact that He was determined to be the Son of God with power by His own resurrection. This is not what the verse states, but that resurrection of the dead, or the raising of dead persons, was the great proof that defined Him to be the Son of God with power. No doubt His own resurrection was the most astonishing instance of it; but His raising of dead persons in His ministry was a witness also, as the resurrection of His saints by and by will be the display of it. Hence the verse in Rom. 1 expresses the truth in all its extent, and without specifying any one in particular. So Lazarus, as being the most conspicuous case of resurrection any where appearing in the Gospels, except Christ’s own, which all give, was the fullest testimony that even John rendered to that great truth. Hence, then, as one might expect from its character, the account is given with remarkable development in that Gospel which is devoted to the personal glory of Jesus as the Son of God. To this attaches the revelation of the resurrection, and the life in Him as a present thing, superior to all questions of prophetic time, or dispensations. It could be found nowhere else so appropriately as in John. The difficulty, therefore, in its occurrence here and not elsewhere, is really none whatever to any one who believes the object of God as apparent in the Gospels themselves.

But, then, there is another feature that meets us in the story. Christ was not only the Son of God, but the Son of man. He was the Son of God, and a perfect man, in absolute dependence on His Father. He was not to be acted upon by any feeling, except the will of God. Thus He carries His divine sonship into His position as a man on earth, and He never allows that the glory of His person should in the smallest degree interfere with the completeness of His dependence and obedience. Hence, when the Lord hears the call,

Behold, he whom thou lovest is sick {John 11:3} -- the strongest possible appeal to the heart for acting at once on it -- He does not go. His answer is most calm, and, if God be not before us, to mere human feeling it might seem indifferent. It was not so, but was absolute perfection.

This sickness,

He says,

is not unto death.

Events might seem to contradict this; appearances might say it was to death, but Jesus was and is the truth always.

This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby {John 11:4}.

And so it was.

Now; Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus {John 11:5}.

Whatever, therefore, it might appear, His affection was unquestionable. But, then, there are other and even deeper principles. His love for Mary, for Martha, and for Lazarus weakened in no respect His dependence on God; He waited on His Father’s direction. So,
when he heard that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was. Then after that saith He to his disciples, Let us go into Judaea again. They say, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again? Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walketh in the day he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night he stumbleth, because there is no light in him {John 11:6-10}.

In Jesus there was nothing but perfect light. He was Himself the light. He walked in the sunshine of God. He was the very perfection of that which is only partially true with us in practice.

If, then, thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light {Matt. 6:22}.

Indeed, He was the light, as well as full of it. Walking accordingly in this world, He waited for the word of His Father. At once, when this came, He says,

Our friend Lazarus sleepest, but I go that I may awake him out of sleep {John 11:11}.

There was no darkness in Him. All is plain, and He goes forth promptly with the knowledge of all He is going to do.

Then we have the ignorant thoughts of the disciples, though not unmixed with devotedness to His person. Thomas proposes that they should go to die with him. How marvellous is the unbelief even of the saints of God! He was going really to raise the dead; their only thought was to go and die with him. Such was a disciple’s sombre anticipation. Our Lord does not say a word about it at the moment, but calmly leaves the truth to correct the error in due time. Then we have the wonderful interview with the sisters; and, finally, our Lord is at the grave, a consciously divine person, the Son of the Father, but in the perfection of manhood, yet with such deep feeling as Deity alone could produce -- not only sympathy with sorrow, but, above all, the sense of what death is in this world. Indeed, our Lord did not raise up Lazarus from the dead, until His own spirit had had as thoroughly taken, as it were, the sense of death on His soul, as when, in the removal of any sickness, He habitually felt its burden (Matt. 8); not, of course, in a low, literal, physical manner, but weighing it all in His spirit with His Father. Of us it is said,

with groanings that cannot be uttered {Rom. 8:26}.

If Christ groaned, His could not but be a groan in accordance with the Spirit -- justly and perfectly uttering the real fulness of the grief that His heart felt. In our case this could not be, because there is that which mars the perfection of what is felt by us; but in the case of Christ, the Holy Ghost takes up and groans out that which we cannot fully express. Even in us He gives the sorrow a divine expression to God; and, of course, in Christ there was no shortcoming, no mingling of the flesh, but all was absolutely perfect. Hence, along with this, there comes the full answer of God to the divine glory and perfection of Christ. Lazarus comes forth at the word of Christ.

This seems to me of deep interest; for we are too apt to look on Christ merely as One whose power dealt with sickness and with the grave. But does it not weaken His power if the Lord Jesus Christ enters into the reality of the case before God? On the contrary, it better manifests the perfection of His love, and the strength of His sympathy, to trace intelligently the way in which His spirit took up the reality of the ruin here below to bear and spread it before God. And I believe that this was true of everything in Christ. So it was before and when He came to the cross. Our Lord did not go there without feeling the past and present and future: the atoning work is not the same as the anguish of being cast off by His people, and the utter weakness of the disciples. Then the sense of what was coming was realized by His spirit before the actual fact. It is not true, but positively and wholly false doctrine, to confine our Lord Jesus to the matter of bearing our sin, though this was confessedly the deepest act of all. Of course, the atonement was only on the cross: the bearing of the wrath of God, when Christ was made sin, was exclusively then and there. But to find fault with the statement that Christ did in His own spirit realize beforehand what He was going to suffer on the cross, is to overlook much of His sufferings, to ignore truth, and despise Scripture -- either leaving out a large portion of what God records about it, or confounding it with the actual fact, and only a part of it after all.

It is true that many Christians have been absorbed with the bare exertion of power in the miracles of Christ. In His healing of disease they have passed by the truth expressed in Isa. 53:4, which Matthew applies to His life, and to which I have referred more than once. It seems undeniable, that not only was the power of God exhibited in those miracles, but that they afforded opportunity for the depth of His feelings to display itself, who had before Him the creature as God made it, and the deplorable havoc sin had wrought. Thus Jesus did perfectly what saints do with a mixture of human infirmity. Take again the fact that the Lord is pleased at times to put us through some exercise of heart before the actual trial comes: what is the effect of this? Do we bear the trial less because the soul has already felt it with God? Surely not. On the contrary, this is just what proves the measure of our spirituality; and the more we go through the matter with God, the power and blessing are so much the greater; so that when the trial comes, it might appear to an outside observer as if all was perfect calmness, and so indeed it is, or should be; and this because all has been out between ourselves and God. This, I admit, increases the pain of the trial immensely; but is this a loss? especially as at the same time there is strength vouchsafed to bear it. Thus the principle applies even to our little trials.

But Christ endured and did everything in perfection. Hence, even before Lazarus was raised up at the grave, we do not see or hear of One coming with divine power and majesty, and doing the miracle, if I may so say, off-hand. What can be more opposed to the truth? He who has such a meagre notion of the scene has everything to learn about it. Not that there was the smallest lack of consciousness of His glory; He is the Son of God unmistakably; He knows that His Father hears Him always; but none of these things hindered the Lord from groans and tears at the grave which was about to witness His power. None of them hindered the Lord from
taking on His spirit the sense of death as no one else did. This is described by the Holy Ghost in the most emphatic language.

He groaned in spirit, and was troubled {John 11:33}. But what was all this, compared with what was soon to befall Himself when God entered into judgment with Him for our sins? It is not only granted, but insisted, that the actual expiation of sin, under divine wrath, was entirely and exclusively on the cross; but thence to assume that He did not previously go through with God the coming scene, and what was leading on to it, and everything that could add to the anguish of our Lord, is defective and erroneous teaching, however freely it is allowed that there was in the scene itself the endurance of wrath for sin, which separates that hour from all that ever was or can be again.

Then, before the end of the chapter, the effect of all this divine testimony is shown. Man decides that the Lord must die {John 11:50}; their intolerance of Jesus becomes now more pronounced. It was well known before. The giddy multitude may never have realized it till it came; but the religious folk, and the leaders at Jerusalem, had made up their minds about it long before. He must die. And now he who was high priest takes up the word, and gives -- though a wicked man, yet not without the Spirit acting -- the authoritative sentence about it, which is recorded in our chapter. The resurrection power of the Son of God brought to a head the enmity of him who had the power of death. Jesus might have done such works at Nain or elsewhere, but to display them publicly at Jerusalem was an affront to Satan and his earthly instruments. Now that the glory of the Lord Jesus shone out so brightly, threatening the dominion of the prince of this world, there was no longer a concealment of the resolution taken by the religious world -- Jesus must die.

In John 12, accordingly, we have this, the undercurrent, still, but in a beautiful contrast. The Spirit of God here works in grace touching the death of Jesus, just as much as Satan was goading on his children to hatred and murder. God knows how to guide a beloved one of His where Jesus was abiding for a little season before He suffered. It was Mary; for John lets us hear the Lord Jesus calling His own sheep by name; and however rightly Matthew and Mark do not disclose it, it was not consistent with John’s view of the Lord that she should be called merely “a woman.” In his Gospel such touches come out distinctly; and so we have Mary and Mary’s act with greater fulness, as to its great principles, than anywhere else -- the part Mary took at this supper, where Martha served, and Lazarus sat at the table. Everything, every one, is found in the just place and season; the true light makes all manifest as it was, Jesus Himself being there, but about to die.

Mary took a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus {John 12:3}. She did anoint His head, and other Gospels speak of this; but John mentions what was peculiar. It was natural to anoint the head; but the special thing for the eye of love to discern was the anointing of the feet. This was specially shown in two ways.

The woman in Luke 7 did the very same thing; but this was not Mary, nor is there any good reason to suppose that it was even Mary Magdalene, any more than the sister of Lazarus. It was a woman that was a sinner {Luke 7:37}; and I believe there is much moral beauty in not giving us her name, for obvious reasons. What could it do but become an evil precedent, besides indulging a prurient curiosity about her? The name is here dropped; but what of that, if it be written in heaven? There is a delicate veil cast over (not the grace shown by the Lord, but) the name of this woman who was a sinner; but there is an eternal record of the name and deed of Mary, the sister of Lazarus, who at this much later moment anoints the feet of Christ. Yet, as far as this goes, both women did the same thing. The one, in the abasement of feeling her sin before His ineffable love, did what Mary did in the sense of His deep glory, and with an instinctive feeling withal of some impending evil that menaced Him. Thus the sense of her sin, and the sense of His glory, brought them, as it were, to the same point. Another point of analogy is, that neither woman spoke; the heart of each expressed itself in deeds intelligible, at least, to Him who was the object of this homage, and He understood and vindicated both.

In this case the house was filled with the odour of the ointment; but this manifestation of her love who thus anointed Jesus brought out the ill-feeling and covetousness of one soul who cared not for Jesus, but was, indeed, a thief under his high pretensions of care for the poor. It is a very solemn scene in this point of view, the line of treachery alongside of the offering of grace. How often the self-same circumstances, which draw out fidelity and devotedness, manifest either heartless treachery or self-seeking and worldliness!

Such, in brief, was the interior of Bethany. Outside Jewish rancour was undisguised. The heart of the chief priests was set on blood. The Lord, in the next scene, enters Jerusalem as the Son of David. But I must pass on, merely noting this Messianic witness in its place. When Jesus was glorified, the disciples remembered these things. The subsequent notice we have is the remarkable desire expressed by the Greeks, through Philip, to see Jesus. Here the Lord at once passes to another testimony, the Son of man, where the introduction of His most efficacious death is couched under the well-known figure of the corn of wheat falling into the ground and dying {John 12:24}, as the harbinger, and indeed the means, of much fruit. In the path of His death they must follow who would be with Him. Not that here again the destined Head of all, the Son of man, is insensible at the prospect of such a death, but cries to the Father, who answers the call to glorify His name by the declaration that He had (i.e. at the grave of Lazarus), and would again (i.e. by raising up Jesus Himself).

The Lord, in the centre of the chapter just after this, opens out once more the truth of the world’s judgment, and of His cross as the attractive point for all men, as such, in contrast with Jewish expectation. There is, first, perfect submission to the Father’s will, whatever it may cost; then, the perception of the results in all their extent. This is
followed by their unbelief in His proper glory, as much as in His sufferings. Such must ever be for man, for the world, the insuperable difficulty. They had heard it in vain in the law; for this is always misused by man, as we have seen in the Gospel of John. They could not reconcile it with the voice of grace and truth. Both had been fully manifested in Jesus, and above all would be yet more in His death. The voice of the law spoke to their ears of a Christ continuing for ever; but a Son of man humbled, dying, lifted up! Who was this Son of man? How exactly the counterpart of an Israelite’s objections to this day! The voice of grace and truth was that of Christ come to die in shame, yet a sacrifice for sinners, however true also it was that in His own person He should continue for ever. Who could put these things together, seemingly so opposed? He who only heeds the law will never understand either the law or Christ.

Hence the chapter concludes with two closing warnings. Had they heard their own prophets? Let them listen also to Jesus. We have seen their ignorance of the law. In truth, the prophet Isaiah had shown long before that this was no new thing. He had predicted it in Isa. 6, though a remnant should hear. The light of Jehovah might be ever so bright, but the heart of the people was gross.

Seeing they saw, but they did not understand

{Isa. 6:9}.

There was no reception of the light of God. Even if they believed after a sort, there was no confession to salvation, for they loved the praise of men. Jesus -- the Son of God, Jehovah Himself -- stands on earth and cries -- His final testimony. He pronounces upon it -- claims once more to be the light. He was come a light into the world {John 12:46}.

This we have seen all through, from John 1 down to John 12. He was come a light into the world, that those that believed on Him should not abide in darkness. The effect was plain from the first; they preferred darkness to light. They loved sin; they had God manifested in love, manifested in Christ. The darkness was thus rendered only more visible in consequence of the light.

If any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day {John 12:47, 48}.

Christ had not spoken from Himself, but as the sent One from the Father, who had charged Him what to say and what to speak.

And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak {John 12:50}.

Time does not admit of more than a few words on the next two chapters (John 13, 14), which introduce a distinct section of our Gospel, where (testimony having been fully rendered, not indeed with hope of man, but for the glory of God) Christ quits association with man (though supper-time was come, not “ended” -- John 13:2) for a place suited to His glory, intrinsic and relational, as well as conferred; but along with this (blessed to say), to give His own a part with Him in that heavenly glory, instead of His reigning over Israel here below.

Before concluding to-night, this I can notice but briefly, in order to bring my subject within the space allotted for it. Happily there is the less need to dwell on the chapters at the length they might claim, since many here are familiar with them, comparatively speaking. They are especially dear to the children of God in general.

First of all, our Lord has now terminated all question of testimony to man, whether to the Jew or to the world. He now addresses Himself to His own in the world, the unwavering, abiding objects of His love, as one just about to leave this world actually, for that place which suits His essential nature, as well as the glory destined Him by the Father. Accordingly our Lord, as one about to go to heaven, new to Him as man, would prove His increasing love to them (though fully knowing what the enemy would effect through the wickedness of one of their number, as well as through the infirmity of another), and hence proceeds to give a visible sign then of what they would only understand later. It was the service of love that He would continue for them, when Himself out of this world and themselves in it; a service as real as any that He had ever done for them while He was in this world, and if possible, more important than any they had yet experienced. But, then, this ministration of His grace was also connected with His own new portion in heaven. That is, it was to give them a part with Him outside the world. It was not divine goodness meeting them in the world, but as He was leaving the world for heaven, whence He came, He would associate them with Himself, and give them a share with Himself where He was going. He was about to pass, though Lord of all, into the presence of God His Father in heaven, but would manifest Himself the servant of them all, even to the washing of their feet soiled in walking here below. The point, therefore, was (not here exactly suffering for sins, but) the service of love for saints, to fit them for having communion with Him, before they have their portion with Him in that heavenly scene to which He was going at once. Such is the meaning suggested by the washing of the disciples’ feet. In short, it is the word of God applied by the Holy Ghost to deal with all that unfits for fellowship with Christ in heaven, while He is there. It is the Holy Ghost’s answer here to what Christ is doing there, as one identified with their cause above, the Holy Ghost meanwhile carrying on a like work in the disciples here, to keep them in, or restore them to, communion with Christ there. They are to be with Him alone; but, meanwhile, He is producing and keeping up, by the Spirit’s use of the word, this practical fellowship with Himself on high. While the Lord, then, intimates to them that it had a mystical meaning, not apparent on the face of it, nothing could be more obvious than the love or the humility of Christ. This, and more than this, had been abundantly shown by Him already, and in His every act. This, therefore, was not, and could not be, what was here meant, as that which Peter did not know then, but should

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know hereafter. Indeed, the lowly love of his Master was so apparent then, that the ardent but hasty disciple stumbled over it. There ought to be neither difficulty nor hesitation in allowing that a deeper sense lay hidden under that simple but suggestive action of Jesus -- a sense which not even the chief of the twelve could then divine, but which not only he, but every one else, ought to seize now that it is made good in Christianity, or, more precisely, in Christ’s dealing with the defilements of His own.

This should be borne in mind, that the washing meant is not with blood, but with water. It was for those who would be already washed from their sins in His blood, but who need none the less to be washed with water also. Indeed, it was well to look more narrowly into the words of our Lord Jesus. Besides the washing with blood, that with water is essential, and this doubly. The washing of regeneration is not by blood, though inseparable from redemption by blood, and neither the one nor the other is ever repeated. But in addition to the washing of regeneration, there is a continual dealing of grace with the believer in this world; there is the constant need of the application of the word by the Holy Ghost discovering whatever there may be of inconsistency, and bringing him to judge himself in the detail of daily walk here below.

Note the contrast between legal requirement and our Lord’s action in this case. Under the law the priests washed themselves, hands as well as feet. Here Christ washes their feet {John 13:5}. Need I say how highly the superiority of grace rises over the typical act of the law? Then follows, in connection and in contrast with it, the treachery of Judas. See how the Lord felt it from His familiar friend! How it troubled His spirit! It was a deep sorrow, a fresh instance of what has been referred to already.

Finally, at the end of the chapter, when the departure of Judas on his errand brought all before Him, the Saviour speaks again of death, and so glorifying God. It is not directly for the pardon or deliverance of disciples; yet who does not know that nowhere else is their blessing so secured? God was glorified in the Son of man where it was hardest, and even more than if sin had never been. Hence, as fruit of His glorifying God in His death, God would glorify Him in Himself

straightway {John 13:32}.

This is precisely what is taking place now. And this, it should be observed again, is in contrast with Judaism. The hope of the Jews is the manifestation of Christ’s glory here below and by and by. What John shows us here is the immediate glorification of Christ on high. It does not depend upon any future time and circumstance, but was immediately consequent on the cross. But Christ was alone in this; none now could follow -- no disciple, any more than a Jew, as Peter, bold but weak, would prove to his cost. The ark must go first into Jordan, but we may follow then, as Peter did triumphantly afterwards.

John 14 (and here, too, I must be brief) follows up the same spirit of contrast with all that belonged to Judaism; for if the ministration of love in cleansing the saints practically was very different from a glorious reign over the earth, so was the hope here given them of Christ just as peculiar. The Lord intimates, first of all, that He was not going to display Himself now as a Jewish Messiah, visible to the world; but as they believed in God, so they were to believe in Him. He was going to be unseen: quite a new thought to the Jewish mind as regards the Messiah, who, to them, always implied One manifested in power and glory in the world.

Ye believe in God,

He says,

believe also in me {John 14:1}.

But then He connects the unseen condition He was about to assume with the character of the hope He was giving them. It was virtually saying that He was not going merely to bless them here. Nor would it be a scene for man to look on with his natural eyes in this world. He was going to bless them in an infinitely better way and place.

In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you {John 14:2}.

This is what the Son tells. Very different is the burden of the prophets. This was a new thing reserved most fitly for Him. Who but He should be the first to unveil to disciples on earth the heavenly scene of love and holiness and joy and glory He knew so well?

If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also {John 14:2, 3}.

This is the turning-point and secret --

where I am.

All depends on this precious privilege. The place that was due to the Son was the place that grace would give to the sons. They were to be in the same blessedness with Christ. It was not merely, therefore, Christ about to depart and be in heaven, maintaining their communion with Himself there, but -- wondrous grace! -- in due time they, too, were to follow and be with Him; yea, if He went before them, so absolute was the grace, that He would not devolve it on any one else, so to speak, to usher them there. He would come Himself, and thus would bring them into His own place --

that where I am, there ye may be also.

This, I say, in all its parts, is the contrast of every hope, even of the brightest Jewish expectations.

Besides, He would assure them of the ground of their hope. In His own person they ought to have known how this could be.

Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know {John 14:4}.

They were surprised. Then, as ever, it was the overlooking of His glorious person that gave occasion to their bewilderment. In answer to Thomas, He says,

I am the way, the truth, and the life {John 14:6}.

He was the way to the Father, and therefore they ought to have known; because no man comes to the Father but by Him. By receiving Jesus, by believing in Him, and only so,
one comes to the Father, whom they had seen in Him, as Philip should have known. He was the way, and there was none other. Besides, He was the truth, the revelation of every one and everything as they are. He was also the life, in which that truth was, by the Spirit’s power, known and enjoyed. In every way Christ was the only possible means of their entering into this blessedness. He was in the Father, and the Father in Him; and as the words were not spoken from Himself, so the Father abiding in Him did the works (John 14:1-11).

Then our Lord turns, from what they should even then have known in and from His person and words and works, to another thing which could not then be known. This divides the chapter. The first part is the Son known on earth in personal dignity as declaring the Father -- imperfectly, no doubt, but still known. This ought to have been the means of their apprehending whither He was going; for He was the Son not merely of Mary but of the Father. And this they then knew, however dull in perceiving the consequences. All His manifestation in this Gospel was just the witness of this glory, as they certainly ought to have seen; and the new hope was thoroughly in accordance with that glory. But now He discloses to them that which they could only do and understand when the Holy Ghost was given.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it. If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you (John 14:12-20).

This supposes the Holy Ghost given. First, it is the Son present, and the Father known in Him, and He in the Father. Next, the Holy Ghost is promised. When He was given, these would be the blessed results. He was going away indeed; but they might better prove their love by keeping His commandments, than in human grief over His absence. Besides, Christ would ask the Father, who would give them their ever-abiding Comforter while He Himself was away. The Holy Ghost would be not a passing visitor on the earth, even as the Son who had been with them for a season; He would abide for ever. His dwelling with them is in contrast with any temporary blessing; and besides, He would be in them -- the expression of an intimacy which nothing human can fully illustrate.

Observe, the Lord uses the present tense both for Himself and for the Comforter -- the Holy Spirit -- in this chapter, in a way that will be explained shortly. In the early part of verse 2 He says about Himself,

I go to prepare a place for you [John 14:2].

He does not mean that He was in the act of departure, but just about to go. He uses the present to express its certainty and nearness; He then was on the point of going. So even of coming back again, where likewise He uses the present,

I come again [John 14:3].

He does not precisely say, as in the English version, “I will come.” This passage of Scripture suffices to exemplify a common idiomatic usage in Greek, as in our own and other tongues, when a thing is to be regarded as sure, and to be constantly expected. It seems to me an analogous usage in connection with the Holy Ghost --

He dwelleth with you [John 14:17].

I apprehend that the object is simply to lay the stress on the dwelling. The Holy Ghost, when He comes, will not come and go soon after, but abide. Hence, says the Lord Jesus,

He abideth with you [John 14:17]

-- the same word so often used for abiding throughout the chapter; and next, as we saw,

He shall be in you [John 14:17]:

a needful word to add; for otherwise it was not implied in His abiding with them.

These, then, are the two great truths of the chapter: their future portion with Christ in the Father’s house; and, meanwhile, the permanent stay of the Holy Ghost with the disciples, and this, too, as indwelling on the footing of life in Christ risen (John 14:19).

I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you [John 14:18-20].

Thus, having the Holy Ghost as the power of life in Him, they would know Him nearer to them, and themselves to Him, when they should know Him in the Father, than if they had Him as Messiah with them and over them in the earth. These are the two truths which the Lord thus communicates to them.

Then we have a contrast of manifestation to the disciples, and to the world, connected with another very important point -- the Holy Ghost’s power shown in their obedience, and drawing down a love according to the Father’s government of His children. It is not merely the Father’s love for His children as such, but Father and Son loving them, because of having and keeping the commandments of Jesus. This would be met by a manifestation of Jesus to the soul, such as the world knows nothing of. But the Lord explains further, that if a man loves Him, he will keep His word, and His Father will love him,

and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him (John 14:23).

This is not a commandment, but His word -- a simple intimation of His mind or will; and, therefore, as a more thorough test, so followed by a fuller blessing. This is a

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beautiful difference, and of great practical value, being bound up with the measure of our attentiveness of heart. Where obedience lies comparatively on the surface, and self-will or worldliness is not judged, a commandment is always necessary to enforce it. People therefore ask, “Must I do this? Is there any harm in that?” To such the Lord’s will is solely a question of command. Now there are commandments, the expression of His authority; and they are not grievous. But, besides, where the heart loves Him deeply, His word 13 will give enough expression of His will to him that loves Christ. Even in nature a parent’s look will do it. As we well know, an obedient child catches her mother’s desire before the mother has uttered a word. So, whatever might be the word of Jesus, it would be heeded, and thus the heart and life be formed in obedience. And what is not the joy and power where such willing subjection to Christ pervades the soul, and all is in the communion of the Father and the Son? How little can any of us speak of it as our habitual unbroken portion!

The concluding verses (John 14:25-31) bring before them the reason of the Lord’s communication, and the confidence they may repose in the Spirit, both in His own teaching them all things, and in His recalling all things, which Jesus said to them.

Peace,

He adds,

I leave [fruit of His very death; nor this only, but His own character of peace; what He Himself knew] with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you {John 14:27}.

Not as the world, which is capricious and partial; keeping for itself even where it affects most generosity. He alone who was God could give as Jesus gave, at all cost, and what was most precious. And see what confidence He looks for, what affections superior to self!

Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I {John 14:28}.

Little remained for Him to talk with them. Another task was before Him -- not with saints, but with Satan, who coming would find nothing in Him, save, indeed, obedience up to death itself, that the world might know that He loves the Father, and does just as He commands. And then He bids the disciples rise up and go hence, as in John 13 He rose up Himself (both being, in my opinion, significant actions, in accordance with what was opening out before Him and them).

But I need and must say no more now on this precious portion. I could only hope to convey the general scope of the contents, as well as their distinctive character. May our God and Father grant that what has been said may help His children to read His word with ever deepening intelligence and enjoyment of it, and of Him with whose grace and glory it is filled!

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13. It is difficult to say why Tyndale, Cranmer, the Geneva, and the Authorised Versions give the plural form, which has no authority whatever. Wiclif and the Rhemish, adhering to the Vulgate, happen to be right. His word has a unity of character which is of moment. He that loves Christ keeps His word; he that does not love Him keeps not His words; if he observes some of them only, other motives may operate; but if he loved Christ, he would value His word as a whole.
Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Gospels

Lecture 11

John 15 – 21

In John 15 our Lord substitutes Himself for Israel, as the plant of God, responsible to bear fruit for Him on earth (not merely for man, as such, openly sinful and lost). He takes the place of that which most put itself forward as being according to God here below. As our Lord Himself said,

Salvation is of the Jews (John 4:22):
this place of privilege and promise made their actual condition so much the guiltier. Our Lord, therefore, sets aside openly, and for ever, as regards those that He was now calling out of the world, all connection with Israel.

I am the true vine {John 15:1}, He says. We all know that Israel of old is called the vine -- the vine that the Lord had brought out of Egypt. But Israel was empty, fruitless, false: Christ was the only true vine. Whatever might be the responsibility of Israel, whatever their boasted privileges (and they really were much every way), whatever the associations and hopes of the chosen people, all outside Christ had fallen under the power of the adversary. The only blessing for a soul now was found in Christ Himself; and so He opens the discourse (or, as we saw, closes what went before) with --

Rise up: let us go hence {John 14:31}.

There was an abandonment, not only for Himself, but for them, of all connection with nature, or the world, even in their religion. It was Christ now, or nothing. As in the beginning of John 13, He had risen up anticipatively as a sign of His work for them on high; so here He calls them to quit all their earthly belongings with Himself; they were now definitively done with. Thus we have the Lord taking now the place substitutionally of all that had exercised religious power over their spirits. It was now proved to be neither a blessing nor even safety for a soul on earth.

I, He says,

am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman {John 15:1}.

He puts Himself in the place of all to which they had been attached and belonged here below, and the Father in lieu of Almighty God, or the Jehovah of Israel. So had He been known to the fathers and the children of Israel; but it was His Father, as such, to whose care He commends them now.

Every branch in me that beareth not fruit; for fruit was what God looked for, not merely acts or obligations, but bearing fruit:

Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit {John 15:2}.

This is the general statement. There is a twofold dealing with those who took the place of being branches of the true vine. Where no fruit was borne, there was judgment in excision; where fruit appeared, purging followed, that there might be more.

The Lord applies this truth particularly:

Already ye are clean through the word that I have spoken to you {John 15:3}.

Exhortation follows in John 15:4, 5; the results distinctively for “a man,” for any one (περί τὸν ἑαυτὸν ὧν) who does not abide, and for the disciples who do, are found respectively in John 15:6, and 15:7, 8.

In this chapter it is never simply a question of divine grace saving sinners, blotting out iniquities, remembering sins and transgressions no more; but the power of the word is morally applied to judge whatever is contrary to God’s character displayed in Christ, or, rather, to the Father’s will revealed in Him. No standard less than this could be entertained, now that Christ was revealed. They then (for Judas was gone) were already clean through the word Christ had spoken to them. The law of Moses, divine as it was, would not suffice: it was negative; but Christ’s word is positive.

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine: no more can ye, except ye abide in me {John 15:4}.

It is not what God is in grace towards those that are outside Him and lost, but the appraisal of the ways of those associated with Christ, the dealings of God, or more strictly of His Father, with those who professed to belong to the Lord. I say “professed,” because it is to me evident that He does not contemplate in His view those exclusively who really had life everlasting. Still less do branches of the vine mean the same thing as members of Christ’s body, but His followers, who might even abandon Him, as some in the earliest days walked no more with Him. This alone explains our chapter, without forcing it.

The Lord, then, has in view those who then surrounded Him, already branches in the vine, and of course, in principle, all that should follow, including those that would

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nominally, and at first to all appearance really, abandon Israel and all things for Him. It was no light matter, but one of much seriousness; and surely, therefore, if a man did thus come out from all that claimed his affections and conscience, from his religion; in short, if a man came out at the cost of every thing, finding most of all foes in those of his own household, there was that which presumed sincerity of conduct, but had still to be proved. The proof would be abiding in Christ. There is no word more characteristic of John than the very word “abiding,” and this in the way both of grace and of government. Here it is the disciples put to the proof. For Christianity is the revelation, not of a dogma, but of a person who has wrought redemption; doubtless, also, of a person in whom is life, and who gives it. Thence flows a new sort of responsibility; and a very important thing it is to see this most strikingly kept up in him who, of all the evangelists, most strongly brings in the absolute unconditional love of God. Take the early part of the Gospel, where the gift of Jesus in divine love, the sending Him into the world, not to judge but to save, makes known what God is to a lost world. There we have grace without a single thought of any thing on man’s part, save the depth of need.

For God,

He says,

so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved (John 3:16, 17).

But here the ground is different. We see those who had come out to Christ from all that they had previously valued in the earth. Alas! flesh is capable of imitating faith; it can go a long way in religiousness, and in renunciation of the profane world. Soon there would be multitudes who would come out from Israel and be baptized unto Christ; but still they must be fully tested. None would stand by baptism, or by any other ordinance, but by abiding in Christ.

Abide in me, and I in you [John 15:4].

Here He always puts man’s part first, because it is a question, as we have seen, of responsibility; where it is the grace of God, His part is first necessarily, and, further, it necessarily abides. Whereas, if man’s responsibility is before us, it is evident that there can be no necessary permanence here: all turns on dependence on Him who always abides the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Thus the reality of God’s work in the soul proves itself, so to speak, by continual looking and clinging to Christ. In John 15:4 it is not, “Except I abide in you,” but,

Except ye abide in me.

I am the vine, and ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing (John 15:5).

It is not here believing, but “doing,” though faith be the spring, of course. The Lord would have us bear much fruit, and the only way in which fruit is to be borne is by abiding in Him in whom we believe. What can be a weightier consideration for us, after receiving Christ! Do you go after some other thing or person in order to bear fruit? The result in God’s sight is bad fruit.

Thus Christ is not only everlasting life to the soul that believes in Him, but He is the only source of fruit-bearing, all the course through, for those that have received Him. The secret is the heart occupied with Him, the soul dependent on Him, Himself the object in all trials, difficulties, and duties even; so that, though a given thing be a duty, it be not done now barely as such, but with Christ before the eye of faith. But where there is not a life exercised in self-judgment and in enjoyment of Christ, as well as prayer, men get tired of this; they turn away from Him to the nostrums of the day, whether novel or antique, moral or intellectual. They find their attraction in religious feelings, experiences, frames, or visions; in imagining some new good self, or in anatomizing the old bad self; in sacerdotalism, ordinances, or legalism, of one sort or another. Thus they really return, in some shape or degree, to the false vine, instead of cleaving to the true. They lose themselves thus. It may even be a slip back into the world, into the open enemy of the Father; for this is no uncommon result, where there is for a time an abandonment of the old fleshly vine, the religion of ordinances, of human effort, and of assumed privilege. All this was found in its fulness and apparent perfection in Israel; but it was now discovering its utter hopeless hollowness and antagonism to the mind of God; and this was manifested, as we shall find later on in this chapter, in their causeless hatred of the Father and the Son. Christ is ever the test, and this the close declares, as much as the beginning sets Him forth as the only power of preparing for, and producing fruit.

This appears again in the sixth verse, and remarkably too:

If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch [John 15:6].

Apply such language to life everlasting, or, still more, to union with Christ, and there is nothing but endless confusion. Where Scripture speaks of union with Christ, or, again, of life in Him, you never have such a thought as a member of Christ cut off, or one that had eternal life losing it. It is very possible that some who have accurate knowledge might give it up, or plunge into all; and this is what Peter speaks of in his second epistle. There is no preservative energy in knowledge ever so full. Such might allow stumbling-blocks, disappointments, etc., to hinder their following Christ, and so practically abandon what they know, the result of which would be the surest and most disastrous ruin. They are worse even than before. So Jude speaks of men twice dead; and, in fact, experience proves that men who have no life in Christ, after having professed awhile, become fiercer adversaries, if not grosser sinners, against the Lord than before any such profession was made.

This is the case our Lord describes here:

If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned [John 15:6].

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It was one who had come out from the world, and had followed Christ. But there was no attraction of heart, no power of faith, and consequently no dependence on Christ; and this is the Lord’s sentence pronounced on all such, whether in that day or in any other.

On the other hand, He says,

If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you (John 15:7).

Not only is the heart occupied with Christ, but also His words weigh there. The Old Testament alone would not suffice. It had been used of God when there was nothing more. Blessed of God at all times it would surely be; and he that valued Christ’s words would never slight those that witnessed of Christ before He came. But the soul that would make light of the words of Christ, or do without them, after they were communicated, would evince its own faithlessness. The Christian that really prizses the word of God in the Old Testament would still more set his heart on that in the New. He that had no more than a naturally reverent attachment to the law and the prophets, without faith, would prove his real condition by inattention to Christ’s words. Thus, to this day, the Jews are themselves the great witness of the truth of our Lord’s warning. They are clinging to the empty vine; and so all their religious profession is as empty before God. They may seem to cleave to the words of Moses, but it is mere human tenacity, not divine faith: else the words of Christ would be welcome above all. As the Lord had told them at an earlier moment, had they believed Moses, they would have believed Christ; for Moses wrote of Christ: in truth, there was no divine persuasion as to either. Again, the great test now is Christ’s words abiding in us. Old truth, even though equally of God as the new, ceases to be a test when new truth is given and refused, or slighted; and the same thing is true not merely of God’s word as a whole, but of a particular truth, when God awakens it at any given time for the actual exigency of the Church or of His work. It is vain, for instance, to fall back now on the principles put forward and acted on two or three hundred years ago. Of course it is right and of God to hold fast all He gave at any time; but if there be real faith, it will be found out ere long that the Holy Ghost has before Him the present need for the Lord’s glory in the Church: and those that have real confidence in His power will not merely hold fast the old but accept the new, in order so much the more to walk in communion with Him who ever watches and works for the name of Christ and the blessing of His saints.

In this case, however, it is the larger subject -- the all-importance of Christ’s words abiding in us:

If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you.

There is first the person, then the expression of His mind. Prayer follows:

Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

It is not prayer first (for this should not take the place either of Christ or of intelligence in His mind), but Christ Himself, the prime object; then His words, as forming fully the heart, according to His thoughts and will; and, lastly, the going out of the heart to the Father, on the ground both of Christ and of His revealed mind, with the annexed assurance that so it should come to pass for them (John 15:7).

The prayer of Christians is often far from this. How many prayers are there where nothing seems to be done! This may be true; not merely of poor failing souls, such as any of us here; but even an apostle might find the same thing in his course, and God Himself be the witness of it. Indeed, the apostle Paul is the chronicler of the fact to us, that his prayers were not always in this communion. We know he besought the Lord thrice to take away that which was an immense trial to him, making him despicable in the eyes of the less spiritual. We can understand this: nothing is more natural; but, for that very reason, it was not all in the power of the Spirit of God, with Christ as the first object. He was thinking of himself, of his brethren, and of the work; but God graciously brought him to Christ, as the One sustained and sustaining object -- to abide in Him, as it is said here, and to have Christ’s words abiding in himself, and then all the resources of God were at his command.

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me (2 Cor. 12:9).

(Compare also Phil. 4:6-13.) It is only so that there is the certainty of the answer, at least, of what we ask being done.

The object is to show how God the Father answers and acts in accordance with those who are thus practically associated in heart with Christ. And so it is written,

Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit, and ye shall become my disciples (John 15:8).

Disciples, be it noted; for we must carefully bear in mind that we have not the Church as such here, and, indeed, we have never the Church, strictly speaking, in John. The reason is manifest, because the object of this Gospel is not to point out Christ in heaven, but God manifesting Himself in Christ on the earth. I do not mean that we have no allusion to His ascent or presence there; for we have seen that there is here some such allusion, especially when the Holy Ghost replaces Him here, and we shall have it repeatedly in what follows. At the same time, the main testimony of John is not so much Christ as man in heaven, but God in Him manifest on the earth. It is evident that, He being the Son, the special place of privilege found in the Gospel of John is that of children -- not members of Christ’s body, but sons of God, as receiving and associated with the Son, the only-begotten Son of the Father.

Here He speaks of them as disciples; for, in point of fact, the relationship of which John 15 speaks was already true. They had already come to Christ; they had forsaken all to follow Him, and were then around Him. He was the Vine now and here. It was not a new place He was going to enter. They, too, were branches then, and more than that, they were clean through the word He had spoken to them. Not that they were then cleansed by blood, but, at least, they were born of
water and of the Spirit. They had this cleansing, this moral operation, of the Spirit wrought in their souls. They were bathed or washed all over, and henceforth needed not save to wash their feet.

As the Father hath loved me; so have I loved you: continue [abide] ye in my love (John 15:9).

It is all a question of the Father’s government and the disciples’ responsibility: not of a people having to do with a governor nationally, as Jehovah was to Israel, but of Christ’s disciples in relation with the Father, according to the revelation of Himself in Christ. Nor is it here His grace delivering souls, but, what is true along with that, the full maintenance of individual responsibility, according to the manifestation of His nature and relationship in Christ here below. Thus, as compared with the past, the standard is raised immensely. For when once God had brought out Christ, He neither could nor would go back to anything less. It is not merely that He could not own anything short of Christ as a means of salvation, because this is always true; and never was any one brought to God at any time since the world began save by Christ, however scanty the testimony or partial the knowledge of Him. Under the law there was, comparatively speaking, little or no acquaintance with His work as a distinct thing, nor could there be, perhaps (at any rate there was not), even after He came, till the work was done. But here we have God’s ways and character as manifested in Christ, and nothing less than this would suit His disciples, or be agreeable to the Father. As already remarked, the application of this to life everlasting only induces contradiction. Thus, if we suppose that the subject of the chapter is, e.g. life or union with Christ, just see into what difficulties this false start plunders one at once: all would be made conditional, and those united to Christ might be lost.

If ye keep my commandments (John 15:10)

-- what has that to do with life eternal in Christ? Does union with Christ, does life eternal, depend on keeping His commandments? Clearly not; yet there is a meaning, and a most weighty meaning for those that belong to Christ, in these words. Apply them, not to grace but to government, and all is plain and sure and consistent.

The meaning is, that it is impossible to produce fruit for the Father -- impossible to keep up the enjoyment of Christ’s love, unless there be obedience, and this to Christ’s commandments. I repeat, that he who values the Master will not despise the servant; but there are many who do acknowledge their responsibility to the law of Moses without appreciating and obeying the words of Christ. He that loves Christ will enjoy all truth, because Christ is the truth. He will cherish every expression of God’s mind; he will find guidance in the law, the prophets, the psalms -- everywhere; and so much the more where there is the fullest revelation of Christ Himself. Christ is the true light. Therefore, as long as Christ is not the One in and through whose light the Scriptures, whether old or new, are read, a man is but groping his way in the dark. When he sees and believes in the Son, there is for him a sure way through the wilderness, and also a bright way in the word of God. The darkness passes away; bondage is no more; there is no condemnation, but, on

the contrary, life, light, and liberty; but, at the same time, it is a liberty used in the sense of responsibility to please our God and Father, measured by the revelation of Himself in Christ.

So the Lord says,

If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love (John 15:10).

The consequence is, that where there is carelessness in one who belongs to Christ, in a living branch of the vine, the Father as the husbandman deals in purging judgment. Where habitual obedience is found, there is habitual enjoyment of Christ’s love.

These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full (John 15:11).

Supposing that for a time there is a departure from Christ, what is the effect of it? No matter how really a man may be a child of God, he is miserable; the more real, the more miserable. One that had not a conscience exercised before God might sleep over sin and accustom himself to evil for awhile; and an unreal disciple would grow tired of carrying on the profession of Christ along with indulged evil; nor would God allow it to go beyond a certain point as an ordinary rule. But for a saint, true-hearted in the main, nothing is more certain than that Christ would deal with him, and that he would lose meanwhile all sense of the love of Christ as a present practical thing. It is a matter of communion, not of salvation. And surely it ought to be so, and we would not desire it to be otherwise. Who would desire an unreal thing -- the keeping up an appearance, the parade of words and sentiments beyond the heart’s state? There is nothing more calamitous for a soul than to be going on badly, and withal keeping up a vain, exaggerated semblance of feeling, where there is a scanty answer to it within.

With the enjoyment of Christ’s love, then, goes obedience; and where the disciple fails in obedience, there cannot be a real abiding in His love. Here it is not a question of love everlasting, but of present communion. He only abides in Christ’s love who walks in His will faithfully. We must discriminate in the love of Christ. Unconditionally, of pure grace, He loved them that were His. Again, there was love, in a broad sense, even for those that were not His, as we have seen more than once. Besides, there is the special personal love of approbation for him who is walking in the ways of God.

Some there are a little sensitive on these subjects. They do not like to hear, save of eternal love of the elect; and certainly, if this were weakened or denied, they might have reason to resent it. But as it is, there cannot be a more painful proof of their own state. The reason why they cannot bear this further truth is because it condemns them. If these things are in Scripture (and deny them who dares?) our business is to submit; our duty is to seek to understand them; our wisdom is to correct and challenge ourselves, if peradventure we find insubjection within us to anything that concerns Him and our own souls. Not to speak of Christ, even on the lowest ground,
we are depriving ourselves of what is good and profitable. What, indeed, can be more ruinous than putting aside that which condemns any state in which we find ourselves?

I need not enter into all the details of our chapter, though I have rather minutely gone over it thus far, believing it to be of special importance, because it is so much and generally misunderstood. Here the Lord presents Himself as the only source, not of life, as elsewhere, but of fruit-bearing for disciples, or His professed followers. What He shows is, that they need Him just as much for every day as for eternity; that they need Him for the fruit the Father expects from them now, just as much as for a title to heaven. Hence He speaks of that which pertains to a disciple on the earth; and accordingly the Lord speaks of having Himself kept His Father's commandments, and of His own abiding in His love; for, indeed, He had ever been here below the dependent man, to whom the Father was the moral source of the life He lived; and so He would have us now to live because of Himself.

I entreat any who have misread this chapter to examine thoroughly what I am now urging on my hearers. It is incalculable the quantity of scripture that is passed over without distinct exercise of faith. Souls receive it in a general way; and too often one reason why it is received so easily is, because they do not face the truth, and their conscience is not exercised by it. If they thought, weighed, and let into their souls the real truth conveyed, they might at first be startled, but the way and the end would be blessed to them. What a return for these wondrous communications of Christ, just to slip over them perfunctorily, without making the light our own! Our Lord then clearly shows that He, as man here below, had Himself walked under the government of His Father. It was not merely that He was born of a woman, born under the law, but, as He says here,

Even as I have kept my Father's commandments {John 15:10}.

It went much farther than the ten words, or all the rest of the law; it embraced every expression of the Father's authority, from whatever quarter it came. And as He could not but perfectly keep His Father's commandments, He abode in His love. As the eternal Son of the Father, of course He was ever loved of the Father; as laying down His life (John 10), He was therefore loved of His Father; but, besides, in all His earthly path, He kept His Father's commandments, and abode in His love. The Father, looking upon the Son as man walking here below, never found the slightest deflection; but, on the contrary, the perfect image of His own will in Him who, being the Son, made known and glorified the Father as He never was nor could be by any other. This was not simply as God, but rather as the Man Christ Jesus here below. I admit that, being such an One, there could be no failure. To suppose I will not say the fact, but the possibility even, of a flaw in Christ, either as God or as man, proves that he who admits the thought has no faith in His person. There could be none. Still, the trial was made under the most adverse circumstances; and He who, though God Himself, was at the same time man, walked as man perfectly, as truly as He was perfect man; and thus the Father's love rested governmentally upon Him fully, unwaveringly, absolutely in all His ways.

Now we, too, are placed upon the true ground as the disciples, strictly speaking, who were then there; but, of course, the same principle applies to all.

Another thing comes in after this. Gathered round Christ, the disciples were called on by Christ to love one another (John 15:12). Loving one's neighbour was not the point now; nor is it so here. Of course, loving one's neighbour abides always; but this, no matter how accomplished, ought not to be enough for a disciple of Christ. Such a demand was right and seasonable for a man in the flesh -- for a Jew especially; but it could not suffice for the heart of a Christian, and, in fact, he who denies this, quarrels with the Lord's own words. A Christian, I repeat, is not absolved from loving his neighbour -- nobody means that, I trust; but what I affirm is, that a Christian is called to love his fellow Christian in a new and special manner, exemplified and formed by the love of Christ; and I cannot but think that he who confounds this with love to his neighbour has a great deal to learn about Christ, and Christianity too.

The Lord evidently introduces it as a new thing.

This is my commandment {John 15:12}.

It was His commandment specially. He it was that first gathered the disciples. They were a distinct company from Israel, though not yet baptized into one body; but they were gathered by Christ, and round Himself, severed from the rest of the Jews so far.

This is my commandment, That ye love one another.

But according to what measure?

As I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends {John 15:12, 13}.

Shall I be told that any man ever loved, before Christ came into the world, as He loved? If a man will be ignorant, let him be ignorant, and show his unbelief by such an assertion if he will. Now I say That there is a love looked for, such as could only be since Christ manifested it, and that His love fills and fashions after its own nature and direction. The disciples were now to love one another according to the pattern of Him who laid down His life for them as His friends. Indeed, He died for them when they were enemies; but this is out of sight here. They were His friends, if they did whatever He commanded them (John 15:14). He called them friends, not slaves; for the slave knows not what his master does; but He called them friends, for He made them His confidants in all He had heard of His Father. They had not chosen Him, but He them, and set them to go and bear fruit, abiding fruit, that He might give them whatsoever they asked the Father in His name.

These things I command you, that ye love one another (John 15:15-17).

And truly they would need the love of one another, as Christ loved them. They had become objects of the hatred of the world (John 15:18, 19). The Jews knew no such experience. They might be disliked of the Gentiles. They were a peculiar people, no doubt, and the nations could ill brook a small nation raised to such a conspicuous place, whose law condemned them and their gods. But the disciples
were to have the hatred of the world, of the Jew as much or more than of the Gentile. They had this indeed already, and they must make up their minds to it from the world. The love of Christ was on them, and, working in them and by them, would make them the objects of the world's hatred, and after that sort which He had Himself known. As He says here:

If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you (John 15:18, 19).

I refer to this for the purpose of showing, that the revelation of Christ has brought in not merely a total change in the consciousness of eternal life and salvation when the work was done, as well as the overthrow of all distinctions between Jew and Gentile, which we find, of course, in the Epistles -- but, besides that practically, has brought in a power of producing fruit that could not be before, a mutual love peculiar to Christians, and a rejection and hatred from the world beyond all that had been. In every way possible Christ gives us now His own portion, from the world as well as from the Father.

Remember the word that I said unto you. The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also (John 15:20).

Fully do I admit that there were works of faith, deeds of righteousness, holy, wise, obedient ways, in saints of God from the beginning. You could not have faith without a new nature, nor this again without the exercise practically of that which was according to God's will. Therefore, as all saints from the beginning had faith, and were regenerate, so also there were spiritual ways in accordance with it.

But God's revelation in Christ makes an immense accession of blessing; and the consequence is, that this brings out the mind of God in a way that was not and could not have been before, just because there was no manifestation of Christ, and nobody but Christ could bring it adequately out. With this revelation the hatred of the world is commensurate; and the Lord puts it in the strongest possible way.

But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me. If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin (John 15:21, 22).

What can be plainer than the enormous change that was coming in now? We know that there had been sin all along, in the dealings of God with His ancient people; but what does the Lord here mean? Are we to fritter away the meaning of His language? Are we not to believe that, whatever there was before, the revelation of Christ brought sin to such a head, that what had been before was, comparatively speaking, a little thing when put beside the evil that was done against, and measured by, the glory of Christ the Son, the rejection of the Father's love; in short, the hatred shown to grace and truth -- yea, the Father and the Son fully revealed in the Lord Jesus? Clearly so. It is not, then, a question of judging sin by right and wrong, by law, or by conscience -- all well and in place for Israel and man as such. But when One who is more than man comes into the world, the dignity of the person sinned against, the love and light revealed in His person, all bear on the estimate of sin; and the consequence is, there could he no such character of sin till Christ was manifested, though, of course, heart and nature are the same.

But the revelation of Christ forced everything to a point, sounded the condition of man as nothing else could, and proved that, bad as Israel might be, when measured by a law -- a holy, just, good law of God, yet, measured now by the Son of God, all sin previously was as nothing compared with the still deeper sin of rejecting the Son of God.

He that hateth me hateth my Father also (John 15:23).

It is not merely God as such, but my Father that was hated.

If I had not done among them --

-- not now His words only, but works --

If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father (John 15:24).

There was a full testimony, as we have seen already, in John 8, 9. (His words in John 8, His works in John 9); but the manifestation of His words and of His works only brought out man thoroughly hating the Father and the Son. Had they only failed to meet the requirements of God, as man had done under the law, there was ample provision to meet him in mercy and power; but now, under this revelation of grace, man, and Israel most of all, the world (for in this they are all merged now) stood out in open hostility to, and implacable hatred of, the fullest display of divine goodness here below. But this dreadful hopeless hatred, evil as it was, ought not to surprise one who believes the word of God; it was,

that the word might be fulfilled which was written in their law, They hated me without a cause (John 15:25).

There is nothing that so demonstrates man's total alienation and enmity. This is precisely what Christ here urges.

The disciples accordingly, having received this grace in Christ, were called into a like path with Him, the epistle here below of Christ who is above. Fruit-bearing is the great point throughout John 15, as the end of it and John 16 bring before us testimony.

When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning (John 15:26, 27).

Here is a twofold testimony -- that of the disciples who had seen Christ and heard His words. Hence they were called to bear witness of Him --

because ye have been with me from the beginning.

It was not only the great manifestation at the end, but the truth from the beginning, grace and truth always in Him. Dealing differently, no doubt, according to that which was before Him; still it was in Christ ever the value of what
came, not what He found, which was the great point. And to this testimony (for He is showing now the full testimony which the disciples were called to render) the Holy Ghost would add His, (wondrous to say and know it true!) as distinct from the witness of the disciples. We know right well that a disciple only renders testimony by the power of the Holy Ghost. How, then, do we find the Holy Ghost’s testimony spoken of as distinct from theirs? Both are true, especially when we bear in mind that He would testify of the heavenly side of truth. In John 14:26, it was said,

The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

There the Holy Ghost is both a teacher and helper. As it is said,

He will teach you all things

-- what they never knew, besides bringing to remembrance things that they had known.

In the end of John 15 there is a good deal more. The Holy Ghost,

when he is come

(not “whom the Father will send,” but)

whom I will send from the Father (John 15:26).

The Holy Ghost was both sent by the Father, and sent by the Son; not the same thing, but quite consistent. There is a distinct line of truth in the two cases. You could not transplant from John 15 into John 14, nor the reverse, without dislocating the whole order of the truth. Surely it all deserves to be weighed, and demands from us that we should wait upon God to learn His precious things. In John 14 it is evidently the Father giving another Comforter to the disciples, and sending Him in Christ’s name: Christ is looked at there as One who prays, and whose value acts for the disciples. But in John 15 it is One who is Himself everything for the disciples from on high. Here He was the one spring of whatever fruit was borne, and He is gone on high, but is the same there; and so not merely asks the Father to send, but Himself sends them from the Father the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from with the Father, if so literal a turn may be allowed. His own personal glory on high is in full view, and so He speaks and acts, while the connection with the Father is always kept up. Still, in the one case it is the Father who sends; in the other, the Son; and this last, where the point is to show the new glory of Christ above.

He shall testify of me; and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning

{John 15:27}.

There would be the testimony of the Holy Ghost sent from the Son, and bearing witness of Him, according to the place whence He came to replace Him here. The Holy Ghost, sent thus from above, would bear witness of the Son in heaven; but the disciples also would bear witness of what they knew when He was upon the earth, because they had been with Him from the beginning (i.e. of His manifestation here). Both we have in Christianity, which not only maintains the testimony of Christ, as manifested on the earth, but also the Holy Ghost’s witness of Christ known on high. To leave out either is to strip Christianity of half its value. There is that which never can make up for Christ on the earth; and certainly there is that revealed of Christ in heaven which no manifestation on the earth can supply. They have, both of them, a divine place and power for the children of God.

John 16 seems to be based rather on this last. The main difference is, that the Holy Ghost is more spoken of here apart from the question of who sends. It is more the Holy Ghost coming than sent here; that is, the Holy Ghost is looked at -- not certainly as acting independently, but yet as a distinct person. He comes, not to display His own power and glory, but expressly to glorify Christ. At the same time, He is looked at in more distinct personality than in John 14, 15. And our Lord had the wisest reason for making known to the disciples what they had to expect. They were now entering on the path of testimony, that always involves suffering. We have seen what should befall them in bearing fruit as Christ’s disciples and friends. This is enough for the world, which hates them as Him, because they are not of it, but are loved and chosen of Christ. These two things unite the disciples. The hatred of the world and the love of Christ press them so much the more together. But there is also the hatred which befalls them in testifying, not as disciples so much as witnesses. Witnessing as the disciples did of what they had known of Christ here, witnessing of what the Spirit taught them of Christ on high, the consequence would be,

They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service {John 16:2}.

It is clearly religious rancour created by this full testimony, not the world’s general ill-feeling, but special hatred to their testimony. Hence, it would be putting them, not merely into prisons, but out of the synagogues; and this under the notion of doing God service. It is religious persecution.

And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me {John 16:3}.

How perfectly the truth shines here on Christian as well as on Jewish hatred of all full testimony to Christ! Spite of the liberalism of the day, this peeps out where it dares. They talk about God; they speculate about the Deity, providence, fate, or chance. They may even be zealous for the law, and tack on Christ to it. There a great deal of the world’s religion ends. But they know not the Father, nor the Son. It is irreverence to draw near and cry, Abba, Father! It is presumption for a man in this life to count himself a child of God! The consequence is, that wherever there is this ignorance of the Father and the Son, there is inveterate hostility against such as are joyful in the communion of the Father and the Son. This hatred every true witness, without compromise, and separate from the world, must more or less experience. The Lord would not have them surprised. Jewish brethren might have thought that, having received Christ, everything was to be smooth, bright, and peaceful. Not so. They must expect special and increasing, and, worst of all, religions hatred (John 16:1-4).

But now I go my way to him that sent me {John 16:5}.

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The path lay through death, no doubt; but He puts it as going to Him that sent Him. Let them be comforted, then, as surely they would if they rightly thought of His Father’s presence. But

none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? (John 16:5).

They felt natural sadness at the thought of His departure. Had they gone a step farther, and asked whether He was going, it would have been all right, they would have felt glad for Him; for though it were their loss, it was most surely His gain and joy -- the joy that was set before Him, the joy of being with His Father, with the comfort for His own of an accomplished redemption (attested by His thus going on high).

But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you (John 16:7).

It is the Comforter coming. No doubt Christ sends; and there lies the connection with the end of John 15. Still there is the special form of presenting Him as one that comes, which is confirmed in the next verse.

And when he is come, he will reprove [or convince] the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment (John 16:8).

This is a sentence much to be pondered. It is now God’s Spirit dealing according to the gospel with individual souls, which is perfectly true and most important. Conviction of sin is wrought in all who are born of God. What confidence could there be in a soul professing to have found redemption, even forgiveness of sins, through His blood, unless there were an accompanying sense of sin? The Spirit of God does produce this. Souls must be simple and distinct in it as truly as in believing in Christ Jesus. There is a real individual work in those, yea, in all brought to God. For a sinner, repentance remains an eternal necessity.

Here, however, the Holy Ghost is not spoken of as dealing with individuals when He regenerates them and they believe, but as bringing conviction to the world of sin because of unbelief. There is no real conviction of sin unless there be faith. It may be but the first working of God’s grace in the soul that produces it. There may not be faith so as to have peace with God, but assuredly enough to judge of one’s own ways and condition before God; and this is precisely the way in which He does ordinarily work. At the same time there is also the conviction of which the Lord speaks: the Holy Ghost, when He is come, will convince the world of sin. Why? Because they have broken the law? Not so. This may be used, but is not the ground nor the standard when Christ is the question. The law remains, and the Spirit of God often employs it, specially if a man be in self-righteousness. But the fact is clear, that the Holy Ghost is sent down; as it is also clear, that the Holy Ghost, being here, convicts the world -- i.e. what is outside where He is. Were there faith, the Holy Ghost would be in their midst; but the world does not believe. Hence Christ is, as everywhere in John, the standard for judging the condition of men.

When he is come, he will convince the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin [not when they begin to believe in me, but] because they believe not in me (John 16:8, 9).

Again, the conviction of righteousness is equally remarkable. There is no reference even to the blessed Lord when on earth, or to what He did here.

Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more (John 16:10).

Thus there is a twofold conviction of righteousness. The first ground is, that the only righteousness now is in Christ gone to be with the Father. So perfectly did Christ glorify God in death, as He always did in life the things that pleased His Father, that nothing short of putting Him as man at His own right hand could meet the case. Wondrous fact! a man now in glory, at the right hand of God, above all angels, principalities, and powers. This is the proof of righteousness. It is what God the Father owed to Christ, who had so perfectly pleased and so morally glorified Him, even in respect of sin. All the world, yea, all worlds, would be too little to mark His sense of value for Christ and His work -- nothing less than setting Him as man at His right hand in heaven. But there is another though negative, as that was the positive, proof of righteousness -- that the world had lost Christ,

and ye see me no more.

When Christ returns, He will gather His own to Himself, as in John 14. But as for the world, it has rejected and crucified Christ. The consequence is, that it will see Christ no more till He comes in judgment, and this will be to put down its pride for ever. Thus there is this double conviction of righteousness: the first is Christ gone to be with the Father on high; the second is Christ seen no more consequently. The rejected Christ is accepted and glorified in the highest seat above, which condemns the world and proves there is no righteousness in it or man; but more than this, the world shall see Him no more. When He returns, it is to judge man; but as far as concerns the offer of blessing to man in a living Christ, it is gone for ever. The Jews did and do look for Him; but when He came, they would not have Him. The best of the world, therefore, the choicest and most divinely privileged of men, have turned out the most guilty. A living Messiah they will never see. If any have Him now, it can only be a rejected and heavenly Christ.

But there is another thing -- the Spirit will convince the world

of judgment (John 16:11).

What is the conviction of judgment? It is not the destruction of this place or that. Such was the way in which God manifested His judgment of old; but the Holy Ghost bears witness now, that the prince of this world is judged. He led the world to cast out the truth, and God Himself, in the person of Christ. His judgment is sealed. It is fixed beyond hope of change. It is only a question of the moment in God’s hands, and the world with its prince will be treated according to the judgment already pronounced.

Of judgment,
He says,

because the prince of this world is judged
(John 16:11).

In John we have the truth, without waiting for what will be manifest. The Spirit here judges things at the roots, dealing with things according to their reality in God’s sight, into which the believer enters.

Thus everywhere there is absolute opposition between the world and the Father, expressed morally when the Son was here, and proved now that the Spirit is come. The great mark of the world is that the Father is unknown. Hence, like Jews, or even heathen, they can pray to Almighty God to bless their leagues, or their arms, their crops, their herds, or what not. They flatter themselves perhaps that they may do God service; but the Father’s love is unknown -- never in such a condition can He be fully known. Even when we look at children of God, scattered here and there in the waste, they are trembling and fearful, and practically at a distance, instead of consciously near in peace, as if it were God’s will that His children should now stand off in Sinai-distance and terror. Who ever heard even of an earthly father, worthy of the name, so sternly repelling his children? Certainly this is not our Father as we know Him through Christ Jesus. Brethren, it is the spirit of the world which, when sanctioned, invariably tends to destroy the knowledge of the Father, and of our proper relationship, even among His real children, because it necessarily slips more or less into Judaisms.

But the Holy Ghost has another work. He convinces the world of the truth they do not know, by the very fact that He is outside the world, and has nothing to do with it. He dwells with the children of God. I do not deny His power in the testimony of the gospel to souls. This is another thing not spoken of here. But besides, we have His direct immediate action among the disciples.

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth
(John 16:12, 13).

Thus the disciples, favoured as they were, were far from knowing all that the Lord desired for them, and would have told them if their state had admitted of it. When redemption was accomplished, and Christ was raised from the dead, and the Holy Ghost was given, then they were competent to enter into all the truth, not before. Hence, Christianity awaits not only Christ’s coming, but the accomplishment of His work, and also the mission and personal presence of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, consequent on that work. But He would take no independent place, any more than the Son had.

He shall not speak from himself; but whatever he shall hear, he shall speak: and he will report (or announce) to you things to come. He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall report it to you
(John 16:13, 14).

It is not said, as some think, that He shall not speak about Himself; for the Holy Ghost does speak, and tells us much concerning Himself and His operations; and never so much as under the Christian revelation. The fullest instruction as to the Spirit is in the New Testament; and, pray, who speaks of the Holy Ghost if it be not Himself? Was it merely Paul? or John? or any other man? The fact is, that the authorised version gives rather obsolete English. The meaning is, that He shall not speak of His own authority, as if He had nothing to do with the Father and the Son. For He is come here to glorify the Son, just as the Son when here was glorifying the Father. And this explains why, although the Holy Ghost is worthy of supreme worship, and of being, equally with the Father and the Son, personally addressed in prayer, yet, having come down for the purpose of animating, directing, and effectuating the work and worship of God’s children here, He is never presented in the Epistles as directly the object, but rather as the power, of Christian prayer. Therefore, we find them praying in, and never to, the Holy Ghost. At the same time, when we say “God,” of course we do mean not only the Father, but the Son, and the Holy Ghost too. In that way, therefore, every intelligent believer knows that he includes the Spirit and the Son with the Father, when he addresses God; because the name “God” does not belong to one person in the Trinity more than to another. But when we speak of the persons in the Godhead distinctively, and with knowledge of what God has done and is doing, we do well to remind ourselves and one another, that the Spirit has come down and taken a special place among and in the disciples now; the consequence of which is, that He is pleased administratively (without renouncing His personal rights) to direct our hearts thus towards God the Father and the Lord Jesus. He is thus (if we may speak so, as I believe we may and ought reverentially) serving the interests of the Father and the Son here below in the disciples. The fact we have noticed, the administrative position of the Spirit, is thus owing to the work He has voluntarily undertaken for the Father and the Son, though, of course, as a question of His own glory, He is equally to be adored with the Father and the Son, and is always comprehended in God as such.

The rest of the chapter, without entering into minute points, shows that the Lord, about to leave the disciples, would give them a taste of joy -- a testimony of what will be (John 16:16-22). The world might rejoice in having got rid of Him; but He would give His own joy, which would not be taken from them. In measure, this was made good by our Lord’s appearing after He rose from the dead; but the full force of it will only be known when He comes again.

Then there is another privilege. The Lord intimates a new character of drawing near to the Father, which they had not yet known (John 16:23-26). Hitherto they had asked nothing in His name.

In that day:
He says,

  ye shall ask me nothing
{John 16:23}.

We are in
that day
now.

In that day
does not mean in a future day, but in one that is come.

Instead of using Christ’s intervention as Martha proposed,
instead of begging Christ to ask the Father, demanding each thing they needed of Christ Himself, they might reckon on the Father’s giving them whatsoever they should ask Him in Christ’s name. It is not a question of a Messianic link to get what they wanted, but they would be able to ask the Father in His name themselves. How blessed to know the Father thus hearkening to the children asking in the Son’s name! It is of children on earth now the Lord speaks, not of the Father’s house by and by. Evidently this is a capital truth, bearing powerfully on the nature of the Christian’s prayers, as well as on his worship.

It is exactly what accounts for the fact, that we are here on ground quite different from that of the precious and blessed form of prayer which the Lord gave His disciples when they wanted to know how to pray, as John taught his disciples. The Lord necessarily gave them that which was suited to their then condition. Now, I believe, it is little to say that there is not, nor ever was, a formula of prayer comparable with the Lord’s prayer. Nor is there, to my thinking, a single petition of that prayer which is not a model for the prayers of His followers ever since; but all remains true and applicable at all times -- at least, till our Father’s kingdom come. Why, then, was it not employed formally by the apostolic Church? The answer lies in what is now before us. Our Lord here, at the end of His earthly course, informs the disciples that hitherto they had demanded nothing in His name. They had, no doubt, been using the Lord’s prayer for some time; nevertheless they had asked nothing in His name. In that day they were to ask the Father in His name. What I gather from this is, that those who had even used the Lord’s prayer, as the disciples had done up to this time, did not know what it was to ask the Father in the Lord’s name. They still continued at a comparative distance from their Father; but this is not the Christian state. By the Christian state I mean that in which a man is conscious of his nearness to his God and Father, and able to draw near in virtue of the Holy Ghost given. On the contrary, prayers that suppose a person to be an object of divine displeasure, anxious, and doubtful whether he is to be saved or not -- such an experience supposes one incapable of speaking to the Father in Christ’s name. It is speaking as still tied and bound with the chain of their sins, instead of standing in known reconciliation, and, with the Spirit of adoption, drawing near to the Father in the name of Christ. Who can honestly, or at least intelligently, deny it? Thus, whatever the blessing through the Lord’s ministry, there was certainly an advance here foreshown, founded on redemption, resurrection, and the Spirit given. Why should men limit their thoughts, so as to ignore that incomparable blessing to which even in this Gospel Christ was ever pointing, as the fruit of His death and of the presence of the Comforter who would bring in

that day?

It was impossible to furnish a prayer which could reconcile the wants of souls before and after the work of the cross, and the new place consequent on it. And, in fact, the Lord has done the contrary; for He gave the disciples a prayer on principles of everlasting truth, but not anticipating that which His death and resurrection brought to view. Of these new privileges the Holy Ghost sent down was to be the power. Be assured this is no secondary matter, and that traditional views slight unwittingly the infinite efficacy and value of what Christ has wrought, the results of which the Holy Ghost was sent down to apply to our souls. And the gift of that divine person to dwell in us -- is this, too, a secondary matter? or is there no radical change which accompanies the work of Christ when accomplished and known? If, indeed, everything be secondary to the supply of man’s need, if the unfolding of God’s glory and ways in Christ be comparatively a cipher, I understand as much as I hate a principle so base and unbelieving.

It appears to me that the Lord Jesus Himself clearly sets forth the new thing at the highest value, which no general reasonings of men ought to weaken in the least. That immense change, then, let us accept on His authority who cannot deceive us, assured that our brethren, who fail to see how full association with the efficacy of His work, and the acceptance of His person, made good in the presence of the Spirit, accounts for the difference between prayer before and prayer after, put no intentional slight on His words in this chapter, or on His work of atonement. But I beseech them to consider whether they are not allowing habits and prejudices to blind them to what seems to me the mind of Christ in this grave question.

In the close of John 16:25-33, the Lord puts, with perfect plainness, both their coming position in His name, and as immediate objects of the Father’s affection, and His own place as coming from and going to the Father, above all promise and dispensation. This the disciples thought they saw distinctly; but they were mistaken: their words do not rise higher than --

We believe that thou camest forth from God (John 16:30).

The Master thereon warns them of that hour, even then come in spirit, when His rejection should prove their dispersion -- deserted, yet not alone,

because the Father is with me (John 16:32).

He spoke, that in Him they might have peace, as in the world they should have tribulation.

But be of good cheer: I have overcome the world (John 16:33).

It was an enemy of the Father and of them, but an enemy overcome of Him.

* * *

On John 17 I must be brief, though its treasures might well invite one to devote ample space to weigh them. A few words, however, may perhaps give the general outline. The Lord, lifting up His eyes to heaven, no longer speaks to the disciples, but turns to His Father. He lays a double ground before Him: one, the glory of His person; the other, the
accomplishment of His work. He seeks from the Father for His disciples a place of blessing in association with Himself suitable both to His person and work.

Be it observed, that from John 17:6 He develops the relationship of the disciples with His Father, having manifested the Father's name to those who were the Father's, and given them the words which the Father gave Him, and spoken as He did now that they might have His joy fulfilled in them. From John 17:14 He develops it with the world, they being not of it, and wholly sanctified from it, while sent into it like Himself. And observe here, that He has given the Father's word (λόγον) for their testimony (as before His words, ὡριμαστε), but sanctifies them, not by this only, which kept them from the evil of the world, but by Himself, always separate from sin, but now made higher than the heavens, so as to fill them with an object there that could engage and expand and purify their affections. From John 17:20 He extends this place of privilege and responsibility to those who should believe on Him through the word of the apostles, the moral unity of John 17:11 being now enlarged into a unity of testimony, that the world might believe that the Father sent the Son; and carried onward, even to the display of glory --

I in them, and thou in me {John 17:23}

-- when they shall be perfected into one, and the world shall know (not then “believe”) that the Father sent the Son, and loved them as He loved Him. (Compare 2 Thess. 1:10.)

Lastly, from John 17:24 to the end, we have, if possible, deeper things than even these; and here the Lord expresses His heart's desire; for it is no longer, as before, in the form of a request (ἐρωτῶ), but,

Father, I will,

or desire (Θέλω). This word indicates a new character of plea:

I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am {John 17:24}.

The earlier section laid His person and His work as the ground for His being glorified on high, according to the title of the one, and in the accomplishment of the other. John 17:24, as it were, takes up that position of glory with the Father before the world was, into which Christ has gone, with His heart's expression of desire that they should be with Him where He is, that they might behold His glory, which the Father gave Him!

for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world {John 17:24}.

Thus, if the central portion gave us the disciples on the earth in relation with the Father on the one hand, and in total separation from the world on the other, with subsequent believers brought into one, both in testimony and in glory by and by before the world, the closing verses take up Christians, as it were, with the Father in an unearthy, heavenly glory, and His desire that they should be with Him there. It is not merely sought for, that they should be thoroughly, as far as could be, in His own place of relationship with the Father, and apart from the world, but also that they should be brought into intimacy of nearness with Himself before the Father. Then, in John 17:25, the breach between the world and the Father and the Son being complete, He says,

O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee; but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me.

There is always this opposition between the Father and the world, proved by His presence in the world. But the disciples had known that the Father sent the Son, as the Son knew the Father. He had made known to them the Father's name, and would yet more;

that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them {John 17:26};

this last verse bringing into them, as it were, the Father's love, as the Son knew it, which was the secret source of all the blessing and glory, and Christ Himself in them, whose life by the Spirit was the sole nature capable of enjoying all. Thus they should have a present enjoyment of the Father, and of Christ, according to the place of nearness they had as thus associated with Him.

* * *

On the concluding chapters of our Gospel I cannot speak particularly now. Yet I must, in passing, point out that even in these solemn closing scenes the glory of the Son's person is ever the prominent figure. Hence we have no notice of His agony in the garden, nor of God's forsaking Him on the tree. Matthew depicts Him as the suffering Messiah, according to psalms and prophets; Mark, as the rejected Servant and Prophet of God; Luke, as the perfect and obedient Son of man, who shrank from no trial either for soul or body, but even on the cross prayed for His enemies, filling a poor sinner's heart with the good news of salvation, and committing His Spirit with unwavering confidence to His Father. The point here is the Son of God with the world, the Jews especially being His enemies. Hence, John tells us (John 18) what no other Gospel does, that when the band came to take Jesus, led by one who knew too well the spot where His heart had so often poured itself out to the Father, at once they went backward, and fell to the ground. Do you suppose Matthew let it slip? or that Mark and Luke never heard of it? Is it conceivable that a fact so notorious -- the very world being the objects of the divine power that cast them prostrate to the ground -- could be hidden from, or forgotten by, friends or foes? Or if even men (not to speak of the Spirit's power) would forget such a thing, did the rest think it too slight for their mention? All such suppositions are preposterous. The true explanation is, that the Gospels are written with divine design, and that here, as everywhere, John records a fact which falls in with the Spirit's object in his Gospel. Did these men come to seize Jesus? He was going to be a prisoner, and to die; in the one case, as much as in the other, He would prove it was not of man's constraint, but of His own will and in obedience to His Father's. He was a willing prisoner, and a willing victim. If none could take His life unless He laid it down, so none could take Him prisoner unless He gave Himself up. Nor was it simply that He could ask His Father for twelve legions of angels, as He says in

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Matthew; but, in John, did He want angels? They might and did ascend and descend on Him as Son of man; but He had only to speak, and it was done. He is God.

The moment He said, I am He (John 18:5), without lifting a finger, or even audibly expressing a desire, they fell to the ground. Could this scene be suitably given by any other than John? Could he leave it out who presents his Master as the Son and the Word who was God?

Again, we have our Lord's calm rebuke to Peter, who had cut off the ear of Malchus. Let Luke alone tell us of the Lord's gracious healing (for Jehovah's power, to heal was not absent); John alone adds,

The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it? (John 18:11).

He preserves throughout His personal dignity and His conscious relationship, but withal in perfect submission to His Father.

Then follows the notice of Peter's sad history with that other disciple which was known to the high priest. Next, our Lord is before the high priest, Caiaphas, as previously before his father-in-law Annas; and, finally, before Pilate. Sufficient to say, that the one point which meets us here, as distinct from the other Gospels, is His person. Not that He was not King of the Jews, but His kingdom is not of this world, not from hence, and He Himself is born and come into the world to bear witness to the truth. Here it is the Jews insist He ought by their law to die, because He made Himself the Son of God (John 19). Here, too, He answers Pilate, after scourging and mockery,

Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin (John 19:11).

It was the Jews, led on by Judas, that had this greater sin. The Jew ought to have known better than Pilate, and Judas better than the Jew. The glory of the Son was too bright for their eyes. Afterwards there is another characteristic scene, the blending of the most perfect human affection with His divine glory -- He confides His mother to the disciple whom He loved (John 19:25-27).

The Gospel which most of all shows Him to be God is careful to prove Him man. The word was made flesh. Afterwards this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst (John 19:28).

I know not a more sweet and wonderful proof of how completely He was divinely superior to all circumstances. He had before Him with perfect distinctness all the truth of God. Here was a scripture which He remembers as unaccomplished. It was a word in Ps. 69. It was enough.

I thirst (see Psa. 69:21).

What absorption in His Father's will!

Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished (John 19:29, 30).

Where could such a word as this be but in John? Who could say,

It is finished,

except Jesus in John? Matthew and Mark both give our Lord saying,

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? [Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34].

This could not be in John. Luke gives us,

Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit [Luke 23:46],
because there the perfect man never abandons His perfect reliance on God. God must, in the judgment of our sins, forsake Him, but He would never forsake God. The atonement would not have been what it is unless God had thus forsaken Him. But in Luke it is the sign of absolute trust in His Father, and not God's abandonment. In John He says, It is finished,
because He is the Son, by whom all worlds were made. Who but He could say it? Who but John could mention that He delivered up (παρέδωκεν) His spirit? In every point of difference the fullest possible proof of divine glory and wisdom appears in these Gospels. Put to death no doubt He was, but at the same time it was His own voluntary will; and who could have this about death itself but a divine person? In a mere man it would be sin; in Him it was perfection. Then come the soldiers, breaking the legs of the others crucified with Him; but finding Jesus dead already, one pierces His side,

and forthwith came thereout blood and water. And he that saw it bare record [John 19:34].

Thus a double scripture is fulfilled. The apostle John does not quote many scriptures; but when he does, the person of the Son is the great point. Accordingly this was the case now; for not a bone was to be broken. It was true. Nevertheless, He was to be pierced. He was singled out from the others, even while dead between the dying thieves. He has a place even here that belonged to Him alone.

Joseph charges himself with the body too; and Nicodemus, who came first by night is here by day, honoured by association with Jesus crucified, of whom he had been ashamed once, spite of the miracles He was doing.

In John 20 is the resurrection, and this in a remarkable light. No such outward circumstance is here as in Matthew, no soldiers trembling, no walk with disciples, but as ever the person of God's Son, though disciples prove how little they entered into the truth. Peter saw and believed. For as yet they knew not the Scriptures, that He must rise again from the dead (John 20:8, 9).

It was evidence; and there is no moral value in accepting on evidence. Believing the word of God has moral value, because it gives God credit for truth. A man gives up himself to confide in God. Believing the Scriptures, therefore, has another character altogether from a judgment formed on a
matter of fact. Mary Magdalene, with as little understanding of the Scriptures as they, stood without at the sepulchre weeping, when they went to their own homes. Jesus meets her in her sorrow, dries her tears, and sends her to the disciples with a message of His resurrection. But He does not permit her to touch Him. In Matthew the other women even retain Him by the feet. Why? The reason appears to be that in the earlier Gospel it is the pledge of a bodily presence for the Jews in the latter day; for whatever be the consequences of Jewish unbelief now, God is faithful. The Gospel of John has here no purpose of showing God's promises for the circumcision; but, on the contrary, sedulously detachs the disciples from Jewish thoughts. Mary Magdalene is a sample or type of this. The heart must be taken off His bodily presence.

   Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father [John 20:17].

   The Christian owns Christ in heaven. As the apostle says, even if we had known Christ after the flesh,

   henceforth know we him no more [2 Cor. 5:16].

The cross, as we know it, closes all connection with even Him in this world. It is the same Christ manifested in life here upon earth. John shows us, in Mary Magdalene contrasted with the women of Galilee, the difference between the Christian and the Jew. It is not outward corporeal presence on earth, but a greater nearness, though He is ascended to heaven, because of the power of the Holy Ghost.

   But go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father, and to my God, and your God [John 20:17].

Never had He put Himself and His disciples so together before.

   The next scene [John 20:19-23] is the disciples gathered together. It is not a message individually, but they are assembled on the same first day at evening, and Jesus stands, spite of closed doors, in the midst of them, and showed them His hands and His side.

   Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained [John 20:21-23].

It is a picture of the assembly that was about to be formed at Pentecost; and this is the assembly's function. They have authority from God to retain or to remit sins -- not at all as a question of eternal forgiveness, but administratively or in discipline. For instance, when a soul is received from the world, what is this but remitting sins? The Church again, by restoring a soul put outside, puts its seal, as it were, to the truth of what God has done, acts upon it, and thus remits the sin. On the other hand, supposing a person is refused fellowship, or is put away after being received, there is the retaining of sins. There is no real difficulty; if men did not pervert Scripture into a means of self-exaltation, or cast away truth, on the other side, revolting from the frightful misuse known in popery. But Protestants have failed to keep up consciously the possession of so great a privilege, founded on the presence of the Holy Ghost.

   Eight days after we have another scene [John 20:24-29].

One of the disciples, Thomas, had not been with the others when Jesus had thus appeared. Clearly there is a special teaching in this. Seven days had run their course before Thomas was with the disciples, when the Lord Jesus Christ meets his unbelief, pronouncing those more blessed who saw not, and yet believed. Of what is this the symbol? Of Christian faith? The very contrary. Christian faith is essentially believing on Him that we have not seen: believing,

   we walk by faith, not by sight [2 Cor. 5:7].

But the day is coming when there will be the knowledge and the sight of glory in the earth. So the millennium will differ from what is now. I deny not that there will be faith, as there was faith required when Messiah was on earth. Then faith saw underneath the veil of flesh this deeper glory. But, evidently, proper Christianity is after redemption was wrought, and Christ takes His place on high, and the Holy Ghost is sent down, when there is nothing but faith. Thomas, then, represents the slow mind of unbelieving Israel, seeing the Lord after the present cycle of time is completely over. What makes it the more remarkable is the contrast with Mary Magdalene in the previous verses, who is the type of the Christian taken out of Judaism, and no longer admitted to Jewish contact with the Messiah, but witnesses of Him in ascension.

   Mark, too, the confession of Thomas; not a word about

   My Father and your Father,

   but,

   My Lord and my God [John 20:28].

Just so the Jew will acknowledge Jesus. They shall look on Him whom they pierced, and own Jesus of Nazareth to be their Lord and their God. (See Zech. 12.) It is not association with Christ, and He not ashamed to call us brethren, according to the position He has taken as man before His and our God and Father, but the recognition forced on him by the marks of the cross, which drew out the confession of Christ's divine glory and Lordship.

   In John 21, the appended scene is the fishing. After a night of failure, a vast multitude of fish is taken in the net, without breaking it or risking the ships (Luke 5); or the need of gathering the good into vessels; and of casting the bad away (Matt. 13). This I conceive to be a gathering in from the Gentiles. The sea is continually used in contrast to the land in prophetic Scripture. Thus, if the last was the Jewish scene when the Church state closed, this is the figure of the Gentiles in the great day of the earth's jubilee, the age to come contrasted with this age. From John 21:15 to the end is the deep personal dealing of our Lord with Peter; also John's place. As I have no doubt there is a significance typically in what we have just glanced at, so it appears to me with regard to this also. The intermediate ministry of Paul is, of course, not here noticed; for he was the witness of Christ glorified in heaven -- Head of the Church His body, wherein is neither
Jew nor Gentile. To Peter, the Lord, thoroughly restoring his soul after proving him to the core, commits His sheep and lambs (His Jewish flock, as we know from elsewhere). A violent end comes, though to God’s glory. But if the full heavenly testimony is left for its own due place in Paul’s completing the word of God -- that hidden mystery, John is seen witnessing in principle to the end. (Compare John 21:22, 23 with the Revelation.) However, I do not enlarge here, but rather apologise for the time that I have occupied in going over so large an extent of God’s word. I pray the Lord that even these suggestions may be blessed of God in stirring up fresh desire to study, and weigh, and pray over these precious Gospels. Surely it will be sweet reward now, if God deign thereby to give some of His children to approach His word with more reverence and a more childlike trust in every word He has written. May He vouchsafe this through Christ our Lord.
Lectures Introductory
to the Study of
The Epistles of Paul the Apostle
Preface

The twelve lectures which make up the volume before the reader were delivered in London within the month of May, 1868. As presenting a sketch of the epistles of the great apostle of the Gentiles, the subject is one of the nearest interest to us of the uncircumcision who believe. But it is also definite enough to need no prefatory words, further than to say that, though I have sought diligently to correct the faults made in extemporaneous discourse, or the flaws of such as took them down in shorthand, I cannot but deeply feel how far short the result is from presenting an adequate summary of the wonderful compositions to which the lectures refer. But I reckon on, as I pray for, the grace of the Lord to bless even this résumé, to such as read His word along with it, to the help of their souls.

Guernsey, March, 1869.
Lectures Introductory

to the Study of

The Epistles of Paul The Apostle

Lecture 1

Romans

The circumstances under which the epistle to the Romans was written gave occasion to the most thorough and comprehensive unfolding, not of the church, but of Christianity. No apostle had ever yet visited Rome. There was somewhat as yet lacking to the saints there; but even this was ordered of God to call forth from the Holy Ghost an epistle which more than any other approaches a complete treatise on the fundamentals of Christian doctrine, and especially as to righteousness.

Would we follow up the heights of heavenly truth, would we sound the depths of Christian experience, would we survey the workings of the Spirit of God in the Church, would we bow before the glories of the person of Christ, or learn His manifold offices, we must look elsewhere -- in the writings of the New Testament no doubt, but elsewhere rather than here.

The condition of the Roman saints called for a setting forth of the gospel of God; but this object, in order to be rightly understood and appreciated, leads the apostle into a display of the condition of man. We have God and man in presence, so to speak. Nothing can be more simple and essential. Although there is undoubtedly that profoundness which must accompany every revelation of God, and especially in connection with Christ as now manifested, still we have God adapting Himself to the very first wants of a renewed soul -- nay, even to the wretchedness of souls without God, without any real knowledge either of themselves or of Him. Not, of course, that the Roman saints were in this condition; but that God, writing by the apostle to them, seizes the opportunity to lay bare man’s state as well as His own grace.

* * *

From the very first we have these characteristics of the epistle disclosing themselves. The apostle writes with the full assertion of his own apostolic dignity, but as a servant also.

Paul, a bondman of Jesus Christ

-- an apostle

called,

not born, still less as educated or appointed of man, but an apostle

called,

as he says --

separated unto the gospel of God, which he had promised afore by his prophets {Rom. 1:1, 2}.

The connection is fully owned with that which had been from God of old. No fresh revelations from God can nullify those which preceded them; but as the prophets looked onward to what was coming, so is the gospel already come, supported by the past. There is mutual confirmation. Nevertheless, what is is in nowise the same as what was or what will be. The past prepared the way, as it is said here,

which God had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures, concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, [here we have the great central object of God’s gospel, even the person of Christ, God’s Son] which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh (Rom. 1:2, 3).

This last relation was the direct subject of the prophetic testimony, and Jesus had come accordingly. He was the promised Messiah, born King of the Jews.

But there was far more in Jesus. He was declared,

says the apostle,

to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead (ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν, Rom. 1:4).

It was the Son of God not merely as dealing with the powers of the earth, Jehovah’s King on the holy hill of Zion, but after a far deeper manner. For, essentially associated as He is with the glory of God the Father, the full deliverance of souls from the realm of death was His also. In this too we have the blessed connection of the Spirit (here peculiarly designated, for special reasons, the Spirit of holiness).

That same energy of the Holy Ghost which had displayed itself in Jesus, when He walked in holiness here below, was demonstrated in resurrection; and not merely in His own rising from the dead, but in raising such at any time no doubt, though most signally and triumphantly displayed in His own resurrection.

The bearing of this on the contents and main doctrine of the epistle will appear abundantly by-and-by. Let me refer in
passing to a few points more in the introduction, in order to link them together with that which the Spirit was furnishing to the Roman saints, as well as to show the admirable perfectness of every word that inspiration has given us. I do not mean by this its truth merely, but its exquisite suitability; so that the opening address commences the theme in hand, and insinuates that particular line of truth which the Holy Spirit sees fit to pursue throughout. To this then the apostle comes, after having spoken of the divine favour shown himself, both when a sinner, and now in his own special place of serving the Lord Jesus.

By whom we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith {Rom. 1:5}.

This was no question of legal obedience, although the law came from Jehovah. Paul’s joy and boast were in the gospel of God. So therefore it addressed itself to the obedience of faith; not by this meaning practice, still less according to the measure of a man’s duty, but that which is at the root of all practice -- faith-obedience -- obedience of heart and will, renewed by divine grace, which accepts the truth of God. To man this is the hardest of all obedience; but when once secured, it leads peacefully into the obedience of every day. If slurred over, as it too often is in souls, it invariably leaves practical obedience lame, and halt, and blind.

It was for this then that Paul describes himself as apostle. And as it is for obedience of faith, it was not in anywise restricted to the Jewish people --

among all nations, for his (Christ’s) name: among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:5, 6).

He loved even here at the threshold to show the breadth of God’s grace. If he was called, so were they -- he an apostle, they not apostles but saints; but still, for them as for him, all flowed out of the same mighty love of God.

To all that be at Rome, beloved of God, called saints (Rom. 1:7).

To these then he wishes, as was his wont, the fresh flow of that source and stream of divine blessing which Christ has made to be household bread to us:

Grace and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:7).

Then, from Rom. 1:8, after thanking God through Jesus for their faith spoken of anywhere, and telling them of his prayers for them, he briefly discloses the desire of his heart about them -- his long-cherished hope according to the grace of the gospel to reach Rome -- his confidence in the love of God that through him some spiritual gift would be imparted to them, that they might be established, and, according to the spirit of grace which filled his own heart, that he too might be comforted together with them by the mutual faith both of you and me (Rom. 1:11, 12).

There is nothing like the grace of God for producing the truest humility, the humility that not only descends to the lowest level of sinners to do them good, but which is itself the fruit of deliverance from that self-love which puffs itself or lowers others. Witness the common joy that grace gives an apostle with saints he had never seen, so that even he should be comforted as well as they by their mutual faith. He would not therefore have them ignorant how they had lain on his heart for a visit (Rom. 1:13). He was debtor both to the Greeks and the barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise: he was ready, as far as he was concerned, to preach the gospel to those that were at Rome also (Rom. 1:14, 15). Even the saints there would have been all the better for the gospel. It was not merely “to those at Rome,” but to you that be at Rome {Rom. 1:15}.

Thus it is a mistake to suppose that saints may not be benefited by a better understanding of the gospel, at least as Paul preached it. Accordingly he tells them now what reason he had to speak thus strongly, not of the more advanced truths, but of the good news.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Rom. 1:16).

Observe, the gospel is not simply remission of sins, nor is it only peace with God, but the power of God unto salvation.

Now I take this opportunity of pressing on all that are here to beware of contracted views of salvation.

Beware that you do not confound it with souls being quickened, or even brought into joy. Salvation supposes not this only, but a great deal more. There is hardly any phraseology that tends to more injury of souls in these matters than a loose way of talking of salvation. “At any rate he is a saved soul,” we hear. “The man has not got anything like settled peace with God; perhaps he hardly knows his sins forgiven; but at least he is a saved soul.” Here is an instance of what is so reprehensible. This is precisely what salvation does not mean; and I would strongly press it on all that hear me, more particularly on those that have to do with the work of the Lord, and of course ardently desire to labour intelligently; and this not alone for the conversion, but for the establishment and deliverance of souls. Nothing less, I am persuaded, than this full blessing is the line that God has given to those who have followed Christ without the camp, and who, having been set free from the contracted ways of men, desire to enter into the largeness and at the same time the profound wisdom of every word of God. Let us not stumble at the starting-point, but leave room for the due extent and depth of salvation in the gospel.

There is no need of dwelling now on salvation as employed in the Old Testament; and in some parts of the New, as the gospels and Revelation particularly, where it is used for deliverance in power or even providence and present things. I confine myself to its doctrinal import, and the full Christian sense of the word; and I maintain that salvation signifies that deliverance for the believer which is the full

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consequence of the mighty work of Christ, apprehended not, of course, necessarily according to all its depth in God's eyes, but at any rate applied to the soul in the power of the Holy Ghost. It is not the awakening of conscience, however real; neither is it the attraction of heart by the grace of Christ, however blessed this may be. We ought therefore to bear in mind, that if a soul be not brought into conscious deliverance as the fruit of divine teaching, and founded on the work of Christ, we are very far from presenting the gospel as the apostle Paul glories in it, and delights that it should go forth.

I am not ashamed, &c. {Rom. 1:16}.

And he gives his reason:

For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, The just shall live by faith {Rom. 1:17}.

That is, it is the power of God unto salvation, not because it is victory (which at the beginning of the soul's career would only give importance to man even if possible, which it is not), but because it is the righteousness of God.

It is not God seeking, or man bringing righteousness. In the gospel there is revealed God's righteousness. Thus the introduction opened with Christ's person, and closes with God's righteousness. The law demanded, but could never receive righteousness from man. Christ is come, and has changed all. God is revealing a righteousness of His own in the gospel. It is God who now makes known a righteousness to man, instead of looking for any from man. Undoubtedly there are fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, and God values them - I will not say from man, but from His saints; but here it is what, according to the apostle, God has for man. It is for the saints to learn, of course; but it is that which goes out in its own force and necessary aim to the need of man -- a divine righteousness, which justifies instead of condemning him who believes. It is the power of God unto salvation {Rom. 1:16}.

It is for the lost, therefore; for they it is who need salvation; and it is to save -- not merely to quicken, but to save; and this because in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed.

Hence it is, as he says, herein revealed from faith {Rom. 1:17}, or by faith. It is the same form of expression exactly as in the beginning of Rom. 5 --

being justified by faith (ἐκ πίστεως) {Rom. 5:1}.

But besides this he adds to faith {Rom. 1:17},

the first of these phrases, from faith, excludes the law; the second, to faith, includes every one that has faith within the scope of God's righteousness. Justification is not from works of law. The righteousness of God is revealed from faith; and consequently, if there be faith in any soul, to this it is revealed, to faith wherever it may be. Hence, therefore, it was in no way limited to any particular nation, such as those that had already been under the law and government of God. It was a message that went out from God to sinners as such. Let man be what he might, or where he might, God's good news was for man. And to this agreed the testimony of the prophet:

The just shall live by faith {Rom. 1:17} (not by law). Even where the law was, not by it but by faith the just lived. Did Gentiles believe? They too should live. Without faith there is neither justice nor life that God owns; where faith is, the rest will surely follow.

This accordingly leads the apostle into the earlier portion of his great argument, and first of all in a preparatory way. Here we pass out of the introduction of the epistle.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness {Rom. 1:18}.

This is what made the gospel to be so sweet and precious, and, what is more, absolutely necessary, if he would escape certain and eternal ruin. There is no hope for man otherwise; for the gospel is not all that is now made known. Not only is God's righteousness revealed, but also His wrath. It is not said to be revealed in the gospel. The gospel means His glad tidings for man. The wrath of God could not possibly be glad tidings. It is true, it is needful for man to learn; but in nowise is it good news. There is then the solemn truth also of divine wrath. It is not yet executed. It is revealed, and this too from heaven.

There is no question of a people on earth, and of God's wrath breaking out in one form or another against human evil in this life. The earth, or, at least, the Jewish nation, had been familiar with such dealings of God in times past. But now it is the wrath of God from heaven; and consequently it is in view of eternal things, and not of those that touch present life on the earth.

Hence, as God's wrath is revealed from heaven, it is against every form of impiety -- against all ungodliness.

Besides this, which seems to be a most comprehensive expression for embracing every sort and degree of human iniquity, we have one very specifically named. It is against the unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness {Rom. 1:18}.

To hold the truth in unrighteousness would be no security. Alas! we know how this was in Israel, how it might be, and has been, in Christendom. God pronounces against the unrighteousness of such; for if the knowledge, however exact, of God's revealed mind was accompanied by no renewal of the heart, if it was without life towards God, all must be vain. Man is only so much the worse for knowing the
truth, if he holds it ever so fast with unrighteousness. There are some that find a difficulty here, because the expression “to hold” means holding firmly. But it is quite possible for the unconverted to be tenacious of the truth, yet unrighteous in their ways; and so much the worse for them. Not thus does God deal with souls. If His grace attract, His truth humbles, and leaves no room for vain boasting and self-confidence. What He does is to pierce and penetrate the man’s conscience. If one may so say, He thus holds the man, instead of letting the man presume that he is holding fast the truth. The inner man is dealt with, and searched through and through.

Nothing of this is intended in the class that is here brought before us. They are merely persons who plume themselves on their orthodoxy, but in a wholly unrenewed condition. Such men have never been wanting since the truth has shone on this world; still less are they now. But the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against them pre-eminently. The judgments of God will fall on man as man, but the heaviest blows are reserved for Christendom. There the truth is held, and apparently with firmness too. This, however, will be put to the test by-and-by. But for the time it is held fast, though in unrighteousness. Thus the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against (not only the open ungodliness of men, but) the orthodox unrighteousness of those that hold the truth in unrighteousness.

And this leads the apostle into the moral history of man -- the proof both of his inexcusable guilt, and of his extreme need of redemption. He begins with the great epoch of the dispensations of God (that is, the ages since the flood). We cannot speak of the state of things before the flood as a dispensation. There was a most important trial of man in the person of Adam; but after this, what dispensation was there? What were the principles of it? No man can tell. The truth is, those are altogether mistaken who call it so. But after the flood man as such was put under certain conditions -- the whole race. Man became the object, first, of general dealings of God under Noah; next, of His special ways in the calling of Abraham and of his family. And what led to the call of Abraham, of whom we hear much in the epistle to the Romans as elsewhere, was the departure of man into idolatry. Man despised at first the outward testimony of God, His eternal power and Godhead, in the creation above and around him (Rom. 1:19, 20). Moreover, He gave up the knowledge of God that had been handed down from father to son (Rom. 1:21). The downfall of man, when he thus abandoned God, was most rapid and profound; and the Holy Spirit traces this solemnly to the end of Rom. 1. With no needless words, in a few energetic strokes summing up that which is abundantly confirmed (but in how different a manner!) by all that remains of the ancient world.

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, &c. (Rom. 1:22-32).

Thus corruption not only overspread morals, but became an integral part of the religion of men, and had thus a quasi-divine sanction. Hence the depravity of the heathen found little or no check from conscience, because it was bound up with all that took the shape of God before their mind. There was no part of heathenism, practically viewed now, so corrupting as that which had to do with the objects of its worship. Thus, the true God being lost, all was lost, and man’s downward career becomes the most painful and humiliating object, unless it be, indeed, that which we have to feel where men, without renewal of heart, espouse in pride of mind the truth with nothing but unrighteousness.

* * *

In the beginning of Rom. 2 we have man pretending to righteousness. Still, it is “man” -- not yet exactly the Jew, but man -- who had profited, it might be, by whatever the Jew had; at the least, by the workings of natural conscience. But natural conscience, although it may detect evil, never leads one into the inward possession and enjoyment of good -- never brings the soul to God. Accordingly, in Rom. 2 the Holy Spirit shows us man satisfying himself with pronouncing on what is right and wrong -- moralizing for others, but nothing more. Now God must have reality in the man himself. The gospel, instead of treating this as a light matter, alone vindicates God in these eternal ways of His, in that which must be in him who stands in relationship with God. Hence therefore, the apostle, with divine wisdom, opens this to us before the blessed relief and deliverance which the gospel reveals to us. In the most solemn way he appeals to man with the demand, whether he thinks that God will look complacently on that which barely judges another, but which allows the practice of evil in the man himself (Rom. 2:1-3).

Such moral judgments will, no doubt, be used to leave man without excuse; they can never suit or satisfy God.

Then the apostle introduces the ground, certainty, and character of God’s judgment (Rom. 2:4-16). He will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: to them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first and also of the Gentile (Rom. 2:6-10).

It is not here a question of how a man is to be saved, but of God’s indispensable moral judgment, which the gospel, instead of weakening, asserts according to the holiness and truth of God. It will be observed therefore, that in this connection the apostle shows the place both of conscience and of the law, -- that God in judging will take into full consideration the circumstances and condition of every soul of man. At the same time he connects, in a singularly interesting manner, this disclosure of the principles of the eternal judgment of God with what he calls my gospel (Rom. 2:16).

This also is a most important truth, my brethren, to bear in mind. The gospel at its height in no wise weakens but maintains the moral manifestation of what God is. The legal institutions were associated with temporal judgment. The gospel, as now revealed in the New Testament, has linked with it, though not contained in it, the revelation of divine
wrath from heaven, and this, you will observe, according to Paul’s gospel. It is evident, therefore, that dispensational position will not suffice for God, who holds to His own unchangeable estimate of good and evil, and who judges the more stringently according to the measure of advantage possessed.

But thus the way is now clear for bringing the Jew into the discussion.

But if [so it should be read] thou art named a Jew, &c. (Rom. 2:17).

It was not merely that he had better light. He had this, of course, in a revelation that was from God; he had law; he had prophets; he had divine institutions. It was not merely better light in the conscience, which might be elsewhere, as is supposed in the early verses of our chapter; but the Jew’s position was directly and unquestionably one of divine tests applied to man’s estate. Alas! the Jew was none the better for this, unless there were the submission of his conscience to God. Increase of privileges can never avail without the soul’s self-judgment before the mercy of God. Rather does it add to his guilt: such is man’s evil state and will. Accordingly, in the end of the chapter, he shows that this is most true as applied to the moral judgment of the Jew; that none so much dishonoured God as wicked Jews, their own Scripture attesting it; that position went for nothing in such, while the lack of it would not annul the Gentile’s righteousness, which would indeed condemn the more unfaithful Israel; in short, that one must be a Jew inwardly to avail, and circumcision be of the heart, in spirit, not in letter, whose praise is of God, and not of men.

* * *

The question then is raised in the beginning of Rom. 3. If this be so, what is the superiority of the Jew? Where lies the value of belonging to the circumcised people of God? The apostle allows this privilege to be great, specially in having the Scriptures, but turns the argument against the boasters. We need not here enter into the details; but on the surface we see how the apostle brings all down to that which is of the deepest interest to every soul. He deals with the Jew from his own Scripture (Rom. 3:9-19). Did the Jews take the ground of exclusively having that word of God -- the law? Granted that it is so, at once and fully. To whom, then, did the law address itself? To those that were under it, to be sure. It pronounced on the Jew then. It was the boast of the Jews that the law spoke about them; that the Gentiles had no right to it, and were but presuming on what belonged to God’s chosen people. The apostle applies this according to divine wisdom. Then your principle is your condemnation. What the law says, it speaks to those under it. What, then, is its voice? That there is none righteous, none that doth good, none that understandeth. Of whom does it declare all this? Of the Jew by his own confession. Every mouth was stopped; the Jew by his own oracles, as the Gentile by their evident abominations, shown already. All the world was guilty before God.

Thus, having shown the Gentile in Rom. 1 manifestly wrong, and hopelessly degraded to the last degree -- having laid bare the moral dilettantism of the philosophers, not one whit better in the sight of God, but rather the reverse -- having shown the Jew overwhelmed by the condemnation of the divine oracles in which he chiefly boasted, without real righteousness, and so much the more guilty for his special privileges, all now lies clear for bringing in the proper Christian message, the gospel of God.

Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets (Rom. 3:20, 21).

Here, again, the apostle takes up what he had but announced in Rom. 1 -- the righteousness of God. Let me call your attention again to its force. It is not the mercy of God. Many have contended that so it is, and to their own great loss, as well as to the weakening of the word of God.

Righteousness never means mercy, not even the righteousness of God.

The meaning is not what was executed on Christ, but what is in virtue of it. Undoubtedly divine judgment fell on Him; but this is not the righteousness of God, as the apostle employs it in any part of his writings any more than here, though we know there could be no such thing as God’s righteousness justifying the believer, if Christ had not borne the judgment of God. The expression means that righteousness which God can afford to display because of Christ’s atonement. In short, it is what the words say -- the righteousness of God, and this by faith of Jesus Christ {Rom. 3:22}.

Hence it is wholly apart from the law, whilst witnessed to by the law and prophets; for the law with its types had looked onward to this new kind of righteousness; and the prophets had borne their testimony that it was at hand, but not then come. Now it was manifested, and not promised or predicted merely. Jesus had come and died; Jesus had been a propitiatory sacrifice; Jesus had borne the judgment of God because of the sins He bore. The righteousness of God, then, could now go forth in virtue of His blood. God was not satisfied alone. There is satisfaction; but the work of Christ goes a great deal farther. Therein God is both vindicated and glorified. By the cross God has a deeper moral glory than ever -- a glory that He thus acquired, if I may so say. He is, of course, the same absolutely perfect and unchangeable God of goodness; but His perfection has displayed itself in new and more glorious ways in Christ’s death, in Him who humbled Himself, and was obedient even to the death of the cross.

God, therefore, having not the least hindrance to the manifestation of what He can be and is in merciful intervention on behalf of the worst of sinners, manifests it as His righteousness by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe (Rom. 3:22).
The former is the direction, and the latter the application. The direction is
unto all;
the application is, of course, only to
them that believe;
but it is to all them that believe. As far as persons are concerned, there is no hindrance; Jew or Gentile makes no difference, as is expressly said,

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the [passing over or prater-mission, not] remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus (Rom. 3:23-26).

There is no simple mind that can evade the plain force of this last expression. The righteousness of God means that God is just, while at the same time He justifies the believer in Christ Jesus. It is His righteousness, or, in other words, His perfect consistency with Himself, which is always involved in the notion of righteousness. He is consistent with Himself when He is justifying sinners, or, more strictly, all those who believe in Jesus. He can meet the sinner, but He justifies the believer; and in this, instead of trenching on His glory, there is a deeper revelation and maintenance of it than if there never had been sin or a sinner.

Horribly offensive as sin is to God, and inexcusable in the creature, it is sin which has given occasion to the astonishing display of divine righteousness in justifying believers. It is not a question of His mercy merely; for this weakens the truth immensely, and perverts its character wholly. The righteousness of God flows from His mercy, of course; but its character and basis is righteousness. Christ's work of redemption deserves that God should act as He does in the gospel. Observe again, it is not victory here; for that would give place to human pride. It is not a soul's overcoming its difficulties, but a sinner's submission to the righteousness of God. It is God Himself who, infinitely glorified in the Lord that expiated our sins by His one sacrifice, remits them now, not looking for our victory, nor as yet even in leading us on to victory, but by faith in Jesus and His blood. God is proved thus divinely consistent with Himself in Christ Jesus, whom He has set forth a mercy-seat through faith in His blood.

Accordingly the apostle says that boast and works are completely set aside by this principle which affirms faith, apart from deeds of law, to be the means of relationship with God (Rom. 3:27, 28). Consequently the door is as open to the Gentile as to the Jew. The ground taken by a Jew for supposing God exclusively for Israel was, that they had the law, which was the measure of what God claimed from man; and this the Gentile had not. But such thoughts altogether vanish now, because, as the Gentile was unquestionably wicked and abominable, so from the law's express denunciation the Jew was universally guilty before God.

Consequently all turned, not on what man should be for God, but what God can be and is, as revealed in the gospel, to man. This maintains both the glory and the moral universality of Him who will justify the circumcision by faith, not law, and the uncircumcision through their faith, if they believe the gospel. Nor does this in the slightest degree weaken the principle of law. On the contrary, the doctrine of faith establishes law as nothing else can; and for this simple reason, that if one who is guilty hopes to be saved spite of the broken law, it must be at the expense of the law that condemns his guilt; whereas the gospel shows no sparing of sin, but the most complete condemnation of it all, as charged on Him who shed His blood in atonement. The doctrine of faith therefore, which reposes on the cross, establishes law, instead of making it void, as every other principle must (Rom. 3:27-31).

But this is not the full extent of salvation. Accordingly we do not hear of salvation as such in Rom. 3. There is laid down the most essential of all truths as a groundwork of salvation; namely, expiation. There is the vindication of God in His ways with the Old Testament believers. Their sins had been passed by. He could not have remitted heretofore. This would not have been just. And the blessedness of the gospel is, that it is (not merely an exercise of mercy, but also) divinely just. It would not have been righteous in any sense to have remitted the sins, until they were actually borne by One who could and did suffer for them. But now they were; and thus God vindicated Himself perfectly as to the past. But this great work of Christ was not and could not be a mere vindication of God; and we may find it otherwise developed in various parts of Scripture, which I here mention by the way to show the point at which we are arrived. God's righteousness was now manifested as to the past sins He had not brought into judgment through His forbearance, and yet more conspicuously in the present time, when He displayed His justice in justifying the believer.

But this is not all; and the objection of the Jew gives occasion for the apostle to bring out a fuller display of what God is. Did they fall back on Abraham?

What shall we then say that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God (Rom. 4:1, 2).

Did the Jew fancy that the gospel makes very light of Abraham, and of the then dealings of God? Not so, says the apostle. Abraham is the proof of the value of faith in justification before God. Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness. There was no law there or then; for Abraham died long before God spoke from Sinai. He believed God and His word, with special approval on God's part; and his faith was counted as righteousness (Rom. 4:3). And this was powerfully corroborated by the testimony of another great name in Israel (David), in Psa. 32. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my
transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the
iniquity of my sin. For this shall every one that is
godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be
found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall
not come nigh unto him. Thou art my hiding-place;
thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt
compass me about with songs of deliverance. I will
instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou
shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye
{Psa. 32:4-8}.

In the same way the apostle disposes of all pretence on
the score of ordinances, especially circumcision. Not only
was Abraham justified without law, but apart from that great
sign of mortification of the flesh. Although circumcision
began with Abraham, manifestly it had nothing to do with his
righteousness, and at best was but the seal of the
righteousness of faith which he had in an uncircumcised state.
It could not therefore be the source or means of his
righteousness. All then that believe, though uncircumcised,
might claim him as father, assured that righteousness will be
reckoned to them too. And he is father of circumcision in the
best sense, not to Jews, but to believing Gentiles. Thus the
discussion of Abraham strengthens the case in behalf of the
uncircumcised who believe, to the overthrow of the greatest
boast of the Jew. The appeal to their own inspired account of
Abraham turned into a proof of the consistency of God’s
ways in justifying by faith, and hence in justifying the
uncircumcised no less than the circumcision.

But there is more than this in Rom. 4. He takes up a third
feature of Abraham’s case; that is, the connection of the
promise with resurrection. Here it is not merely the negation
of law and of circumcision, but we have the positive side.
Law works wrath because it provokes transgression; grace
makes the promise sure to all the seed, not only because faith
is open to the Gentile and Jew alike, but because God is
looked to as a quickener of the dead. What gives glory to God
like this? Abraham believed God when, according to nature,
it was impossible for him or for Sarah to have a child. The
quickening power of God therefore was here set forth, of
course historically in a way connected with this life and a
posterity on earth, but nevertheless a very just and true sign
of God's power for the believer -- the quickening energy of
God after a still more blessed sort. And this leads us to see
not only where there was an analogy with those who believe
in a promised Saviour, but also to a weighty difference. And
this lies in the fact that Abraham believed God before he had
the son, being fully persuaded that what He had promised He
was able to perform; and therefore it was imputed to him for
righteousness. But we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our
Lord from the dead. It is done already. It is not here
believing on Jesus, but on God who has proved what He is to
us in raising from among the dead Him who was delivered for
our offences, and raised again for our justification
{Rom. 4:13-25}.

This brings out a most emphatic truth and special side of
Christianity. Christianity is not a system of promise, but
rather of promise accomplished in Christ. Hence it is
essentially founded on the gift not only of a Saviour who
would interpose, in the mercy of God, to bear our sins, but
of One who is already revealed, and the work done and
accepted, and this known in the fact that God Himself has
interposed to raise Him from among the dead -- a bright and
momentous thing to press on souls, as indeed we find the
apostles insisting on it throughout the Acts. Were it merely
Rom. 3 there could not be full peace with God as there is.
One might know a most real clinging to Jesus; but this would
not set the heart at ease with God. The soul may feel the
blood of Jesus to be a yet deeper want; but this alone does not
give peace with God. In such a condition what has been found
in Jesus is too often misused to make a kind of difference, so
to speak, between the Saviour on the one hand, and God on the
other -- ruinous always to the enjoyment of the full
blessing of the gospel. Now there is no way in which God
could lay a basis for peace with Himself more blessed than as
He has done it. No longer does the question exist of requiring
an expiation. That is the first necessity for the sinner with
God. But we have had it fully in Rom. 3. Now it is the positive power of God in raising up from the dead Him that
was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our
justifying. The whole work is done.

The soul therefore now is represented for the first time
as already justified and in possession of peace with God. This
is a state of mind, and not the necessary or immediate fruit of
Rom. 3, but is based on the truth of Rom. 4 as well as
Rom. 3. There never can be solid peace with God without
both. A soul may as truly, no doubt, be put into relationship
with God -- be made very happy, it may be; but it is not what
Scripture calls

peace with God {Rom. 5:1}.

Therefore it is here for the first time that we find salvation
spoken of in the grand results that are now brought before us
in Rom. 5:1-11.

Being justified by faith, we have peace with God
through our Lord Jesus Christ {Rom. 5:1}.

There is entrance into favour, and nothing but favour. The
believer is not put under law, you will observe, but under
grace, which is the precise reverse of law. The soul is
brought into peace with God, as it finds its standing in the
grace of God, and, more than that, rejoices in hope of the
glory of God. Such is the doctrine and the fact. It is not
merely a call then; but as we have by our Lord Jesus Christ
our access into the favour wherein we stand, so there is
positive boasting in the hope of the glory of God. For it may
have been noticed from Rom. 3 to Rom. 5, that nothing but
fitness for the glory of God will do now. It is not a question
of creature-standing. This passed away with man when he
sinned. Now that God has revealed Himself in the gospel, it
is not what will suit man on earth, but what is worthy of the
presence of the glory of God. Nevertheless the apostle does
not expressly mention heaven here. This was not suitable to
the character of the epistle; but the glory of God he does. We
all know where it is and must be for the Christian.

The consequences are thus pursued; first, the general
place of the believer now, in all respects, in relation to the
past, the present, and the future. His pathway follows; and he
shows that the very troubles of the road become a distinct matter of boast. This was not a direct and intrinsic effect, of course, but the result of spiritual dealing for the soul. It was the Lord giving us the profit of sorrow, and ourselves bowing to the way and end of God in it, so that the result of tribulation should be rich and fruitful experience.

Then there is another and crowning part of the blessing:
And not only so, but also boasting in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation {Rom. 5:11}.

It is not only a blessing in its own direct character, or in indirect though real effects, but the Giver Himself is our joy, and boast, and glory. The consequences spiritually are blessed to the soul; how much more is it to reach the source from which all flows! This, accordingly, is the essential spring of worship. The fruits of it are not expanded here; but, in point of fact, to joy in God is necessarily that which makes praise and adoration to be the simple and spontaneous exercise of the heart. In heaven it will fill us perfectly; but there is no more perfect joy there, nor anything higher, if so high, in this epistle.

* * *

At this point we enter upon a most important part of the epistle, on which we must dwell for a little. It is no longer a question of man’s guilt, but of his nature. Hence the apostle does not, as in the early chapters of this epistle, take up our sins, except as proofs and symbols of sin. Accordingly, for the first time, the Spirit of God from Rom. 5:12 traces the nature of man to the head of the race. This brings in the contrast with the other Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, whom we have here not as One bearing our sins in His own body on the tree, but as the spring and chief of a new family. Hence, as is shown later in the chapter, Adam is a head characterized by disobedience, who brought in death, the just penalty of sin; as on the other hand we have Him of whom he was the type, Christ, the obedient man, who has brought in righteousness, and this after a singularly blessed sort and style --

justification of life {Rom. 5:18}.

Of it nothing has been heard till now. We have had justification, both by blood and also in virtue of Christ’s resurrection. But

justification of life

goes farther, though involved in the latter, than the end of Rom. 4; for now we learn that in the gospel there is not only a dealing with the guilt of those that are addressed in it; there is also a mighty work of God in the presenting the man in a new place before God, and in fact, too, for his faith, clearing him from all the consequences in which he finds himself as a man in the flesh here below.

It is here that you will find a great failure of Christendom as to this. Not that any part of the truth has escaped: it is the fatal brand of that

great house {2 Tim. 2:20}

that even the most elementary truth suffers the deepest injury; but as to this truth, it seems unknown altogether. I hope that brethren in Christ will bear with me if I press on them the importance of taking good heed to it that their souls are thoroughly grounded in this, the proper place of the Christian by Christ’s death and resurrection. It must not be assumed too readily. There is a disposition continually to imagine that what is frequently spoken of must be understood; but experience will soon show that this is not the case. Even those that seek a place of separation to the Lord outside that which is now hurrying on souls to destruction are, nevertheless, deeply affected by the condition of that Christendom in which we find ourselves.

Here, then, it is not a question at all of pardon or remission. First of all the apostle points out that death has come in, and that this was no consequence of law, but before it. Sin was in the world between Adam and Moses, when the law was not. This clearly takes in man, it will be observed; and this is his grand point now. The contrast of Christ with Adam takes in man universally as well as the Christian; and man in sin, alas! was true, accordingly, before the law, right through the law, and ever since the law. The apostle is therefore plainly in presence of the broadest possible grounds of comparison, though we shall find more too.

But the Jew might argue that it was an unjust thing in principle -- this gospel, these tidings of which the apostle was so full; for why should one man affect many, yea, all? “Not so,” replies the apostle. Why should this be so strange and incredible to you? for on your own showing, according to that word to which we all bow, you must admit that one man’s sin brought in universal moral ruin and death. Proud as you may be of that which distinguishes you, it is hard to make sin and death peculiar to you, nor can you connect them even with the law particularly: the race of man is in question, and not Israel alone. There is nothing that proves this so convincingly as the book of Genesis; and the apostle, by the Spirit of God, calmly but triumphantly summons the Jewish Scriptures to demonstrate that which the Jews were so strenuously denying. Their own Scriptures maintained, as nothing else could, that all the wretchedness which is now found in the world, and the condemnation which hangs over the race, is the fruit of one man, and indeed of one act.

Now, if it was righteous in God (and who will gainsay it?) to deal with the whole posterity of Adam as involved in death because of one, their common father, who could deny the consistency of one man’s saving? who would defraud God of that which He delights in -- the blessedness of bringing in deliverance by that One man, of whom Adam was the image? Accordingly, then, he confronts the unquestionable truth, admitted by every Israelite, of the universal havoc by one man everywhere with the One man who has brought in (not pardon only, but, as we shall find) eternal life and liberty -- liberty now in the free gift of life, but a liberty that will never cease for the soul’s enjoyment until it has embraced the very body that still groans, and this because of the Holy Ghost who dwells in it.

Here, then, it is a comparison of the two great heads -- Adam and Christ, and the immeasurable superiority of the second man is shown. That is, it is not merely pardon of past sins, but deliverance from sin, and in due time from all its
consequences. The apostle has come now to the nature. This is the essential point. It is the thing which troubles a renewed conscientious soul above all, because of his surprise at finding the deep evil of the flesh and its mind after having proved the great grace of God in the gift of Christ. If I am thus pitied of God, if so truly and completely a justified man, if I am really an object of God’s eternal favour, how can I have such a sense of continual evil? why am I still under bondage and misery from the constant evil of my nature, over which I seem to have no power whatever? Has God then no delivering power from this? The answer is found in this portion of our epistle (that is, from the middle of Rom. 5).

Having shown first, then, the sources and the character of the blessing in general as far as regards deliverance, the apostle sums up the result in the end of the chapter:

That as sin hath reigned in death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life {Rom. 5:21}, the point being justification of life now through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This is applied in the two chapters that follow. There are two things that might make insuperable difficulty: the one is the obstacle of sin in the nature to practical holiness; the other is the provocation and condemnation of the law. Now the doctrine which we saw asserted in the latter part of Rom. 5 is applied to both. First, as to practical holiness, it is not merely that Christ has died for my sins, but that even in the initiatory act of baptism the truth set forth there is that I am dead. It is not, as in Eph. 2, dead in sins, which would be nothing to the purpose. This is all perfectly true -- true of a Jew as of a pagan -- true of any unrenewed man that never heard of a Saviour. But what is testified by Christian baptism is Christ’s death.

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized unto Jesus Christ were baptized unto his death? {Rom. 6:3}.

Thereby is identification with His death.

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life {Rom. 6:4}.

The man who, being baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, or Christian baptism, would assert any license to sin because it is in his nature, as if it were therefore an inevitable necessity, denies the real and evident meaning of his baptism. That act denoted not even the washing away of our sins by the blood of Jesus, which would not apply to the case, nor in any adequate way meet the question of nature. What baptism sets forth is more than that, and is justly found, not in Rom. 3, but in Rom. 6. There is no inconsistency in Ananias’s word to the apostle Paul --

wash away thy sins, calling upon the name of the Lord {Acts 22:16}.

There is water as well as blood, and to that, not to this, the washing here refers. But there is more, which Paul afterwards insisted on. That was said to Paul, rather than what was taught by Paul. What the apostle had given him in fulness was the great truth, however fundamental it may be, that I am entitled, and even called on in the name of the Lord Jesus, to know that I am dead to sin; not that I must die, but that I am dead -- that my baptism means nothing less than this, and is shorn of its most emphatic point if limited merely to Christ’s dying for my sins. It is not so alone; but in His death, unto which I am baptized, I am dead to sin. And how shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein? {Rom. 6:2}.

Hence, then, we find that the whole chapter is founded on this truth.

Shall we sin,
says he, proceeding yet farther,
because we are not under the law, but under grace? (Rom. 6:15).

This were indeed to deny the value of His death, and of that newness of life we have in Him risen, and a return to bondage of the worst description.

In Rom. 7 we have the subject of the law discussed for practice as well as in principle, and there again meet with the same weapon of tried and unfailing temper. It is no longer blood, but death -- Christ’s death and resurrection. The figure of the relationship of husband and wife is introduced in order to make the matter plain. Death, and nothing short of it, rightly dissolves the bond. We accordingly are dead, says he, to the law; not (as no doubt almost all of us know) that the law dies, but that we are dead to the law in the death of Christ. Compare Rom. 7:6 (where the margin, not the text, is substantially correct) with Rom. 7:4. Such is the principle. The rest of the (Rom. 7:7-25) is an instructive episode, in which the impotence and the misery of the renewed mind which attempts practice under law are fully argued out, till deliverance (not pardon) is found in Christ.

Thus the latter portion of the chapter is not doctrine exactly, but the proof of the difficulties of a soul who has not realised death to the law by the body of Christ. Did this seem to treat the law that condemned as an evil thing? Not so, says the apostle; it is because of the evil of the nature, not of the law. The law never delivers; it condemns and kills us. It was meant to make sin exceeding sinful. Hence, what he is here discussing is not remission of sins, but deliverance from sin. No wonder, if souls confound the two things together, that they never know deliverance in practice. Conscious deliverance, to be solid according to God, must be in the line of His truth. In vain will you preach Rom. 3, or even Rom. 4 alone, for souls to know themselves consciously and holily set free.

From Rom. 7:14 there is an advance. There we find Christian knowledge as to the matter introduced; but still it is the knowledge of one who is not in this state pronouncing on one who is. You must carefully guard against the notion of its being a question of Paul’s own experience, because he says,

I had not known {Rom. 7:7},
I was alive, &c. {Rom. 7:9}.
There is no good reason for such an assumption, but much against it. It might be more or less any man's lot to learn. It is not meant that Paul knew nothing of this; but that the ground of inference, and the general theory built up, are alike mistaken. We have Paul informing us that he transfers sometimes in a figure to himself that which was in no wise necessarily his own experience, and perhaps had not been so at any time. But this may be comparatively a light question. The great point is to note the true picture given us of a soul quickened, but labouring and miserable under law, not at all consciously delivered. The last verses of the chapter, however, bring in the deliverance -- not yet the fulness of it, but the hinge, so to speak. The discovery is made that the source of the internal misery was that the mind, though renewed, was occupied with the law as a means of dealing with flesh. Hence the very fact of being renewed makes one sensible of a far more intense misery than ever, while there is no power until the soul looks right outside self to Him who is dead and risen, who has anticipated the difficulty, and alone gives the full answer to all wants.

Rom. 8 displays this comforting truth in its fulness. From the first verse we have the application of the dead and risen Christ to the soul, till in Rom. 8:11 we see the power of the Holy Ghost, which brings the soul into this liberty now, applied by-and-by to the body, when there will be the complete deliverance.

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh {Rom. 8:1-3}.

A wondrous way, but most blessed! And there (for such was the point) it was the complete condemnation of this evil thing, the nature in its present state, so as, nevertheless, to set the believer as before God's judgment free from itself as well as its consequences. This God has wrought in Christ. It is not in any degree settled as to itself by His blood. The shedding of His blood was absolutely necessary: without that precious expiation all else had been vain and impossible. But there is much more in Christ than that to which too many souls restrict themselves, not less to their own loss than to His dishonour. God has condemned the flesh. And here it may be repeated that it is no question of pardoning the sinner, but of condemning the fallen nature; and this so as to give the soul both power and a righteous immunity from all internal anguish about it. For the truth is that God has in Christ condemned sin, and this for sin definitely; so that He has nothing more to do in condemnation of that root of evil. What a title, then, God gives me now in beholding Christ, no longer dead but risen, to have it settled before my soul that I am in Him as He now is, where all questions are closed in peace and joy! For what remains unsolved by and in Christ? Once it was far otherwise. Before the cross there hung out the gravest question that ever was raised, and it needed settlement in this world; but in Christ sin is for ever abolished for the believer; and this not only in respect of what He has done, but in what He is. Till the cross, well might a converted soul be found groaning in misery at each fresh discovery of evil in himself. But now to faith all this is gone -- not lightly, but truly -- in the sight of God; so that he may live on a Saviour that is risen from the dead as his new life.

Accordingly Rom. 8 pursues in the most practical manner the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free. First of all, the groundwork of it is laid in the first four verses, the last of them leading into every-day walk. And it is well for those ignorant of it to know that here, in Rom. 8:4, the apostle speaks first of

walking, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

The latter clause in the first verse of the authorised version mars the sense. In the fourth verse this could not be absent; in the first verse it ought not to be present. Thus the deliverance is not merely for the joy of the soul, but also for strength in our walking after the Spirit, who has given and found a nature in which He delights, communicating withal His own delight in Christ, and making obedience to be the joyful service of the believer. The believer, therefore, unwittingly though really, dishonours the Saviour, if he be content to walk short of this standard and power; he is entitled and called to walk according to his place, and in the confidence of his deliverance in Christ Jesus before God.

Then the domains of flesh and Spirit are brought before us: the one characterized by sin and death practically now; the other by life; righteousness, and peace, which is, as we saw, to be crowned finally by the resurrection of these bodies of ours. The Holy Ghost, who now gives the soul its consciousness of deliverance from its place in Christ, is also the witness that the body too, the mortal body, shall be delivered in its time.

If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by [or because of] his Spirit that dwelleth in you {Rom. 8:11}.

Next, he enters upon another branch of the truth -- the Spirit not as a condition contrasted with flesh (these two, as we know, being always contrasted in Scripture), but as a power, a divine person that dwells in and bears His witness to the believer. His witness to {“with,” Rom. 8:16} our spirit is this, -- that we are children of God. But if children, we are His heirs. This accordingly leads, as connected with the deliverance of the body, to the inheritance we are to possess. The extent is what God Himself, so to speak, possesses -- the universe of God, whatever will be under Christ: and what will not? As He has made all, so He is heir of all. We are heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.

Hence the action of the Spirit of God in a double point of view comes before us. As He is the spring of our joy, He is the power of sympathy in our sorrows, and the believer knows both. The faith of Christ has brought divine joy into his soul; but, in point of fact, he is traversing a world of infirmity, suffering, and grief. Wonderful to think the Spirit of God associates Himself with us in it all, deigning to give us divine feelings even in our poor and narrow hearts. This occupies the central part of the chapter, which then closes with the unfailing and faithful power of God for us in all our
experiences here below. As He has given us through the blood of Jesus full remission, as we shall be saved by this life, as He has made us know even now nothing short of present conscious deliverance from every whir of evil that belongs to our very nature, as we have the Spirit the earnest of the glory to which we are destined, as we are the vessels of gracious sorrow in the midst of that from which we are not yet delivered but shall be, so now we have the certainty that, whatever betide, God is for us, and that nothing shall separate us from His love which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Then, in Rom. 9–11, the apostle handles a difficulty serious to any mind, especially to the Jew, who might readily feel that all this display of grace in Christ to the Gentile as much as to the Jew by the gospel seems to make very cheap the distinctive place of Israel as given of God. If the good news of God goes out to man, entirely blunting out the difference between a Jew and a Gentile, what becomes of His special promises to Abraham and to his seed? What about His word passed and sworn to the fathers? The apostle shows them with astonishing force at the starting-point that he was far from slighting their privileges. He lays down such a summary as no Jew ever gave since they were a nation. He brings out the peculiar glories of Israel according to the depth of the gospel as he knew and preached it; at least, of His person who is the object of faith now revealed. Far from denying or obscuring what they boasted of, he goes beyond them --

Who are Israelites,
says he,
to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all God blessed for ever {Rom. 9:4, 5}.

Here was the very truth that every Jew, as such, denied. What blindness! Their crowning glory was precisely what they would not hear of. What glory so rich as that of the Christ Himself duly appreciated? He was God over all blessed for ever, as well as their Messiah. Him who came in humiliation, according to their prophets, they might despise; but it was vain to deny that the same prophets bore witness to His divine glory. He was Emmanuel, yea, the Jehovah, God of Israel. Thus then, if Paul gave his own sense of Jewish privileges, there was no unbelieving Jew that rose up to his estimate of them.

But now, to meet the question that was raised, they pleaded the distinguishing promises to Israel. Upon what ground? Because they were sons of Abraham. But how, argues he, could this stand, seeing that Abraham had another son, just as much his child as Isaac? What did they say to Ishmaelites as joint-heirs? They would not hear of it. No, they cry, it is in Isaac's seed that the Jew was called. Yes, but this is another principle. If in Isaac only, it is a question of the seed, not that was born, but that was called. Consequently the call of God, and not the birth simply, makes the real difference. Did they venture to plead that it must be not only the same father, but the same mother? The answer is, that this will not do one whit better; for when we come down to the next generation, it is apparent that the two sons of Isaac were sons of the same mother; nay, they were twins. What could be conceived closer or more even than this? Surely if equal birth-tie could ensure community of blessing -- if a charter from God depended on being sprung from the same father and mother, there was no case so strong, no claim so evident, as that of Esau to take the same rights as Jacob. Why would they not allow such a pretension? Was it not sure and evident that Israel could not take the promise on the ground of mere connection after the flesh? Birthright from the same father would let in Ishmael on the one hand, as from both parents it would secure the title of Esau on the other. Clearly, then, such ground is untenable. In point of fact, as he had hinted before, their true tenure was the call of God, who was free, if He pleased, to bring in other people. It became simply a question whether, in fact, God did call Gentiles, or whether He had revealed such intentions.

But he meets their proud exclusiveness in another way. He shows that, on the responsible ground of being His nation, they were wholly ruined. If the first book in the Bible showed that it was only the call of God that made Israel what they were, its second book as clearly proved that all was over with the called people, had it not been for the mercy of God. They set up the golden calf, and thus cast off the true God, their God, even in the desert. Did the call of God, then, go out to Gentiles? Has He mercy only for guilty Israel? Is there no call, no mercy, of God for any besides?

Hereupon he enters upon the direct proofs, and first cites Hosea as a witness. That early prophet tells Israel, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God. Jezreel, Lo-ruhamah, and Lo-ammi were of awful import for Israel; but, in presence of circumstances so disastrous, there should be not merely a people but sons of the living God, and then should Judah and Israel be gathered as one people under one head. The application of this was more evident to the Gentile than to the Jew. Compare Peter's use in his first epistle, 1 Pet. 2:10. Finally he brings in Isaiah, showing that, far from retaining their blessing as an unbroken people, a remnant alone would be saved. Thus one could not fail to see these two weighty inferences: the bringing in to be God's sons of those that had not been His people, and the judgment and destruction of the great mass of His undoubted people. Of these only a remnant would be saved. On both sides therefore the apostle is meeting the grand points he had at heart to demonstrate from their own Scriptures.

For all this, as he presses further, there was the weightiest reason possible. God is gracious, but holy: He is faithful, but righteous. The apostle refers to Isaiah to show that God would

lay in Zion a stumbling-stone {Rom. 9:33; see Isa. 8:14}.

It is in Zion that He lays it. It is not among the Gentiles, but in the honoured centre of the polity of Israel. There would be found a stumbling-stone there. What was to be the stumbling-
stone? Of course, it could hardly be the law: that was the boast of Israel. What was it? There could be but one satisfactory answer. The stumbling-stone was their despised and rejected Messiah. This was the key to their difficulties -- this alone, and fully explains their coming ruin as well as God’s solemn warnings.

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In the next chapter (Rom. 10) he carries on the subject, showing in the most touching manner his affection for the people. He at the same time unfolds the essential difference between the righteousness of faith and that of law. He takes their own books, and proves from one of them (Deuteronomy) that in the ruin of Israel the resource is not going into the depths, nor going up to heaven. Christ indeed did both; and so the word was nigh them, in their mouth and in their heart. It is not doing, but believing; therefore it is what is proclaimed to them, and what they receive and believe. Along with this he gathers testimonies from more than one prophet. He quotes from Joel, that whosever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. He quotes also from Isaiah --

Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed {Rom. 10:11, see Isa. 28:16}.

And mark the force of it

Whosoever.

The believer, whosoever he might be, should not be ashamed. Was it possible to limit this to Israel? But more than this --

Whosoever shall call {Rom. 10:13}.

There is the double prophecy. Whosoever believed should not be ashamed; whosoever called should be saved. In both parts, as it may be observed, the door is opened to the Gentile.

But then again he intimates that the nature of the gospel is involved in the publishing of the glad tidings. It is not God having an earthly centre, and the peoples coming up to worship the Lord in Jerusalem. It is the going forth of His richest blessing. And where? How far? To the limits of the holy land? Far beyond. Psa. 19 is used in the most beautiful manner to insinuate that the limits are the world. Just as the sun in the heavens is not for one people or land alone, no more is the gospel. There is no language where their voice is not heard.

Yea verily, their sound went forth into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world {Rom. 10:18}.

The gospel goes forth universally. Jewish pretensions were therefore disposed of; not here by new and fuller revelations, but by this divinely skilful employment of their own Old Testament Scriptures.

Finally he comes to two other witnesses; as from the Psalms, so now from the law and the prophets. The first is Moses himself. Moses saith,

I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, &c. {Rom. 10:19}.

How could the Jews say that this meant themselves? On the contrary, it was the Jew provoked by the Gentiles --

By them that are no people, and by a foolish nation
I will anger you (see Deut. 32:21).

Did they deny that they were a foolish nation? Be it so then; it was a foolish nation by which Moses declared they should be angered. But this does not content the apostle, or rather the Spirit of God; for he goes on to point out that Isaiah

is very bold {Rom. 10:20} in a similar way; that is, there is no concealing the truth of the matter. Isaiah says:

I was found of them who sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me {Rom. 10:20; see Isa. 65:1}.

The Jews were the last in the world to take such ground as this. It was undeniable that the Gentiles did not seek the Lord, nor ask after Him; and the prophet says that Jehovah was found of them that sought Him not, and was made manifest to them that asked not after Him. Nor is there only the manifest call of the Gentiles in this, but with no less clearness there is the rejection, at any rate for a time, of proud Israel.

But unto Israel he saith, All day long have I stretched out my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people {Rom. 10:21; see Isa. 65:2}.

Thus the proof was complete. The Gentiles -- the despised heathen -- were to be brought in; the self-satisfied Jews are left behind, justly and beyond question, if they believed the law and the prophets.

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But did this satisfy the apostle? It was undoubtedly enough for present purposes. The past history of Israel was sketched in Rom. 9; the present more immediately is before us in Rom. 10. The future must be brought in by the grace of God; and this he accordingly gives us at the close of Rom. 11. First, he raises the question,

Has God cast away his people? {Rom. 11:1}.

Let it not be! Was he not himself, says Paul, a proof to the contrary? Then he enlarges, and points out that there is a remnant of grace in the worst of times. If God had absolutely cast away His people, would there be such mercy? There would be no remnant if justice took its course. The remnant proves, then, that even under judgment the rejection of Israel is not complete, but rather a pledge of future favour. This is the first ground.

The second plea is not that the rejection of Israel is only partial, however extensive, but that it is also temporary, and not definitive. This is to fall back on a principle he had already used. God was rather provoking Israel to jealousy by the call of the Gentiles. But if it were so, He had not done with them. Thus the first argument shows that the rejection was not total; the second, that it was but for a season.

But there is a third. Following up with the teaching of the olive-tree, he carries out the same thought of a remnant that abides on their own stock, and points to a re-instatement of the nation. And I would just observe by the way, that the Gentile cry that no Jew ever accepts the gospel in truth is a falsehood. Israel is indeed the only people of whom there is
always a portion that believe. Time was when none of the English, nor French, nor of any other nation believed in the Saviour. There never was an hour since Israel's existence as a nation that God has not had His remnant of them. Such has been their singular fruit of promise; such even in the midst of all their misery it is at present. And as that little remnant is ever sustained by the grace of God, it is the standing pledge of their final blessedness through His mercy, whereon the apostle breaks out into raptures of thanksgiving to God. The day hastens when the Redeemer shall come to Zion. He shall come, says one Testament, out of Zion. He shall come to Zion, says the other. In both Old and New it is the same substantial testimony. Thither He shall come, and thence go forth. He shall own that once glorious seat of royalty in Israel. Zion shall yet behold her mighty, divine, but once despised Deliverer; and when He thus comes, there will be a deliverance suited to His glory. All Israel shall be saved. God, therefore, had not cast off His people, but was employing the interval of their slip from their place, in consequence of their rejection of Christ, to call the Gentiles in sovereign mercy, after which Israel as a whole should be saved.

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever {Rom. 11:33-36}.

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The rest of the epistle takes up the practical consequences of the great doctrine of God's righteousness, which had been now shown to be supported by, and in no wise inconsistent with, His promises to Israel. The whole history of Israel, past, present, and future, falls in with, although quite distinct from, that which he had been expounding. Here I shall be very brief.

Rom. 12 looks at the mutual duties of the saints. Rom. 13 urges their duties towards what was outside them, more particularly to the powers that be, but also to men in general. Love is the great debt that we owe, which never can be paid, but which we should always be paying. The chapter closes with the day of the Lord in its practical force on the Christian walk. In Rom. 14 and the beginning of Rom. 15 we have the delicate theme of Christian forbearance in its limits and largeness. The weak are not to judge the strong, and the strong are not to despise the weak. These things are matters of conscience, and depend much for their solution on the degree to which souls have attained. The subject terminates with the grand truth which must never be obscured by details -- that we are to receive one another, as Christ has received us, to the glory of God. In the rest of Rom. 15 the apostle dwells on the extent of his apostleship, renews his expression of the thought and hope of visiting Rome, and at the same time shows how well he remembered the need of the poor at Jerusalem. Rom. 16 brings before us in the most instructive and interesting manner the links that grace practically forms and maintains between the saints of God. Though he had never visited Rome, many of them were known personally. It is exquisite -- the delicate love with which he singles out distinctive features in each of the saints, men and women, that come before him. Would that the Lord would give us hearts to remember, as well as eyes to see, according to His own grace! Then follows a warning against those who bring in stumbling-blocks and offences. There is evil at work, and grace does not close the eye to danger; at the same time it is never under the pressure of the enemy, and there is the fullest confidence that the God of peace will break the power of Satan under the feet of the saints shortly.

Last of all, the apostle links up this fundamental treatise of divine righteousness in its doctrine, its dispensational bearings, and its exhortations to the walk of Christians, with higher truth, which it would not have been suitable then to bring out; for grace considers the state and the need of the saints. True ministry gives out not merely truth, but suited truth to the saints. At the same time the apostle does allude to that mystery which was not yet divulged -- at least, in this epistle: but he points from the foundations of eternal truth to those heavenly heights that were reserved for other communications in due time.
Lectures Introductory

to the Study of

The Epistles of Paul The Apostle

Lecture 2

First Corinthians

As usual, the introductory words (1 Cor. 1:1-3) of the epistle give us no little intimation of that which is to follow. The apostle speaks of himself as such --

called [to be] an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God,

but coupling a brother with him,

and Sosthenes our brother,

he writes to

the church of God at Corinth

-- not to the saints, as was the case in the epistle to the Romans, but to the church at Corinth --

to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus,

as in the former epistle --

called [to be] saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours {1 Cor. 1:1, 2}.

This will be found to lead the way into the main subject of the present communication. Here we must not look for the great foundations of Christian doctrine. There is the unfolding of the assembly in a practical way; that is, the church of God is not viewed here in its highest character. There is no more than an incidental glance at its associations with Christ. No notice is here taken of the heavenly places as the sphere of our blessing; nor are we given to hear of the bridal affections of Christ for His body. But the assembly of God is addressed, those sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints called,

with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Thus room is left for the profession of the Lord's name. It is not, as in Ephesians,

to the saints which are in Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus {Eph. 1:1}.

There is no such closeness of application, nor intimacy, nor confidence in a really intrinsically holy character. Sanctified they were in Christ Jesus. They had taken the place of being separate,

calling upon the name of the Lord;

but the remarkable addition should be noticed by the way --

with all that in every place call upon the name of the Lord, both theirs and ours {1 Cor. 1:2}.

And this is the more notable, because if there be an epistle which the unbelief of Christendom tries more than another to annul in its application to present circumstances, it is this first letter to the Corinthians. Nor need we wonder. Unbelief shrinks from that which calls, now rather recalls, the saints to a due sense of their responsibility in virtue of their position as the church of God here below. Those at Corinth had forgotten it. Christendom has not merely forgotten but denied it, and so would fain treat a large part of that which will come before us to-night as a bygone thing. It is not disputed that God did thus work in times past; but they have not the smallest serious thought of submitting to its directions as authoritative for present duty. Yet who can deny that God has taken more care to make this plain and certain in the very frontispiece of this epistle than anywhere else? He is wise and right: man is not. Our place is to bow and believe.

There is another point also to be weighed in the next verses (1 Cor. 1:4-8). The apostle tells them how he thanks his God always on their behalf, but refrains from any expression of thankfulness as to their state. He recognises their rich endowments on God's part. He owns how they had been given all utterance, and all knowledge, the working of the Spirit of God, and His power. This is exceedingly important; for there is a disposition often to consider that difficulties and disorder among the saints of God are due to a want of government and of ministerial power. But no amount of gift, in few or many, can of itself produce holy spiritual order. Disorder is never the result of weakness alone. This, of course, may be taken advantage of, and Satan may tempt men to assume the semblance of a strength they do not possess. No doubt assumption would produce disorder; but weakness simply (where it leads souls, as it should, to spread out their need before the Lord) brings in the gracious action of the Holy Ghost, and the unfailing care of Him who loves His saints and the assembly. It was not so at Corinth. Theirs was rather the display of conscious strength; but at the same time they lacked the fear of God, and the sense of responsibility in the use of what God had given them. They were like children disposing themselves with not a little energy that wrought in vessels which altogether failed in self-judgment. This was a source, and a main source, of the difficulty and disorder at Corinth. It is also of great importance to us; for there are those that continually cry out...
for increase of power as the one panacea of the church. What reflecting spiritual mind could doubt that God sees His saints are not able to bear it? Power in the sense in which we are now speaking of it -- that is, power in the form of gift -- is far from being the deepest need or the gravest desideratum of the saints. Again, is it ever the way of God to display Himself thus in a fallen condition of things? Not that He is restrained, or that He is not Sovereign. Not, moreover, that He may not give, and liberally, as suits His own glory; but He gives wisely and holily, so as to lead souls now into exercise of conscience and brokenness of spirit, and thus keep and even deepen their sense of that to which God's church is called, and the state into which it has fallen.

At Corinth there was a wholly different state of things. It was the early rise of the church of God, if I may so say, among the Gentiles. And there was not wanting an astonishing sample of the power of the Spirit in witness of the victory that Jesus had won over Satan. This was now, or at least should have been, manifested by the church of God, as at Corinth. But they had lost sight of God's objects. They were occupied with themselves, with one another, with the supernatural energy which grace had conferred on them in the name of the Lord. The Holy Ghost in inspiring the apostle to write to them in no way weakens the sense of the source and character of that power. He insists on its reality, and reminds them that it was of God; but at the same time he brings in the divine aim in it all.

God, says he,

is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord {1 Cor. 1:9}.

Immediately after he alludes to the schisms that were then at work among them, and calls on them to be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment; informing them of the tidings which had reached him through the house of Chloe, that there were contentions among them, some saying

I am of Chloe,

I am of Paul,

I am of Apollos;

I am of Cephas,

and others I am of Christ himself {1 Cor. 1:12}.

There is no abuse to which flesh cannot degrade the truth. But the apostle knew how to introduce the Lord's name and grace with the grandly simple but weighty facts of His person and work. It was unto His name that they were baptized; it was He that had been crucified. And be it observed, that from the first of this epistle it is the cross of Christ that has the prominence. It is not so much His blood-shedding, nor even His death and resurrection, but His cross. This would have been as much out of place in the beginning of Romans as the putting forward of propitiation would be out of place here. Expiation of sins by Christ, His death and resurrection, are given of God to be displayed before the saints, who needed to know the firm, immutable foundation of grace; but what the saints wanted most was to learn the gross inconsistency of turning to selfish ease, honour, and aggrandisement the privileges of God's church, and the power of the Spirit of God that wrought in its members.

It is the cross which stains the pride of man, and puts all his glory in the dust. Hence the apostle brings Christ crucified before them. This to the Jew was a stumblingblock, and to the Greek foolishness. These Corinthians were deeply affected by the judgment of both Jews and Greeks. They were under the influence of man. They had not realized the total ruin of nature. They valued those that were wise, scribes, or disputers of this world. They were accustomed to the schools of their age and country. They conceived that if Christianity did such great things when those who possessed it were poor and simple, what might it not do if it could only be backed by the ability, and the learning, and the philosophy of men! How it must ride triumphantly to victory! How the great must bow, and the wise be brought in! What a glorious change would result when not the unlettered poor only, but the great and the noble, the wise and the prudent, were all joined in the confession of Jesus!

Their thoughts were fleshly, not of God. The cross writes judgment on man, and folly on his wisdom, as it is itself rejected by man as folly; for what could seem more egregiously unreasonable to a Greek than the God that made heaven and earth becoming a man, and, as such, crucified by the wicked hands of His creatures here below? That God should use His power to bless man was natural; and the Gentile could coalesce as to it with the Jew. Hence too, in the cross, the Jew found his stumblingblock; for he expected a Messiah in power and glory. Though the Jew and the Greek seemed opposite as the poles, from different points they agreed thoroughly in slighting the cross, and in desiring the exaltation of man as he is. They both, therefore, (whatever their occasional oppositions, and whatever their permanent variety of form,) preferred the flesh, and were ignorant of God -- the one demanding signs, the other wisdom. It was the pride of nature, whether self-confident or founded on religious claims.

Hence the apostle Paul, in the latter part of 1 Cor. 1, brings in the cross of Christ in contrast with fleshly wisdom, as well as religious pride, urging also God's sovereignty in calling souls as He will. He alludes to the mystery (1 Cor. 2), but does not develop here the blessed privileges that flowed to us from a union with Christ, dead, risen, and ascended; but demonstrates that man has no place whatever, that it is God who chooses and calls, and that He makes nothing of flesh. There is glorying, but it is exclusively in the Lord.

No flesh should glory in his presence {1 Cor. 1:29}.

This is confirmed in 1 Cor. 2, where the apostle reminds them of the manner in which the gospel had entered Corinth. He had come there setting his face against all things that would commend himself. No doubt, to one of such eminent ability and such varied gifts as the apostle Paul, it was hard, to speak after the manner of men, to be nothing. How much
it must have called for self-denial utterly to decline that which he could have handled so well, and which people at Corinth would have hailed with loud acclamation. Just think of the great apostle of the Gentiles, on the immortality of the soul, giving free rein to the mighty spirit that was in him! But not so. What absorbed his soul, in entering the intellectual and dissolute capital of Achaia, was the cross of Christ. He determined therefore, as he says, to know nothing else -- not exactly to know the cross alone, but Jesus Christ and him crucified [1 Cor. 2:2].

It was emphatically, though not exclusively, the cross. It was not simply redemption, but along with this another order of truth. Redemption supposes, undoubtedly, a suffering Saviour, and the shedding of that precious blood which ransoms the captives. It is Jesus who in grace has undergone the judgment of God, and brought in the full delivering power of God for the souls that believe. But the cross is more than this. It is the death of shame pre-eminently. It is utter opposition to the thoughts, feelings, judgments, and ways of men, religious or profane. This is the part accordingly that he was led in the wisdom of God to put forward. Hence the feelings of the apostle were distrust of self, and dependence on God according to that cross. As he says,

I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling [1 Cor. 2:3].

Thus, as Christ Himself is said in 2 Cor. 13 to be crucified in weakness, such was also the servant here. His speech and his preaching was

not in enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power {1 Cor. 2:4}.

Accordingly, in this chapter he proceeds to supplement the application of the doctrine of the cross to the state of the Corinthians by bringing in the Holy Ghost; for this again supposes the incapacity of man in divine things.

All is opened out in a manner full of comfort, but at the same time unsparing to human pride. Weigh from the prophecy of Isaiah the remarkable quotation --

Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit {1 Cor. 2:9, 10; see Isa. 64:4}.

There is first the great standing fact before our eyes. Such is the Saviour to the saved. Christ crucified is the death-knell on all man’s wisdom, and power, and righteousness. The cross writes total condemnation on the world. It was here the world had to say to Jesus. All that it gave Him was the cross. On the other hand, to the believer it is the power of God and the wisdom of God, because he humbly but willingly reads in the cross the truth of the judgment of his own nature as a thing to be delivered from, and finds Him that was crucified, the Lord Himself, undertaking a deliverance just, present, and complete; as he says,

Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption {1 Cor. 1:30}.

Flesh is absolutely put down. Man cannot go lower for weakness and ignominy than the cross on which hangs all the blessedness God gives the believer. And therein God is glorified as He is nowhere else. This in both its parts is exactly as it should be; and faith sees and receives it in Christ’s cross. The state of the Corinthians did not admit of Christ risen being brought in, at least here. It might have drawn a halo, as it were, round human nature -- this presenting the risen man in the first instance. But he points to God as the source, and Christ as the channel and means, of all the blessing.

Of him,
says he,

are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption {1 Cor. 1:30}.

But then, as he shows, there was not only this great source of blessing in Christ, but there is the power that works in us. Never is it the spirit of man that lays hold of this infinite good which God vouchsafes him. Man requires a divine power to work within him, just as he needs the Saviour outside himself.

Accordingly, in 1 Cor. 2, still carrying on the thought of Christ crucified, and connecting it with their condition, he intimates that he was in no wise limited to it. If persons were grounded in Christianity, he was prepared to go into the greatest depths of revealed truth; but then the power of entering safely was not human, but of the Holy Ghost. Man is no more capable of fathoming the depths of divine things than a brute can comprehend the works of human wit or science. This doctrine, was utterly repulsive to the pride of the Greeks. They might admit man to have need of pardon, and of moral improvement. They fully admitted his want of instruction, and refinement, and, so to speak, of spiritualization, if it only might be. Christianity deepens our estimate of every want {need}. Man not only wants a new life or nature, but the Holy Ghost. It is not merely His grace in a general sense, but the power of the Holy Ghost personally dwelling in him. It is this alone which can lead us into the deep things of God. And this, he lets us see, affects not merely this particular or that, but the whole working of divine grace and power in man. The whole and sole means of communicating blessing to us must be the Holy Ghost. Hence he insists, that as it is the Spirit of God in the first place who reveals the truth to us, so it is the same Spirit who furnishes suitable words, as, finally, it is through the Holy Ghost that one receives the truth revealed in the words He Himself has given. Thus, from first to last, it is a process begun, carried on, and completed by the Holy Ghost. How little this makes of man!

This introduces 1 Cor. 3 and gives point to his rebukes. He taxes them with walking as men. How remarkable is such a reproach! Walking as men! Why, one might ask, how else could they walk? And this very difficulty -- as no doubt it would be to many a Christian now (that walking as men should be a reproach) -- was no doubt a clap of thunder to the proud but poor spirits at Corinth. Yes, walking as men is a
departure from Christianity. It is to give up the distinctive power and place that belongs to us; for does not Christianity show us man judged, condemned, and set aside? On the faith of this, living in Christ, we have to walk. The Holy Ghost, besides, is brought in as working in the believer, and this, of course, in virtue of redemption by our Lord Jesus. And this is what is meant by being not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, which is proved by the Holy Ghost dwelling in us.

Here the apostle does not explain all this, and he gives a very withering reason for his reticence. These Corinthians had an uncommonly good opinion of themselves, and so they must be told plainly the reason why he does not open out these deep things. They themselves were not fit; they were but babes. What! the polished Greek believers no more than babes! This was rather what they would have said of the apostle or of his teaching. They thought themselves far in advance. The apostle had dwelt on the elementary truths of the gospel. They yearned after the fire of Peter and the rhetoric of Apollos. No doubt they might easily flatter themselves it was to carry on the work of God. How little many a young convert knows what will best lead him on! How little the Corinthians dreamt of depreciating the Second man, or of exalting the first! Hence the apostle tells them that he could not speak unto them as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.

I have fed you with milk, and not with meat {1 Cor. 3:2}.

Far from denying, he owns that their insinuation was true -- he had only brought before them elementary truths. They were not in a condition to bear more. Now this is full of meaning and importance practically at all times. We may damage souls greatly by presenting high truths to those that want the simplest rudiments of divine truth.

The apostle, as a wise master-builder, laid the foundation. The state of the Corinthians was such that he could not build on the foundation as he would have desired. His absence had given occasion for the breaking out of their carnal wishes after the world's wisdom. They were making even the ardour of a Peter and the eloquence of an Apollos to be a reason for dissatisfaction with one that, I need not say, was superior to both of them. But the apostle meets them in a way most unexpected to their self-satisfaction and pride, and lets them know that their carnality was the real reason why he could not go on with them into deeper things.

This leads him to point out the seriousness of the work or building; for he presents the church of God under this figure. What care each servant needs to take how and what he builds! What danger of bringing in that which would not stand the fire or judgment of God -- nay, further, of bringing in that which was not simply weak and worthless, but positively corrupting; for it was to be feared there were such elements even then at Corinth! Again he brings in another principle to bear upon them. Their party spirit, their feeling of narrowness, the disposition to set up this servant of Christ or that, was not only a dishonour to the Master, but a real loss to themselves. Not that there is any ground to suppose it was the fault of Peter or Apollos any more than of Paul. The evil was in the saints themselves, who indulged in their old zeal of the schools, and allowed their natural partiality to work. In point of fact this never can be without the most grievous impoverishment to the soul, as well as a hindrance to the Holy Ghost. What faith must learn is, that all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas; . . . all are yours {1 Cor. 3:21, 22}.

Thus the subject enlarges, as is his wont, taking in an immense breadth of the Christian's possessions -- life, death, things present, and things to come.

All are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's {1 Cor. 3:22, 23}.

This again brings in another point before the subject closes. He is not content with the pressing of responsibility on others; he had a solemn sense of his own place, which made him wonderfully independent of the judgments of men. Obedience gives firmness as well as humility. Not in the smallest degree was the pride of the Corinthians met by pride on his part, but by keeping the Lord and His will before his soul. Yet this is certainly true that this effect of faith looks like pride to a man who merely views things on the surface. The calm going on in the service of Christ, the endurance of this spirit or that, as no more than the idle wind, was no doubt exceedingly unpleasant to such as were wise in their own conceit, and valued the criticism they freely bestowed on the different servants of the Lord. But Paul sees all in the light of the eternal day. They had forgotten this, and were in a sense trafficking with these powers of the Spirit of God. They were making them the counters of a game they were playing in this world. They had forgotten that what God gives He gives in time, but in view of eternity. The apostle puts the truth of the case before their souls as he had it vividly before his own (1 Cor. 4).

Another thing is noticeable here. He had reproached them with walking not as Christians but as men (that is, with their habitual life and conversation formed on human principles instead of divine). On the other hand, it would appear from what follows, that they reproached the apostle in their hearts, -- not, of course, in so many words, -- with not being enough of a gentleman for their taste. This seems to me the gist of the fourth chapter. It was a thing that they considered quite beneath a Christian minister to work from time to time with his hands, often poor, occasionally in prison, knocked about by crowds, and so on. All this they thought the fruit of indiscretion and avoidable. They would have preferred respectability, public and private, in one who stood in the position of a servant of Christ. This the apostle meets in a very blessed way. He admitted that they were certainly not in such circumstances; they were reigning as kings. As for him it was enough to be the off-scouring of all men, this was his boast and blessedness. He wished that they did indeed reign, that he might reign with them (that the blessed time might really arrive). How his heart would rejoice in that day with them! And surely the time will come, and they would all reign together when Christ reigns over the earth. But he quite admits that for the present the fellowship of Christ's sufferings was the place he had chosen. Of honour in the world, and ease for the flesh, he at least could not, if they could, boast. Present greatness was what he in no wise
coveted; to suffer great things for His sake was what the Lord had promised, and what His servant expected in becoming an apostle. If his own service was the highest position in the church, his was certainly the lowest position in the world. This was as much an apostle’s boast and glory as anything that God had given them. No answer can I conceive more telling to any one of his detractors at Corinth who had a heart and conscience.

In 1 Cor. 5 we enter on another and more painful part of the epistle. A fearful instance of sin had come to light, so gross, indeed, that the like was not even named among the Gentiles. In fact it was a case of incest, and this among those called of God, and sanctified in Christ Jesus! The question is not in the least raised whether the guilty person was a saint or not; still less does he allow that which one so often and painfully heard pleaded in extenuation, “Oh, but he [or she] is a dear Christian.” Christian affection is most excellent; as brethren we should love even to laying down life for each other; as it is also very right that we should own the work God has wrought, above all what He has wrought in grace. But when one hearing the name of the Lord has, through unwatchfulness, fallen into wickedness, which of course grieves the Holy Ghost and stumbles the weak, it is not the time to talk thus. It is the time, in the very love that God implants, to deal sternly with that which has disgraced the name of the Lord. Is this to fail in love to the person? The apostle showed ere long that he had more love for this evildoer than any of them. The second epistle to the Corinthians entreats them to confirm their love to him whom they had put away. They were too hard against him then, as they were too loose now. Here their consciences needed to be roused. To deal with the matter they owed to the Lord Jesus. It was not merely getting rid of the obnoxious man. They had to prove themselves clear in the matter certainly; but he puts before them another course, whenever the guilty one had repented.

I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, &c. {1 Cor. 5:3}.

The case was most gross, and there was no question about it. The facts were indisputable; the scandal was unheard of.

I have judged already, as though present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh {1 Cor. 5:3-5}.

There was no discussion raised whether the person might be converted. The fact is, church discipline supposes and goes on the ground that those on whom it is exercised are Christians; but when it is a question of discipline, it is not the season for the display of Christian affection. This would falsify the conscience and turn the eye from off the point to which the Holy Ghost was directing attention. There was wickedness in their midst; and while known and unjudged, all were implicated; none could be clean till it was put away. Accordingly the apostle, while he expresses the desire that the spirit of the man should be saved in the day of the Lord, flesh being destroyed, at the same time rouses the saints to that which became the name of the Lord on the very ground that they were unleavened. If they were free from evil, let them act consistently. Let them preserve that purity in practice which was theirs in principle. They were unleavened, and therefore should be a new lump. Notoriously there was old leaven among them. What business had it there?

Put away from

-- not the table of the Lord merely, this he does not say, but

-- put away from among yourselves {1 Cor. 5:13}.

This is much stronger than expelling from the table. Of course, it implies exclusion from the Lord’s table, but from their table too --

with such an one, no, not to eat {1 Cor. 5:11}.

An ordinary meal, or any such act expressive even in natural things of fellowship with the person thus dishonouring the Lord, is forbidden.

Mark, they must put away. It is not the apostle acting for them; for God took particular care that this case, demanding discipline to the uttermost, should be where the apostle was not. What an admirable instruction for us who have no longer an apostle! None can pretend that it was an assembly where there was a high degree of knowledge or spirituality. The very reverse was the case. The responsibility of discipline depends on our relationship as an assembly to the Lord, not on its changing states. The Corinthians were babes; they were carnal. He who loved them well could not speak of them as spiritual. Nevertheless, this responsibility attached to the very fact that they were members of Christ -- His body. If saints are gathered to the name of the Lord, and so are God’s assembly, if they have faith to take such a position here below, and have the Holy Ghost owned as in their midst, this, and nothing short of this, is their responsibility: nor does the ruined state of the church touch the question, nor can it relieve them from their duty to the Lord. The church at Corinth had soon failed most gravely far and wide. This was the more shameful, considering the brightness of the truth vouchsafed to them, and the striking manifestation of divine power in their midst. The presence of apostles elsewhere in the earth, the beautiful display of Pentecostal grace at Jerusalem, the fact that so short a time had elapsed since they had been brought out of heathenism into their standing in God’s grace, all made the present state of the Corinthians so much the more painful; but nothing can ever dissolve the responsibility of saints, whether as individuals or as an assembly.

Put away from among yourselves that wicked person {1 Cor. 5:13}.

Another thing is to be observed, -- that the Holy Spirit’s scale of sin is not that of man. Which of you, my brethren, would have thought of classing a rafter with an adulterer? A rafter is one who uses abusive language for the purpose of injuring another, -- not the transient out-breaking of flesh, sad as it is, but provoked it may be, or at any rate, happening through unwatchfulness. The habit of evil speaking stamps him who practises it as a rafter; and such a man is unfit for the company of the saints, for God’s assembly. It is the old
leaven of malice and wickedness. He is unclean. Doubtless the world would not so judge; but this is not the world’s judgment. The Corinthians were under the influence of the world. The apostle had already shown that to walk as men is beneath the Christian. Now we see that to walk as the world, no matter how refinedly, ever exposes Christians to act worse than men of the world. God has stamped upon His children the name of Christ; and what does not express His name is inconsistent, not only with the Christian, but with His assembly. They are all as such held responsible, according to the grace and holiness and glory of Christ, for the sin done in their midst, of which they are cognisant. They are bound to keep themselves pure in ways.

There was another case also: brother was going to law with brother (1 Cor. 6). We have no reason to think they had fallen so far as to go to law with those that were not brethren; this would seem to be a lower step still. But brother was going to law with brother, and this before the unjust. How often now-a-days one hears, “Well, one expects something better from a brother; and surely he ought to suffer the consequences of his ill-doing.” This was just the feeling of the Corinthian plaintiff. What, then, is the weapon that the apostle uses in this case? The dignified place in the glory that God designs for the Christian:

Know ye not that we shall judge the world -- judge angels? [see 1 Cor. 6:2, 3].

Were such going before the Gentiles? Thus is seen how practical all truth is, and how God casts the bright light of the approaching day on the smallest matters of the life of to-day.

Again, there was no quarter in the world where personal purity was more unknown than at Corinth. Indeed, such were the habits of the ancient world, it would only defile the ears and minds of God’s children to have any proofs of the depravity in which the world then lay, and that too in its best estate, the wisest and the greatest not excepted, -- those, alas, whose writings are in the hands of the youth of our day, and more than ever, perhaps, in their hands. Those wits, poets, and philosophers of heathen antiquity lived in habitual, yea, often in unnatural grossness, and thought nothing of it. It is a danger for the saints of God to be tinctured by the atmosphere of the world outside when the first fervour of grace cools, and they begin to take up their old habits. It was certainly so at Corinth.

Accordingly the believers there were betrayed into their former uncleanness of life when the heavenly light got dim. And how does the apostle deal with this? He recalls to them the Holy Spirit’s dwelling in them. What a truth, and of what force to the believer! He does not say simply that they were redeemed, though he brings it in also; still less does he merely reason on the moral heinousness of the sin; neither does he cite the law of God that condemned it. He presses upon them that which was proper to them as Christians. It was no question of man, let him be Gentile or Jew, but of a Christian. Thus he sets before them the distinctive Christian blessing -- the Holy Ghost dwelling in the believer, and making his body (not his spirit but his body) a temple of the Holy Ghost; for here was precisely where the enemy seems to have misled these Corinthians. They affected to think they

might be pure in spirit, but do what they liked with their bodies. But, answers the apostle, it is the body which is the temple of the Holy Ghost. The body belongs to the Lord and Saviour; the body, therefore, and not the spirit only, He claims now. No doubt that the spirit be occupied with Christ is a grand matter; but the licentious flesh of man would talk, at any rate, about the Lord, and at the same time indulge in evil. This is set aside by the blessed fact that the Holy Ghost even now dwells in the Christian, and this on the ground of his being bought with a price. Thus the very call to holiness ever keeps the saint of God in the sense of his immense privileges as well as of his perfect deliverance.

1 Cor. 7 naturally leads from this into certain questions that had been proposed to the apostle touching marriage and slavery -- questions which had to do with the various relationships of life. The apostle accordingly gives us what he had learned from the Lord, as well as what he could speak of as a commandment of the Lord, distinguishing in the most beautiful manner, not between inspired and non-inspired, but between revelation and inspiration. All the word is inspired; there is no difference as to this. There is no part of Scripture that is less inspired than another.

All (every) scripture is given by inspiration of God [2 Tim. 3:16]:

but all is not His revelation. We must distinguish between parts revealed and the whole inspired. When a thing is revealed of God, it is absolutely new truth, and of course is the commandment of the Lord. But the inspired word of God contains the language of all sorts of men, and very often the conversation of wicked men -- nay, of the devil. I need not say that all this is not a revelation; but God communicates what Satan and wicked men say (as for instance Pilate’s words to our Lord and the Jews). None of these evidently was that which is called a revelation; but the Holy Ghost inspired the writers of the book to give us exactly what each of these said, or revealed what was in the mind of God about them. Take, for example, the book of Job, in which occur the sayings of his friends. What intelligent reader could think that they were in any way authorised communicators of the mind of God? They say sometimes very wrong things, and sometimes wise, and often things that do not in the smallest degree apply to the case. Every word of the book of Job is inspired; but did all the speakers utter necessarily the mind of God? Did not one of the speakers condemn one or other of the rest? Need one reason on such facts? This, no doubt, makes a certain measure of difficulty for a soul at the first blush; but on maturer consideration all becomes plain and harmonious, and the word of God is enhanced in our eyes.

And so it is in this chapter, where the apostle gives both the commandment of the Lord, and his own matured spiritual judgment, which he expressly says was not the commandment of the Lord. Still he was inspired to give his judgment as such. Thus the whole chapter is inspired, one part of it just as much as another. There is no difference in inspiration. What was written by the different inspired instruments is of God as absolutely as if He had written it all without them. There is no degree in the matter. There can be no difference in inspiration. But in the inspired word of God there is not
always revelation. Sometimes it is a record which the Spirit gave a man to make of what he had seen and heard, sometimes he recorded by the Spirit what no man could have seen or heard. Sometimes it was a prophecy of the future, sometimes a communication of God's present mind according to His eternal purpose. But all is equally and divinely inspired.

The apostle then lays down -- at least as far as may be here briefly sketched -- that while there are cases where it is a positive duty to be married, undeniably there was a better place of undivided devotedness to Christ. Blessed is he who is given thus to serve the Lord without let: still it must be the gift of God. The Lord Jesus had laid down the same principle Himself. In Matt. 19, it is needless to say, you have the selfsame truth in another form.

Again, while the Lord employs the apostle thus to give us both His own commandment and His mind, the general principle is stated as to the relationships of life. It is broadly laid down that one should remain in that condition in which he is called, and for a very blessed reason. Supposing one were a slave even, he is already, if a Christian, a freeman of Christ. You must remember that in these days there were everywhere bondmen: those that then ruled the world took them from all classes and all countries. There were bondmen highly educated, and once in a high position of life. Need it be said that often these bondmen rose up against their cruel masters? The very knowledge of Christ, and the possession of conscious truth, if grace did not counteract mightily, would tend to increase their sense of horror at their position. Suppose, for instance, a refined person, with the truth of God communicated to his soul, was the slave of one living in all the filth of heathenism, what a trial it would be to serve in such a position! The apostle urges the truth of that liberty in Christ which Christendom has well-nigh forgotten -- that if I am Christ's servant I am emancipated already. Match if you can the manumission he has got. Twenty millions will procure no such emancipation. At the same time, if my master allows me liberty, let me use it rather. Is it not a remarkable style of speech and feeling? The Christian, even if a slave, possesses the best freedom after all: anything else is but circumstantial. On the other hand, if you are a freeman, take care how you use your liberty: use it as the Lord's bondman. The freeman is reminded of his bondmanship; the bondman is reminded of his freedom. What a wonderful antithesis of man is the Second Man! How it traverses all the thoughts, circumstances, and hopes of flesh!

Then he brings before us the different relationships at the end of the chapter, as they are affected by the coming of the Lord. And there is nothing which shows more the importance of that hope as a practical power. There is not only the direct but the indirect allusion when the heart is filled with an object; and the indirect is a yet stronger witness of the place it holds than the direct. A mere hint connects itself with that which is your joy and constant expectation; whereas when a thing is little before the heart you require to explain, prove, and insist upon it. But this chapter brings vividly before them how all outward things pass away, even the fashion of this world. Time is short. It is too late either to make much of scenes so changing, or to seek this thing or that here below with such a morrow before our eyes. Hence he calls on those who had wives to be as those who had none, on those who were selling and buying to be above all the objects that made up the sum of business. In short, he puts Christ and His coming as the reality, and all else as the shadows, transitions, movements of a world that even now crumbles underneath us. No wonder that he follows all up at the end with his own judgment, -- that the man most blessed is he who has the least entanglement, and is the most thoroughly devoted to Christ and His service.

Next in 1 Cor. 8 he begins to take up another danger for the Corinthian saints. They had the sound of the truth ringing in their ears; and assuredly there are few sounds sweeter than the liberty of the Christian. But what is more liable to abuse? They had abused power to self-exaltation; they were now turning liberty to license. But there is a solemn fact which none can afford to forget as to both power and liberty -- that without responsibility nothing is more ruinous than either. Herein lay the sad failure of these saints. In the sense of responsibility they were utterly wanting. They seem to have forgotten completely that the Lord from whom the liberty had come is the One in whose sight, and for whose glory, and according to whose will, all power was to be used. The apostle recalls them to this; but he takes up their license in going into heathen temples, and eating things offered to idols, not first of all on the high ground of the Lord, but on account of their brethren. In their boasted liberty, and because they knew an idol was nothing, they considered that they might go anywhere, and do what they pleased. Nay, not so, cries the apostle: you must consider your brother. There is many a disciple who, far from knowing how vain idolatry is, thinks a good deal of the idol. Thus, you that know so much, if you make light of going here and there, will induce other disciples to follow your steps who may slip into idolatry through it, and thus a brother perish for whom Christ died; and what is the liberty of one who is instructed may prove the extreme ruin of one who is equally a believer in the Lord. Thus he looks at the thing in its full character and ultimate tendency if unchecked. Grace, as we know, can arrest these tendencies, and avert the evil results.

In 1 Cor. 9 he interrupts the course of his argument by an appeal to his own place as an apostle. Some were beginning to question his apostolate. It was not that he in the slightest degree forgot his call by God's will to that special service; neither was he insensible to the blessed liberty in which he was serving the Lord. He could lead about a sister-wife like another; he had foregone this for the Lord's sake. He could look for support from the church of God; he preferred to work with his own hands. So in the second epistle to the Corinthians he begs them to forgive the wrong; for he would not accept anything from them. They were not in a condition to be entrusted with such a gift. Their state was such, and God had so overruled it in His ways, that the apostle had received nothing from them. This fact he uses in order to humble them because of their pride and licentiousness.

The course of this chapter then touches on his apostolic
place, and at the same time his refusal to use the rights of it. Grace can forego all questions of right. Conscious of what is due, it asserts rights for others, but refuses to use them for itself. Such was the spirit and the faith of the apostle. And now he shows what he felt as to practical state and walk. Far from being full of his knowledge, far from only using his place in the church for the assertion of his dignity and for immunity from all trouble and pain here below, he on the contrary was as one under the law to meet him that was under it; he was as a Gentile to meet him that was free from law (that is, a Gentile). Thus he was a servant of all that he might save some. Besides, he lets them know the spirit of a servant, which was so lacking in the Corinthians in spite of their gifts; for it is not the possession of a gift, but love which serves and delights in service. The simple fact of knowing that you have a gift may and often does minister to self-complacency. The grand point is to have the Lord before you, and when others are thought of, it is in the love which has no need to seek greatness, or to affect it. The love of Christ proves its greatness by serving others.

This, then, was the spirit of that blessed servant of the Lord. He reminds them of another point -- that he was himself diligent in keeping his body in subjection. He was like a man with a race that was going to be run, and who gets his body into training. He puts this in the strongest way,

Lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. {1 Cor. 9:27).

Mark the tact of the apostle. When he has something discreditable to say, he prefers to say it about himself; when he has something pleasing to say, he loves to put it with regard to others. So here he says,

This was a great comfort, but it was also a serious caution.

God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able {1 Cor. 10:13).

It is in vain, therefore, to plead circumstances as an excuse for sin.

But [He] will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry {1 Cor. 10:13, 14).

He makes it plain that he is, with characteristic address, dealing with their little-exercised consciences from the statement of his own earnest vigilance over his ways, and then from the sad and solemn history of Israel judged of the Lord. Thus, too, he goes forward into new ground, -- the deeper spiritual motives, the appeal to Christian affection as well as to faith. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? He begins with that which most nearly touches the heart. It would have been an order more natural, if one may so say, to speak of the body of Christ; as we know in the Lord’s supper habitually, there is that which brings before us first the body and then the blood. The departure from what may be called the historical order makes the emphasis incomparably greater. More than that, the first appeal is founded on the blood of Christ, the answer of divine grace to the deepest need of a soul found in its guilt before God and covered with defilement. Was this to be slighted?

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? {1 Cor. 10:16).

He does not here say, “the blood” or the “body of the Lord.” This we find in 1 Cor. 11; but it is here Christ, because it becomes a question of grace. “The Lord” brings in the idea
of authority. This, then, is evidently an immense advance in dealing with the subject. Accordingly be now develops it, not on the ground of injury to a brother, but as a breach of fellowship with such a Christ, and indifference to His immense love. But he does not forget His authority:

Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table and of the table of demons {1 Cor. 10:21}.

It is not simply the love of Christ, but His full authority as the Lord. The apostle contrasts two mighty powers that were contesting -- demons, on the one hand, a power stronger than man, struggling as to him here below; and, on the other hand, there was the Lord that had shed His blood for them, but the Lord of all who should judge quick and dead. Hence he follows up with a comprehensive and simple principle, but full of liberty withal, that in going into the market you need ask no questions. If I do not know that the food has been connected with idols, the idol is nothing to me; but the moment I know it, it is no longer the question of an idol but a demon; and a demon, be assured, is a very real being indeed. Thus what the apostle insists on amounts to this, that their vaunted knowledge was short indeed. Whenever a person boasts, you will in general find that he particularly fails precisely where he boasts most. If you set up for great knowledge, this will be the point in which you may be expected to break down. If you set up for exceeding candour, the next thing we may well dread to hear is that you have played very false. The best thing is to see that we give ourselves credit for nothing. Let Christ be all our boast. The sense of our own littleness and of His perfect grace is the way, and the only way, to go on well.

This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? {1 John 5:4, 5}.

Then in 1 Cor. 11 we enter on another point. It would seem that the sisters at Corinth gave them a deal of trouble, and that they had forgotten entirely their due relative place. No doubt the men were at least as much to blame. It is hardly possible that women should ever put themselves forward in the church unless Christian men have deserted their true, responsible position and public action. It is the man’s place to guide; and although women may assuredly be far more useful in certain cases, still, unless the man guides, what an evident departure from the order God has assigned to them both! How complete a desertion of the relative position in which they were placed from the first! Thus it was at Corinth. Among the heathen, women played a most important part, and in no quarter of the world, perhaps, so prominent a one as there. Need it be said that this was to their deep shame? There was no city in which they were so degraded as that in which they attained such conspicuous and unnatural prominence. And how does the apostle meet this new feature? He brings in Christ. This is what decides all. He affirms the everlasting principles of God, and he adds that which has so brightly been revealed in and by Christ. He points out that Christ is the image and the glory of God, and that the man stands in an analogous place as connected with and distinguished from the woman. That is to say, the woman’s place is one of unobtrusiveness, and in fact, she is most effective where she is least seen. The man, on the contrary, has a public part -- a rougher and ruder task, no doubt -- one that may not at all bring into play the finer affections, but which demands a calmer and more comprehensive judgment. The man has the duty of the outward rule and administration.

Accordingly he marks the first departure from what was right by the woman’s losing the sign of her subjection. She was to have a covering on her head; she was to have that which indicated as a sign that she was subject to another. The man seemed to have failed just in the opposite way; and although this may seem a very little thing, what a wonderful thing it is, and what power it shows, to be able to combine in the same epistle eternal things and the very smallest matter of personal decorum, the wearing of long hair or short, the use of a covering on the head or not! How truly it marks God and His word! Men would scorn to combine them both in the same epistle; it seems so petty and so incongruous. But it is the littleness of man which calls for big matters to make him important; but the smallest things of God have significance when they bear on the glory of Christ, as they always do. In the first place, it was out of order that a woman should prophesy with her head uncovered; man’s place was to do so. He was the image and the glory of God. The apostle connects it all with first principles, going up to the creation of Adam and Eve in a very blessed manner, and above all bringing in the second Man, the last Adam. Did they think to improve on both?

The latter part of the chapter takes up not the relative place of the man and the woman, but the supper of the Lord, and so the saints gathered together. The first part of it, as is evident, has nothing to do with the assembly, and thus does not dispose of the question whether a woman should prophesy there. In fact, nothing is said or implied in the early verses of the assembly at all. The point primarily mooted is of her prophesying after the manner of a man, and this is done with the greatest possible wisdom. Her prophesying is not absolutely shut out. If a woman has a gift for prophecy, which she certainly may have as well as a man, for what is it given of the Lord but for exercise? Certainly such an one ought to prophesy. Who could say the gift of prophecy given to a woman is to be laid up in a napkin? Only she must take care how she does exercise it. First of all, he rebukes the unseemly way in which it was done -- the woman forgetting that she was a woman, and the man that he is responsible not to act as a woman. They seem to have reasoned in a petty way at Corinth, that because a woman has a gift no less than a man, she is free to use the gift just as a man might. This is in principle wrong; for after all a woman is not a man, nor like one officially, say what you please. The apostle sets aside the whole basis of the argument as false; and we must never hear reasoning which overthrows what God has ordained. Nature ought to have taught them better. But he does not dwell on this; it was a withering rebuke even to hint at their forgetfulness of natural propriety.

Then, in the latter verses, we have the supper of the Lord, and there we find the saints expressly said to be
gathered together. This naturally leads the way to the spiritual gifts that are treated of in 1 Cor. 12. As to the supper of the Lord, happily I need not say many words to you. It is, by the great mercy of God, familiar to most of us; we live, I may say, in the enjoyment of it, and know it to be one of the sweetest privileges God vouchsafes us here below. Alas! this very feast had furnished occasion, in the fleshly state of the Corinthians, to a most humiliating abuse. What led to it was the Agape, as it was styled; for in those days there was a meal which the Christians used to take together. Indeed, the social character of Christianity never can be overlooked without loss, but in an evil state it is open to much abuse. Everything that is good may be perverted; and it never was intended to hinder abuse by extinguishing that which was only to be maintained a right in the power of the Spirit of God. No rules, no abstinence, no negative measures, can glorify God, or make his children spiritual; and it is only by the power of the Holy Ghost in producing a sense of responsibility to the Lord as well as of his grace that saints are duly kept. So it was then at Corinth, that the meeting for the Lord’s Supper became mingled with an ordinary meal, where the Christians ate and drank together. They were glad to meet -- at any rate, originally it was so, when love was gratified with the company of each other. Being not merely young Christians, but unwatchful and then lax, this gave rise to sad abuse. Their old habits re-asserted their influence. They were accustomed to the feasts of the heathen, where people thought nothing whatever of getting drunk, if it was not rather meritorious. It was in some of their mysteries considered a wrong to the god for his votary not to get drunk, so debased beyond all conception were the heathen in their notions of religion.

Accordingly these Corinthian brethren had by little and little got on until some of them had fallen into intemperance on the occasion of the Eucharist; not, of course, simply by the wine drank at the table of the Lord, but through the feast that accompanied it. Thus the shame of their drunkenness fell upon that Holy Supper; and hence the apostle regulated, that from that time forward there should be no such feast coupled with the Lord’s Supper. If they wished to eat, let them eat at home; if they came together in worship, let them remember it was to eat of the Lord’s body, and to drink of the Lord’s blood. He puts it in the strongest terms. He does not feel it needful or suitable to speak of “the figure” of the Lord’s body. The point was to make its grace and holy impressiveness duly felt. It was a figure, no doubt; but still, writing to men who were at least wise enough to judge aright here, he gives all its weight, and the strongest expression of what was meant. So Jesus had said. Such it was in the sight of God. He that partook undiscerningly and without self-judgment was guilty of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus. It was a sin against Him. The intention of the Lord, the true principle and practice for a saint, is to come, examining his ways, trying his springs of action, putting himself to the proof; and so let him eat (not stay away, because there is much discovered that is humbling). The guard and warning is, that if there be not self-judgment, the Lord will judge. How low is the state of things to which all saints tend, and not the Corinthians only! There ought to have been, I suppose, an interposition of the church’s judgment between the Christian’s lack of self-judgment and the Lord’s chastenings; but, alas! man’s duty was altogether lacking. It was from no want of gifts. They had no sense of the place God designed self-judgment to hold; but the Lord never fails.

In 1 Cor. 12 accordingly, the apostle enters on a full statement of these spiritual powers. He shows that the distinctive feature of that which the Spirit of God leads to is the confession, not exactly of Christ, but of Jesus as Lord. He takes the simplest and most necessary ground -- that of his authority. This is observable in 1 Cor. 12:3:

Wherefore I give you to understand that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed; and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost.

Impossible that the Spirit should dishonour, yea, that He should not exalt, Him who humbled Himself for God’s glory.

Now, there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord; and there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God that worketh all in all {1 Cor. 12:4-6}.

They had forgotten all this. They were pre-occupied with human thoughts, with this clever Jew and that able Gentile. They had lost sight of God Himself working in their midst. The apostle points out that if there were different services, if distinct gifts to one and another, it was for the common good of all. He illustrates the nature of the church as a body with its various members subserving the interests of the body and the will of the head.

By one Spirit were we all baptized into one body {1 Cor. 12:13}; it is not the Holy Ghost merely making many members, but one body.

Accordingly he confronts with this divine aim their misuse of their spiritual powers, -- independence one of another, disorder as to women, self-glorification, and the like, as we see in 1 Cor. 14 the detail. He presses that the least comely members, those that are least seen, may be of more importance than any others; just as in the natural body some of the most vital parts are not even visible. What would a man do without a heart, or liver, or lungs? So in the spiritual body there are members which are most important and not seen at all. But men are apt to value most those which make a showy appearance. Thus he rebukes the whole tenor and spirit of Corinthian vanity; at the same time he maintains their place of blessing and responsibility to the last. After all their faults he does not hesitate to say,

Now ye are the body of Christ {1 Cor. 12:27}.

This way of dealing with souls has been grievously enfeebled in the present day. Grace is so feebly known, that the first thought you will find amongst godly people is what they ought to be; but the ground and weapon of the apostle Paul is what they are by God’s grace.

Ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular; and God hath set some in the church {1 Cor. 12:27, 28}.

It was far from his mind in the least to deny it. Observe here
an important use of the expression,

the church.

It cannot be the local assembly, because, looking at Corinth, no apostles were there. Whatever might be the providential arrangements outside in the world, he is looking at the assembly of God here on earth; and it is the assembly as a whole, the Corinthian assembly being, as every true assembly is, a kind of representative of the church universally. It is the church of God here below; not merely churches, though that was true also.

Thus we can look at what the church will be by-and-by -- glorified and absolutely perfect. We can also look at a particular local assembly. Besides there is this most important sense of the church never to be forgotten -- namely, that divine institution viewed as a whole on earth. Members of Christ no doubt compose it; but there is His body, the assembly as a whole, in which God works here below. Such is the reason why we do not find in this epistle evangelists or pastors, because it is not a question of what is needed to bring souls in or lead them on. He looks at the church as a thing already subsisting as the witness of the power of God before men. Therefore it was not at all necessary to dwell on those gifts which are the fruit of Christ's love to and cherishing of the church. It is regarded as a vessel of power for the maintenance of God's glory, and responsible for this here below. Therefore tongues, miracles, healings, the use of outward powers, are largely dwelt on here.

But we pass on to another and a still more important theme, a wonderfully full picture even for God's word, that most perfect and beautiful unfolding of divine love which we have in 1 Cor. 13. After all, if the Corinthians had coveted gifts, they had not coveted the best. But even if we may desire the best gifts, there is better still; and the best of all is charity -- love. Accordingly we have this in the most admirable manner brought out both in what it is and in what it is not, and that too as corrective of the wrong desires of the Corinthians, and the evil spirit which had manifested itself in the exercise of their gifts; so that what seems to be an interruption is the wisest of parentheses between 1 Cor. 12, which shows us the distribution of gifts and their character, and 1 Cor. 14, which directs the due exercise of gifts in the assembly of God. There is but one safe motive-power for their use, even love. Without it even a spiritual gift only tends to puff up its owner, and to corrupt those who are its objects.

Hence 1 Cor. 14 thus opens:

Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy {1 Cor. 14:1}.

And why? Prophecy seemed to be somewhat despised amongst the Corinthians. Miracles and tongues were liked, because these made themselves of importance. Such wonders made men stare, and drew general attention to those who were invested evidently with a superhuman energy. But the apostle lays it down, that the gifts which suppose the exercise of spiritual understanding have a far higher place. He himself could speak more tongues than they all. It need hardly be added that he did more miracles than any of them. Still, what he valued most was prophesying. We must not suppose that this gift simply means a man preaching. Prophesying never means preaching. More than this, prophesying is not simply teaching. It, no doubt, is teaching; but it is a good deal more. Prophesying is that spiritual application of the word of God to the conscience which puts the soul in His presence, and makes manifest as light to the hearer the mind of God. There is a great deal of valuable teaching, exhortation, and application, that has no such character. It is all very true, but it does not put the soul in the presence of God; it gives no such absolute certainty of God's mind flashing on the condition and judging the state of the heart before Him. I do not speak now of the unconverted, though prophesying might affect such as well as the converted. The direct object of it was, of course, the people of God; but in the course of the chapter the unbeliever is shown coming into the assembly and falling on his face, and owning that God was among them of a truth. Such is the genuine effect. The man finds himself judged in the presence of God.

There is no need to enter into all that this chapter brings before us, but it may be well to observe that we have giving of thanks and blessing, as well as singing and prayer. Prophesying and the rest are brought in as all pertaining to the Christian assembly. What was not directly edifying, as speaking in a tongue, is forbidden unless one could interpret. I doubt very much whether there was any revelation after the scheme of Scripture was complete. To suppose anything revealed, when that which is commonly called the canon was closed, would be an impeachment of God's purpose in it. But till the last portion of His mind was written down in a permanent form for the church, we can quite understand His goodness in allowing a special revelation now and then. This gives no warrant to look for anything of the sort at any time subsequent to the completion of the New Testament. Again, it is plain from this that there are certain modifications of the chapter. Thus so far it is true that if anything has, through the will of God, terminated (for instance, miracles, tongues, or revelations), it is evident that such workings of the Spirit ought not to be looked for; but this does not in the smallest degree set aside the Christian assembly or the exercise according to God's will of what the Spirit still distinctly gives. And undoubtedly He does continue all that is profitable, and for God's glory, in the present state of His testimony and of His church here below. Otherwise the church sinks into a human institute.

In the end of the chapter a very important principle is laid down. It is vain for people to plead the mighty power of God as an excuse for anything disorderly. This is the great difference between the power of the Spirit and the power of a demon. A demon's power may be uncontrollable: chains, fetters, all the power of man outside, may utterly fail to bind a man who is filled with demons. It is not so with the power of the Spirit of God. Wherever the soul walks with the Lord, the power of the Spirit of God on the contrary is always connected with His word, and subject to the Lord Jesus. No man can rightly pretend that the Spirit forces him to do this or that unscripturally. There is no justification possible against Scripture; and the more fully the power is of God, the less will a man think of setting aside that perfect expression
of God’s mind. All things therefore are to be done decently and in order -- an order which Scripture must decide. The only aim, as far as we are concerned, that God endorses, is that all be done to edification, and not for self-display.

The next theme (1 Cor. 15) is a most serious subject doctrinally, and of capital importance to all. Not only had the devil plunged the Corinthians into confusion upon moral points, but when men begin to give up a good conscience, it is no wonder if the next danger is making shipwreck of the faith. Accordingly, as Satan had accomplished the first mischief among these saints, it was evident the rest threatened soon to follow. There were some among them who denied the resurrection -- not a separate state of the soul, but the rising again of the body. In fact the resurrection must be of the body. What dies is to be raised. As the soul does not die,

resurrection

would be quite out of place; to the body it is necessary for God’s glory as well as man. And how does the apostle treat this? As he always does. He brings Christ in. They had no thought of Christ in the case. They seem to have had no wish to deny the resurrection of Christ; but should not a Christian have at once used Christ to judge all by? The apostle at once introduces His person and work as a test. If Christ did not rise, there is no resurrection, and therefore no truth in the Gospel;

your faith is vain: you are yet in your sins
{1 Cor. 15:17}.

Even they were quite unprepared for so dreadful a conclusion. Shake the resurrection and Christianity goes. Having reasoned thus, he next points out that the Christian waits for the time of joy and glory and blessing for the body by-and-by. To give up resurrection is to surrender the glorious hope of the Christian, and to be the most miserable of men. For what could be more cheerless than to give up all present enjoyment without that blessed hope for the future at Christ's coming? Thus strongly was the whole complex nature of man before the apostle’s mind in speaking of this hope of blessedness by-and-by.

Then, somewhat abruptly, instead of discussing the matter any more, he unfolds a most weighty revelation of truth.

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive {1 Cor. 15:20-22}.

True, the kingdom is not yet come for which we are waiting, but it will come. See how all truth hangs together, and how Satan labours to make a consistency in error. He knows the weakness of man’s mind. Nobody likes to be inconsistent. You may be dragged into it, but you are never comfortable when you have a sense of inconsistency about you. Hence, after one error gains empire over the mind of man, he is ready to embrace others just to make all consistent.

Such was the danger here among the Corinthians. They had been offended by the apostle’s supreme indifference to all that is of esteem among men. His habits of speech and life were not at all up to the mark that they supposed scantily before the world in a servant of God. Out of this fertile root of evil has the clergy grown. It has been the effort to acquire as much refinement as possible. Holy orders make a man a sort of gentleman if he was not so before. This seems to have been at work in the minds of these critics of the apostle. Here we find what lay at the bottom of the matter. There is generally a root of evil doctrine where you find people wrong in practice. At any rate, where it is a deliberate, persistent, and systematic error, it will not be merely a practical one, but have a root deep underneath. And this was what now came out at Corinth. It was feebleness about that which, after all, lies at the very foundation of Christianity. They did not mean to deny the person of Christ or His condition as risen from the dead; but this is what the enemy meant, and into this their wrong notion tended to drift them. The next step, after denying resurrection for the Christian, would be to deny it about Christ. And here the apostle does not fail to rebuke them, and in a manner trenchant enough. He exposes the stupidity of their questions, wise as they flattered themselves to be. How? It is always the danger of man that he is not content to believe; he would like first of all to understand. But this is ruinous in divine things, which are entirely outside sense and reason. All real understanding for the Christian is the fruit of faith.

The apostle does not hesitate in apostrophising the unbeliever, or at any rate, the errorist he has in view, to expose his folly.

Thou fool,
says he,

that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die
{1 Cor. 15:36}.

Thus the strongest possible censure falls on these Corinthians, and this for the very matter in which they plumbed themselves. Human reasoning is poor indeed outside its own sphere. However, he is not content merely with putting down their speculations; he brings in subsequent and special revelation. The previous part of the chapter had pointed out the connection of Christ’s resurrection with our resurrection, followed by the kingdom which finally gives place in order that God may be all in all. In the latter part of the chapter he adds what had not been explained hitherto. From the early portion we should not have known but that all saints die, and that all rise at Christ’s coming. But this would not be the full truth. -- It is most true that the dead in Christ rise, of course, but this does not explain about the living saints. He had vindicated the glorious character of the resurrection; he had proved how fundamental, and momentous, and practical, is the truth that the body is to be raised again, which they were disposed to deny as though it were a low thing, and useless even if possible. They imagined the true way to be spiritual was to make much of the spirit of man. God’s way of making us spiritual is by a simple but strong faith in the resurrection-power of Christ; look to His resurrection as the pattern and spring of our own. Then at the last he adds that he would show them a mystery. On this I must just say a few words in order to develop its force.
The resurrection itself was not a mystery. The resurrection of just and unjust was a well-known Old Testament truth. It might be founded on Scriptures comparatively few, but it was a fundamental truth of the Old Testament, as the apostle Paul lets us hear in his controversy with the Jews in the Acts of the Apostles. In fact, the Lord Jesus also assumes the same thing in the gospels. But if the raising of the dead saints was known, and even the raising of the wicked dead, the change of the living saints was a truth absolutely unrevealed. Up to this it was not made known. It was a New Testament truth, as this indeed is what is meant by a mystery.

It was one of those truths that were kept secret in the Old Testament, but now revealed -- not so much a thing difficult to comprehend when stated, as a thing not revealed before.

And behold, says he,

I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed {1 Cor. 15:51}.

Evidently this supports and confirms, while it might seem an exception to, the resurrection; but, in point of fact, it gives so much the more force and consistency to the rising of the dead in a very unexpected way. The general truth of the resurrection assuredly does put the sentence of death on all present things to the believer, showing that the earth cannot rightly be the scene of his enjoyment, where all is stamped with death, and that he must wait for the resurrection power of Christ to be applied before he enters the scene where the rest of God will be our rest, and where there will be nothing but joy with Christ, and even this earth will behold Christ and His saints reigning over it till the eternal day. The addition to this of the New Testament truth of the change gives immense impressiveness to all, and a fresh force, because it keeps before the Christian the constant expectancy of Christ.

Behold, I show you a mystery

-- not now that the dead in Christ shall rise, but we,

beginning with the we

-- we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed; for this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality {1 Cor. 15:51-53}.

And therefore,

as he closes with the practical deduction from it all, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord {1 Cor. 15:58}.

The last chapter is now before us, in which the apostle lays down a weighty exhortation as to collections for the saints. He puts it on the ground of their being prospered in any degree, and connects it with the special day of Christian enjoyment, when they gather together for the communion of saints.

Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by in store as he has been prospered, that there be no gatherings when I come {1 Cor. 16:2}.

Need it be said how human influence has dislocated the truth there? No doubt this was precisely what the apostle, or the Holy Ghost rather, discerned to be at work at Corinth, the same mistake that has wrought so malignantly in Christendom; that is to say, personal rank, learning, eloquence, or a great name (as of an apostle for instance), invoked to call out the generosity of the saints (perhaps, even of the world), and increase the proceeds by all these or like means.

But is there not another danger? Is there no snare, for you, beloved brethren? When persons are more or less free from the ordinary incubus of tradition, when they are not so much under the influence of excitement, and of those appeals to the love of being known and of pleasing this or that man, or the cause, or any of those human motives that often do operate, I apprehend that they are exposed to danger in a wholly opposite direction. Do we sufficiently make it a matter of personal responsibility to the Lord, every one of us, to give, and that in connection with the first day of the week and its blessed surroundings and objects, when we meet at His table? Do we every one of us give as we are prospered by the way? It is very well to keep clear of human influence, but let us see to it that we do not forget that

the Lord has need {Matt. 21:3; Mark 11:3; Luke 19:31}
of our giving for the purposes He loves here below. And of this I am sure, that if we have rightly cast aside mere human calls, and if we do thank God for the deliverance from worldly influence, and from the power of custom, public opinion, &c., it would be a deep reproach if we did not do double as much now, under the grace that confides in us, as we used to do under the law that used to govern us. Your own consciences must answer whether you can meet the Lord about this matter. I believe that we are in no small danger of settling down in the conviction that our old way was quite wrong, and simply keeping the money in our pockets. It does seem to me, I confess, that bad as human pressure may be in order to raise money, bad as may be a variety of earthly objects in this way or that, bad as a worldly lavish expenditure is, after all, a selfish personal keeping to ourselves of what we have is the worst thing of all. I am quite persuaded that the danger of the saints of God who have been brought outside the camp lies here, -- lest, delivered from what they know to be wrong, they may not seek in this an exercised conscience. Standing in the consciousness of the power of God’s grace, they need to be continually looking out that they be devoted to Him. To cease doing what was done in a wrong way, and sometimes for wrong ends too, is not enough. Let there be zealous and vigilant exercise of soul,
and enquiry how to carry out right objects in right ways, and so much the more, if indeed a simpler, fuller knowledge of God’s grace and of Christ’s glory has been given us.

Then we have various forms of ministry noticed. It is not here gifts as such, but persons devoted to labouring in the Lord; for there is a difference between the two things, as this chapter shows us strikingly. For instance, the apostle himself comes before us in ministry with his especial gift and position in the church. Then again, Timothy is there, his own son in the faith, not only an evangelist, but with a charge over elders at length, to a certain extent acting occasionally for the apostle Paul. Again, we have the eloquent Alexandrian thus introduced:

As touching our brother Apollos I greatly desired him to come unto you, but his will was not at all to come at this time {1 Cor. 16:12}.

How delicate and considerate the grace of Paul who wished Apollos to go to Corinth then, and of Apollos who wished not to go under the circumstances! On the face of the case we have the working of liberty and responsibility in their mutual relations; and the apostle Paul is the very one to tell us that Apollos’s will was not to go as he himself wished at this time. It was no question of one in a place of worldly superiority regulating the movements of another of subordinate degree. The apostle did express his strong desire for Apollos to go; but Apollos must stand to his Master, and be assured that he was using a wisdom greater than that of man’s. Finally, we observe another character of service lower down in the house of Stephanas.

This was a simpler case and a humbler position, but very real before God, whatever the danger of being slighted of men. Hence, I think, the word of exhortation --

I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the first-fruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,) &c. {1 Cor. 16:15}.

They gave themselves up in an orderly manner to this work.

That ye submit yourselves {1 Cor. 16:16}, not merely to Timothy or to Apollos, but to such, to the simple-hearted Christian men whose desire was to serve the Lord with the measure of power they had, and this proved by their persevering labour. Undoubtedly, in the midst of the difficulties of the church, in the face of the oppositions and disappointments, manifold griefs, enemies, and sources of sorrow and shame, it requires the power of God to go on without being moved by any of these things. It is an easy thing to make a start; but nothing short of the power of God can keep one without wavering at the work in the face of everything to cast down. And this was the question. We may suppose that these Corinthians were troublesome enough. From the statements made in the early part of the epistle it is evident; and so the apostle calls upon them to submit themselves. Evidently there was an unsnubbed spirit, and those ministered to thought they were just as good as the house of Stephanas. It is good to submit ourselves unto such, and to every one that helpeth with us and laboureth {1 Cor. 16:16}.

I am persuaded, beloved brethren, that it is no imputation of the blessedness of the brotherhood to maintain the speciality of ministry in the Lord. There can be in these matters no more deplorable error than to suppose that there is not to be this godly submission one toward another, according to the place and power that the Lord is pleased to entrust.

The Lord grant that our souls may hold fast the truth here revealed, and in no general or perfunctory way. All I pretend to now is to give a sketch or combination of the parts of the epistle. But may the word itself, and every part of it, sink into our souls and be our joy, that we may not only take the precious truth of such an epistle as the Romans for the peace and joy of our hearts in believing individually, but also may understand our place by faith as of God’s assembly on earth, and with thankful praise as those that call on the name of the Lord -- ours as well as theirs -- as those that find ourselves practically in need of such exhortations. The Lord give us His own spirit of obeying the Father.
Lectures Introductory
to the Study of
The Epistles of Paul The Apostle

Lecture 3

Second Corinthians

It is impossible to read the two epistles to the Corinthians with the smallest care without perceiving the strong contrast between the wounded tone of the first epistle (the heart aggrieved so much the more because it loved the saints), and now, in the second, that same heart filled with consolation about them from God. This is exceedingly assuring, and it is as evidently divine, the effectual working of God’s own grace.

In human things nothing really shuts out decay. The utmost wise men essay is to put a drag on the progress of corruption, and to stave off as long as may be the too rapid inroads of death. Thanks be to God, it is not so in divine things. There is nothing which so brings out the resources of God as His supremacy over evil in grace, nothing that so manifests His tender mercy and His goodness wherever there is real faith. And spite of the painful disorders of the Corinthians, reality was there. So the apostle, though heartbroken because of their state, would confidently look up to God about them, even in his first so strongly reproving epistle; for it was the Lord Himself who had told him He had much people in that city. There was small appearance of it when he wrote the earlier letter to them; but the Lord was right, as He always is, and the apostle confided in the Lord spite of appearances. He now tastes the joyful fruit of his faith in the recovering grace of the Lord. Hence in this epistle we have not so much as in the former the evidence of their outward disorders. The apostle is not occupied as there with the regulation of the state of the church as such, but we see souls restored. There is indeed the result of that salutary dealing in the very different state of individuals, and also of the assembly; but very emphatically, whatever might be the effect on the many, to a large extent there is a blessed unfolding of life in Christ in its power and effects.

Thus our epistle reminds us to a certain extent of the epistle to the Philippians, resembling it, though not of course the same, nor by any means of so lofty a character; but nevertheless a state appears wholly different from the downward path which the first epistle had reproved. For this change God had prepared His servant; for He takes in everything in His matchless wisdom and ways. He considers not only those written to, but the one He was employing to write. Assuredly He had dealt with them, but He had also dealt with His servant Paul. It was another sort of dealing, -- not without humbling to them, in him withering to nature, without the shame that necessarily befell the saints at Corinth, but so much the more fitting him to go out in love toward them. As he knew what God’s grace had wrought in their hearts, he could the more freely express the sympathy he felt, and, encouraged by all that had been wrought, take up what remained to be accomplished in them. But the unfailing grace of God, that works in the midst of weakness and in the face of death, and had so wrought mightily in him, made the Corinthians very dear to him, and enabled him to bring to bear on their circumstances and their state the most suited comfort that it was ever the mission of that blessed man to minister to the hearts of those that were broken down.

This he now pours forth abundantly,

Blessed be God;

for his heart, surcharged with grief when the first epistle was written, could open,

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,

-- no matter what, were it through grave faults, were it to their own deep shame and to his grief as once. But now the comfort far overcomes the sorrow, and we are enabled to comfort them that are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God {2 Cor. 1:3, 4}.

Here with a true heart he at once brings in the suffering’s of Christ:

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 {2 Cor. 1:5, 6}.

The difference in this from Philippians, to which I have referred, is remarkable. The point in hand there is, that they were working out their own salvation, the apostle being, in a certain sense, completely shut out from them. Unable from circumstances, he there lets them know that he does not mingle himself with them in the same way. Their state did not need it. Undoubtedly this is a difference; but it is only that which is owing to their manhood in grace. Here they wanted
more. It was the unfolding of grace in both; but the difference was largely to the credit of His name in the Philippians. It was the proof of their excellent condition that the apostle had such perfect confidence in them, even while he was absolutely precluded from being near them. He was at a distance from them, and had but small prospect of meeting with them shortly.

To the Corinthians he could speak otherwise. He was comparatively near, and was hoping the third time, as he tells us in the latter part of the epistle, to come to them. Nevertheless he interweaves his own experience with theirs in a way which is wonderfully gracious to those who had a heart.

And whether we be afflicted, he says,

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 [2 Cor. 1:6].

Was it not the reckoning of grace? Whatever came on them, it was for their comfort. If affliction, the Lord would turn it to their blessing; if joy and consolation, no less to their blessing. At the same time he lets them know what trouble had come upon himself, and in the most delightful manner turns it to account. Whatever was the might of God that had sustained him when there was nothing on their part to give him comfort, but rather to add to the anguish of his spirit, now that grace was operating in their hearts, he shows how dependant he felt on their prayers. Truly beautiful is grace, and far different from the manner of man.

How blessed to have the working of God not only in Him that is absolute perfection, but in one who feels like ourselves, who had the same nature in the same state that has wrought such continual mischief towards God! At the same time, it is proved by such a one as this servant of God to be only the means of furnishing additional proof in another form that the might of God’s Spirit is without limit, and can work the greatest moral wonders even in a poor human heart. Undoubtedly we should lose much if we had it not in its full perfection in Christ; but how much we should lose if we had not also the working of grace, not where human nature was itself lovely, not a spot without nor a taint of sin within, but where everything natural was evil, and nothing else; where nevertheless the power of the Holy Ghost wrought in the new man, lifting the believer completely above the flesh. This was the case with the apostle.

At the same time there was the answer of grace in their hearts, though it might be developed comparatively but little, Evidently there was a great deal that required to be set right in them; but they were on the right road. This was a joy to his heart, and so at once he encourages them, and gives them to know how little his heart had turned away from them, how he loved to link himself with them instead of standing aloof from them.

Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf.  

For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, &c. [2 Cor. 1:11, 12].

He had been charged with the contrary. Being a man of remarkable wisdom and power of discernment, he paid the penalty that this must always entail in this world. That is, they imputed it to his ability and natural penetration; and the real power of the Spirit of God was thus merely accredited to flesh.

There was also an imputation of vacillation if not dishonesty. His purpose of visiting Corinth had been set aside. First of all the apostle takes this up in a spirit of self-renunciation, bent on Christ’s glory. Supposing their imputation to be true, supposing Paul had been as fickle-minded a man as his enemies insinuated, if he had said he would come and did not come after all, what then? At any rate his preaching was not thus. The word that Paul preached was not yea and nay [2 Cor. 1:18].

In Christ it was

yea [2 Cor. 1:19],

where there is no “nay.” There is no refusal nor failure. There is everything to win, and comfort, and establish the soul in Christ. There is no negation of grace, still less of uncertainty in Christ Jesus the Lord. There is everything that can comfort the sad, attract the hard, and embolden the distrustful. Let it be the very vilest, what is there lacking that can lead on and into the highest place of blessing and enjoyment of God, not only in hope, but even now by the Spirit of God in the face of all adversaries? This was the Christ that he loved to preach. By Him came grace and truth. He at least is absolutely what He speaks. Who or what was so worthy of trust? And this is put in a most forcible way.

For, says he,

all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen [2 Cor. 1:20].

It is not a bare literal accomplishment of the promises. This is not the statement any more than the state of things which is come in now; but as to all the promises of God, it matters not what they may be, in Him is the yea, and in Him the Amen, to the glory of God by us. They have found their every verification in Christ.

Was eternal life promised? In Him was eternal life in its highest form. For what will be eternal life in the millennial day compared with that which was and now is in Jesus? It will be a most real introduction and outshining of eternal life in that day; but still in Christ the believer has it now, and in its absolute perfection. Take, again, remission of sins. Will that display of divine mercy, so needed by and precious to the guilty sinner, be known in the millennium at all comparatively with what God has brought in and sends out now in Christ? Take what you please, -- say heavenly glory; and is not Christ in it in all perfection? It does not matter, therefore, what may be looked at,

whatever the promises of God, in him is the yea,
and in him the Amen {2 Cor. 1:20}.

It is not said in us. Evidently there are many promises not yet accomplished as regards us. Satan has not lost but acquired, in the dominion of the world, a higher place by the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ; but faith can see in that very act by which he acquired it his eternal downfall. Now is the judgment of the world. The prince of the world is judged, but the sentence is not executed yet. Instead of being dethroned by the cross, he has thereby gained in the world that remarkable place and title. But for all that, whatever the apparent success of the devil, and whatever the delay as to

the promises of God, in Him is the yea, and in Him the Amen, unto the glory of God by us {2 Cor. 1:20}.

But further, the apostle is not content with this alone. He would have them know, having thus described the word which he preached, that which was infinitely dearer to him than his own character. Now he tells them that it was to spare them he had not come to Corinth. This ought to have been a reproof; and it is given in the most delicate manner. It was the sweet result of divine love in his heart. He preferred to tarry or turn aside, rather than to visit the Corinthians in their then condition. Had he come at all, he must have come with a rod, and this he could not endure. He wished to come with nothing but kindness, to blame nobody, to speak of nothing painful and humiliating to them (albeit, in truth, more humiliating, to him, for he loved them). And as a parent would be ashamed in his child's shame far more than the child is capable of feeling, so precisely the apostle had this feeling about those he had begotten in the gospel. He loved the Corinthians dearly, spite of all their faults, and he would rather bear their unworthy suggestions of a fickle mind because he did not visit them at once, than come to censure them in their evil and proud state. He wished to give them time, that he might come with joy.

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In the 2 Cor. 2 this is entered into a little more, and the deep anxiety of his heart is shown about them. We may easily gather what an open door for evangelizing is to one who was a great preacher of the gospel, as well as an apostle and a teacher of the Gentiles. Although such an opportunity now offered itself, and was, no doubt, a strong impelling cause to work there, still he had no rest for his spirit. His heart was disturbed about the state of Corinth, and the case that tried him most in their midst. It seemed as if he felt nothing else, as if there was no sufficient call to occupy him in other quarters. He could turn from that most animating and immediate reward to any labourer in this world. Whatever might be the preciousness of presenting Christ to those who knew Him not, to see the manifestation of the glory of Christ in those that did know Him, to see it restored where it was obscured was something even nearer to his heart. The one would be, no doubt, great joy to wretched souls, and the spread of the glory of the Lord in the regions beyond; but here the glory of the Lord had been tarnished in those that bore His name before men; and how could Paul feel this lightly? What pressed so urgently on him? Hence it was that no attraction of gospel service, no promise of work, however fair, that called him elsewhere, could detain him. He felt the deepest affliction about the saints, as he says here, and had no rest in his spirit, because he found not Titus his brother, who had been to see them.

Then, again, among the particular instances which most pressed on him was, his exceeding trouble about the man he had ordered them to put away. For this he had authority from God, and the responsibility of heeding it abides, I need not say, in its entirety for us. We are just as much under that authority as they were. But now that God had wrought in the man who was the chief and grossest evidence of the power of Satan in the assembly, what a comfort to his heart! This sin, unknown even among the Gentiles, and the more shameful as being where the name of the Lord Jesus had been confessed and the Spirit dwelt, became the occasion of the most salutary instruction for all their souls, for they had learnt what becomes God's assembly under such humiliating circumstances. And they had responded to the solemn call pressed on them in the name of the Lord, and had purged out the evil leaven from the midst of their paschal feast. Only now they were in danger on the judicial side. They were disposed to be as over-severe as they had been previously unexercised and lax. Paul would infuse the same spirit of grace towards the penitent offender that filled himself. They had realised at length the shame that had been done to the Lord's glory, and were indignant with themselves as parties to identifying His name, not to speak of themselves, with such scandals. Thus they were slow to forgive the man that had wrought such a wrong, and Satan sought in an opposite way to separate them in heart from the blessed apostle, who had roused them to just feelings after their too long slumber. Just as Paul was horrified at their indifference to sin at first, so now it was impossible but that he must be concerned, lest there should be a failure in grace as a little before in righteousness. But there is nothing like a manifestation of grace to call out grace; and he lets them know what was his own feeling, not merely about the wrong-doer, but about themselves.

To whom ye forgive anything, I forgive also; for if I forgave anything, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; lest Satan should gain an advantage over us: for we are not ignorant of his devices [2 Cor. 2:10, 11].

This is his spirit. It is no longer a command, but a trust reposed in the saints; and when we think of that which is afterwards to appear in this epistle, what was still at work among them as well as what had been, it is certainly a most blessed and beautiful proof of the reality of grace, and of the effects which can be, as they have been, produced by it in the heart of a saint here below. What do we not owe to Jesus?

After having disposed of this matter for the present (for he recurs to it afterwards), he turns to speak of the way in which he was led of God through trial, no matter of what character. Let the question be of the man who had wandered so far astray, but was now restored really to the Lord, and to whom he desired that his brethren should publicly confirm their love; or let it be that he is turned aside from gospel work because of his anxiety on their account, he now tells
them of the triumph which the Lord gave him to prove everywhere.

This leads in 2 Cor. 3 to an unfolding of righteousness in Christ, but in a style considerably different from what we found in the Epistle to the Romans. There the broad and deep foundations were exposed to view, as well as the Spirit's power and liberty consequent on the soul's submission to Christ's work. The proposition was -- God just and the justifyer, not by blood only, but in that resurrection power in which Christ rose from among the dead. According to no less a work of such a Saviour we are justified.

But in this chapter the Spirit goes higher still. He connects righteousness with heavenly glory, while at the same time this righteousness and glory are shown to be perfectly in grace as regards us. It is not in the slightest degree glory without love (as sometimes people might think of glory as a cold thing); and if it withers up man from before it, -- the fleshly nature no doubt, it is only with a view to the enjoyment of greater vigour, through the power of Christ resting on us in our detected and felt weakness.

The chapter opens with an allusion to the habit so familiar to God's church of sending and requiring a letter of commendation.

Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you? {2 Cor. 3:1}.

Not at all. And what then is his letter of commendation? Themselves. What confidence he must have had in the gracious power of God, that his letter of commendation could be the Corinthian saints! He does not look around to choose the most striking instances of those converted by him. He takes what was perhaps the most humiliating scene that he had ever experienced, and he points even to these saints as a letter of commendation. And why so? Because he knew the power of life in Christ. He was reassured. In the darkest day he had looked up to God with confidence about it, when any other heart had failed utterly; but now that light was beginning to dawn upon them, yet still but dawned so to speak afresh, he could boldly say that they were not merely his, but Christ's, letter. Bolder and bolder evidently he becomes as he thinks of the name of the Lord and of that enjoyment which he had found, and found afresh, in the midst of all his troubles. Hence he says,

Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart {2 Cor. 3:2, 3}.

There were not wanting there those that endeavoured to impose legal principles on the Corinthians. Not that here it was the strongest or subtest effort of the enemy. There was more of Sadduceism at work among them than of Pharisaism; but still not unfrequently Satan finds room for both, or a link between both. His ministry was emphatically not that which could find its type in any form of the law, or in what was written upon stone, but on the fleshy table of the heart by the Spirit of the living God. Accordingly this gives rise to a most striking contrast of the letter that kills and of the spirit that gives life. As is said here,

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; who also hath made us able ministers of the new covenant {2 Cor. 3:5, 6}.

Then lest any should conceive that this was the accomplishment of the Old Testament, he lets us know it is no more than the spirit of that covenant, not the letter. The covenant itself in its express terms awaits both houses of Israel in a day not yet arrived; but meanwhile Christ in glory anticipates for us that day, and this is, of course,

not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life {2 Cor. 3:6}.

Next, we find a long parenthesis; for the true connection of the end of 2 Cor. 3:6 is with 2 Cor. 3:17, and all between properly forms a digression. I shall read the words outside the parenthesis, in order to make this manifest. He had said that the spirit giveth life {2 Cor. 3:6}.

Now the Lord (he adds)

is that spirit {2 Cor. 3:17};

which last word ought to be printed with a small “s,” not a capital. Some Bibles have this, I dare say, correctly; but others, like the one in my hand, incorrectly.

That spirit does not mean the Holy Ghost, though it is He alone that could enable a soul to seize the spirit under the letter. But the apostle, I believe, means that the Lord Jesus is the spirit of the different forms that are found in the law. Thus he turns aside in a remarkable but characteristic manner; and as he intimates in what sense he was the minister of the new covenant (i.e. not in a mere literal fashion but in the spirit of it), so he connects this spirit with the forms of the law all through. There is a distinct divine purpose or idea couched under the legal forms, as their inner spirit, and this, he lets us know, is really Christ the Lord.

Now the Lord is that spirit.

This it is that ran through the whole legal system in its different types and shadows. Then he brings in the Holy Ghost, --

and where

(not simply

that spirit,

but)

the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty {2 Cor. 3:17}.

There is a notable difference between the two expressions.

The Spirit of the Lord

is the Holy Spirit that characterizes Christianity; but underneath the letter of the Jewish system, faith seized

the spirit

that referred to Christ. There was the outward ritual and
commandment with which flesh made itself content; but faith always looked to the Lord, and saw Him, however dimly, beyond the letter in which God marked indelibly, and now makes known by ever accumulating proofs, that He from the first pointed to the One that was coming. A greater than anything then manifested was there; underneath the Moseses and the Aarons, the Davids and the Solomons, underneath what was said and done, signs and tokens converged on One that was promised; even Christ.

And now

where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

This was unknown under the Levitical order of things. There was a veiled form of truth, and now it is manifest. The Holy Ghost brings us into the power and enjoyment of this as a present thing. Where He is, there is liberty.

But looking back for a moment at the parenthesis, we see that the direct effect of the law (no matter what may be the mercy of God that sustained, spite of its curse) is in itself a ministration of death. Law can only condemn; it can but enforce death as on God’s part. It never was in any sense the intention of God by the law to introduce either righteousness or life. Nor these only, but the Spirit He now brings in through Christ.

If the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away (2 Cor. 3:7),

-- it was not at all an abiding thing, but merely temporary in its own nature, --

how shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation (another point after the ministration of death; if it then) be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory (2 Cor. 3:8, 9).

It is not simply the mercy of God, you observe, but the ministration of righteousness. When the Lord was here below, what was the character of His ministration? It was grace; not yet a ministration of righteousness. Of course, He was emphatically righteous, and everything He did was perfectly consistent with the character of the Righteous. Never was there the smallest deflection from righteousness in aught He ever did or said. Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. But when He went up to heaven on the footing of redemption through His blood, He had put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself; the ministration was not of grace merely, but of righteousness. In short, righteousness without redemption must destroy, not save; grace before redemption could not deliver, but at most forbear to judge; but righteousness founded on redemption provides the stabel possible basis for the believer.

Whatever the mercy displayed to us now, it is perfectly righteous in God to show it. He is vindicated in everything. Salvation is no stretch of His prerogative. Its language is not, “The person is guilty; but I will let him off; I will not execute the sentence against him.” The Christian is now admitted to a place before God according to the acceptance of Christ Himself. Being altogether by Christ, it brings nothing but glory to God, because Christ who died was God’s own Son, given of His own love for this very purpose, and there in the midst of all wrongs, of everything out of course here below, while the evil still remains unreMOVED, and death ravages still, and Satan has acquired all possible power of place as god and prince of this world, this deepest manifestation of God’s own glory is given, bringing souls which were once the guiltiest and the vilest out of it, not only before God, but in their own souls, and in the knowledge and enjoyment of it, and all righteously through Christ’s redemption. This is what the apostle triumphs in here. So he calls it not the ministration of life indeed; for there was always the new birth or nature through the mercy of God; but now he brings in a far fuller name of blessing, that of the Spirit, because the ministration of the Spirit is over and above life. It supposes life, but moreover also the gift and presence of the Holy Ghost. The great mistake now is when saints cling to the old things, lingering among the ruins of death when God has given them a title flowing from grace, but abundant in righteousness, and a ministration not merely of life, but of the Spirit.

So he goes on farther, and says that

that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious (2 Cor. 3:10, 11).

This again is another quality that he speaks of. We come to what abides — to what never can be shaken, as he puts it to the Hebrews later. To this permanence of blessing we are come in Christ, no matter what else may come. Death may come for us; judgment certainly will for the world — for man at least. The complete passing away of this creation is at hand. But we are already arrived at that which remains, and no destruction of earth can possibly affect its security; no removal to heaven will have any other effect than to bring out its lustre and abidingness. So he says,

Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: and not as Moses, which put a vail over his face (2 Cor. 3:12, 13).

This characterized the dealings of the law, that there never was the bringing God and man, so to speak, face to face. Such a meeting could not yet be. But now it is. Not only has God come down to man face to face, but man is brought to look in where God is in His own glory, and without a vail between. It is not the condescension of the Word made flesh coming down to where man is, but the triumph of accomplished righteousness and glory, because the Spirit comes down from Christ in heaven. It is the ministration of the Spirit, who comes down from the exalted man in glory, and has given us the assurance that this is our portion, now to look into it, soon to be with Him. Hence he says it is not as Moses, which put a vail over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: but their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the Old Testament; which vail is done away in Christ (2 Cor. 3:13, 14).

This is as in Christ when known to us. So
even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is
upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to
the Lord, the vail shall be taken away
{2 Cor. 3:15, 16}.

But then we do not wait here for their turning to the Lord,
which will be their portion by-and-by. Meanwhile the Lord
has turned to us, turning us to Himself, in His great grace,
and brought us into righteousness, peace, as well as glory in
hope-- yea, in present communion, through redemption. The
consequence is, all evil is gone for us, and all blessedness
secured, and known to be so, in Christ; and, as he says here,
where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty
{2 Cor. 3:17}.

Then, he adds further,

We all, with open [unveiled] face, beholding [“as in
a glass” is uncalled for] the glory of the Lord, are
changed into the same image from glory to glory,
even as by the Spirit of the Lord {2 Cor. 3:18}.

Thus the effect of the triumph of our Lord Jesus, and of the
testimony of the Holy Ghost, is to put us into present
association with the glory of the Lord as the object before our
souls; and this is what transforms us according to its own
heavenly character.

* * *

In 2 Cor. 4 the apostle takes into account the vessel that
contains the heavenly treasure. He shows that as
we have this ministry,
and
have received mercy
therefore to the uttermost,
we faint not; but have renounced the hidden things of
dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling
the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of
the truth commending ourselves to every man’s
conscience in the sight of God. But if our gospel be
hid, it is hid to them that are lost {2 Cor. 4:1-3}.

Such is the solemn conclusion:

In whom the god of this world hath blinded the
minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the
glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God;
should shine unto them. For we preach not
ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves
your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who
commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath
shined in our hearts, to give the light of the
knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus
Christ {2 Cor. 4:4-6}.

This is the gospel of the glory of Christ. It is not merely
that we have the heavenly title, as we are taught in 1 Cor. 15.
The utmost on this subject brought before us there was, that
we are designated

heavenly {1 Cor. 15:49},
and are destined to bear the image of the heavenly One by-
and-by. 2 Corinthians comes between the two points of title
and destiny, with the transforming effect of occupation with
Christ in His glory on high. Thus space is left for practice
and experience between our calling and our glorification. But

then this course between is by no means sparing to nature;
for, as he shows here,

we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the
excellency of the power may be of God, and not of
us {2 Cor. 4:7}.

God makes us feel this, and helps on the practical
transformation; and by what means? By bringing us into
every kind of trouble and sorrow, so as to make nothing of
flesh. For it is the allowed liveliness of nature that hinders the
manifestation of the treasure; whereas its judgment leaves
room for the light to shine out. This, then, is what God
carries on. It explained much in the apostle’s path which they
had not been in a state to comprehend; and it contributed,
where received and applied in the Spirit, to advance God’s
objects as regards them.

Death worketh in us, but life in you {2 Cor. 4:12}.

What grace, and how blessed the truth! But see the way in
which the process is carried on,

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we
are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not
forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always
bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord
Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made
manifest in our body. For we which live are alway
delivered unto death {2 Cor. 4:8-11}.

He speaks of the actualisation: all helps the great object, even
such circumstances as seemed the most disastrous possible.
God exposed His servant to death. This was only carrying out
more effectually the breaking down that was always going on.

So then death worketh in us, but life in you. We
having the same spirit of faith, according as it is
written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we
also believe, and therefore speak; knowing that he
which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also
by Jesus, and shall present us with you. For all
things are for your sakes {2 Cor. 4:12-15}.

And thus then, if there was the endurance of affliction, he
would encourage their hearts, calling, as he felt it,
light affliction.

He knew well what trial was.

Our light affliction, which is but for a moment,
worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal
weight of glory; while we look not at the things
which are seen, but at the things which are not seen:
for the things which are seen are temporal; but the
things which are not seen are eternal
{2 Cor. 4:17, 18}.

* * *

This introduces the Christian’s estimate of both death and
judgment as measured by Christ. He looks now steadily at all
that can possibly appal the natural heart. Death the Christian
may pass through. Judgment will never be for the Christian.
Nevertheless his sense of judgment, as it really will come,
although not for himself, is most influential and for others
too. There may be a mighty effect on the soul, and a deep
spring of worship, and a powerful lever in service, through
that which does not concern us at all. The sense of what it is
may be all the more felt because we are delivered from its
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weight; and we can thus more thoroughly, because more calmly, contemplate it in the light of God, seeing its inevitable approach and overwhelming power for those that have not Christ. Accordingly he says,

We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven {2 Cor. 5:1, 2}.

But let us not forget that he takes care (for his heart was not relieved as to every individual in Corinth) to add solemnly,

If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked {2 Cor. 5:3}.

He was not quite sure but that some there might be found exposed, because devoid of a Saviour. There are those who give this a very different turn, and make it to be a verse of consolation instead of warning; but such a view deprives us of the true scope of the clause. The common version and natural interpretation appears to me quite correct. It does not mean “since being clothed we shall not be found naked,” which has no worthy lesson to convey to any soul. The readings differ, but that which answers to the common version I believe to be correct. The apostle would warn every soul that, although every one will be clothed in the day that is coming (namely, at the resurrection of the body, when souls are no longer found without the body but clothed), nevertheless some, even in spite of that clothing, shall be found naked. The wicked are then to be clothed no less than the saints, who will have been already raised or changed; their bodies shall be raised from the dead just as truly as those of the righteous; but when the unrighteous stand in resurrection before the great white throne, how bare will they appear? What will it be in that day to have no Christ to clothe us?

After so salutary a caution to such as made too much of knowledge in the neglect of conscience, the apostle turns to that fulness of comfort which he was communicating to the saints.

We,

he says,

that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened. He has no wish to deny the sorrow and weakness. He knew what it is to suffer and be sorrowful far better than any of them.

We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed {2 Cor. 5:4}.

Thus there is no mere wish to get away from the present scene with its sadness and trial. It is never allowed one to be impatient. To desire to be with Christ is right; but to be restive under which connects us with shame and pain is not of Christ.

Not for,

then,

that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon.

This was his ardent wish, -- to be clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life {2 Cor. 5:4}.

It is not that he might die, but the very reverse, -- that the mortality already working in him might be swallowed up by Him who is eternal life, and our life.

He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God:

It is not here wrought something for us, but wrought us.

This is a remarkable expression of the grace of God in associating with His unfailing purpose in Christ.

He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit;

given us, therefore, even now a taste of the blessedness and glory that are in store for us.

Therefore we are always confident {2 Cor. 5:5, 6}.

Think of such language! Think of it as the apostle’s words describing our portion, and in full view of both death and judgment!

We are always confident.

We can easily understand one whose eye was simply on Christ and His love, saying, “We are confident,” though turning to look at that which might well tax the stoutest heart. Certainly it were madness not to be overwhelmed by it, unless there were such a ministration of the Spirit as the apostle was then enjoying in its fruits in his soul. But he did enjoy it profoundly; and, what is more, he puts it as the common enjoyment of all Christians. It is not alone a question of his own individual feelings, but of that which God gave him to share now with the saints of God as such.

Therefore,

says he,

we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: for we walk by faith, not by sight: we are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ {2 Cor. 5:6-10}.

This, again, is a very important truth indeed in its own place, and the effect is most striking; namely, deep anxiety about the lost, and the consciousness of our own manifestation to God now. Not that I mean by this that we shall not be manifested by--and by; for we shall be perfectly. But if we are manifest in conscience before God now, it is evident that there is nothing that can cause the slightest uneasiness in our being manifested before Christ’s tribunal. The truth is, so far is the manifestation before our Lord a source of alarm to the saint (though it should surely solemnise the heart), that I am persuaded the soul would lose a positive and substantial blessing, if it could by any possibility escape being manifested there. Nor does it matter what the degree of
manifestation may now be in conscience. Still, it can never be perfect till then; and our God would give us perfection in this as in all else. It is now hindered by various causes, as far as we are concerned. There is the working of self-love in the hearts of the saints; there is that which has cast a film over the eye which dulls our souls. Alas! we know it too well.

The effect of our manifestation before the tribunal of Christ is, that we shall know as we are known. That is, it will be carrying out in absolute perfection what we now know in the measure of our spirituality. Now, what is the effect of one's arriving at a better knowledge of himself, and a deeper consciousness of the Christian's place in Christ? Always a real blessing, and a means of greater enjoyment of Christ. Is it not much to have a lover feeling about ourselves? to esteem others better than ourselves? and thus to deepen daily in the grace of the Lord Jesus? And are not these things the result? And will the perfect knowledge of ourselves be a loss, and not a gain?

At the same time, it is solemn assuredly for every secret to be spread out between the Lord and ourselves. It is solemn for all to be set in the light in which we may have been misled now, and which may have caused trouble and grief to others, casting reproach on the name of the Lord, -- in itself an affecting and afflicting thing. Never should we be deceived by Satan. He may accuse the saints, but they ought in no case to be deceived by him. He deceives the world, and accuses the brethren. Alas! we know, in point of fact, that we are liable through unwatchfulness to his wiles; but this does not make it less a humiliation for us, and a temporary advantage for Satan when we fall into his trap. We are not ignorant of his devices; but this will not always, nor in itself in any case, preserve us. There are defeats. The judgment-seat of Christ will disclose all; where each hidden thing will be clear; where nothing but the fruit of the Spirit shall stand for ever.

Nevertheless the sight of that judgment-seat brings at once before his eye, not the saints, but the perishing world; and so complete is the peace of his own spirit, so rich and sure the deliverance Christ has accomplished for all the saints, that the expressed effect is to kindle his heart about those that are braving everlasting destruction -- those on whom the judgment-seat can bring nothing but hopeless exclusion from God and His glory.

For we say here by the way, that we must be all manifested, whether saints or sinners. There is a peculiarity in the phrase which is, to my thinking, quite decisive as to its not meaning saints only. As to the objection to this founded on the word

we,
there is no force in it at all.

We is no doubt commonly used in the apostolic epistles for saints, but not for them exclusively. Context decides. Be assured that all such rules are quite fallacious. What intelligent Christian ever understood from scripture all the canons of criticism in the world? They are not to be trusted for a moment. Why have confidence in anything of the sort? Mere traditional formulas or human technicalities will not do for the ascertainment of God’s word. The moment men rest on general laws by which to interpret scripture, I confess they seem to me on the brink of error, or doomed to wander in a desert of ignorance. We must be disciplined if we would learn indeed; and we need to read and hear things as God writes them; but we do well and wisely to eschew all human byways and short-cuts for deciding the sense of what God has revealed. It is not only the students of medieval divinity, or of modern speculation, who are in danger. None of us is beyond the need of jealousy over self, and of simple-hearted looking to the Lord.

Here, indeed, the apostle's reasoning, and the nicety of language, furnish demonstrative evidence in the passage (that is, both in the spirit and in the letter), that we must all, whether saints or sinners, be manifested before Christ; not at the same time nor for the same end, but all before His judgment-seat at some time. Had the language been, “we must all be judged,” the “we” must have been there limited to the unconverted. While they only come into judgment, believer and unbeliever must alike be manifested. The effect of manifestation for the believer will be the fulness of rest and delight in the ways of God. The effect of the manifestation for the unbeliever will be the total withering up of every excuse or pretence that had deceived him here below. No flesh shall glory in His presence, and man must stand self-convicted before the Judge of all. Thus the choice of language is, as usual in scripture, absolutely perfect, and to my mind quite decisive that the manifestation here is universal. This acts on the servant of Christ, who knows what the terror of the Lord is, and calls him out to

persuade men [2 Cor. 5:11].

What is meant by this? It is really to preach the gospel to men at large.

At the same time the apostle adds,

We commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf [2 Cor. 5:12].

For he had expressed his trust of being made manifest to their consciences, as well as stated how absolutely we are manifested to God.

For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause [2 Cor. 5:13].

Then he brings in the constraining power of the love of Christ, and why? Because, as he looked round him, he saw nothing but death written on man, and all that pertains to him here below. The whole scene was one vast grave. Of course, he was not thinking of the saints of God, but, contrariwise, in the midst of this universal death, as far as man is concerned, he rejoices to see some alive. I understand, therefore, that when he says,

If one die for all, then were all dead,
he means those who had really died by sin, and because of the contrast it seems to me plain

He died for all, that they which live
(these are the saints, the objects of God’s favour)
should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto
him which died for them, and rose again
{2 Cor. 5:14, 15}.

What was the effect of this? That having thus before his soul, not the universal death of all only, but some who by grace were alive, through the death and resurrection of Christ, he now brings out, not the contrast of the new creation with all that went before -- yea, the contrast of the Messianic hopes as such with that higher glory which he was now asserting. Even a living Messiah could not satisfy what his soul had learnt to be in accordance with the glory of God. Not, of course, that he did not delight in the hope of his nation. It is one thing to value what God will do for the earth by-and-by, it is quite another to fail in appreciating that which God has now created and revealed in a risen Christ above, -- once rejected and dying for us. Accordingly it is one glory that will display the promises and ways of God triumphing over man and Satan; it is another and far surpassing glory which He who is the Messiah, but much more, and now the heavenly man, reveals. His death is the judgment of our sins in God's grace, and an end of the whole scene for us, and hence perfect deliverance from man and from present things -- yea, even from the best hopes for the earth.

What can be better than a Messiah come to bless man in this world? But the Christian is not occupied with this at all. According to the Old Testament he looked at it, but now that the Messiah is seen dead and risen, now that He is passed into heavenly glory through death, this is the glory for the Christian.

Henceforth know we no man after the flesh:
this puts the saints in a common position of knowledge.

Henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea,
though we have known Christ after the flesh
{2 Cor. 5:16}.

As for a living Messiah, and all the expectations that were bound up with Him and His coming here below, all this is passed away for the Christian. It is not that the Messiah will not return as such; but as for the sphere and character of our own relations, they are founded on death and resurrection, and seen on high. Such is the way the apostle treats it. He looks at Christ in His relationship with us as One that has passed out of this earth and the lower creation into heavenly places. It is there and thus we know Him. By knowing Him he means the special form of the truth with which we are concerned, the manner in which we are put into positive, living association with Him. That which we know as our centre of union, as the object of our souls, is Christ risen and glorified. In any other point of view, however bright and glorious,

now henceforth know we him no more. Therefore if
any man be in Christ, &c. {2 Cor. 5:16, 17}.

It is not merely if any man look to Christ: the Old Testament saints rejoiced to see His day; but this is a very different thing from being in Christ. There are many who take the scriptures in so crude and vague a manner that to their eyes it is all the same; but I hope such is not the case with any here. No doubt, to be in Christ as we are now is through looking to Him. But it was not always so. Take the disciples in the days of Christ’s pathway here below: were they in Christ then? Certainly not. There was the working of divine faith in them. They were unquestionably born again;

but is this the same thing as being
in Christ?

Being in Christ means that, redemption having come in, the Holy Ghost can and does give us a conscious standing in Christ in His now risen character. To be

in Christ
describes the believer, not in Old Testament times, but now.

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself {2 Cor. 5:17-19}.

Thus there is a blessed and suited ministry. The law directed a people at a distance from God. It supposed such a condition and dealt accordingly. Even if a poor brute touched the mountain, it was to be stoned. At length God came down to meet man in grace as he is; and man rejected God manifest in flesh. Redemption was thereby effected; man is brought without sin to God. Christ is the person who made both good. He brought God down to man, and He brought man in Himself up to God. Such is the position in which we stand. It is not any longer merely God coming down to man in Christ. This is neither the manner nor the measure in which He reveals Himself now. The Lord Jesus Christ is gone up to heaven; and this not as a sole individual, but as the head of a family. He would not take the place of headship until all the evil was completely gone. He would give us His own acceptance before God. He took His stand on retrieving God's moral glory by bearing our sins; yet as He came down, so He went up to God, holy and spotless. He had by His own blood blotted out the sins of others who believe in Him. It was not merely a born Messiah, the chief of Israel, but

God was in Christ {2 Cor. 5:19}.

Observe, not that God is in Christ, but that He was. It is a description of what was manifested when the Lord was here below. But if it be a mistake to read God is, it is a still greater error too common in books, old and new alike, that God has reconciled the world. This is not the meaning of the statement. The English version is perfectly right; the criticism that pretends to correct it is thoroughly wrong. It is never said that the world is reconciled to God. Christ was a blessed and adequate image of God; and God was in Him manifesting Himself in the supremacy of His own grace here below. No doubt His law had its suited place; but God in grace is necessarily above the law. As man, at least as of Israel, Jesus was born under the law; but this was in not the slightest degree an abandonment of God's rights, and still less of His grace. God came near to men in love in the most attractive form, going in and out among them, taking up little children, entering into houses when asked, conversing by the way, going about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed

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of the devil; for God was with Him. It was not merely in quest of the lost sheep of Israel. How could such grace be restrained only to Jews? God had larger thoughts and feelings than this. Therefore let a Gentile centurion come, or a Samaritan woman, or any body else: who was not welcome? For

God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them [2 Cor. 5:19].

Full of grace and truth, He would not even raise the question of this trespass or that. There was no doubt of man’s guilt; but this was not the divine way of Christ. Other and more efficacious aims were in the hand of the God of all grace. He would save, but at the same time exercise the conscience more than ever. For great would be the loss for a sinner awakened, if it were possible for him not to take God’s part against himself. This is the real course and effect of repentance in the soul. But God was in Christ reconciling the world for all that, yea in order to it. It was not a question of dealing with them for their trespasses. And what now that He is gone away?

He hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation [2 Cor. 5:19].

He is gone, but not the errand of mercy for which He came. The Messiah as such disappears for the time; there remains the fruit of the blessed manifestation of God in Christ in an evil world.

Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech by us: we pray in Christ’s stead, be reconciled to God [2 Cor. 5:20].

But how can this be? On what basis can we essay such a task? Not because the Spirit of God is in us, however true it may be, but because of the atonement. Redemption by Christ’s blood is the reason.

For God hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him [2 Cor. 5:21].

Then, following up this in the next chapter (2 Cor. 6), the true moral traits of the Christian ministry are shown, and what a price it had in his eyes. What should not be done and endured for the sake of worthily carrying out this ministration of Christ here below! What should be the practical witness to a righteousness not acquired by us, but freely given of God! Such is the character of it, according to the work of Christ before God and of His redemption; so we should give no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed: but in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments [2 Cor. 6:3-5].

In every thing crushing to nature did the apostle fulfil his mission. Is the reproach of Christ to be an apostolic perquisite? Are not His servants to share it still? Is it not true from first to last?

Again, in serving the Lord, there are two special ways in which we are apt to go astray. Some err by an undue narrowness, others by injurious laxity. In fact, it is never right to be narrow, and always wrong to be lax. In Christ there is no license or excuse for either. But the Corinthians, like others, were in danger on both sides; for each provokes the other. Hence the appeal,

O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged. Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels [2 Cor. 6:11, 12].

There was the caution against a narrow heart; but now against a lax path he warns,


Thus is embraced individual responsibility as well as corporate.

For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them [2 Cor. 6:16].

Thus, as in the exercise of ministry according to Christ, there was nothing that should not be endured; there was no scorn or trial, no pain or shame, but what he himself counted as nothing that Christ only should be served, and the witness of His name kept up in this world according to His grace; so now he presses on the saints what is incumbent on them as the epistle of Christ, to make good a true witness for Him in this world, steering clear of all that is hard and narrow, which is altogether alien from the grace of God, and of that laxity which is still more offensive to His nature. In 2 Cor. 7:1 thewhole matter is wound up,

Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

2 Cor. 7:2 evidently belongs to the subject succeeding. In the rest of 2 Cor. 7 he renews (and has, I think, connected both with these words about the ministry and the responsibility of the saints) what he had alluded to already among them. He touches, with that delicate tact so characteristic of him, on their repentance. He would encourage their hearts in every way, but now ventures to go somewhat farther in the grace of Christ.

Accordingly his own feelings are told out, -- how exceedingly cast down he had been, and oppressed on every side, so that he had no rest.

Without were fightings, within were fears [2 Cor. 7:5].

Indeed, the fear had gone so far, that he had actually been tried as to the inspired epistle he had written. The apostle had a question raised in his mind about his own inspired epistle! Yet what writing was more certainly of God?

For though I made you sorry with the letter, I do not regret, though I did regret [2 Cor. 7:8].

How clearly we learn, whatever the working of God in man, that after all the inspiration of a vessel is far above his own will, and the fruit of the action of the Holy Ghost! As we find
an unholy man might be inspired of God to bring out a new
communication -- for example, a Balaam or a Caïphas, so
dholy men of God still more. But the remarkable thing to note
is the way in which a question was raised even about an
epistle which God has preserved in His own book, and,
without a doubt, divinely inspired. But he also mentions how
glad he was now that, having sent off that letter, he had made
them sorry.

For I perceive that the same epistle hath made you
sorry, though it were but for a season. Now I
rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye
sorrowed to repentance; for ye were made sorry
according to God, that ye might receive damage by
us in nothing [2 Cor. 7:8, 9].

How great is the grace!

For sorrow according to God worketh repentance to
salvation not to be regretted: but the sorrow of
the world worketh death. For behold this selfsame thing,
that ye sorrowed according to God, what carefulness
it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves,
yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what
vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge!
In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear
in this matter [2 Cor. 7:10, 11].

What a comfort to the heart that had been so profoundly
touched by their state!

In 2 Cor. 8, 9 the subject of contributing for saints is
resumed, though a great deal more fully than in 1 Cor. 16,
and with a fresh spring of joy communicated to his spirit.
What an evidence is given of the exercises of his heart in this
thing too! It appears he had spoken confidently about the
Corinthian saints. There had been afterwards much to wound
and weaken that confidence; but he now returns to the matter,
and reckons with certainty that the God who had wrought in
the painful matter, not of the guilty man only, but in them all
about it, -- that His grace would also give him cause for joy
in rousing their hearts into largeness of love for those that
were depressed elsewhere. He had boasted of the liberality of
the Corinthians, which had kindled zeal in others. On the one
hand, he would have his hope of them verified, on the other
he desired none to be burdened, but certainly fruit Godward
both in the givers and in the receivers. How rich and
enriching in His grace! Blessed be God for His unspeakable
gift!

In 2 Cor. 10, 11 he comes to another subject -- his own
ministry -- on which a few words must suffice. Enough had
been cleared away to open his heart on it: he could enlarge
here. It was his confidence in them that made him write.
When his spirit was bound, because of there being so much
to cause shame and pain, he could not be free; but now he is.
Hence we have here a most blessed opening of what this
servant of God felt in what was necessarily a sore distress to
his spirit. For what could be more humiliating than that the
Corinthian saints, the fruit of his own ministry, had admitted
into their hearts insinuations against him, doubts of the reality
of his apostolate, all that lowering which, in other forms but
not substantially unlike, we may have too often observed, and
just in proportion to the importance and spiritual value of the
trust reposed of God in any on the earth? The apostle knew
sorrow as no other ever knew it. Not even the twelve tasted
its bitterness as he did, from spirituality and from circumstances;
and the manner in which he deals with it, the
dignity, and at the same time the lowliness, the faith that
looked right to the Lord, but at the same time the warmth of
affection, grief of heart mingling with joy, furnish such a
tableau as is unique even in the word of God. No such
analysis appears anywhere else of the heart of one serving the
saints in the midst of the greatest outrages to his love, as we
recognise in this epistle. He bow to the charge of rudeness
in speech; but they had used the admitted power of his letters
against himself. Yet he warns lest what he is absent they may
learn in him present. Others might exalt themselves through
his labours; he hoped when their faith was increased to
preach the gospel in the regions beyond (2 Cor. 10). They
had exalting the other apostles in disparagement of him. They
had even imputed to him selfishness. It might be true, thought
they, that he had reaped no material benefit himself from
them; but what about others, his friends? How much there
was calculated to wound that generous heart, and, what he
felt yet more, to damage his ministry! But in the midst of
such sorrow and the rather as flowing from such sources,
God watched over all with observant eye. Wonderfully
hedged in was His servant, though to speak of himself he
calls his folly (2 Cor. 11). But no human power or wit can
protect a man of God from malice; nothing can shut out the
shafts of evil speaking. In vain to look to flesh and blood for
protection: were it possible, how much we should have
missed in this epistle! Had his detractors been brethren of the
circumcision from Jerusalem, neither the trial nor the blessing
would have been anything like what it is for depth; but the
fact that it came to Paul from his own children in Achaia was
enough to pain him to the quick, and did prove him
thoroughly.

But God sometimes lifts us up to look into the glory, as
He comes down into the midst of our sorrows in pitiful
mercy. This, with his own heart about it, the apostle brings
before us lovingly; though it is impossible, within my limits,
so much as to touch on all. He spreads before us his sorrows,
dangers, and persecutions. This was the ministry of which he
had boasted. He had been often whipped and stoned, had been
weary, thirsty, hungry, by sea and land: these were the prizes
he had received, and these the honours which the world gave
him. How it all ought to have gone to their hearts, if they had
any feeling at all, as indeed they had! It was good for them
to feel it, for they had been taking their ease. He closes the list
by telling them at last how he had been let down from the
wall of a city in a basket, -- not a very dignified position for
an apostle. It was anything but heroism thus to escape one’s
enemies.

But the same man who was thus let down immediately
after speaks of being caught up to heaven. Now, it is this
combination of the truest and most proper dignity that ever a
man had in this world, -- for how few of the sons of man,
-speaking of course of Christians, that approached Paul in this
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respect; so on the other hand, how few since have known the dignity of being content to suffer and be nothing, of having every thought and feeling of nature thoroughly crushed, like Paul, within as well as without! So much the more as he was one who felt all most keenly, for he had a heart and mind equally capacious. Such was he who had to be thus tried as Christ's bondman. But when he comes to special wonders, he does not speak about himself; when about the basket he is open. Thus here he talks ambiguously.

I know a man

is his method of introducing the new portion. It is not I, Paul, but

a man in Christ {2 Cor. 12:2}

is taken up, who had seen such things as could not be expressed in human words, nor suited to man's present state. It is therefore left completely vague. The apostle himself says he does not know whether it was in the body, or out of the body; so completely was all removed from the ordinary experience and ken of man. But he adds what is much to be observed,

And lest I should be exalted above measure through
the abundance of the revelations, there was given to
me a thorn in the flesh.

Thus a deeper humiliation befell him than he had ever known,

-- a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan
{2 Cor. 12:7},

-- the allowed counterbalance to such extraordinary experiences. It was Paul. The secret could not be hid. But Christ is here, as ever, the theme of the apostle from first to last. This was the treasure in the earthen vessel; and in order to bring about corresponding profit, God works by external means as well as by inward grace, so as to carry forward His work of enhancing always and increasingly what is in Christ, and making less and less of man.

The close of the chapter sketches, with painful truth but a loving hand, the outbursts of that nature, crushed in him, pampered in them. For he dreaded lest God should humble him among them because of their evil ways. What love such a word bespeaks!

* * *

The final chapter (2 Cor. 13) answers a challenge which he kept for the last place, as indeed it ill became the Corinthians above all men. What a distress to him to speak of it at all! They had actually dared to ask a proof that Christ had spoken to them by him. Had they forgotten that they owed their life and salvation in Christ to his preaching? As he put in the foreground patience as a sign of apostleship, which in him assuredly was taxed beyond measure, so now he fixes on this as the great seal of his apostleship -- at least, to them. What can be more touching? It is not what Jesus had said by him in books, or in what power the Spirit had wrought by him.

Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me,
which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you.
. . . . examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith;
prove your own selves {2 Cor. 13:3-5}.  

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Lectures Introductory

to the Study of

The Epistles of Paul The Apostle

Lecture 4

Galatians

We saw the second of Corinthians characterized by the most rapid transitions of feeling, by a deep and fervent sense of God’s consolations, by a revulsion so much the more powerful in a heart that entered into things as few hearts have ever done since the world began. For as the first epistle had put down man in every form, and more particularly man as an expression of the world in its pride, so the second epistle breathes the comfort of God’s restoring grace, and is characterized therefore by the strongest emotions of the heart; for he ardently loved these saints. He had felt their wrong, but at the same time had been lifted marvellously above what might be called personal feeling, and so much the more, therefore, could have the grief of love unmingled with that which really impairs its strength, and leaves its sensibilities incomparably less acute. So much the more, then, we find the working of spiritual feeling as expressed by him in the second epistle, where he speaks of God lifting up those that were cast down, as He had delivered himself from the imminent danger to which he had been exposed even as to life.

In the epistle to the Galatians we have another tone and style, a serious and griefed spirit, with feelings not less deep -- it may be, even more profoundly moved -- than in writing to the Corinthians; and for this reason, that the foundations were still more deeply affected by that which was working among the assemblies of Galatia. It was not the worldly presumption of man, nor the slight which this would inevitably cast on apostolic authority, as well as on the order of the church, on morality even, at least on Christian morality, on the comely ways of brethren one with another in private as well as in their public assemblies. In the epistle to the Galatians a deeper question was raised -- nothing less than the fountain of grace itself. Hence in this epistle it is not so much the laying bare the need of man -- of the sinner, as the vindication of that same grace of God for the saint, with the exhibition of the ruinous results to him who is drawn aside from the deep and broad groundwork that God has laid for souls in Christ. Here particularly the Christian is guarded against the inroads of legalism. If the world were the great enemy at Corinth, the law perverted is that against which the Spirit of God raises up the apostle in writing to the Galatians. Flesh alas? has an affinity for both. This epistle, as those to the Corinthians, opens with an assertion of his apostolic place. At the outset here (not there) he sets aside human intervention. Men were not his source, nor was man even a medium to him. He strikes accordingly at the root of all successional or derived authority.

Paul, an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ and,

-- in order to make it still more evident, --

by God the Father, who raised him from the dead
{Gal. 1:1}.

This is peculiar to our epistle. In the epistle to the Ephesians we shall find that the apostle claims a still higher character for all ministry. There it is not traced to God the Father, that raised Christ from the dead; but it descends from Christ ascended to heaven (which, we shall soon see, perfectly fits in with that epistle). Here it is the total judgment of flesh in its religious pretensions, and more particularly a blow to that which is an essential principle of law. The whole legal institution depended on a people lineally descended from Abraham, as their priests on a similar succession from Aaron. Being, of course, dying men, whether it be the general privileges of Israel, or the special place of the priest, all was transmitted from father to son. In its own proper sphere and blessings Christianity knows nothing of the sort, but denies it in principle. So here Paul is

an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, that raised him from the dead {Gal. 1:1}.

To have been with the Messiah, the hearer of His words and the witness of His work, up to His departure, was ever a condition to those who were accustomed to the twelve apostles. The apostle himself meets that difficulty in the face, and in effect concedes to his detractors that he was not made an apostle by Christ here below. But if not called to have his place among the twelve, it was the Lord’s sovereign dealing to give him a better one. There is no approach to a vaunt about his dignity. He does not even deign to fill up the sketch. He leaves it to spiritual wisdom to gather what was the evident impression of the truth.

For his own special call was an indisputable fact; and it is a great joy to the heart to think how Christianity (while it leaves the deepest and the highest space in all directions, so to speak, for the working of the Holy Ghost, while there is more room in it than anywhere else for the play both of the
renewed mind and the affections that the Spirit of God gives, while, consequently, it admits of the richest possible exercises of both mind and heart), nevertheless, in its grand truths rests on the most patent and certain facts. For God considers the poor; He has regard to the simple; He has children in His eye. And facts tell on their mind. Indeed, there is no soul really above them. Whoever despises the facts of Christianity, as if nothing in Scripture were worthy of meditation, or of ministering to others but exercises and speculative deductions, will be found, if he do not find himself often, on the verge of dangerous delusions, both for the mind and for the walk.

But the apostle here does not reason about the matter. He simply states, as I have said, that his apostolic character was not only from Jesus, but from God the Father, that raised Him from the dead. It had a resurrection-source, instead of being from Christ on earth, and in relation to the work God was doing when He sent His Son here below. Along with himself he takes care expressly to couple others:

and all the brethren which are with me {Gal. 1:2}.

Paul did not stand alone. He had the faith that could by grace cleave to God if he had not a companion; but God blesses that faith, and acts by it on the conscience of others, even on those that, alas! too often might be ready to turn aside. In this case, happily, the brethren near at hand went along with him in heart. After wishing those addressed grace and peace, as usual, he speaks of the Lord in a manner singularly in unison with the object of the epistle:

Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us -- not from judgment, not from the wrath to come, but --

from this present evil world {Gal. 1:4}.

The evil that was gaining ground among the Galatian believers -- legalism -- links the soul with the world, and indeed proves it to be evil by giving present credit to the flesh, and association with all the system that is around us now. But in truth the Lord gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father: to whom be glory for ever and ever {Gal. 1:4, 5}.

At once the apostle launches into the troubled sea. There is no recounting what God had done for them. There is no mention here of grace, nor even of any special powers conferred by the Spirit of God. We shall find he does not forget this elsewhere: he reasons on it in another part of the epistle. But his heart was too agitated not to betake himself at once to the point of their danger. Consequently, without further preamble, and with an ominous silence as to their state (for, indeed, it could not be spoken of), he at once breaks the ground.

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you in the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another {Gal. 1:6, 7}.

Mark how nicely every word was suited to deal with their souls. He speaks of the grace of Christ.

He warns against another gospel, i.e., a different one, which was really none at all. It was not another, as he says.

But there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ {Gal. 1:7}.

And then he, indignant at such a thought, makes his most solemn appeals.

But though we -- Paul himself; or any that were associated with him -- though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed {Gal. 1:8}.

Nor this only.

As we have said before, so I say now again. If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received {Gal. 1:9}.

The apostle stands to the truth preached and received. What he preached was the truth as to this matter. He does not deny that others preached it; but if so, they preached the same truth. The apostle was given to preach the truth more fully than any other. To depart from this was fatal. Nor this only.

If he had preached the full truth of the gospel, he insists that they had received it. He will not hear of any pretended misunderstanding. He refuses all cover for different thoughts. In either case

let him be accursed {Gal. 1:9}.

And he justifies this strength of warning:

For do I now persuade men or God? Do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be a servant of Christ {Gal. 1:10}.

Impossible to serve two masters! Christ never mingleth with flesh or law any more than with the world. Bondage is there; and He is a deliverer, but it is to God’s glory, and for His own service in the liberty of grace.

And now the apostle enters on another part of his subject. His account proves how independent he was of the very persons whom they would have desired to have seen associated with him. It was an offence in the eyes of the Jewish Christians, and perhaps specially of the Christians that Judeaize, that the apostle had been so little at Jerusalem -- that his intercourse was so scanty with the twelve. The apostle accepts the fact in all its strength. Far from wishing to gain credit, either for the gospel or for his own apostolic place, in consequence of being linked with those that had been apostles before him, he insists on that very independence which they counted a reproach. His is an apostleship to itself, as real as that of the twelve, but of another order, not at the same time, nor in the same manner. All sprang, no doubt, from the same God, from the same Lord Jesus Christ; but even so from God and from the Lord in other relationships. Very particularly was it marked by the manner of his call, that his apostleship had no connection with either the world or the flesh. It had nothing whatever to do even with the Lord Himself, in the days of His flesh, when acting as minister of the circumcision {Rom. 15:8} in the land of Judaea. Invariably, where man
seeks to bring in a successional apostleship, the twelve become the great model.

Hence it is that Rome, which most decidedly in principle rests on human succession (as all worldly religion must, to a certain extent, embrace the same principle) -- Rome, I say, seeks to derive her authority, as all know, from Peter. No person can intelligently read the New Testament without perceiving the utter fallacy of such a system; for Peter was expressly, as the next chapter of this epistle tells us, apostle of the circumcision. So were the others that seemed to be the chief. If any apostleship would have served for the Gentiles, it ought to have been Paul's then; for Paul was the apostle of the uncircumcision. What a condemnation of themselves, that no system which ever seeks for an earthly succession can in the least make Paul answer its purpose! In his case the breach with man was evident; the association with heaven, and not Jerusalem, was too plain to be disputed or evaded. Successor to Paul there is none; if so, who and where? In the case of the twelve, we do find an apostle chosen to supply the gap of Judas -- chosen, I admit, of God, though after a Jewish sort {Acts 1}, as Chrysostom justly remarks, for the Holy Ghost was not yet given. I admit that this was all in place and season then for Jerusalem.

But at the same time it is plain that the apostle Paul here starts with the instructive fact, that the very thing for which some Judaizers then blamed him was the distinctive glory of that to which the Lord had called him.

I certify you, brethren, says he,

that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. For ye have heard of my conversation in times past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: and profited in the Jews' religion above many of my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus {Gal. 1:11-17}.

Now, it is evident -- and to this I call your particular attention -- that the apostle here binds together his gospel with his apostolic place. This was the serious move of the enemy. You cannot attack such a servant without attacking his testimony. You cannot weaken his apostleship without endangering the very gospel that you have received yourselves. And this is always true in its measure, and shows the exceeding gravity of opposition where God raises up for His own special work in this world; but more particularly where, as in the apostle's case, the mere manner of his conversion, the special form of his separation unto God, bears the impress of the truth he was to preach. To impugn the one is to imperil the other. The Galatians did not think of this; people that are thus blinded by the enemy never do. To them, no doubt, it appeared as if they were zealous and sincere champions of unity. They were grieved to think that the Jewish church, with its twelve apostles and its elders, with its manifold links with antiquity and God's past testimony on earth, should seem separated in any measure from the apostle and his work. No doubt there was a difference of tone. Had a man come down from the teaching of the twelve, albeit inspired of God to write, as we know some of them were, and all of them having a most truly apostolic place, he might have been startled by the teaching of St. Paul. Can it be doubted that the special form of spiritual thought and feeling formed, for instance, by James's or Peter's teaching, yea, even by that of John, while harmonizing, where the heart was open, with the instruction of Paul, nevertheless would appear at first very different? We know how feeble and slow the heart is, and how apt disciples in general are to narrow the riches of the grace and truth of God. -- even in Christianity how much need there is to remember what the Lord warns us of in Luke 5 -- that no man accustomed to old wine straightway desires new, but says, The old is better. This was at work even in those early days. It had tainted among others the Galatians; for although, in point of fact, what had converted them was the heavenly testimony of the apostle Paul, nevertheless they had in time become acquainted with Christians who had not been so favoured, perhaps from the churches in Judæa. Saints they may have been; and such, we know, moved about from Jerusalem. At any rate, the Galatians, naturally fickle, were quick to take up prejudices. They had somehow become uneasy. Those that were used of Satan, both to oppose the apostle in person, and also to distrust that testimony which they had not spirituality enough to appreciate, busily insinuated doubts into the minds of these Gentile brethren, and found too ready an ear among them.

Thus the apostle had to link together the gospel of grace with his own apostolic dignity; and we do well to take heed to this remarkable fact. With the utmost simplicity he shows that his own separation from man was a part of God's ways for the purpose of making more strikingly felt the great truth that he was afterwards to proclaim. He had been himself (could they deny it?) at least as zealous for the Jews' religion as any Jew of the straitest sect. He had made as much proficiency as any of his day -- it may be, more. Who of his nation had advanced in Judaism beyond him? Who more zealous of the doctrines of his fathers? Therefore, it came to pass that there was nothing the apostle had not learned of which they boasted. He had been trained up under the most distinguished teacher -- the great Rabbi Gamaliel; but

when it pleased him, who had separated him from his mother's womb, and called him by his grace, to reveal his Son in him {Gal. 1:15, 16}.

Mark, again, the strength of the expression. It is not simply that he was brought to follow Jesus, to believe and confess His name; but God revealed His Son in him. And we can all see how exactly the phrase falls in with the words of our Lord given in the Acts of the Apostles; for the wonderful truth burst upon the apostle's ear from the beginning, in the Saviour's call to him from heaven. The oneness of the saints
with Christ Himself is, as we all familiarly know, clearly
intimated. So here it is said that God was pleased to reveal
His Son in him, that he might preach the good news of Him
among the heathen.

Immediately, then, as it is added, he conferred not with
flesh and blood; neither went up to Jerusalem to them which
were apostles before him; but went into Arabia, and returned
again, not to Jerusalem, but to Damascus, the place near
which he had been called at first.

Then after three years,
he says,

I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter [Gal. 1:18].
Surely now there was some link with the twelve! Not so. He
went simply to make the acquaintance of Peter, and abode
with him -- how long? Fifteen days. Far too short a time, if
it were a question of due initiation into the testimony of the
twelve. But, in point of fact, he did not see the twelve. He
saw Peter; but

other of the apostles saw I none, save James the
Lord's brother [Gal. 1:19].
To this he gives the most solemn asseveration:

The things which I write unto you, behold, before
God, I lie not [Gal. 1:20].
Thus he accepts the challenge that was given by unbelief. He
heartily avows what they counted a defect; and not only so, but
with the greatest solemnity assures them that he had not
seen the apostles, save only Peter, and James the brother of
the Lord, and these but for a short space.

The apostleship of Paul, therefore, was entirely
independent of Jerusalem and the twelve. He had derived the
gospel that he preached from the Lord, and not from any of
his fellow-servants who had been engaged in the work before
him. Nor had he conferred even then with flesh and blood;
his mission as well as conversion and call were alike
independent of it. He had been called, as none could deny, in
a way which not even any other apostle had ever known. Of
none else could it be so said that

it pleased God to reveal his Son in him [see
Gal. 1:15, 16].
It was not thus that Peter or the rest were drawn to follow
their Master. The language would not have been applicable
when the other apostles were called. There was no question of
revealing His Son in them then. The very utmost that could
be said was, that God had been pleased to reveal His Son to
Peter and the others. But there was no sense of union then.
There was no consciousness of the identification of the saint
with Christ. Accordingly, the language would have been
premature and entirely beyond the conscious experience of
the saints, or the real truth of the matter in the sight of God.
But God took care that the call of Paul should be delayed till
the whole order of the Jewish apostleship should be complete.
He took care also that the twelfth apostleship should be filled
up: for it is a profound mistake to suppose that Peter and the
other apostles had been hasty in numbering Matthias with
them, and that Paul was really the twelfth apostle according
to the mind of the Lord. The truth is, that they had their
relationship to the twelve tribes of Israel. This seems to have
been the reason of their being twelve; and it is to me clear
that our Lord establishes this as the true reference and key
when He declares that, in the regeneration, the Son of Man
shall sit upon the throne of his glory, and they shall sit upon
twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. One of
them fell from his place, but the vacancy was filled up
directly.

Thus all had been duly prepared of God, with a far-
reaching wisdom, to make the call of Paul an evidently and
entirely separate thing, to make his apostleship as distinct in
fact as in form: to give him fresh communications, even as to
the Lord's supper, and to convey anew the very gospel that
he preached as the revelation of the Son in him. The Lord did
stamp the testimony of Peter as being truly the revelation of
His Father. Flesh and blood had not revealed it. It was not a
question of man's wit. His Father had made a revelation to
Peter. What had been revealed? He revealed that Jesus was the
Christ, the Son of the living God. But, I repeat, this
simply was revealed to him. You cannot go farther. Jesus, the
rejected Messiah, was the Son of the living God, the giver of
life, the quickening Son of God. In Paul's case the Holy
Ghost could go a step farther, and that step He seems to me
to take. The apostle states it with perfect calmness, and
without comparing others. There is no depreciating of any
soul, but the plain statement of the positive truth, which after
all is the best and the humblest way, that most of all
magnifies God, and edifies His children. So it was, then, that
the apostle presents his own wonderful relation to Christ. It
was not merely that Paul was lowered by the carping
Judaizers -- God's grace was being sacrificed. It was not
merely that his apostleship was doubted -- God's magnifying
of His own Son was set at naught. It was the ungrateful heart
of man that, in its avidity after something that would bring an
appearance of strength and unity, would sacrifice that which
was of heaven for what was after all connected with the earth
and the flesh.

Another thing, too, let me just point out in passing. If
ever there was a man who more than another contended for
the oneness of the saints in every sense, -- above all, for the
one body of Christ, for the unity of the Spirit, -- it was the
apostle Paul. Nevertheless, there never was one that had a
deeper sense of the importance of walking, if need were,
alone with God. Be assured that it is the same simplicity of
faith which enters into both these things now. On the other
hand, where unity becomes an object, it is never understood;
and at the same time the walk of faith cannot be maintained.
In short, the man who, occupied with Christ above, enters for
that very reason most into the blessedness of the body of
Christ here below by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven,
is the very one that will know in fit season what it is not to
confer with flesh and blood. No doubt this might be
provoking to human importance sometimes. It might seem
terribly despising his brethren.

Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood
[Gal. 1:16].

No doubt also his line of procedure did not at all consort
with their desires, who were sticklers for earthly order, and

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a line that looks safe and respectable to natural eyes. What! an apostle, or at any rate one that says he is an apostle, setting aside what God inaugurated in Jerusalem, not even conferring with those whom the Lord Himself called by His personal summons here below? Here they might flatter themselves were plain tangible facts; here the slightest testimony on the Lord’s part that the twelve are really His chosen apostles. But as for the apostle Paul, he says he was called, and this by his master from heaven; but by his own showing nobody heard the call of Christ but himself. One can readily conceive men of strong prejudice and of weak faith thus hesitating, especially in presence of the apostle’s strong assertion of entire liberty from the law for the Gentiles. Consequently it is plain from the beginning, that the apostleship of Paul made a demand upon faith which the other apostolate did not. He was an enemy stopped in sovereign grace. He was not converted first, and then gradually led into that highest degree, but called at once to be an apostle as well as saint in a way that belonged to no one but himself. It was from and in connection with Christ in heaven. He acts on this in faith; he understands it with an energy and a brightness that increased even in his Roman prison.

But it was true from the first.

Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.

Had Paul gone up to present his credentials to the others, he would have lowered, obscured, and done as far as in him lay to destroy the special blessedness and peculiar glory of his apostleship. But he was not thus disobedient to the heavenly vision. And God held the reins that the truth might be kept unsullied and pure; and he goes south and north as the Lord guided His servant, but not to Jerusalem to those that were apostles before him. He visits Arabia and Damascus once more. Then after a certain lapse of time he does see Jerusalem, but no more than Peter and James, -- not the apostolic college officially. And you will observe the immense importance attached to this simple account; for all here is plain matter of fact, but pregnant with the weightiest consequences as long as the church and the gospel last here below.

The things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not. Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, and was unknown by face unto the churches of Judæa which were in Christ {Gal. 1:20-22}.

Was this then a reproach? Be it so: such was true. It was really part of God’s wondrous ways with him, as indicating the true character of Christianity and of its ministry as contrasted with Judaism. It was therefore not only for him, but for the instruction of the Galatians, and of us all. If understood, it completely cut all the earthly swaddling-clothes of the heavenly church, and of the Christian. Those who lived in Jerusalem were too prone to preserve the clothes and the cradle which had their place and use at first, but had no claim to be kept up among the Gentiles. Whatever might be the apostle’s tenderness toward his nation elsewhere, not an earthly link but must be snapped. Accordingly the apostle lays stress on the fact that he was

unknown by face unto the churches of Judæa which

were in Christ: but they had heard only, that he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. And they glorified God in me {Gal. 1:22-24}.

This, be it observed, was part of God’s way with him beyond all others. There was no such thing as a gradual training. The other apostles enjoyed this more. They had followed Jesus in His earthly path of presentation to Israel. They had been by degrees instructed according to the testimony which the Lord Jesus was pleased to give; and most suited it was, of course, to the time, people, and circumstances. Anything else would have been imperfect; but still it had essentially a transitional character. It was partly directed to the hearts and consciences of the Jews, partly in view of the approaching rupture of all ties with Israel.

In Paul’s case there was nothing of the sort. His testimony was characteristically though not of course exclusively heavenly, as it was also the witness of grace to the fullest. How could it be otherwise with one persecuting at the moment that he was arrested, in hot deadly opposition to God’s church up to his most unexpected call from heaven? Thus is seen sovereign grace, and nothing else, as well as a heavenly link instantly formed between the Lord in glory and His servant on earth. No wonder that the apostle attached the greatest moment to the facts of his conversion and call, and that, instead of hiding his lack of familiarity both with the apostles and with the churches in Judea, he glories in it. It was through no such channel that he had his apostleship. Christ on high had called him. Such was the will of God the Father that had raised Christ from the dead.

But we have a good deal more. He tells us that fourteen years after he again went up to Jerusalem. He went up with Barnabas, taking Titus with him. It was by revelation, not by summons from Jerusalem, or to acquire a title thereby. And Titus,

as he says here,

who was with me, being a Greek, &c. {Gal. 2:3}.

So far from this being the smallest allowance of Jewish prejudice, it was itself a powerful blow against it. Thus, going up with Barnabas, he took Titus, a Gentile, along with him; and even so by revelation. It was rather to have Gentile liberty secured by the twelve apostles, and that the Judaizers should be condemned by the church at Jerusalem. It was the very reverse of deriving his authority from either. He went up by revelation for the purpose of getting a condemnation in Jerusalem itself of those who would force Jewish principles on the church of God at large. The legal mischief had emanated from Jerusalem: the remedy of grace must be applied by the apostles, elders, and brethren there. It was a misuse of the respect naturally accorded to some who came from Jerusalem; and so God took care to correct the evil by a formal, public, authoritative sentence of the body there, instead of a pure and simple rejection of the error among the Gentile churches, which might have looked like a schism, or at least a divergence of feeling between them and the apostle Paul. It might have been inferred that Paul was to do what he could with the Gentile churches, but that the twelve exclusively cared for the churches in Judæa, he consequently
having nothing to do with them. But it is not so. The apostle goes up to Jerusalem, not only with Barnabas, who had come from thence, but taking with him Titus, who seems not to have been there before -- Titus, his own valued companion in labour, but a Gentile. In fact, what Jerusalem had done, as far as this was concerned, was to let slip men that would impose circumcision -- evil workers, as he in a later epistle contemptuously calls such like of the concision; for they were corrupting the Gentile churches by Judaism, instead of helping them in Christ.

Thus, then, God directed and ruled that the apostle should go up and have the evil condemned on the spot, and at the centre from which it had emanated. And when he went there, was it a question of receiving aught from the twelve? Nay; he communicated unto them the gospel which he preached among the Gentiles. It was not that they communicated to him the gospel they had learned from Jesus here below, but he communicated to them that gospel he was in the habit of preaching among the Gentiles. But it was in no vain glory, in no tone of superiority, though, no doubt, it was a far fuller and higher testimony than theirs; for he adds, privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run or had run in vain {Gal. 2:2}.

He granted that persons might indulge in some such thoughts about him. It was for the chiefs at Jerusalem to judge for themselves, and they did judge to the confusion of the apostle's adversaries.

But neither Titus [he takes occasion to say parenthetically], being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised {Gal. 2:3}.

And what was the result of all this? Why, that though there were false brethren unaware brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage.

Paul did not give place by subjection even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with them {Gal. 2:4, 5}.

For the foundation was at stake.

But of these who seemed to be somewhat.

Here he takes up, not the mischievous trouble of the Gentiles, whom he does not hesitate to call false brethren,

but the highest in office he found there.

Of these who seemed to be somewhat (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me).

It is interesting to note the earnestness and strength with which the apostle speaks, now the question had been fairly raised. Pungent, abrupt, indignant, he none the less was led of God.

But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man’s person:) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me; but contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter, &c. {Gal. 2:6-9}.

A different issue ensued from their settling down in the mutual independence of the Gentile churches and the Jewish.

They gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision {Gal. 2:9}.

They thus acted and pronounced according to the evident intention of God conveyed in the character of their apostolates respectively.

Thus, it is seen, the truth was established. The apostle Paul interferes in no way with the work which God had given the others to do. He owned and valued, in its own place, the difficult, weighty, and momentous work which God had assigned to Peter, James, and the rest; but at the same time he stood firmly -- humbly, of course, and lovingly, but firmly -- for that which the Lord had assigned to himself and his colleagues among the Gentiles; and, so far from Christ's liberty having been in the least weakened, the apostolic conclave put their seal, with the whole church at Jerusalem, upon it most heartily (Acts 15). As it is said here,

They gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, that we should go unto the heathen and they unto the circumcision. Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do {Gal. 2:9, 10}.

But this was not all. He mentions another fact, and of the greatest gravity, closing this part of his argument -- that when Peter subsequently came down into the Gentile quarters, he had been himself affected by the subtle spirit of Judaism, i.e., the chief of the twelve! How little is man to be accounted of! -- And Paul, far from deriving his apostleship or aught else from Peter, was obliged to rebuke him, and this publicly.

When Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed: for before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles; but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? {Gal. 2:11-14}.

I call your attention particularly to this, brethren, that an act apparently so simple as Peter's ceasing to eat with the Gentiles had such a solemn character in the eye of the apostle Paul, that he considered it a question of the truth of the gospel. Are you prepared for this searching judgment of what looked a small and indifferent matter? Do your souls go along with Paul's decision? Or are you inclined toward the easy-going yieldingness of Peter? Can you seize the gravity of this?

Remember what it must have been to one like Paul to censure the most honoured of the twelve. For Peter is not said
to have withdrawn from the Lord’s table where the uncircumcised met, but from the simple matter of eating with the Gentiles. The truth of the gospel, to the apostle Paul’s mind, was at stake. Need it be added that he was right and Peter wrong? The gospel had brought in before God this double conclusion, founded on the first Adam and the last. It supposed, and went forth to every creature on the ground of the total ruin of Jew and Gentile. There was no difference: all had sinned. And it proclaimed the full and equally blessed standing of those who received Christ. There was no difference in the blessing of Christ: man’s guilt and God’s grace were alike indiscriminate. There was no difference either way (Rom. 3:10). But the act of Peter went to maintain a difference. The truth of the gospel, therefore, was compromised. And there were reasons why Peter was grievously in fault, particularly as he did no longer adhere to the law, but lived as one conscious of the freedom from it which the gospel gives those who believe in a risen Christ. Why then did he want the Gentiles to live as did the Jews?

The apostle accordingly now turns to the great argument of his epistle, and the discussion of those grand principles that are characteristic to Christianity, and in full agreement with the facts that have already been brought before you.

We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we may be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified {Gal. 2:15, 16}.

But then he goes farther. He says,

If, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore the minister of sin? {Gal. 2:17}.

This would have flowed from Peter’s conduct. Had Peter been right, it was evident that the gospel had put Peter in the wrong. The gospel had led Peter to treat the Jews and Gentiles all alike. The gospel had given him to sanction in his ways and words the overthrow of the partition wall. If Peter was acting rightly now, this had all been a mistake, and consequently the gospel -- nay, solemn to say, Christ Himself -- would be thus a minister of sin. Such was the serious but necessary import of Peter’s act. Peter would have been horrified at such a conclusion. This shows us the exceeding seriousness of a step apparently so trifling as his abstaining from further intercourse with the Gentiles in mere ordinary life. The apostle’s discerning eye at once judged by Christ and by that gospel which he had learned from Him. He habitually measured things not so much by their bearing on Jews or Gentiles as by their effect on Christ’s glory. In point of fact, to bring in Christ is also best of all to secure the blessing, the privileges, the glory that God has in His grace for every one that believes. Paul was pleading for the real interests of the Jew just as much as of the Gentile; but he presses this most clenching argument -- that Peter’s conduct involved the making Christ Himself the minister of sin; for if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor {Gal. 2:18}.

Then the apostle at once explains, as annexed to this, the real state of the case.

I through the law am dead to the law {Gal. 2:19}.

As you know, he had been under law as a Jew. And what was the effect of God’s giving him to have an application of law in his own conscience? Why, to feel himself a dead man. As it is reasoned out in Rom. 7, the law came, and he died.

I through law am dead to law, that I might live unto God {Gal. 2:19}.

The law in itself never produces such a result. All that the law can do, even when yielded by the might of the Spirit of God, is to force on a soul the consciousness of being dead before God. The law is never life to the dead, but kills morally those who seem alive.

I through law am dead to law.

It is thus, then, that grace uses it to give me death in my conscience before God. Thus I am dead through the law. The Spirit of God can employ it to make a man feel that all is over with him; but He goes farther in grace, and by that very law brings the man in dead to the law, and not merely condemned. He through law died to law, that he might live to God! Here he comes to the positive blessing; for the Spirit cannot rest in what is but negative. But it is life after death to law, and consequently in another sphere.

He next announces the true secret of it all:

I am crucified with Christ {Gal. 2:20}.

It is not merely that I have found in Christ a Saviour, but I am crucified with Christ. My very nature is dealt with. All that I have as a living man in the world is gone, -- not, of course, as a mere matter of fact, but, what is far more important, as a matter of faith. The history of the flesh -- its sad and humbling history -- is soon over; but the history that faith opens into never closes.

I am crucified with Christ.

This terminates all for me as a living man here below.

Nevertheless -- astonishing to say, for it could not be natural life -- nevertheless, I live.

And what sort of life can this be?

Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me {Gal. 2:20}.

How precious to have done with one’s sinful self and to begin a life so perfect as Christ’s!

And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me {Gal. 2:20}.

I have nothing to do with the law any more, even if I had been once under it as a Jew. For the law was used with killing power; and, slain as it were in my conscience, I found in that very place Christ Himself by the grace of God, -- Christ that died for me; and not merely this, but Christ in whom I died. I am crucified with Christ: consequently all that remains for me is living this new life which Christ is in me. And this life is sustained by the very same person who is its source.
The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

It is not a question of my loving Him, though this is and must be true of the saints; but this would tend to throw the soul on self, and it is not the reckoning of grace. What comforts the soul, what strengthens and keeps it up, is that He loved me, and gave Himself for me.

Thus, as he says most emphatically,

I do not frustrate the grace of God [Gal. 2:21];

they did, every one who substituted aught but Christ and His cross. Every one who went back from such a gospel as this was, as far as it went, frustrating the grace of God.

If righteousness come by the law,

(he does not merely say, “come of the law,” but come by it,)

then Christ is dead [died] in vain [Gal. 2:21].

Not so; it is exclusively of grace by Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. It is wholly apart from works of law.

Accordingly, in the next chapter he pursues his reasoning.

O foolish Galatians,

he now breaks out in an impassioned appeal to them,

who hath bewitched you [that ye should not obey the truth should here vanish], before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth crucified among you? [Gal. 3:1].

Observe the place the cross has here, not merely Christ’s blood, but His death on the cross. As we saw it in the Corinthians applied to judge the worldliness of the saints there, so here it judges their legalism.

This only would I learn of you. Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? [Gal. 3:2].

There are two things in the Christian; he has a life, a new life in Christ, but he has also the Holy Ghost. The law kills instead of giving life, and puts under condemnation instead of giving that Spirit which is necessarily a spring of sonship and liberty. Having brought in the true character of the Christian’s life as flowing simply and solely from Christ, and from Christ crucified too, so here he takes up the Holy Ghost. He was given, whether in power or in person, not by the law, but by the hearing of faith.

Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain, if it be yet in vain? He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? [Gal. 3:3-5].

There could be but one answer. This immense privilege had no connection with law whatever. The Holy Ghost is given as the seal of faith in Christ on the accomplishment of redemption, not before nor otherwise.

Then he takes up Abraham; for this is always the stock argument of those who would bring in circumcision and the law, Abraham being emphatically the friend of God and the father of the faithful. And mark how the Holy Ghost turns Abraham into an additional and most unexpected proof of the grace of God and the truth of the gospel. Only we must carefully bear this in mind, that in the epistle to the Galatians we never rise exactly to church ground. It is Christian ground, certainly, but not the church as such. Of course the same persons who are here in present view belonged to the church of God; but then they are not contemplated in their heavenly relationship, but as the children of promise, as we shall see in the end of this very chapter. There are many present privileges and future glories that belong to the Christian; and promise is one of them. We are not to suppose that a higher and more heavenly character blots out the lesser place; of this the apostle takes advantage here. But he proves more when he says that Abraham believed God; it was plainly not a question of law. Abraham never heard of the law.

Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith (not those that cry up the law)

are the children of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith,

not by becoming proselytes of the gate, or entering on a legal basis, but

foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed [Gal. 3:6-8].

Later, and in a far fuller way now, the gospel was the blessed answer to this early grace. He does not say that it is the complement of it; but most decidedly it flows from the same divine spring of grace. The gospel, not the law, owns its kindred with the promise.

So then,
says he,

they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham [Gal. 3:9].

The law holds out but never gives blessing. Those that are of faith, not those who pretend to the law and do it not, are blessed with their father.

But he goes deeply. He tells them that as many as take the ground of law-works are under the curse already. Not that they have actually broken down and failed; but so incapable is man of standing before God on the principle of doing the law, that it is all over with him the moment he pretends to it.

As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them [Gal. 3:10].

The consequence is, that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God; and this he proves, not only from the promise, but from the prophets. When the prophet speaks of any one living, it is by faith --

The just shall live by faith [Gal. 3:11].

Hence, you see, all exactly suits the gospel as Paul insisted on
it.

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ [Gal. 3:13, 14].

He does not say, that the Gentiles were under that curse, but that Christ bought off us who were in this position from its curse; for in truth, whatever might be our boast, all we (the Jews) got from the law was a curse, not a blessing; and what Christ did for us was to purchase us from that awful plight in which the law could not but put us because we had transgressed it. And thus the blessing of Abraham could flow freely towards the Gentiles who never were there.

And this leads to another point, -- the relation of the law to the promises. How do they stand related? and how do they affect each other? The apostle turns this into an admirable piece of divine reasoning in defence of the gospel.

Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; though it be but a man's covenant, yet, if it be confirmed, no man annulleth or addeth thereto [Gal. 3:13].

Everybody knows this. When once a covenant is "signed, sealed, and delivered," it must not be meddled with. You cannot lawfully add to it, any more than set aside its provisions.

Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. He saith not, And to seeds, as to many; but as to one. And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant confirmed before by God unto Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, can not annul so that it should make the promise of none effect [Gal. 3:16, 17].

Such is the application.

For if the inheritance be of law, it is no more of promise [Gal. 3:18]:

otherwise by the condition of law you would annul the promise. That is to say, the covenant that was made between God and Abraham had reference to the seed which was coming, symbolized by Isaac, but really looking onward to Christ. Nothing that God afterwards introduced annulled this. If the law, introduced afterwards, were allowed to exercise control, the effect would be to set aside the promise. It would be first adding to it, and not only so, but annulling it. The inheritance, therefore, depends on the grace of God fulfilling His promise, not on man's accomplishment of the law, even if possible. The promise is therefore entirely distinct from the law, which was not heard of for four hundred and thirty years after. The long lapse of time ought to have guarded men from mixing up the law with the promise, and thus from the appearance of annulling the promise by the law, for this would be most dishonouring to God. We can understand a foolish man making a covenant, and the next day repenting of it, which is never true of the divine purposes. In this case it was God that gave the promise; it was He that confirmed the covenant to Christ, without saying a word about the law till four hundred and thirty years after. How impossible, therefore, to add the law to the promise! Still less is it possible to let the law set its force aside.

To Abraham were the promises made, and to his seed [Gal. 3:16].

This is exceedingly important, and the more as I believe the scope of the allusion to Abraham and to his seed is not often appreciated. The argument is founded upon the unity of the seed of promise in this connection. For God does speak elsewhere, and even on this occasion, of a numerous seed. One of the encouragements, as we know, which God furnished to Abraham was, that he should have a seed like the sand of the sea, and like the stars of the sky. These were his lineal posterity. But where the Gentiles are mentioned, God only speaks of seed without reference to number.

This is best seen by turning to Gen. 22, where both facts are found in the same context. I just refer to it for a moment, because it adds much to the beauty of the reasoning in Galatians. In Gal. 2:17 it is written,

In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore.

At first sight it seems most extraordinary, if the apostle referred to such a Scripture for the proof of the importance of one seed; because, if there is anything that lies on the surface of the passage, it is the multiplicity of the seed -- a seed expressly said to exceed all reckoning. This, then, is not what the apostle Paul has in view, but in contrast with it. And mark the difference. When God speaks of the seed numerous as the sand or the stars, He gives them a Jewish character of blessing.

Thy seed (i.e., the numerous seed) shall possess the gate of his enemies [Gen. 22:17].

God promises the final power and glory of Israel in the earth, putting down their foes, and so forth.

But immediately after this it is added,

In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed [Gen. 22:18].

Here we have the Gentiles expressly named, and to this the apostle refers. Mark it well. When God gives a pledge not of possessing the gate of enemies, when He speaks of the blessing of the nations, instead of the overthrow of Israel's foes, then he speaks simply of thy seed. There is no comparison of countless seed; there is not an allusion to the sand of the sea, or to the stars of the sky. On this the apostle reasons.

What the Jews would have liked, no doubt, was power (and the Galatians, after all, were in danger of slipping into the same snare; for the law suits the world, as grace does not), and in the world present power and honour. This the Jews are destined to have by-and-by; for the promises to Abraham are not exhausted yet. Whereas the Holy Ghost by the apostle draws attention to the contrast of thy seed (as one) with the numerous seed, with earthly blessing attached to them; whilst to thy seed
simply, without reference to stars or to sand, no more is annexed than the blessing of Gentiles. This it is to which we are come now under Christianity. By-and-by will be fulfilled the promised earthly blessing, and power, and glory for Israel like the sand and the stars. The Jews will surely be exalted, as well as converted nationally, and they will then put down their enemies, being made the head when other nations become the tail. But meanwhile, under the gospel, there is an express promise of the blessing of the Gentiles when God spoke of the one seed, which is Christ. Already the true Isaac, is given, and in that true seed the Gentiles are being blessed. It is no question now of being subject to the Jews, who shall never possess the gate of their enemies, but be peeled and scattered and few, while the gospel is going forth. The other part remains, and must be accomplished in its own day, when Israel’s heart turns to the Lord. Meanwhile another and a better sort of blessing is given, as a better Seed also is given -- the true Heir of all the promises of God, even Christ the Lord. And, doubtless, God had all this in view when He pledged Himself with an oath to Abraham. He did not forget His people Israel; but He had always the glory of Christ before Him; and the moment we rise up to this blessed Seed of all blessing (the true Isaac, dead and risen really, as the son of Abraham was then in figure), the blessing of the Gentiles is secured in that one sole person, before the Jews are multiplied in their land under the new covenant, and possess the gate of their enemies.

This then is the apostle’s allusion and reasoning; but he proceeds to meet a natural objection. If the promise be the only means of enjoying the inheritance, what is the good of the law? Does not this make very light of it? You say that the promise is everything, and that the law cannot either set aside the promise or add other clauses to it. What then is the end of the law? It is for the purpose of bringing in transgression, answers the apostle. This is all that people’s zeal and labour come to. They spring from unbelief -- from undue thoughts of self, from ignorance of God, from slight thoughts of Christ. Legal activity is but labouring in the fire for vanity; and if, alas! the Christian dooms himself to such hard labour instead of resting in the faith of Christ, whom has he to blame? Certainly not God, nor His plain and precious word. He will gain transgression thereby; nothing more, nothing better.

Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator [Gal. 3:19].

Thus it is evident that the legal system is a parenthesis. Promise was before the law, and flowed out of the grace of God. The law came in meanwhile, serving its own object, which was to bring out what was in the heart of man. For he is a sinner; and the law called out the sin into articulate transgressions, and made it perfectly plain that the heart is only evil continually, and proves it by plain transgressions; that is all. Then comes the seed, and the promise is made Yea and Amen in Him -- all the promises of God. As made under the law He was for Israel; but He died and rose, and was thus free to bless a Gentile as much as a Jew. For what has a risen man to do with Israel more than the nations? All question of natural ties drops in death; as the cross is the disproof of any right to Christ in either. For Jew and Gentile were alike guilty of crucifying Him. All therefore becomes a matter of the pure grace of God; and He is pleased to bless the Gentiles in the Seed, even Christ dead and risen.

The law is of a wholly different nature, and hence was ordained of angels in the hand of a mediator. The creature intervenes here, and the consequence soon appears. For he comes to another and most cogent argument.

Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one [Gal. 3:20].

The meaning is that you never can get stability in blessing until you have simply God putting forth His own power according to His own grace. Leave room for God, and for God alone. Such is the only possible way in which blessing can be brought in, in order that such souls as we are should be blessed and maintained in it. And thus it is with the promise. In it there is one party, -- even God Himself, who gave it, and accordingly fulfils it in that Seed to whom the covenant was confirmed. But the moment you bring in the law, you have two parties; and, strange to say, instead of the greater party being God, it becomes man, whose responsibility is to God. God asks, and man is called to give, i.e., is called to obedience. Alas! we know too well the result from sinful man. Grace alone in such a case brings glory to God. Thus, clearly, in the law man becomes the prominent and responsible party, not God. This never can bring man to God any more than glory to God. The law, accordingly, never was the truth, either on God’s side, or man’s. It was, of course, altogether just and right in itself. Man had his duty to God, and he ought to have done his duty; but it was precisely what he could not do, because he was a sinner. To make this evident by transgressions was the object of the law. It was to demonstrate his sinfulness, not to gain the inheritance. But this was only provisional and parenthetic. After all, what God had at heart was the accomplishment of His own promise in grace. When He gave the promise to Abraham, He said,

I will give.

And now in Christ He has accomplished it -- I mean already. But before He sent the promised Seed, man’s self confidence needed the discipline of the intermediate thing, the law; and after infinite long-suffering on God’s part, the people who undertook to obey it had to be swept out of the land for their disobedience.

The law was given them with all pomp and solemnity. It was ordained by angels, who had nothing to do with promise, which God gave direct to His friend. When He had anything unailing to do or say, He loved to appear in grace; He said it Himself, and did it for Himself. But when men would have anything fraught with distress to His people, when through their folly confusion must ensue, contrary to all that His heart loved, then it was left to others. Thus the law was ordained by angels in the hands of a mediator. A double intervention comes between God and man, in contrast with the simplicity of His ways of grace. In grace, God in the person of His Son
speaks and accomplishes all; and thus He is glorified from first to last. Man is only the receiver; and truly, as we know, it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).

God reserves to Himself this great blessedness in the gospel; whereas under the law there was nothing of the kind. Then I must repeat that God could only make claims; and man had to take the place, if he could, of giving to God -- of rendering his obedience. He was bound to do what he ought; but, in point of fact, all was a failure, and could be nothing else, because man was a sinner.

This then is what the law brought in. Is it against the promise of God? Not at all. Rather, if man had been able to obey the law and so acquire a title, then two systems would have interfered with each other as being to the same end. Some would have received the inheritance because of promise, and others on the ground of law. Thus the two totally opposite roads of grace and law would have been leading to the same result. This must be indeed confusion; as it is, there is none. Under law all is lost; under grace all is saved. The law and the promise are both from God, but the law’s use is only negative and condemnation. It cannot and ought not to spare sinners. The promise has another and most blessed place. It brings in deliverance for man in the accomplishment of God’s purpose in Christ. This is what is found under it. Thus the law pulls down what is evil, and the promise gives what is good and builds it up. The law brings man in his nothingness into evidence, it proves that he is only a poor lost sinner. Grace brings out the faithful promise of God, and His goodness to him that deserves nothing. Thus, rightly understood and applied, the law and the promises, while wholly distinct, are in no way inconsistent with each other. Merge them, as unbelief does, and all is confusion and ruin.

Further, it is laid down, if there had been a law capable of giving life, righteousness would be by the law. But this could not be. On the contrary,

the Scripture hath concluded all under sin {Gal. 3:22}

-- not under righteousness -- by law. Thus, whether it be the Gentile without law, or the Jew with it, all are shut up under sin.

The scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe {Gal. 3:22}.

But, he adds, faith is come (that is, the testimony to be believed by man now, or the gospel). This he means, here by faith.

Before faith came we [Jews] were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God {Gal. 3:23-26}.

Instead of being under a slave, with rigorous and humiliating discipline, there is now the place of a child before his Father; the Christian stands by faith of Jesus in direct relationship to God.

Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus {Gal. 3:26}.

This is shown still more fully in the allusion to baptism:

As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ {Gal. 3:27}.

It is of course assumed that every Christian had been baptized. There was no doubt or difficulty on this head in these early days. There was no believer, Jew or Gentile, who had not gladly submitted to that very blessed sign of having part with Christ, and of that which is made good by Christ.

As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

It is not a question of law at all. Christian baptism, contrariwise, supposes man dead; and the only death that can deliver man out of his own death is the death of Christ. Therefore, when a man is baptized, he is not, of course, baptized into his own death; there is no sense in such a thought. He is baptized into Christ's death, which is the sole means of deliverance out of his state of sin. So here the Christian puts on Christ, not the law or circumcision. He wants to get rid of the first Adam and all its appliances, not to keep it on; and therefore he puts on Christ.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female {Gal. 3:28}; all is Christ and only Christ. It is not an old creation, but a new one. Can anything prove that it is not an old creation better than this -- that there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female, which last at least is an absolute necessity for the perpetuation of the race? All this vanishes in Christ; we are all one in Him; and if you are Christ's, what need to be circumcised? You do not want to become the children of Abraham in that sense, which would be the revival of the flesh. If Christ’s, they were Abraham’s seed already, and heirs according to the promise {Gal. 3:29};

for Christ, he had shown before, was the one true Seed; and if we are Christ’s, we belong to that one true Seed, and therefore are the children of Abraham without circumcision at all. Nothing can be more conclusive than this disproof of the fleshly pretensions that were connected with Jerusalem, and were brought in under cover of Abraham, but really to the subversion of the gospel.

In Gal. 4 the relation is taken up, not of the law to the promise, but of the Christian now to the condition of the saints of old -- a very important point also. Here one may be very brief:

The heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors, until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, &c. {Gal. 4:1-3}.

The comparison would take in the Old Testament saints; or the application (“even so we”) is to those then alive, who had been under that state of things.
We, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world; but when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons [Gal. 4:3-5].

The apostle shows that, so far from bringing in Christians and putting them on the ground of the Old Testament, God is really leading those who were in that connection out of it all by redemption. He fully allows that the Lord was both made of a woman and made under the law; but what was the ultimate object in view? It was not to keep people under the law, still less could it be to put any under the law, but to bring them clean out if they had been under it before. Such was the case with the Old Testament believers, and many Jewish believers then alive. Was it possible, then, that any could desire to put the Gentiles under law, when they had been brought out from it themselves by the will of God, the work of Christ, and the witness of the Holy Spirit? What a gross inconsistency! What a subversion, not only of the truth of God revealed in the gospel, but also of redemption, which is its basis! For Christ bought off those that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons, bringing them by grace into a place of known salvation and intelligent joy in relation with our God and Father, out of that bondage and nonage which the law supposes.

But what about the Gentiles?

Because ye are sons [Gal. 4:6].

He does not condescend to reason about their place in the matter, but puts them at once in their due relationship. Because they were sons, God sent that blessed proof and power of their sonship. He gives freely the Holy Ghost on their acceptance of Christ’s name; or, as it is here written,

He sent forth the Spirit of his Son in your hearts, crying, Abba, Father [Gal. 4:6].

That is, if the Holy Ghost was given as the seal of their redemption, and as the joy of the sonship, wherein they now stood, in the exercise of their nearness to God and enjoyment of His love, they cry,

Abba, Father,

-- the very words of Christ himself (but in how different circumstances!) to His Father.

Wherefore, thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ [Gal. 4:7].

Thence he advances to another point of his argument. Indeed, we may say that now he thunders on the Galatians that were dragging in the law. Did they know that for a Gentile Christian to take up Judaic elements is in principle to go back to heathenism? Heathenism! Why they thought they were becoming more truly religious, more reverent in their value for Scripture. They thought that Christianity would be all the better for adopting the ancient forms and beautiful figures of the law. Not at all, says the apostle, you are returning straight into your old heathenism without knowing it yourselves. For he had shown that our purchase by Christ delivers even the Jew from subjection to the law; whilst Gentiles are set at once on the ground of grace without the intervention of any legal apprenticeship whatever.

Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? [Gal. 4:8, 9].

What can be conceived more serious or trenchant than such a statement as this? Impossible to find a blast more withering to all that they were aiming at. Born and bred in the abominable idolatries of the heathen, they were strangers to the institutions of Israel. They had been lately brought by the grace of God into Christianity, where they found Jewish brethren, now made one, as it is said, in Christ. Ignorant or false men had made them hanker after circumcision. What were they doing? When a Gentile Christian, mark, takes up such Old Testament elements, according to the Holy Ghost, it is not to him merely Judaism, but a return to his Gentile idols, little as he may think so.

Jewish elements were borne with in a Jew. The apostle Paul himself, in Rom. 14, insists upon the forbearance of a Gentile even towards the Jew that might be still encumbered by his days, meats, and so on. But the moment a Gentile takes the system up, or a Jew presses it on a Gentile, it is nothing but downright heathenism. Who would have ventured to say, without express scripture, that the old Jewish forms thus adopted by a Gentile believer have such an idolatrous character? Yet how true it is, the more we look below the surface; indeed, in our day it becomes more and more palpable to the eye. Ritualism is the present most patent comment on the apostle’s statement. The very defence set up, and the meanings which these men put on the forms and ceremonies of which they make Christianity so largely to consist, demonstrate their most barefaced turning back to idolatry. Do not suppose that idolatry has its character saved because Jesus is worshipped. Christianity refuses to be muddled with anything but itself. Tender and comprehensive as Christianity is, it is also the most exclusive thing that can be. Truth must necessarily be exclusive, and all who hold the truth must, in their adhesion to it and Him who is its personal expression, be exclusive too. (I mean by this, of course, exclusive of sin and falsehood.) There can be no compromise; but to be exclusive in any sense save as the expression of the truth in Christ would be in its own way an utter and heartless falsehood. There is nothing that requires more the power of grace; for even the truth itself, if severed from grace, ceases to be the truth. Being found only in Christ, it supposes the manifestation of grace; light does not in the same way that truth does.

Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ [John 1:17].

(Compare John 1:9 and 1:17.)

Now the Galatians were unwittingly in danger of giving up the truth. They were only, as they supposed, beginning to cherish a becoming attitude toward the religion of the fathers, and of all who had before Christ honoured God on earth. Venerable religion! -- the only system of earthly worship which had ever possessed God’s sanction. Why not adopt
what was wanting in Christianity? Where was the harm of taking up what saints of old submitted to? No, rejoins the apostle; you are going back to heathenism. They had been idolaters before they became Christians; and to take up Jewish principles in addition to Christ is to turn back again to their cast-off idols. Next, we are told, wherein this consisted.

Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. 

[Gal. 4:10].

What! is this all? I have known a divine who had a character for intelligence use these words as a motto and sanction. And no wonder. Christendom is built upon this footing. They think that it is quite right, for the church especially, to appoint days for this and that saint; to have certain seasons to remind one of the Lord's incarnation, ministry, and crucifixion, of His resurrection, ascension, and so on. I choose the best facts; for I have no wish to rake up abuses. All this is counted a great, wise, and sensible help to devotion. Well, "sensible" help in the meaning of an appeal to nature it is; but it is a sensible help to idolatry, not to living faith. This is the very evil which the Spirit of God so earnestly and energetically denounces here by the apostle Paul. He does not charge them with anything of an openly gross or immoral nature; but what a proof that the truth of God, that the grace of Christ, is exclusive of everything but itself! Nor is there a greater evidence of God's tender and considerate care for us than such a fact as this. For He knows our tendency to mingle law with grace in some form or measure, and treats that which was of the fathers and long before Moses, as a foreign ingredient deleterious to Christians. As God has wrought for us on the cross, and delivered us from every atom of sin in Christ, so He will not allow us to mix one earthly or legal element with the revelation of His grace, which He has made ours in redemption, and proclaimed to us by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.

Hereon the apostle puts before them another expostulation:

I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain. [Gal. 4:11].

And this directly follows his censure of their observance of times and seasons.

Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as ye are. [Gal. 4:12].

They knew very well that he had nothing to do with the law or its ordinances.

Be as I am.

By this he plainly means -- free from law.

For I am as ye are.

They were, after all, Gentiles, and as such ought to have had nothing to do with the law. So he calls on them to be as free of the law as himself. For he, though a Jew, had completely done with the law, and all that pertains to it.

For I am as ye are: ye have not injured me at all. [Gal. 4:12].

That is, the apostle, instead of regarding his despised freedom from the law as a just reproach, glories in it. There was no insult to him, nor injury done, in saying that he did not acknowledge the law for a Christian.

But, further, he refers in a very affecting manner to some personal circumstances -- how in his own body he was a witness of having nothing to do with flesh; for what God had been pleased to put upon him as serving Him in the gospel was not great power of nature, but that which made him contemptible in his preaching. It is evident that the thorn in the flesh was something which left him open to a slight, and made it difficult indeed for any one to understand how a man who was called to be an apostle should find it hard to convey plainly his mind in preaching. It is quite obvious that there was a hindrance of some sort. It seems to have been something which affected his speech too, and exposed him to ridicule and to unfavourable comments where men were carnally-minded. But in this he could glory. It was something painful to bear. At first he prayed the Lord to take it from him; but no! though he had prayed thrice, as his Lord had done on another and wondrous occasion, so the apostle was to have communion with Christ in this way, and learn that there is something better than the taking away of that which makes nothing of the flesh. The power of Christ must rest upon him. Thus it appears that the Galatians as well as the Corinthians had been similarly affected. And this leads him to speak of another trial. When they first knew him, there was no difficulty felt on this score; they heard him as an angel of God. It was they who had changed, not he. They had so completely lost sight of the grace of Christ, the sweetness and the bloom of it, that he travailed again for them: his soul once more passed through that which had exercised him when they were converted.

Then he gives a closing blow to those who doted about the law. He says to those who would be under the law, why do you not listen to the law? Look at Abraham and his house; look at the maid Hagar; look at Isaac and Ishmael. There you have in a figure the two parties that are still found on the earth: the law party symbolized by Ishmael, the child of flesh; and those that cling to the grace of God, who have their pattern in Isaac, the child of promise. Now, what does God say about it? Why this:

Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, and the other by a freewoman. [Gal. 4:22].

The apostle expressly reasons on Abraham, as they were always anxious to cite Abraham, the father of circumcision. Their main support then, as they thought Abraham, had two sons; but they stood, according to Scripture, on wholly different principles.

The child of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. [Gal. 4:23].

How apt the illustration for exposing the judaizers! The case is hit off exactly to the life. Which son represented them? Under which type did they fall -- Ishmael or Isaac? Whom did their principle make them resemble?

There can be no doubt about the matter.

Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? [Gal. 4:21].

Which things are an allegory: for these are the two
covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, which answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us [all?]. For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath a husband [Gal. 4:24-27].

The application of this is as plain as it is conclusive, for those who appealed to Abraham and bowed to the word of God. Instead of going up to Jerusalem on earth, instead of endeavouring to effect a junction with the law or anything else here below, the gospel wants no such allies, but repudiates them all. The very reverse of their system is true. The true link is with Jerusalem above, as our prototype is Isaac, the child of the freewoman. Theirs was the slave’s son -- Ishmael.

Then, bringing in the name of Jerusalem, the Spirit leads him to apply the prophecy of Isaiah, which shows that millennial Israel (in their turn abandoning self-righteousness, and made free by God’s grace in Christ) will look back and count as their own those now brought in as Christians, and find far more children begotten by the gospel, in the time of their own desolation, than even when they flourished of old, and had all that earthly power and glory could give. Thus a decisive blow is struck at the principle of connection with the law; and it was evident that they did not truly hear the law {Gal. 4:21}.

Their ears were heavy, and their eyes blinded by their legalism. Nor did they understand the prophets better. To be under law was fatal to Jerusalem. Everything lost then would be gained when promise has its way. Up to the destruction of Jerusalem it was law; but now, under Christianity, Jerusalem, being rebellious and scornful of promise like Ishmael, is cast out and has nothing. She is desolate; she is no longer in the condition of the married wife, but like the fugitive bondwoman. She is as one that has no husband. Yet, wondrous to say, when she desires to be under grace by-and-by, all those that are now brought in by promise will be accounted as children to her. Such is the reasoning in which the apostle uses this very remarkable prophecy. When Jerusalem is humbled by the mercy of God, and betakes herself to her Messiah and the new covenant, she will hear the law,

and the prophets will be accomplished in her blessing, and in the largeness of love the present children of promise (even Christians, as being in a certain mystical sense children of Jerusalem) will be her boast. But this will be Jerusalem, under not law but promise and liberty, restored by grace after having lost everything by the law, and reduced to utter desolation. But for us now the apostle carefully adds the principle of our heavenly character. Ours is Jerusalem above, not a city on earth. That is, he links on the heavenly character of Jerusalem for us before touching on the desolate place of Jerusalem after the flesh, or of the predicted change of heart and blessing in grace, when she will be glad to appropriate, as it were, the Christians born now after the Spirit. This closes the course of the apostle’s argument.

* * *

Next he turns to direct exhortation, the chief salient points of which will call for but few words. It is liberty and not law that the Christian stands in. At the same time he insists in the most peremptory manner that our liberty in Christ is to be used for holiness. He shows that the Spirit of God dwelling in the believer gives no license for the action of the flesh. In other words, if the believer simply were one forgiven by grace, without having either life in Christ or the Holy Ghost dwelling in him, he might, perhaps, plead that he could not avoid sinning. He had been brought to a place of blessing outside himself and by another, the Saviour, which in itself gives the soul motives indeed but not power; whereas, for the soul who is brought to God by the gospel, and planted in the liberty wherein Christ makes free before God, it is no more a question of flesh, but of the Holy Ghost who is given to him. And who will venture to say that the indwelling Spirit of God fails to supply power to him who submits to the righteousness of God in Christ? Hence the point is not at all whether we have intrinsic power, but whether He is not now abiding in us as a Spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind {see 2 Tim. 1:7}.

Undoubtedly such is the assurance of God’s word to His children; and thus Gal. 5 is in contrast with Rom. 7. In that chapter of Romans we have a man converted indeed, but without liberty, and consequently powerless. He sees the right, feels the good, desires the holy, but never accomplishes. The reason is, that he has not yet come to own by faith that he has no strength any more than righteousness, and that Christ is all and in all. He is afresh making efforts to improve, yet still in bondage and misery. He is occupied with himself. He feels what he ought to do, but he does it not, and thus is increasingly wretched. Sense of duty is not power. What gives power is the heart surrendering itself in everything, and thus set at liberty by Christ. I am perfectly delivered, and the measure of my deliverance is Christ, and Christ raised from the dead. This is Christianity; and when the soul thankfully accepts from God this blessed liberty, the Holy Ghost is given to and acts in the believer as a Spirit of peace and power; so that if there is the flesh lustng against the Spirit, the Spirit resists this, in order that (for such is the true meaning) they should not do the things that they would.

Accordingly he draws from this a most weighty argument against bringing in the law as the rule of life for the believer. You do not need it, because the Holy Ghost thus working strengthens you unto love. Liberty comes first, mark; power and love afterwards. And how true all this is! Make a child thoroughly happy, and you will soon see that its duty becomes comparatively light and a joy. But when one is miserable, does not every duty, even where it may be as light as a feather, feel as if it were an iron chain on you? It is no wonder that one who is thus tied and bound feels restive under it. Far otherwise is God’s way with souls. He makes one first thoroughly happy in the sense of His grace and the liberty Christ has won, and then the Holy Ghost becomes an
indwelling spring of power, though His power is put forth in us only as we have Christ kept before us. Thus, if we walk in the Spirit, we shall not fulfil the desires of the flesh. Such is the secret of true power. The consequence is,

If ye are led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law {Gal. 5:18};

and more than this, if we are producing the fruits of the Spirit, he can easily say,

Against such there is no law {Gal. 5:23}.

Let others talk as they will of the law, no law can censure the real fruits of the Holy Ghost, or those in whom they are found.

Then we come to the closing chapter; and here we find the Spirit of God calling for tenderness in dealing with those who are overtaken in a fault.

Ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted {Gal. 6:1}.

Besides, we have a more daily duty:

Bear ye one another’s burdens {Gal. 6:2}.

It is not merely to seek in love a fallen brother, but to be the succourer of others in their difficulties. Love finds its activity in caring for those that are cast down,

and so fulfils the law of Christ {Gal. 6:2}.

Do you want a law? Is not this just the law for you? It is the law of Christ. Thus He lived and moved here below. The law of Moses tells a man to do his duty in his own place. The law of Christ makes the going out of love towards another, so to speak, to be his joy. It was exactly what Christ was on earth; and the expression of Christ is the prime call of the Christian.

But there is more for us. He shows that God would give us a deliverance from self-importance; and what a mercy it is to be so blessed; that one can afford to forget one’s self!

Now, the law always brings fallen man into importance: such it must be in its principle. The law necessarily makes the man, and the man’s doings, to be the prominent object. Hence the effect of the law in all its ramifications on man is the same. Thus it wrought among the Galatians. After all their vapouring about the law, they were biting and devouring one another. Was this the love the law claimed? Had they been occupied with Christ, they would have really loved one another, and in other respects too fulfilled the law, without thinking about themselves or it. Such is the effect of Christianity, and such in perfection was Christ Himself. But spite of, or rather because of, their use of law, they were self-important, without holy power, and judged instead of loving each other. How abortive is man in the things of God!

For if a man think himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceiteth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone; and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden {Gal. 6:3-5}.

Thus, whatever may be the energy that seeks souls in love, there is nothing after all like Christianity for maintaining individual responsibility intact.

How wholesome is the language here,

Every one shall bear his own burden!

But responsibility is always according to the relation in which one stands, and the measure of knowledge which each possesses, or ought to possess. Let me press this gravely upon those who are here this night. If I am a man, I am responsible as such; being fallen and sinful, this will end in judgment. If I am a Christian, I am responsible according to that position and privilege. My responsibility is defined by the place in which I am found. If I am a mere man, a sinner, the end of that is (for responsibility is not like power, destroyed by sin) the eternal judgment of God. If I am a Christian, I acquire a new kind of responsibility. My business is to act consistently with the new place in which grace has put me. Let us never confound the two. One of the most dangerous errors in Christendom is, that these two things are lumped together.

The truth is the distinctive boon and mark of Christendom. There is now much confusion of things that differ; and so, more or less, error runs through the whole of it in all its parts; but I know not anything more ruinous than this. The most difficult thing in Christendom is for people to know what it is to be Christians, and to take this place by the faith of Christ themselves. That is, the most simple and most obvious truth is just the last thing a man thinks about. And no wonder. What Satan aims at is, that people should not count themselves what they are, and that they should be always slipping into what they are not. The result of this is, that neither God has His place, nor they. All is confusion. Christ is forgotten.

But then there is another point of exhortation too; and surely we ought not to forget that there are not only the common links of love, and the willingness to succour one another, as we see, beginning with a most extreme case and ending with a general one; but still further,

Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things {Gal. 6:6};

and not only that, but also the general responsibility of the saint and in a solemn manner. It is not only that we are put now where we can be the witness to grace in all its outgoings, but, besides that, we are where flesh might show itself. And this is a universal principle. If I sow to the flesh, I shall of the flesh reap corruption; if I sow to the Spirit, I shall reap life everlasting. Eternal life is beyond doubt the gift of divine grace; but, besides, the eternal life that I have now by pure and simple faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is what I find at the end of my course as well as at the starting. There is such a thing as, by patient continuance in well doing, to seek for eternal life. Eternal life is spoken of in this double way in scripture (Rom. 6:22, 23); and I also press this as a truth of no small importance and but too much forgotten.

Then, further, attention is drawn to another topic -- his own writing of this letter. It was a very unusual circumstance. The apostle, as far as I know, wrote no other letter to any one of the churches of the saints. To the Galatians there was an exception. If he wrote to the Romans, it was transcribed, or at any rate written, by another. He signed ordinarily, putting his subscription at the end, i.e., his own name, to verify it; but he did not write it. Writing was a somewhat laborious task in those days, and it was a kind of
profession to be a writer or scribe, before printing, of course, was known. Now the apostle in writing to the Galatians was so moved in love, and so yearned over them in their danger, that he actually wrote the epistle with his own hand. He draws particular attention to this fact ere he closes:

You see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand [Gal. 6:11].

Thus it was the ardour of love and grief; it was the earnestness of his purpose that could not bear in this instance to employ an intermediary. Just as he had shown that God in His love to man had given the promise direct, so the apostle Paul acts in his care for the saints of God where all the foundations were endangered.

Finally, he concludes by putting the sentence of death, if I may so say, on circumcision, and all such as might adopt it. He intimates also how vain a thing is legalism, because those that were pleading for circumcision in no case carried out their own principle. Bring in one part of law, and you fall under the authority of the whole. You are bound to carry it out consistently. This they never thought of doing. The enemy had ensnared them by crying up circumcision, in order to betray them into a link with Judaism; but they had no thought of bearing the real burden of the law. As for himself, he gloried only in the cross.

God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world [Gal. 6:14].

Along with the cross goes a new creation. How blessed, and how all-important for our souls! The cross has sentenced the world; and this very sentence of the world is our deliverance from the world. We are crucified unto it by grace, as the world is crucified unto us by judgment. For the world there is nothing yet executed, any more than the great results of grace for the saints as yet appear in their fulness. The solemnities of Christ’s judgment await men in the day of the Lord. But the whole matter is decided before God. And this is of immense moment to remember. Christianity brings everything to a climax; it also settles all questions. The Christian by the cross of Christ has terminated his connection with flesh, with the world, with the law. He is brought into another condition. And what is this? He is a new creature in Christ. Therefore, no wonder that he says,

God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

At the same time it is shown to be, not what it might seem, a negative power only, but along with it is the new creation into which grace forms us.

In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature [Gal. 6:15].

Gentiles might boast in their freedom. What ground is there for boasting in this? In Christ alone, in His cross, let us boast, and in the new creature which is by Christ. Therefore the apostle adds,

And as many as walk according to this rule [that is, the rule of the new creation], peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God [Gal. 6:16].

Those that walk according to this rule would be saints in general. The

Israel of God,

I apprehend, would mean, that the only part of Israel whom God owns now consists of those that really are of faith -- those that received Jesus. It is not a vague general expression for all saints, but implies that fleshly Israel was nothing now. If any of them believe in the Crucified, they were God’s Israel. Soon all will believe in Christ, and all Israel be saved. But this is a future prophetic vision not touched on here. The new creation is a present blessing that the soul already enjoys. It is an actual result of the cross of Christ. Consequently we have no allusion to the Lord’s coming in this epistle to the Galatians. It is all devoted to the deliverance of the saint from this present evil age by the cross of Christ, and his consistent maintenance of the new nature and position of grace -- of the new creation in Christ Jesus.

May the truth of God sink into our hearts! Thus all things fall into their place, and the Spirit connects us in heart with that which God is doing and will do for the glory of Christ. The apostle had heard enough of circumcision: it was repulsive to him henceforth. It was his to bear in his body a very different brand --

the marks of the Lord Jesus [Gal. 6:17],

the scars of the only warfare that is precious in the sight of God the Father. Lastly, he desires for his brethren, that

the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ [Gal. 6:18]

might be with their spirit. Nothing more in keeping with the wants of those addressed, who had so soon turned aside from the grace of Christ to a different gospel.

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Lectures Introductory
to the Study of
The Epistles of Paul the Apostle

Lecture 5
Ephesians

In this epistle we have the unfolding of the grace of God in all its fulness, not merely the application of His righteousness to man's need on His part, but God from out of Himself, and for Himself, as the adequate motive and object before Him, even His own glory. Hence it is that righteousness disappears in this epistle. We have had the gospel thus in all the epistles that have gone before. In Romans, in 1st and 2nd Corinthians, and in Galatians, righteousness was largely used. It was developed in a positive and comprehensive way, as in Romans. It was brought in either to convict the Corinthians of their utter departure through the spirit of the world, the flesh taking that shape, or it was brought in triumphantly on their restoration. Again, by it the apostle, writing to the Galatians, vindicated God's ways with man, and set the Christian outside the law.

But in Ephesians the aim is of much more absolute and direct character. It is not the wants of man in any sense, either positively or negatively. Here God from Himself and for Himself is acting according to the riches of His own grace. Accordingly the very opening brings before us this astonishingly elevated manner of presenting the great truth with which the apostle's heart was filled.

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God {Eph. 1:1}.

It was pre-eminently for this that he had been chosen as an apostle; and he represents his apostleship not here as a question of calling, but by the will of God:

everything in this epistle flows from the will of God; --
to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus {Eph. 1:1}.

Although about to show us what the church is in its heavenly blessing, that is, in its highest associations, he always begins with the individual. This was peculiarly needed. The tendency is ever to set aside what is personal for that which is corporate. The epistle to the Ephesians truly understood will help none so to do. It may be perverted to this or anything else; but so far is our corporate place from being put in the foreground that we do not hear one word about the assembly as such till the close of the first chapter. Only in Eph. 1:22 is the church even named for the first time, where it is said God has given Christ to be the head over all things to the church.

But up to this the saints are contemplated as such. The moral order of this is exceedingly beautiful. In the admirable wisdom and grace of God it is the direct setting aside of that which is found in all earthly systems, where the individual is merely a portion of a vast body which arrogates to itself the highest claims. It is not so in the word of God. There the individual blessing of the soul has the first place. God would have us set thoroughly clear and intelligently appreciating our individual place and relation to Himself. Where these are made and kept right, we can then safely follow what God will show us in due time, but not otherwise.

As usual the apostle salutes the saints with the best wishes for their blessing.

Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ {Eph. 1:2}.

Then, without delay, the next verses introduce a general view of the glorious topic that occupied him.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ {Eph. 1:3}.

It is God in His proper nature, and in His relationship to Jesus. He is the God of Jesus; He is the Father of Jesus. But the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ {Eph. 1:3}.

It is not carnal blessing such as was in measure given under the law to Israel, and will be under the new covenant by and by; it is spiritual blessing. The earth is their sphere; it is there that Israel looks to be blessed, and the Gentiles somewhat farther off, but all in the ordered blessing of the Most High God. Altogether differently here

the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us where Christ is on high. There is no place good enough for Christ the Son but heaven. There it is God Himself displays His own glory; there He displays Christ Himself to all the heavenly hosts, delighting to put honour on that Man whom He raised from the dead and set at His own right hand. It is there not merely that He means to bless us, but that He has blessed us already. Such is the character of our blessing, and such its seat. The character is spiritual, the seat heavenly; and as the whole is given by the
God and Father of our Lord Jesus, so it is secured in Christ.

In the next verse the apostle opens out that which is more particularly connected with
the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love {Eph. 1:4}.

If the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us with every spiritual blessing above in Christ, this is the first need -- to have a nature capable of communion with His God, to have a condition that would do no dishonour, not only to the highest sphere, but to the holiest form and sphere in which God has ever made Himself known. This is the nature that is given to the believer now. But it is not merely a thing imparted. The special point before the apostle’s mind is that this was the choice of God before the world, in which we are brought to know the infinite blessing. It was entirely unconnected with the world. Far different was Israel’s case, however favoured as a nation. They were chosen in time. Not only were they called in time as we have been, but they were chosen in time, which we were not. The choice of the saints for heavenly blessedness was before the creation of the universe, before the foundation of the world.

This gives a very peculiar character to our blessedness. It is altogether independent of the old creation, of that which might fail and pass away. It was a choice of God Himself before there was any creature responsible or dependent. God made known His choice, not when the creature was to be proved, but when it had failed to the uttermost; but the choice itself was decided on by God Himself before the creature came into being. It is the moral answer to what was shown in Christ, --

that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.

Indeed, these are the very qualities of God Himself. He is holy in nature, and blameless in His ways. Man may cavil and murmur now in unbelief; but God will vindicate them every one when man shall be silent for ever. Besides, there is love, the activity, as well as the moral qualities, of His being. Love it is which, as it were, puts all in movement that belongs to God. It is not something extraneous that acts on God as a motive, but His own love flowing out from Himself according to His holy nature, and in perfect consistency with His character and ways.

This is the moral nature which God confers on us who are born of Him. This and nothing less or else is what He chooses us to be before Him -- chooses us to be in Christ in His own sight, and therefore with the fullest certainty that it shall be according to His own mind. It is not merely in the presence of an angel, still less before the world. Angels are not adequate judges of what pertains to us; they may be witnesses, but not judges. God Himself is acting for His own glory and according to His own love. But then the possession of a nature capable of communing with God did not and could not satisfy. He would have something more. What could this possibly be? Is He not satisfied with giving us a nature like His own? No, not even so, and for this reason -- God has relationships, and these relationships are shown in Jesus just as much as His nature is. If we want to know what the holiness, and blamelessness, and love of God is, we must look at Him; but in the same way also, if we desire to know what are the relationships into which God puts those He loves, where shall we find the highest? Certainly not in the first man Adam. Israel’s was at best a mere creature relationship, though, no doubt, having a special place in creation. Of all the creatures that live and breathe, man is the only one on earth that became a living soul by the breath of the Lord God, who, as it is written, breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. That is, there is a creative connection between God and man which is the source of man’s moral relations with God, and the reason why man, and man alone of all creatures on the earth, shall live again and give an account of himself to God.

But in that which comes before us in our epistle, it is not a question even of the highest creature on earth -- one that was called to have dominion on earth, and be the image and glory of God here below. God had in view One infinitely above man; and yet He was a man. It was Jesus; and Jesus stood in what was altogether peculiar -- in a relationship that was perfectly according to God’s counsels; but more than that, according to a relationship that was peculiar to His own person. There was counsel, but besides there was intrinsic glory altogether independent of any plans of conferred honour. In other words, the Son of God never was made the Son. He is never even called the child (τέκνον) of God. 15
To us, to be called children of God is more intimate than to be styled His sons; but it would derogate from the Lord. Jesus is never called a child in the sense in which I am now speaking. He has His own relationship to the Father eternally. To us it is more to be born of the very nature of God, than to be sons adopted into the family of God. There might be an adopted son without the nature. One might be altogether a stranger to him that adopts. But in Jesus, the Son of God, there was this character of Son in His own title and being from everlasting. Need I say that this is altogether above human comprehension? Yet nothing is more certain than that God so speaks to our faith. Were there an interval of one instant between the Father and the Son, did the Father exist in any respect before the Son as such, all the truth of God as revealed in the Bible perishes. He to whom I look up, by and in whom alone I can know God and the Father, is God Himself. Let the notion of time come into the conception given of Godhead and of the persons -- Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and all would be falsehood and confusion. The Son would be a creature -- not self-subsisting, not therefore truly God. For if God, He is as such not less truly God than the Father; for there can be no difference as to Godhead. As the Father is everlasting, so is the Son. The relationship in the Godhead has nothing to do with the question of time; and the

15. The Lord Jesus is repeatedly called παιός, translated “Son” and “child” in the English version of the Acts of the Apostles, but more properly God’s servant as Messiah.

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great mistake that has been wrought by all human philosophy is from introducing notions of time where time can have no place whatever.

Thus in the Godhead there are the relationships of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. But I confine myself now to the relationship of the Son to the Father from everlasting. And God, having these counsels before Him from everlasting, deigns to have a people, not only capable of enjoying Him as having the very same nature as His own, without which they could not enjoy glory; but, besides, if He has us in His presence, He would have us in the highest relationship into which grace could bring us. Now, the highest being that of the Son, we accordingly are brought into that relationship, though not, of course, in the sense in which He was eternally so. To us it could be but eternal purpose, to Him eternal being; to us pure grace, but to Him His own indefeasible right. But the Son being before the Father as His supreme object of love and delight from all eternity, to bring us as sons before Him was as much a part of His counsels as to make us partakers of divine nature. Thus nature is the subject of Eph. 1:4, as relationship is of Eph. 1:5. Hence in the latter we find, not exactly choosing, but predestinating us:

Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will {Eph. 1:5}.

It is well to mark the difference. To be before Him without having His own nature would be impossible; and therefore it is not stated as a matter of predestination, but of choice. He might have been pleased to choose none; but if we are to be brought into His presence at all, it is impossible to be there without having the divine nature, in a moral sense (and, of course, one only speaks of this). It is not the impartation of Godhead: none can be so foolish as to think of such a thing. But the divine nature is given to us in its qualities of holiness and love. On the other hand, we find that the predestination is

according to the good pleasure of his will,
because no necessity operates in this. There was a moral necessity for a nature suitable to God, if we were to be in His presence at all; but there was none for this special relationship. He might have put us in any degree of relationship He pleased. Angels, for instance, are there; but they have no such relationship. His grace has predestinated us to the very highest relation -- that of sons unto Himself by Jesus Christ

according to the good pleasure of his will.

And the apostle concludes the whole of this part of the matter

to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved {Eph. 1:6}.

All this wondrous scheme is to the glory of His grace. He uses therefore the highest terms in order to express it. Grace alone would not suffice, glory alone would not serve; but both. It is

to the praise of the glory of his grace.

Meanwhile it is again presented to us in this new fact, that we are brought in as objects of His perfect favour in the Beloved. Such is the measure, if measure it can be called, of the grace wherein we stand.

But then those in respect of whom God the Father had such thoughts were in point of fact sinners. The next verse shows that this is not forgotten, for account is taken of the fact, and it is provided for. The same

Beloved

who accounts to us for the counsels of God has brought in redemption. In Him we enter into favour,

in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of offences,

not exactly according to the praise of his glory,

but according to the riches of His grace {Eph. 1:7}.

It is a present thing in every sense, though, of course, needed for heaven and eternity. Hence the expression does not go beyond the riches of God’s grace. Thus is touched, incidentally, the need of our souls as offenders against God, but only so far as to show that it was in no way overlooked.

Next the apostle turns to the boundless scene that lies before us, as in the preceding verses he had looked at what is behind us. And why is all this? Clearly God has a purpose, a settled and glorious plan to gather the whole universe under Christ as its Head. Are those that He has brought into a share of His own moral nature and the relationship of sons to be left out of this? In nowise: even now He has abounded toward them

in all wisdom and prudence {Eph. 1:8}.

These words do not attribute to God all wisdom and prudence, which certainly would be nothing new; but they intimate that He has now conferred on His saints all wisdom and prudence. It is truly an astonishing statement. The contrast is with Adam, who had a knowledge that was suited to his own place and relationship. Accordingly we hear in Gen. 2 how he gave names to all that was put under him. And as to his wife, he instantly understands, though he had been in a deep sleep while she was being formed. But when presented to him, he knows all that it was meet for him to know then. He knows instinctively that she was part of himself, and gives her a name suitably. Such seems to have been the measure of Adam’s wisdom and prudence. As being the image and glory of God on earth, he is the one that gives names to his companion, or to the subject creation. It is not merely that he accepts names given him by God, but God delights in putting him in this place of lordship, and to a certain extent also of fellowship -- lordship to that which is below him, and fellowship as regarded his wife. Thus, then, Adam acts and speaks.

But the saints, now being made the objects of these heavenly counsels of God, have a wisdom and prudence of their own, quite peculiar to the new creation in Christ, and its proper relations: God puts no limits to it. In point of fact, He looks for the expression and exercise of it, be assured, from all of us, though no doubt according to our measure. It is no use merely taking it up as a name or barren title. Our God and Father does look for the display of the mind of Christ in us, so that we should be able to form a judgment according to Himself, and to express it about whatever comes before us.
For if we are in Christ, we have a vantage ground which makes all things clear. Christ is not darkness but light, and puts all in the light; He makes us to be children of the light, that so we may be able to judge ourselves, not discerned by man as such, but capable of discerning whatever claims our attention. Such is the place of a Christian, and a wondrous place it is, flowing from the nature and relationship which we possess by the grace of our God.

But the connection is important. God has abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; having made known unto us [what is the special proof of it] the mystery of his will {Eph. 1:8, 9}.

This does not yet appear; for there is nothing to indicate to mankind what He purposes to do. It is an absolutely new thing; and this new purpose is according to the good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in him; in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will, that we should be to the praise of his glory, &c. {Eph. 1:9-12}.

Here the apostle repeats that high, large, and blessed phrase already so familiar to us, that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ; in whom ye also [trusted] {Eph. 1:12, 13}.

It was not confined to those that had their hope founded on Christ while the nation refused Him. Paul was one of those; and there were others at Ephesus, as we well know -- in point of fact the first nucleus of the assembly there. The first saints and faithful in the city of Ephesus, as Acts 19 shows, were persons who had been baptized with the baptism of John, and afterwards brought from Jewish to Christian ground by the apostle Paul. Hence he says, that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ, referring to himself and any other saints who had been chosen from the people of the Jews. At the same time there is no exclusion of Gentile believers, but the reverse.

In whom ye also [trusted], after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation {Eph. 1:13}.

For the mass subsequently brought in were Gentiles, and the gospel of salvation they forthwith received, without going through the intermediate steps that the others knew. The Jews, or those who had been under Jewish teaching, had been for a while in an infantine state, or an Old Testament condition; but the Gentiles by faith passed simply and directly into the full Christian blessing.

In whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the holy Spirit of promise, who is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory {Eph. 1:13, 14}.

It cannot have escaped observation that there are two great parts in that which has come before us. The first is nature; the second is relationship. The Holy Ghost is here viewed according to these two. Connected with nature, He has sealed us, as it is said here and elsewhere; and connected with relationship, He is the earnest. For if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ {Rom. 8:17}.

The Holy Ghost thus takes a corresponding part. Just as Christ is the sample and model whether of nature or relationship, so the Holy Ghost is not without His own proper place in bringing the saint into the reality, knowledge, and enjoyment of both. The Holy Ghost gives us the certainty and joyful assurance of our place as saints; the Holy Ghost at the same time gives us the foretaste of the bright inheritance of God that lies beyond.

Then follows a prayer of the apostle -- the first of those he pours out for the Ephesian saints. Naturally this prayer grows out of the two great truths he had been urging. He prays for the saints that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory [for this is what his mind connected with it], may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints {Eph. 1:17, 18}.

These are the two former points. The hope of his calling is the bright prospect of the saints themselves, as they are in Christ before God.

The riches of the glory of his inheritance embrace, of course, that vast scene of creation which is to be put under the glorified saints. He prays accordingly that they might enter into both, realizing the holy peaceful atmosphere of the one, and the glorious expectations that were bound up with the other; for clearly the future is before his mind. But then he adds a third point, which was not given in the previous part of the chapter; namely, that they might know what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead {Eph. 1:19, 20}.

This last was of all-importance to the saints, and the rather as that power had already been put forth. It shines in full contrast with Israel. If the latter enquired how God had interfered most conspicuously for them, no doubt they were reminded of the power that brought them out of the land of Egypt. This was always their comfort in the midst of disasters and troubles. The God that divided the Red Sea, and brought them across Jordan, was equal to any difficulty that might ever assail them again. In the prophets this too remains always the standard, until God exert His power in another way, when He shall be no longer spoken of as Jehovah that brought them out of the land of Egypt, but out of the north country into their land, where He shall settle them for ever.
Thus Israel stands in the permanent remembrance of power that redeemed them from the land of Egypt, and in the anticipation of a still greater manifestation that will eclipse whatever had been seen of old.

But the Christian is even now himself, with his fellow-saints, the object of the very same power which never can be outshone -- the power that raised up Christ from the dead. We wait for nothing greater nor its match; we await the results of this glorious power for the body and the creation; but we look for no new putting forth of power which can enter into competition with that which God has already shown in Christ. The moment that Jesus presents Himself as the answer to what has been put forth already, the saints rise or are changed in the twinkling of an eye. Besides, it is not merely that the body will immediately respond to the call of the Lord Jesus, but even now the very same power has wrought toward us in making us Christians which

wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all {Eph. 1:20-23}.

Such is the power that has wrought now -- wrought toward us even while we are in this world.

Accordingly, in Eph. 2, the apostle pursues this train, and shows that it is not another exertion of power, but a part of the very same work of God which raised up Jesus from the dead. In other words, Christ was not raised up as an insulated individual, severed from all others by His glory and their sin and shame. The gospel of God's grace proclaims the very reverse. He was raised up as the great manifestation of divine power for effectuating God's counsels as well as redemption. Not only was His resurrection this manifestation, but also whatever God put forth toward us was in virtue of that display of His energy -- was, so to speak, morally included in that power which raised up Christ from the dead. This clearly is of the deepest possible interest to the saints. Throughout the epistle all the secret is just this -- God would associate us with Christ (that is, of course, in everything that is consistent with the maintenance of the divine glory). Whatever could contribute to it, whatever fell in according to it, everything that God Himself could do to bind us up with Christ, sharing with us all that is glorious in Christ His own Son, even to His holy nature and relationship with the Father, as far as this could be conferred on a creature, is no more than God had in His heart -- yea, is what God has given us now, and will display in heavenly places ere long.

So the apostle says,

You hath he quickened, who were dead in offences and sins {Eph. 2:1};

for now we can bear to learn anything, however humiliating, and He can speak of anything, no matter how exalted or holy. God had never so spoken of man before. In Romans the sinner is regarded as alive in sins; and death, the death of Christ, is the means of deliverance. In Ephesians death is the very first place where we find even Christ. Not a word is said of sending Him into the world, or of His life and labours there, any more than of our doing this or being that. The first place where Christ is seen is in the grave whence God according to the mightiest action of His almighty power raised Him up. It was an absolutely new thing: never was one so glorious, never can there be another so triumphant, as the power there put forth. Man, Satan, yea, the judgment of God that had gone forth against Him because of our sins, had no force to detain Him in the grave. That judgment had fallen on Him necessarily and unspARINGLY; but in the face of everything calculated to hinder, God's power broke up the last stronghold of the enemy. There was Jesus lying in the grave; and from that grave God raised Him, and set Him on the highest pinnacle of heaven's glory -- not only of that which then was, but that ever shall be. Such is the very power that has taken you and me up in divine grace, and wrought toward us. The very power that brought you out of the world and of your sins is the power that raised up Christ from the dead, set Him in the heavenly places, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of that glorious Head to whom it is united.

This is pursued then first with reference to the Gentiles, for now the order is reversed. In Eph. 1 he began with the Jews, and then showed the Gentiles brought in; but now he begins with the outer circle where the Gentiles were.

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in offences and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience {Eph. 2:1, 2}.

What can be conceived more dreadful than such a condition, positively without spiritual life, dead in offences and sins! Not only so, but they had walked according to the course of that which is most of all offensive to God --

of this world, according to the prince of the authority of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience;

for indeed they were, one as much as another, children of disobedience.

Among whom also we all, &c. {Eph. 2:3}.

for he does not let slip the Jews, but turns round on their estate, equally lifeless as the Gentiles. They might otherwise think themselves more or less superior. He had spoken of the poor idolatrous Gentiles and their awful condition; but we all,

says he, -- putting himself along with them, -- Jews as we were, children of the covenant and what not, were none the less dead in offences and sins.

Among whom also we all had our conversation in time past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye
are saved), and raised us up together [Eph. 2:3-6].

Now he unites both in this place of richest blessing; for He has even

made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus [Eph. 2:6, 7].

In truth it is His grace to the full, and for heaven (not earth), though given to us to know here before we get there;

for by grace are ye saved [Eph. 2:8].

The whole work is thus presented in its completeness from first to last; nevertheless, it is only

through faith

as yet. This is and must be the medium, as far as the saints are concerned, grace being the spring on God's part:

and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship [Eph. 2:8-10].

It is clearly not a question of righteousness here, or consistency with any known standard of judgment. God would frame a new sort of workmanship worthy of Himself; and therefore all question of antecedent measures disappears. Righteousness supposes a claim in the first place, however met; even though it may be God's righteousness, still it is God acting in consistency with Himself and His own claims. But in Ephesians we are in presence of a new creation in Christ, where claim is out of the question. Who would demand of God to make the objects of His mercy like Christ the Son? Who could, before He revealed His purpose, have so much as conceived such a dealing possible? Even now, though plainly made known in this epistle and elsewhere, how few Christians there are who rest in it as their assured portion! So totally and absolutely is it outside the range of human thought and feeling that the difficulty is to drop self, to cut all the strings that bind us to human nature and the world, to see all ended even now that is connected with the present course of this age, so that we may be simply occupied and filled with that heavenly blessedness which God unfolds to our souls.

However this be,

We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works [Eph. 2:10],

-- a peculiar kind of good works, suited to the relationship in which we stand. This is the great point to seize always throughout Scripture. There never can be spiritual understanding, unless souls let in this after all plain principle, that the suited good depends on the relationship in which we are placed, whether to God, or to any other. The good for an Israelite, for a Gentile, for a man, is wholly different from the good for a Christian, because their relationships are not the same as his. Now we are Christians; and this decides the character of the duties we have to pay, or of the good works which He has before prepared that we should walk in them; for

we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for this very purpose. It is not at all put as a question of command according to the law; but

God had before prepared,
as a part of His wonderful scheme,

that we should walk in them [Eph. 2:10].

He merely now touches on the principle, as he had before let us see not merely God's counsels from before the foundation of the world, but the manner and means of their application through Christ our Lord to us in time. Hence the condition in which we were found here below came into view; and, as we have seen, it was total ruin, whether Jew or Gentile be looked at.

But now from Eph. 2:11 the apostle enters into particulars, and shows that the bringing down from God's own heights of these glorious counsels and making them thus manifest in man here below, completely sets aside the Jewish system, or rather supposes the setting aside of all Jewish elements. Hence, being

Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; [the apostle bids such remember] that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world [Eph. 2:11, 12].

And what had God done now? Had He brought the Gentiles into the place that Israel once occupied? The Jews had rejected their own Messiah. Of old they had forfeited every claim according to the law, and were spared and kept in God's mercy and faithfulness. But now they had consummated their rebellion by refusing the Christ of God. What was to be done? Would God send out and bring in the Gentiles to fill their place? Another plan discloses itself. The Jews who believe are taken out of their former place, as much as the Gentiles, who had no place. Both are now introduced by grace into an entirely new and heavenly place in Christ, which was not so much as heard of before. Accordingly not only does he enforce the truth first presented in the end of Eph. 1, the church which is the body of Christ, but he also still more qualifies it as a

new man [Eph. 2:15],

and as

one body [Eph. 2:16];

because, in treating of the two objects of grace, and component parts of the church, Jews and Gentiles who believe, he shows that God does not purpose to form two societies of these saints, but one body. It is not a mere aggregate of Gentiles into the well-known line of old blessing, but one new man, not merely fresh in time, but of an absolutely new order, never seen or experienced before. It is not again a simple question of a new nature, but of a new man: the first Adam, with all remedial or corrective dealings in him disappear, and one new man comes before our view.

Here again the apostle brings in the relation of the Holy Ghost to the new thing. The consequence is that we find the Spirit of God, now sent down from heaven, not only putting the saints into relationship with the Father, but, besides, dwelling in them and making them God's habitation through
the Spirit.

Thus we have at last the church developed in its two main characters. It has its heavenly association as the one body of Christ; it has its earthly place and responsibility as the habitation of God through the Spirit {Eph. 2:22}.

All this, it will be observed, is consequent on the cross. The one was not at all, nor was the other in such sort before. God had a dwelling-place of old in Israel: but it was a house made with hands, however magnifical, that followed the tabernacle of witness in the desert, in both of which the Shechinah, or visible sign of His glory, deigned to dwell. Such is not the character of God’s dwelling now. It is neither the tabernacle, nor the temple, but His habitation in Spirit. It is not, of course, a display of glory before men’s eyes; yet is it most real -- a proper dwelling of God on earth, answering to, though not necessarily coextensive with, those who are constituted the body of Christ glorified on high. Not that the body is there yet, but that the body of Christ is heavenly in its character, although in fact on the earth now. Besides, as we have seen, the church is the dwelling-place of God through the Holy Ghost’s presence here below.

This leads to the third chapter, in which the apostle unfolds things parenthetically. It is a revelation of God that comes in at the time when the Jews have, at least temporarily, lost their place altogether. The very structure of the chapter, as has been noticed, is a sort of confirmation of this. The chapter itself is a parenthesis.

For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of the dispensation [administration or stewardship] of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery (as I wrote afore in few words; whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ); which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed {Eph. 3:1-5}.

Observe, therefore, that what was the first in counsel is the last in revelation.

Accordingly, when all was complete in the communication of God’s plans in the Bible, there was one subject that was left a blank. Paul was the chosen witness to fill up that blank. He wrote in few words no doubt, but he has written with divine perfection, and clearly enough for those by God’s grace made competent to understand, let the words be ever so few. Many wonder that such truths as these should not have more words used in communicating them. But profound truths are for those who have spiritual understandings; and such do not require many words to comprehend them. When persons are only learning the elements of truth, the grace of God provides precept on precept, line on line, for those who want it. If He is showing needy souls how they may be forgiven of God, He displays it in a thousand forms; if the need of righteousness, He repeats it over and over again. But it is not so with the revelation of the mystery. There is a certain spiritual competence supposed, -- a due preparation not only of heart, but also of knowledge; or, as the apostle said,

we speak wisdom among them that are perfect {1 Cor. 2:6}.

Here no lengthy exposition would be wanted about it, because they were not so infantine as to suppose that the truth of God depends on the number of times that a thing is asserted. Once is enough for the intelligent.

God therefore has not been pleased in the heights of divine truth to repeat words in the same way as His grace leads Him to do when He is helping the babes. Hence the apostle Paul, in what is by no means the simplest utterance he has given, writes in few words. He could condescend. We know how he would bend down and be as it were a Gentile to one without law, and a Jew to one under law, to do good to souls.

But now he speaks briefly. He was not constrained to enter into a full or long explanation. But as he said that by revelation it was made known to him, so he would from God communicate it to them.

Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit {Eph. 3:5}.

It is remarkable that the mystery, though revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the power of the Holy Ghost, was not revealed by them. It was revealed by Paul alone. Revealed to all the apostles and prophets of the New Testament, to one as much as another, it never seems to have taken such a hold of the others as of Paul. In point of fact, from his conversion right through, the revelation of the mystery was involved. That which comforted his soul was Christ in heavenly glory far above all things. As the light that shone then was brighter than the sun at noonday, so in the vision the truth about to be learnt was entirely outside and superior to the present or the past. It was grace in its deepest character and in its highest form, and so the apostle Paul was the suited vessel that God employed to instruct others, -- not merely the one to whom the revelation was made, but by whom the revelation was to be communicated. It is revealed to us here.

We must carefully remember that the mystery does not mean the church merely. It is the mystery of Christ emphatically; and the part about Christ is the higher of the two. The church is but a consequence; and we bless God for this, and bless Him also that we know the church is but the complement of Christ. One might distrust a mystery, if it centred in the church. Who that knows what man is, and God, as Christ has made both known, would dare to rest in any one person or thing which did not find its brightest form in Christ Himself? And the reason is simple; so inadequate is the creature, so untrustworthy is the first Adam, that one might well be certain the true meaning of the Bible was lost to him who judged otherwise. Such an one must have only got the lower end of the line, and not the full truth in its own native purity and freshness from God. Impossible that the Head should not be there as well as the body; and the apostle speaks as to Christ yet more than as to the assembly.
God then brings out His own secret, after having kept it hidden from all past ages and generations, though, of course, it has been before Him from the beginning. If God reveals it now, the idea of man -- of ourselves -- being the first and main object in the mind of God is impossible. It is the mystery of Christ; and this is what secures the blessing in its fulness and purity for the church of God. Therefore we need never fear, no matter what the blessing and the privilege may be. If it be illustrated in Christ, if it be bound up with Him, fear not to trust simply and to believe implicitly. Enter boldly into the sweetness of His grace and fulness of His glory. We never can go astray, if we follow the path of the Lord Jesus.

Though it is the mystery of Christ, it is not exclusively about Christ. So in Eph. 5 he says,

This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church {Eph. 5:32}.

Is there not good reason for saying that the church is but a consequence? The church follows; and as it belongs to Christ, so it is a part of Him. Hence, to make the mystery to be the church is a very serious moral as well as doctrinal mistake.

The apostle adds that it was now revealed of the Spirit,

That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel: whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints

-- there is nothing like this truth, where it is learnt from the Holy Ghost, for humbling the soul, were it even the greatest of the apostles, --

is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and make all see what is the fellowship [rather administration] of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things [by Jesus Christ?): to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God {Eph. 3:6-10}.

God had something more to teach those who are the natural denizens of heaven. They had to learn what they had never known. They had seen creation, and sung at the sight. They had seen the ways of God with man, and with Israel; and surely they had entered into the glory of God that was involved in all His ways. Nevertheless, whether it was creation, whether man or favoured Israel, there was so much the more painful a declension that portended the judgment of God upon them. Thus there were dark shadows, and lowering clouds. But now appeared something altogether new. Latest of all, God divulged His wonderful scheme in which the man that came from above, the Son that became a man, the Word made flesh, had gone down to the very lowest in order to make good the glory of God morally in the scene where He had been most put to shame. But now, consequent on His resurrection from the dead, and of the place given Him in heaven above all, there was made known to these very principalities and powers

the manifold wisdom of God {Eph. 3:10},

-- made known to them before it came to pass, the sure deliverance of the whole scene of creation, of man, of Israel, as well as of the earth. But not merely this. That man who came down but was found alone to the end of His earthly course would now be alone no more; He would have a new and suited body, believing Jews and Gentiles fellow-heirs and of the same body. Most wholesome blessedness! for who should be more above the feelings of jealousy than those who delight in that which shows the greatness, and the glory, and the perfect goodness of God in His greatest work? This, then, was what was needed for the principalities and powers, and this is what they behold in the church of God.

The apostle accordingly is now led at the sight of the mystery of Christ into another prayer, in which he asks the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ [for now he takes up the other relationship], of whom the whole [rather, every] family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; being rooted and grounded in love, that ye may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God {Eph. 3:14-19}.

Here the prayer is not, as in the first chapter, that they might know the power that had wrought toward them; it is now that their hearts might be in the secret of His grace according to the power that works in them. That is, he looks at the inner source, not merely at the glorious results. Here he prays to the Father of our Lord Jesus, not simply to the God that had raised up the Christ from the dead, and was glorifying Him on high. It will be observed that the desire is not merely that they might be enlightened as to the special glory of their standing; but that their hearts might be filled with the love of Christ, and this too as a present thing filling them to overflowing, though surely not to cease in the ages to come.

Unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end {Eph. 3:20, 21}.

This is not a question therefore of the place or standing of the Christian, but rather of his condition or state, which the Spirit would have in unison with the love of Him who alone made either possible. Consequently here it is not an energy already put forth, but he pleads that Christ might dwell by faith in their hearts. It is not a conferred position, however blessed, but practical enjoyment -- even that Christ Himself might be habitually the object before them, now that all question of deliverance and blessing was settled in their favour. It was all a known thing that they were blessed by -- yea, with -- Christ, forming a part of Christ, expressly fellow-heirs, and of the same body. But now, founded on this, the apostle prays thus for them, that the Holy Ghost would so act in the inner man that there might be no hindrance to Christ, and that they might know, not the Holy Ghost (for this they did not doubt),
but Christ dwelling there by His power constantly.

Unquestionably the Spirit of God does evermore dwell in the Christian, though I am not aware that He is ever said to dwell in our hearts. He may shed abroad the love of God therein; but He is rather said to dwell in us, making the body God’s temple. Here the apostle would have Christ to be more the satisfying object of our affections. This is the point. Far be it from us just to know that He loves us through the word of God, as a security to us, like a dry parchment deed of gift that we quietly keep in a strong box. Rather is the very gospel to the sinner free and full, that, having the certainty of the divine fulness of our blessing, our hearts may be now open to enjoy Christ, and be occupied with His love.

That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; not that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, but
rooted, and grounded in love, [that ye] may be able to comprehend with all saints [Eph. 3:17, 18].

It is not here deliverance, let it be ever so complete; it is not the knowledge of our position in Christ as in Eph. 1; but rather the converse -- Christ dwelling in us by faith, and the heart entering into the positive excellency of the Son, the only adequate object of the Father’s own delight. Hence it was that they might
be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ [Eph. 3:18, 19].

It is not only the full extent of glory, but the sole satisfying spring, Christ thus dwelling in our hearts in the consciousness of His love -- to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God [Eph. 3:19].

He is the ultimate blessedness with which we are filled, the One in whom we most confide, being the Son, in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

Thus, having Him who is the centre of all glory dwelling in our affections by faith, we enter into, and become established in, the grace which is the secret of it all. In communion with the objects of it, we go out into the resulting scenes of glory on every side; knowing Christ’s love though unknowable, and filled into God’s fulness though infinite. The apostle concludes his prayer with an ascription of glory to Him in the Church unto all generations of the age of the ages, able to do far above all we ask or think according to His power which works in us. It is thus seen to be founded on the great facts and standing privileges mentioned at the end of Eph. 2; but it is the desire that the saints should know God’s present power to an indefinite extent working in them in spiritual enjoyment, through the Holy Ghost’s power, giving us to have Christ the definite and constant object of the heart.

Eph. 4 begins the proper exhortatory portion, and here, first of all, urges a walk in view of such a calling as is ours, diligently keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Then the diversities are brought before us.

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love {Eph. 4:1, 2}.

The very truth which, learnt and enjoyed in the Holy Ghost, conduces to all lowliness and meekness, as it calls for mutual forbearance in love, flesh would abuse to all pride and vain-glourousness, to highminded contempt of others, and bitter self-confidence. Than these nothing less becomes those so blessed. Oh that we might have grace to walk in communion with such grace! But if we are to walk thus, let us not forget the prayer for the state of our hearts which precedes these exhortations. Knowledge of standing, and a state answering to Christ’s love, are the basis of a walk worthy of our calling.

The unity of the Spirit {Eph. 4:3} seems to be the general name for that great fact which is now established -- that unity of which Christ is the chief, and to which we all belong. The apostle treats it as our business diligently to observe it. It is impossible for flesh to be true to it. This is as it should be. An easy path could not be divine, as men and things are on earth. We need, but we have, the Holy Spirit who is surely all-sufficient, if looked to. It is impossible to exaggerate the snares and difficulties of Christendom.

But what are difficulties to the Spirit of God? This is the great want -- simple, genuine faith in the Holy Ghost. He is equal to all, and would have us count on his presence and power answering to the name of Christ. What has all the confusion of men to do with the glorious reality that God has established -- His unity, of which we all form part by the power of His Spirit? What does it matter about times, persons, or circumstances, if the Spirit abide to enable us, according to Scripture, diligently to keep His own unity? Numbers are of small account here. The Lord might be where there are only two gathered together unto His name {Matt. 18:20}. If but two acted accordingly, they ought to be and would be an expression of the unity of the Spirit. What is the value of any other unity? It can never rise above its human source. Evidently also, it is no essential matter for present practice of faithfulness, whether few or many see and feel it: this is a question for God’s will, who will act for His own glory, whether by many or by few. Let this then rest in His hands. Be it our part with diligence (for this is needed)
to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace {Eph. 4:3}.

Then we hear the particulars, and in a very orderly manner.

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling {Eph. 4:4}.

This verse states the intrinsic unity that never passes away, beginning with the fact of one body;
then the efficient power, one Spirit; and lastly the cause of it all in the calling of grace. Nothing touches these.

In the next verse we have that which has been justly designated the unity of profession, where all things may come in to mar. Hence it is said,
One Lord {Eph. 4:5},
which is precisely that which is owned in the common creed
of Christendom. And as there is one Lord, so
one faith {Eph. 4:5}.
It is neither “faith” nor “the faith.” That is, it may not be
sincere, nor even doctrinally the truth that is held; but we hear of
one faith
in contrast with Judaism on one hand, and with Paganism on
the other. Hence
one baptism {Eph. 4:5}
follows, which the context shows to be the plain initiatory rite
of Christian profession, and nothing else. In the verse before
the apostle had spoken of the
one Spirit,
and hence it would be superfluous to introduce the statement
of His baptism here, even if the adjuncts did not exclude the
idea.
Thus we have had, first of all, the great spiritual reality
which is always true of Christians, and of none else. They, and
only they, have
one Spirit
dwelling in them. They only have the
one hope of their calling.
But the moment you come to the
one Lord,
this city, yea every city in Christendom, is a witness to a
wide-spread profession of His name. As He is outwardly
called on, so there is everywhere the
one faith,
which does not mean (alas! we know too well) saving faith
necessarily, but the faith of Christendom; and accordingly
one baptism
is its mark, because thus they are put on or take the ground
of professing the one Lord and one faith.

Lastly,
one God and Father of all {Eph. 4:6}.
Here we come to what is universal. Each circle hitherto was
getting larger and larger. First there was the true company
that had divine life and the Spirit of God; secondly, the circle
of profession very much more extensive; and thirdly remains
the universal unity, which embraces not Christendom only,
but all the creatures of God included under their one God and
Father -- whatever derived its being from God, the God that
created all things, as we were told in Eph. 3:9. He consequently is the
one God and Father of all,
not merely of all believers, for this is a mistake of its force,
but of all absolutely; just as we were told in Eph. 3:15, that
of Him every family in heaven and earth is named. No matter
whether Jews or Gentiles, principalities or powers, every
family is derived from this universal source of existence --
One God and Father of all, who is above all [there
we find His supremacy], and through all [there we
find His permeance, if one may so say, as the
support of the whole universe], and in you all [His
intimacy with the saints] {Eph. 4:6}.
The moment the apostle comes to inward relationship, he
leaves the universality of phrase and speaks only of the saints
of God --
in you all.
No statement can be conceived more exact.

Now we must turn to the diversities.
But to every [each] one is given grace according to
the measure of the gift of Christ {Eph. 4:7}.
And as the unity flowed from the power of the Spirit sent
down from heaven; so now when we come to gifts, it is
expressly connected with Christ in glory.

Wherefore he saith, when he ascended up on high,
he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.
Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also
descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He
that descended is the same also that ascended
{Eph. 4:8-10}.
Yes, but He did not go up as He came down from above. He
came a divine person filled with love; and He went a man
also, triumphant not with love only but in righteousness and
power, to give effect to all the glorious counsels of His
Father, which unjudged sin would have for ever frustrated.
He went up after all the working of evil had been really
defeated and destroyed in the sight of God. Satan is allowed
to go on for a little while longer, because God is gathering
out the joint-heirs, while the evil develops itself in a new
form. Man had been shown to be the enemy of all
righteousness, and now betrays himself the enemy of all
grace. As the end of the latter will be incomparably worse
than the former, so judgment will be commensurate with
man’s apostasy from grace; for the Lord must come from
heaven,
in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know
not God, and on them that obey not the gospel of our
Lord Jesus Christ {2 Thess. 1:8}.

Meanwhile, before a blow is struck at man’s failure in
the presence of righteousness, or at his apostasy from grace,
that blessed Saviour, the only begotten Son in the bosom of
the Father, the Son of man who is in heaven, went down to
the very uttermost, and (having exhausted the powers of evil,
and blotted out all that could rise against the objects of God’s
grace,) was raised and seated by God in heaven. He takes His
place there, of course always the Son; but, wonderful to say,
humanity makes an integral and everlasting part, so to speak,
of that divine person, the Son of God. And here is the key,
and that which accounts for the astonishing display of what
God is now doing in man. How could it be otherwise, seeing
that He who sits on His throne, far above every creature in
God’s presence and in all ages, is a man, but withal the very
Son of God? The Son is as truly man as God, and as such
gives gifts to men. Angels are not the object. They had a
distinguished place before the Son became man. Since then it
is not so much they that have lost, but man in and by Christ
that has gained such a place as they never had nor could have.
Never were they to reign; never will they be one with Christ like the saints. They are

ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation {Heb. 1:14}.

But Christ at the right hand of God gives gifts unto men; and, as it is said here,

He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers
{Eph. 4:11};

-- bringing in both the highest gifts and also those ordinarily requisite for the good of the saints. I say “requisite,” simply in view of Christ’s love towards the church. It is not a question of rendering a testimony of the power of God working in man and dealing with the first creation. In Corinthians we have this, and properly in its place. There we have tongues, miracles, &c.; because all that is connected with man in the flesh and in the world is a sign to unbelievers, showing them the goodness of God, and the defeat of that wicked power which governs human nature as it is.

But in the epistle to the Ephesians we have none of these dealings with the first man, but that which forms and nourishes the new creation. Hence we have those gifts alone which are the expression of the grace of Christ toward the saints that He loves, for ministerial work, for the building up of His body. In this order He gave them -- the body to be edified, and ministry carried on, but always the individual first. The building up of the body is the fruit of God’s blessing the individual saints. It cannot be otherwise. It is in vain to look for the church’s prosperity, if saints individually do not grow up unto Christ. And so these gifts are given, as it is said,

till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up unto him in all things, which is the head, even Christ
{Eph. 4:13-15}.

Then we have in the centre of this chapter no longer the unity or the gifts differing, but the moral walk of the saints. And what is the first lesson of the truth as it is in Jesus? This; -- not only that we hear of the one body, and that saints compose this body, but that a new man is seen. Introducing this great practical truth, he reminds them of what they had been, but also tells them what they are now. Our duties flow from what we are, or are made. And what then is the truth as it is in Jesus? Our having put off the old man, and our having put on the new man. Such is the truth, if indeed we have learnt the Christ as God teaches Him. Anything short of this is not the true Christian measure. Jesus could occupy Himself in divine love. Self would have hindered; had there been a particle, it would have ruined both His person and His work; but this is not the truth as it is in Jesus. He came so as to be left absolutely free to occupy Himself in love for God’s glory and our desperate need. And now, in Him who is dead and risen, the Christian has put completely off the old man, is being renewed in the spirit of his mind, and has put on the new man, which according to God is created in righteousness and holiness of truth.

Not only is there this new man that God has created after the image of Christ in contrast with the first Adam, but this is the ground why all moral evil is to be judged, beginning with deceit and falsehood.

Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil. Let the thief steal no more {Eph. 4:25-28}.

How solemn to learn what the old man is in its most detestable forms, against all which the Christian is warned!

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers
{Eph. 4:29};

But, besides the new man which lives in dependence, we need to guard against losing power according to God.

Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption {Eph. 4:30}.

Thus the great basis of all our walk is, that the old man has been judged in Jesus, and the new man we have already put on; but, moreover, the Holy Ghost is given, and we are sealed by Him. Thus we have a new nature which hates sin, and the Holy Ghost which gives power for that which is good.

Then he adds the great exemplar and spirit of it all, according to the forgiveness with which God met us in Christ.

Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ hath forgiven you
{Eph. 4:32}.

But there is yet more. To forgive another’s wrongs is not enough for a Christian. No doubt it is a giving up of self, and therefore the fruit of divine grace. But in Ephesians God cannot but have us imitate His own ways as they have shone in Christ. He Himself is the measure of the walk of the new man, and the manifestation of it is Christ Himself. Nothing short of this suffices. What has God done? He has forgiven you in Christ; and you are called to do the same. But was this all? Was there only this? Was there not positive love, far beyond forgiveness? And what is the manifestation of love? Not the law, but Christ.

Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour
{Eph. 5:1, 2}.

Do you think this devotedness too much? yea, impossible? Not so. Take a passage in (2 Cor. 8:5), which has been before us only a short time ago:

And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.
How blessed is the character and the spring of Christian service! Think of their giving themselves first to the Lord, then to us by the will of God. It is just the answer to the grace of God in Christ. Nor is there full Christian service, except in proportion as it is according to this pattern and in this power. In Christ it was, of course, absolutely perfect: He did give Himself for us. But this was not enough. He might have given Himself ever so truly in pity for us; but it would not have been perfection, had He not given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour.

And so accordingly all that is acceptable takes this shape.

But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking [even light words dishonour the Christian, as being contrary to Christ], nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God {Eph. 5:3-5}.

But there are other elements. God is not only love but light; and inasmuch as this epistle reveals how fully God associates us with Christ according to His own nature, so having first shown us the privilege of loving, as He Himself loved us in Christ, now it shows that we are made light in the Lord {Eph. 5:8}.

But it is not said that we are love. This would be too strong; yea, false. Love is God’s nature, but it is a sovereign prerogative in Him. In His own actings it has no motive or spring except in Himself. This could not be true of us. We need both motive and object, and hence could not be said to be love; because not we, but only God acts from Himself, as much as for Himself. Impossible that the creature could be or do so; and therefore the creature is never said to be love. But there is love after a divine sort in the new nature, which is said to be light, because this is the necessity of the new nature. Impossible that the new nature could countenance sin; the very essence of it is rejection and exposure of what is contrary to God. It is sensitive about sin; detects and detests it thoroughly. Hence we are said to be light in the Lord,

and we need to shake off the things of death that encumber the light, and hinder it. And so Christ gives us more light. For the word is, Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light {Eph. 5:14}.

But just as before, in the walk which shuts out hatred, and anger, and so on, we were warned against grieving the Spirit of God; so the power of the Holy Ghost asserts itself here. Here it is not merely Grieve not the Holy Spirit {Eph. 4:30}.

He goes farther, and says, Be filled with the Spirit.

Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord {Eph. 5:18, 19}.

And is this all? It is not. There has been the full unfolding of God’s love, and the answer to it in the saints here below in their nature, and in the ways that manifest the new nature. But, besides, we have relationships; and now we have God manifesting Himself in each of our positions, and showing us that these are meant to give us opportunity of glorifying God by the good works that were before ordained of God. Accordingly he brings in the most important of them, first, the wife and the husband; then, children and their parents; and, finally, servants and masters.

All through these then we have, but more particularly in the first, the interweaving of the duty with the manifestation of God’s grace:

Christ also loved the church {Eph. 5:25}.

It is not now either sovereign love, or love of complacence. There was the sovereign love of God in Christ forgiving us; there was love of complacence, inasmuch as we were to love according to that love with which we were loved, as shown us in the matchless love of Christ. But now there is love of relationship as well; and here too Christ appears, who is the pattern and perfection of grace in every respect.

Husbands; love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself {Eph. 5:25-27}.

Just look into this revelation of His love. How everything is connected with Christ! He gave Himself for us. What was it for?

That he might present it to himself [not merely to the Father, but present it to himself] a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish {Eph. 5:27}.

More than this; for

no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church {Eph. 5:29}.

Everywhere Christ Jesus Himself is intermixed with every portion. He Himself is the beginning, He Himself the end, He Himself all the way through. He gave Himself as the beginning; and He presents it to Himself as the end. Meanwhile He tenderly cares for the church.

He that loveth his wife loveth himself; . . . for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones {Eph. 5:28-30}.

This is a great mystery,

he adds at the close;

but I speak as to Christ and as to the church {Eph. 5:32}.

Then we have the children, who are called to obey their parents in the Lord. It was not a question of the flesh: how could this be trusted? Let them obey in the Lord. To honour one’s father and mother was both an obligation and had a
special promise under law. And if children that had a relationship with their parents in the flesh and under law did so (for it was indeed right), how much more did it become Christian children to pay them reverence?

This is followed up by an exhortation to parents:
And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath:
but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord {Eph. 6:4}.

Thus is the Lord ever presented as the pattern. Then come the slaves similarly. He was privileged to do all as unto Christ; as the master again must remember that he had his own Master in heaven. This also answers to the grand doctrine of this epistle.

Then the apostle introduces us to another topic. It is not the source of the blessing (Eph. 1); nor the place into which we are now brought as being made one with Christ (Eph. 2); nor the objects to whom we are bearing testimony (Eph. 3). The closing theme shows us where and with whom are our true conflicts as Christians. As such we have not properly to fight with flesh at all, any more than to fight with the world. All other combats are outside the calling of a Christian.

I do not deny but that a Christian may slip elsewhere. But as long even as he is merely in conflict with his own nature, he can hardly be said to be on Christian ground at all. He may be a converted person; and God may be truly dealing with him in the way of gracious action. A really awakened soul may still have a great many unsettled questions in agitation within him. He has not come to God consciously. Now the very baptism of a Christian man is the confession of the truth, that God has in Christ judged flesh root and branch. Is not this the meaning of the institution? How far the person has realised it is another matter; but such is the meaning of baptism. Judging what I am, I confess that all my blessing is in the Saviour, who did not merely come to bless me as a living man in the world, but died and is risen again; and I, confessing Him who is thus dead and risen, have part in His death. The conflict of the Christian is not therefore with flesh, still less is it with the world, but with Satan, and with his power, viewed as interposing and hindering our enjoyment of our heavenly blessing.

Is not this the meaning of the combat as described here? The wrestling is not with flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places {Eph. 6:12}.

The English translators did not know what to make of the apostle, and so they changed it to “high places,” which was an unwarrantable liberty, and gives the most perverse meaning. This has misled many beside the poor Puritans, who fancied they were called of God, as a Christian duty, to strive against kings and all in authority, when not satisfied with their ways or measures. I mention this, because it is a striking proof that an error imported into Scripture leads even right-minded men into sad evil. It is expressly not against any powers that were living and acting in the world. The conflict is against Satan and his hosts. Just as the Canaanites tried to keep the Israelites out of the land which God assured Moses the tribes were to have for their possession, so Satan’s great effort is to hinder the saints of God from realizing their blessedness in heavenly places.

But for this the most careful provision is laid on us. The first thing is to
be strong in the Lord; and in the power of his might {Eph. 6:10}.

That is, all our strength is to lean on another, even the Lord. The next thing is that we take
the whole armour of God, that we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth [inwardly applied, and thus bracing us morally], and having on the breast-plate of righteousness {Eph. 6:13, 14}.

The internal state is the great point here. Carefully remember this. Our standing is quite another matter, which itself could not avail here. The panoply is against Satan and not God. It is a question not of acceptance before God, but of resisting the enemy who would take advantage of loose ways and a bad conscience. The breast-plate means the practical righteousness of the saint himself.

And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace {Eph. 6:15}.

So should our walk be. Besides, take
the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one {Eph. 6:16}.

It is the confident trust of the heart in the favour of God in which we stand, not the remembrance of our first subjection to the gospel. Finally,
receive the helmet of salvation, [there the head is lifted up, not in presumption, but with none the less joy and courage,] and the sword of the Spirit {Eph. 6:17},
which is expressly said to be the word of God. The defensive comes before the offensive; and all should follow dependence on the Lord. The sword must be the real intrinsic power of the word wielded in the Spirit, which does not spare anything. Thus, first blessed, strengthened, and enjoying the grace and truth of God in Christ, we can then go out with the sword of the Spirit to deal with what is contrary to His nature, which Satan would use to obstruct our realization of our heavenly privileges.

Finally, there is the activity now for others, just as before there was dependence for ourselves.
Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints; and for me [as the apostle blessedly adds], that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel
-- (what a gracious way of encouraging and strengthening saints, giving them a feeling of the value of their prayers, both in the sight of God, and in fellowship with the most blessed apostle that God ever gave the church!) --
for which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein
I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak
(Eph. 6:18-20).

He felt his need and that of the work. Also he counted on
their loving desire to know his affairs, as well as to have their
hearts comforted through Tychicus.
Lectures Introductory

to the Study of

The Epistles of Paul The Apostle

Lecture 6

Philippians

There is no epistle in the New Testament which gives so little space to the development of doctrine as this to the Philippians. Need it be said that it has not the less its own proper office on that account? And what is this but the unfolding of the truth in the heart and in the ways of the Christian? Hence it is that, although doctrine is sparse, if not almost excluded, nevertheless what little appears comes in as ancillary to the main purpose. It is interwoven with practical appeal, and indeed the chief development of doctrine (namely, in the second chapter) forms a ground of exhortation.

Accordingly, from the very starting-point, we are prepared for a difference of tone and character. The apostle drops entirely his official status in addressing the saints at Philippi. He associates Timothy with himself, -- not merely, as elsewhere, himself apostle and Timothy in some other relation, but here conjointly --

Paul and Timotheus, the, servants of Jesus Christ

{Phil. 1:1}.

He thus takes a common place with his beloved son in the gospel. This place throughout is one of promoting, enlarging, deepening, and purifying the experience of the saints themselves in that which filled his own heart with joy in the Lord. We shall see the importance of this elsewhere. It is what enabled him to look at the saints, as he called them to look at one another, esteeming others, as he says, better than themselves. Had it been a question of his apostolic dignity, this could not have been; but an apostle even could, and did, and loved to, take the place of one that served others whom he viewed directly in their relationship to Christ. His own place toward them was but to serve them in love. Such did, such was, Christ. There is nothing so high as that which we all have been made in our blessed Lord.

So here at the beginning he simply takes the place of servant with Timothy, owning all the saints as well as the officials in their place:

To all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi,

with the bishops and deacons {Phil. 1:1}.

This last is but a confirmation of the same truth. It is not at all a question of ecclesiastical order, in which naturally the chief guides would have front rank. The apostle is here contributing to that which shall never pass away, and hence begins with the

saints in Christ Jesus

as such. These Philippians will not be less saints in heaven, where there can be no such charges as

bishops or deacons.

I do not say that the fruits of the loving service of any one of them will be forgotten there; nor that even glory will not bear the impress of that which has been really of the Holy Ghost here. Nevertheless there is that which is suited only to the conditions of time; there is that which, given here, survives all change. The apostle loved to give God's place and value to everything; and here it is the mingling of Christ with the circumstances of every day. It is the forming of the heart with the affections and the judgments of the Lord. It is the imbuing of the Christian with that which is life everlasting, but the life that he is now living by

the faith of the Son of God; who loved him and gave himself for him {Gal. 2:20}.

Hence he at once begins, not with a doctrinal preparation after the introduction, but the introduction brings us as usual into the general spirit if not special object of the epistle.

I thank my God for my whole remembrance of you

{Phil. 1:3},

says he, after his usual salutation and wish,

always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy {Phil. 1:4}.

There is no epistle that so abounds in joy. This is the more remarkable because it is so intensely practical. For we can all understand joy in believing; we can readily feel how natural is joy to the Christian who dwells on his eternal portion. The trial is to keep that joy undimmed in the midst of the difficulties and sorrows that every day may bring. This epistle treats of daily sorrows and difficulties, yet does it manifestly overflow with joy, which all the dangers, sufferings, and trials only made the more triumphant and conspicuous.

So he brings before them another remarkable feature of it -- their fellowship; and this fellowship too with the gospel. Their happy and bright state in Christ did not dim their fellowship with the gospel. But whatever might be their own proper joy, whatever might be their delight in that which God
works in the church, they had full and simple-hearted fellowship with His good news. It had always been so, as the apostle gives us to learn. It was not some sudden fit, if one may so say, nor was it the influence of passing circumstances. It was a calm, fixed, cordial habit of their souls, which indeed had distinguished them from the first. This was now among the last outpourings of the apostle’s heart, as he himself had almost arrived at the end of his active labours, if indeed it was not absolutely their end. He was in prison, long shut out from that which had been his joyful service, though in constant toil and suffering for so many years. But his spirit was as bright as ever, his joy perfectly fresh, deep, and flowing. And now he would have them looking to Christ, that no damp should gather round their hearts from anything that might befall him, -- that nothing which happened, whether to themselves, to other saints, or even to the apostle, should interfere for a moment with their unclouded and abounding confidence in the Lord. So he tells them that he always thus remembered them for their fellowship with the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ {Phil. 1:5, 6}.

There is not even the allowance of the possibility of their turning aside from the bright career both of possessing a Saviour they knew, and of enjoying Him increasingly. He had no theory that first love must necessarily wane and cool down, but the very reverse. Himself the striking witness to the contrary, he looked for nothing less in the saints he so dearly loved. Indeed that which had drawn out the epistle was the proof that the trying circumstances of the apostle had but called out their affections. His being out of sight rather made the remembrance of his words and ways the more distinct, and imparted a chastened earnestness to their desires of pleasing the Lord.

Being confident, he therefore says,

of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ, even as it is meet for me to think of you all {Phil. 1:6, 7}.

It is not one who cherished a trust in the Lord’s fidelity spite of what was visible. This counting on the Lord the apostle might have even where things were wrong. It was so as to the Corinthians; nay, it was not wholly wanting for the Galatians, though that which they allowed imperilled the foundations of grace and faith. But the practical ways and spirit of the Philippians were the living evidence not only of life, but, so to speak, of vigorous health in Christ. So it was right for him to anticipate good and not evil, not as in the authorized version and other translations, because “I have you in my heart,” which would be no ground of assurance for them, but because

ye have me in your heart {Phil. 1:7},

which showed their spiritual feelings to be true and sound. This seems to me the real meaning, which the margin gives rightly.

It is a thing more important in practice than many suppose. There is no more common device of Satan than to seek the destruction of the power of testimony by the allowance of evil insinuations against him who renders it. Of course, the enemy would have desired above all and at any cost to lower such an one as the apostle Paul in the loving esteem of God’s saints, more particularly where all had been sweet and happy; but, notwithstanding every effort, grace hitherto had prevailed, and these saints at Philippi felt the more for the apostle when he was a prisoner. When God does not interpose, men are apt to allow reflections and reasonings. Not seldom do they begin to question whether it can be possible that such a one is really of value to the church of God. Would God in this case let His servant be so long kept away from the gospel or the church? Surely there must have been something seriously wrong to judge in him!

It was not thus that the true-hearted Philippians felt; and spiritual feeling is worth more than all reasoning. Their affections were right. Reasonings on such matters are in general miserably wrong. Their sympathies, drawn out by the afflictions of the apostle in his work, were the workings of the Holy Spirit in their souls -- at least the instincts of a life that was of Christ, and that judged in view of Him, and not according to appearances. They had him in their heart, as he says,

Inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers with me of grace,
or of my grace {Phil. 1:7}.

For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ {Phil. 1:8}.

For his was a heart deeply sensible of love, and consequently he was not one that had sought either to make the saints dependent upon him, and still less did the apostle depend on the saints for anything that was the fruit of grace in them. He desired not anything for himself, but only what should abound to their account in the day of Jesus Christ. This he must wish for them, if he wished them well. Accordingly he prays for them, that as they had shown this true and unabated love for himself as Christ’s servant, so their love might abound yet more and more, and this too in knowledge and in all judgment.

This is the great value of Christian experience. It is not love growing less but more, and this abounding in intelligence and knowledge, which could not be looked for in saints just beginning their career. There is no necessity -- and where is the epistle that more thoroughly disproves the thought of any necessity? -- that a saint should decline. To abound in love is far from declension. To

abound yet more and more {Phil. 1:9},

-- to have that love tempered by divinely given wisdom and divinely exercised judgment, -- is the very reverse of going back. Their true and constant progress was what the apostle had before his own soul in prayer for them, instead of coolly giving up the saints, as if the new nature must grow feeblower day by day -- as if the things of the world must overcome
faith, and the things which are seen outweigh those which are unseen and eternal. Is this your measure of the love of Christ? Is He really so far from any of those that call upon Him?

Thus, then, he prays for them; and to this end, -- not that they might become more intelligent merely -- not that they might grow more able to discourse of divine things, though I doubt not that there would be growth in these respects also; but all here has an eminently practical form, --

that ye may approve things that are more excellent;
that ye may be pure and without offence till the day
of Christ {Phil. 1:10}.

Such is the thought that the apostle had before his soul of that which became the Christian. He would have one who begins with Christ to go on with Christ, have nothing but Christ before his eyes, and pursue this path without a stumble till the day of Christ. It is a blessed and refreshing picture even in thought. Oh that the Lord might make it true of His own! This is certainly what the apostle here puts before these saints.

Filled,
says he,

with the fruit of righteousness, which is by Jesus
Christ {Phil. 1:11};

for it is all supposed to be fruit, not isolated fruits here and there, but as a whole, which adds greatly to the strength of it.

It should be

the fruit of righteousness, which is by Jesus Christ,
unto the glory and praise of God {Phil. 1:11}.

Then he turns, not to doctrine after this opening, but to circumstances, -- to circumstances, however, illumined with Christ. The most ordinary details are taken out of their own pettiness (though it is really a little mind which counts them petty), and are made simple and genuine, and this through Christ Jesus intermingleing with them. Oh, it is a blessed thing, that in the midst of the sorrows of this world, the Holy Spirit knows how thus to blend the name of Christ, as the sweetest balm, with the sorrow, however bitter, and to make the very memory of the grief pleasant because of Christ, who deigns to let Himself into it all. It was this that so cheered the apostle's heart in his loneliness often, in his desertion sometimes, when the sight of a brother would have given fresh courage to his heart. Looking to the Lord, as it is the life-breath of love, so it adds to the value of brotherly kindness in its season. Thus we know how on approaching Rome Paul was lifted up and comforted, as he saw those who came to greet him. But there he was soon to experience the faltering of brethren; there he was to see not one standing by him in the hour of his shame and need. He must be conformed to his Master in all things; and this was one of them. But out of the midst of bitter experience he had learned Christ, as even he had never known Him before. He had proved long the power and the joy of Christ for every day, and for every circumstance of it.

It was such an one, truly the servant of Jesus Christ, and so much the more their servant because His, even their servant for Jesus' sake -- it was such an one that wrote from Rome to the tried saints at Philippi. Nor was he in that which he was about to write without deep feeling; but he had learned Christ for all; and this is the key-note of the epistle from the first, though only uttered distinctly at the last. He had learned practically what Christ is, and what He does, and what He can enable even the least to do, (as he says himself,

less than the least of all saints, {Phil. 3:8}

and so much the more, because the least in his own eyes.

Thus then he writes, telling them,

I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel {Phil. 1:12}.

He knew well how much they might be tried by the report of his own imprisonment, and no deliverance coming as yet. But he had himself gone through the trial; he had weighed it all; he had brought it into the presence of God. He had put all, as it were, into the hands of Christ, who had Himself given him His own comfort about it.

I would, then, that ye should understand, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.

Once you are right about Christ, you are right about everything while He is before you. There is nothing assuredly right, on the other hand, where Christ is not the object of the soul. With Him you will be right about the gospel, right about the church, right about doctrine, walk, and service. There is not one of these things but may in itself become the veriest snare; and so much the more dangerous because each looks fair. What looks and sounds better than the saints of God? what than the ministry of Christ? what than the testimony for God? Yet there is not one of these things that has not become the ruin of souls; and there are none that ought to know this better than those I am addressing this night. Who have had more mournful proofs of the danger of putting saints practically in the place of Christ? Who have had more palpitating witness that service may become the object rather than Christ? Has it not been the rock on which many a gallant bark has made shipwreck?

But now the apostle was shut out from every labour apparently. Surely he, most of all, must have felt the change -- the heart that took in the Gentiles, that swept the circle of lands from Jerusalem to Illyricum, that yearned over Spain, ever going out farther and farther, boundless in his desires for the salvation of souls. He was for a considerable time a prisoner. He is at Rome, where he desired to be, no doubt, but which he had never expected to visit as one in bonds. And that he ever was anything but a prisoner there, man at least cannot say. A prisoner he was; and such is all that Scripture tells about him there. We may see the moral harmony of that lot with his testimony, and how suitable it seems that he, who was above all men identified with the gospel of the glory of Christ, should be a prisoner, and nothing but a prisoner in Rome. At any rate, such is the picture that the Holy Spirit gives of him there. And now as he had Christ before his soul, in this way the gospel itself, he can feel, is only promoted so much the more. Far from him was the vanity of being the man first to preach Christ in the great metropolis. He forgot
himself in the gospel. His desire above all was that Christ’s name might go forth. This was very dear to him, let God use whom he would. The things that happened to him he could therefore judge calmly and clearly. What seemed to some the death of the gospel was in point of fact distinctly for the furtherance of it.

The manner, too, in which these things happened seemed to make all as remote as possible from furthering the gospel; but here again he brings in Christ. This disperses all clouds from the soul. This filled Paul with sunshine; and he would have others to enjoy the same bright light which the name of Christ cast on every object. And mark, it is not the anticipation of light with Christ in heaven, but His light now while He is in heaven shining on the heart, and on the circumstances of the pathway here below. He says that they had happened rather for the furtherance of the gospel, -- so that my bonds in Christ are manifest {Phil. 1:13}; for this is the way in which he looks at it -- my bonds in Christ.

Oh, how honourable, how sweet and precious, to have bonds in Christ! Other people would have merely thought of or seen bonds under the Roman emperor, the bonds of that great city that ruled over the kings of the earth. Not so Paul. They were bonds in Christ; how then could he be impatient under them? How could any murmuring who believed they were really bonds in Christ?

My bonds in Christ, he says,

are manifest in all the palace {Phil. 1:13}.

Strange way of God! but so it was that thus the gospel, the glad tidings of His grace, should reach the highest quarters. They were manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; and many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear {Phil. 1:13, 14}.

Blessed is this confidence in Christ, and wondrous are His ways! Who would have expected that the timid man Nicodemus, and the honourable councillor Joseph of Arimathea, would have been brought out at the very time when even the apostles themselves had fled trembling with fear? Yet they were the witnesses of Christ whom God had put forth at the close; for it was manifestly of Him. God never can fail; and the very trials that would seem to crush all hope for the glory of Christ on the earth are the precise occasions in which God proves that after all it is He alone who triumphs, while man always fails even if he be an apostle. But the weakest of saints (how much more this greatest of the apostles!) cannot but be conqueror, more than conqueror, where the heart is filled with Christ. There was victory to his faith by the grace of God. And so, too, he could now read and interpret all things in that bright light around him. Had he occupied himself with the persons that were so preaching the gospel, how disconsolate he must have been! What might you and I have thought of such? Is it too much to say that many a groan would have gone forth from us that are here? Instead of this a song of joy and thanks comes from the blessed man of God at Rome; for, as he says here,

Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife;
and some also of good will. The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely,

-- nor was this all, but --
supposing to add affliction to my bonds {Phil. 1:15, 16}.

Not only was an utterly wrong spirit indulged in the work itself, and toward others engaged actually in it; but even as to the apostle, shut out from such service, a desire to pain and wound was not wanting.

The one preach Christ of contention supposing to add affliction to my bonds: but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached {Phil. 1:16-18}.

Christ is the sovereign balm for every wound; and it was the apostle’s joy, whatever men’s spirit might be, not only to enjoy Christ himself, but that His name was being proclaimed far and wide by many lips, that souls might hear and live. Whatever the motives, whatever the manner, the Lord would surely deal with these in His own day; but, at any rate, Christ was now preached, and God would use this both for His own glory and for the salvation of souls.

Hence, says he,

I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Christ Jesus {Phil. 1:18, 19}.

We must carefully remember throughout all this epistle that salvation never means acceptance. If this be borne in mind a large part of the difficulty that some have found completely disappears. Impossible that anything done by other saints should turn to one’s acceptance any more than what is done by himself. The apostle uses salvation throughout his letter to the Philippians (nor is it confined to this scripture only) in the sense of the complete and final triumph over all the power of Satan. Hence it may be remarked that in the epistle to the Philippians it is not a question of lusts of the flesh; the flesh is not so much as named here, except in a religious way; not in its gross sins, as man would judge, but in its pretensions to religion. See for instance Phil. 3. Hence the conflict is never with internal evil, but rather with Satan. For such conflict we need the power of the Lord and the whole armour of God. But that power displays itself not in our strength, or wisdom, or any conferred resources. The supply of the Spirit of Christ Jesus shows itself in dependence, and this expresses itself therefore in prayer to God. And observe, too, that the apostle felt the value of others’ prayers. They contributed to his victory over the foe. How lovely that even such a man should speak, not merely of his own prayers, but of theirs, turning all to such account.

This shall turn, says he,
to my salvation through your prayers, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ [Phil. 1:19].

There is nothing so unaffectedly humble as real faith, and, above all, that character of faith which lives on Christ, and which consequently lives Christ. Such was the apostle’s faith.

To him to live was Christ.

According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed {Phil. 1:20}.

If he desired for them that they should be without one stumble till the day of Christ, it was the purpose to which grace had girded up his own loins. But that in nothing I shall be ashamed.

What a word, and how calculated to make us ashamed! It is not a question of acceptance in Christ. No; it is practical. It is his state and experience every day, as to which his hope was that in nothing he should be ashamed;

but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death {Phil. 1:20}.

And what is it that gave such a hope to one that owns himself the chief of sinners and less than the least of all saints? There was but one spring of power -- even Christ. And let me observe, it is not merely that Christ is my life. Sweet and wondrous word to say that Christ is our life; but the question is, how are we living? Are we living out that life which we have? Is this the life that is practically exercised? or are there mingled ways and mixed motives? Is there the struggle of the old with the appearance sometimes of the new? Does this content our hearts? Or is it, on the settled judgment of the old as altogether and only self and sin, that we are habitually manifesting Christ? Have we that one blessed person as the hope, motive, beginning, end, way, and power of all that occupies us from day to day? It was so with the apostle. -- May it be so with us!

To me,

may each say truly,

to live is Christ {Phil. 1:21}.

Habitually, indeed throughout this epistle, we find the word

me,

and a very different

me

from the

me

of Rom. 7. There it was an unhappy me,

though distinct from the flesh:

O wretched man that I am! {Rom. 7:24}.

Here it would be, O happy man that I am! He is one who has his joy exclusively from and in Christ. When first he tasted it, he found it so sweet that he cared for none other. And thus it was the power of the Spirit of God that gave him to look out in the midst of all that he passed through day by day, that all, whatever it might be, should be done to Christ, and so too all by Christ, the Holy Ghost working it, so to speak, in his soul to give him simply and settledly in everything that occurred an opportunity of having Christ Himself as the substance of his living and serving, no matter what might come in the course of duty.

To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain

{Phil. 1:21}.

In any case, indeed, to the Christian, death is gain; but he could best say it who could say,

To me to live is Christ,

who could say it not merely as the faith of Him, but as a matter of simple, unconstrained, spontaneous enjoyment of Christ in practical ways.

Now he proceeds to give his reason. It is his own personal experience; and this is the reason why we have

I

so often here. It is not legal experience, for which you must turn to the chapter spoken of in Romans (7), the only bit of a saint’s experience under law, as far as I know, that the New Testament affords (certainly in the epistles). But here is the proper experience of a Christian. It is the apostle giving us what his heart was occupied with when he could not go forth in the activities of work, and when it seemed as if he had nothing to do. Now we all know that when a man is carried on the top of the wave, when the winds fill the sails and all goes prosperously, when hearts are gladdened in sorrow, when one witnesses the joy of fresh deliverance from day to day, it is a comparatively easy thing. But to one cut off from such work it was, in appearance at least, a heavy burden and an immense trial; but Christ changes all for us. His yoke is easy, and His burden light. It is Christ, and Christ only, that thus disposes of grief and pressure. And so accordingly His servant says here,

If I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour

{Phil. 1:22}.

It is needless to recount the comments on these words. They really mean, this is worth my while, -- a well-known phrase in Latin too. He puts it as a matter left for him to judge of and decide by Christ.

If I live in the flesh, it is worth my while

{Phil. 1:22}.

But if not, what then? Why, it was gain. As far as he was concerned, therefore, why could he choose? In a certain sense too he could not, and in another he would not choose. Christ was so truly before his heart, that in fact there was no self left unjudged to warp the choice. This is what brings him, if one may so say, into the dilemma of love. If he left this world, he would be with Christ; if he lived longer in this world, Christ was with him. In short, he was so living Christ, that it was only a question of Christ here and of Christ there. After all it was better for Christ to choose, not for him. But the moment he has Christ before him thus, he judges according to the affections of Christ, and he looks at the need of saints here below.

The question is at once settled as a matter of faith. Though he wist not to choose what between the two before,
when the need of souls rises before him, he says that he shall live, and is not yet going to die. Through the wonderful sight of the love of Christ, this answered the question to his faith, leaving all circumstances entirely aside. Witnesses, prosecutors, judges, emperor, everybody, became, in point of fact, nothing to him.

I can do all things, as he says elsewhere,

through him that strengtheneth me {Phil. 4:13}.

So he could settle now about his life and death.

Therefore, says he,

though I am in a strait betwixt two,
as he had said before,

having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; that your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again {Phil. 1:23-26}.

Only he desires that their conversation should be as it became the gospel of Christ. It was not merely their calling in Christ, their being Christians, that was before him, but a walk as it became the gospel of Christ. It is not at all as the objects of the gospel, but as having fellowship with it, their hearts bound up and identified with all the trials and difficulties that the gospel was sustaining in its course throughout the world.

Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ {Phil. 1:27}.

Thus fervour of desire for others is the happy index of this whenever coupled with adequate knowledge of ourselves. But how can this be unless the heart is perfectly at ease as to itself?

Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ.

Let me press this, because alas! there is no small tendency whenever people know the gospel well, if this be all, to settle down, thinking they have nothing more to do with the matter. It was not so with the Philippians. They had so much the more to do because Christ had done all for their souls. They were coupled with the gospel in all its conflict and progress. It was not because of their own personal interest, though this was great and fresh, but they loved that it should go forth. They identified themselves, therefore, with all who were declaring it throughout the world. Hence he desired that their conversation should be as became such zeal;

that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; and in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God {Phil. 1:27, 28}.

This is the more important, because such fear is the main weapon of Satan. It is always the power of Satan that is in view here. He is regarded as the true adversary, working, of course, by human means; but none the less is it his power. It may be remarked here, that from an expression often misunderstood in Phil. 2 it might seem as if the apostle wished somehow to weaken their confidence. So unbelief interprets, but most assuredly it is wrong. The apostle does call for

fear and trembling {Phil. 2:12}
on the part of the saints in that chapter; but there is not an atom of dread or doubt in it. He would have them realize the solemnity of the strife that is going on. He desires for them, not anxiety about the issue of it, but true gravity of spirit, because of feeling that it is a question between God and the devil, and that we have to do with that struggle in the most direct way. We need to draw from God, the spring and the only supplier of power that can resist the devil; but, at the same time, that we have the devil to resist in His power is a conviction that may well demand

fear and trembling;

and this, lest in such a conflict we should let in anything of self, which would at once give a handle to the devil. In Him, we know, who was the perfect model in the same warfare, which He fought single-handed, conquering for God’s glory and for us, the prince of this world came, and had nothing in Him, absolutely nothing. With us it is far otherwise; and only as we live on Christ do we remove, as it were, from the enemy’s hand that which would furnish him abundant occasion.

In rich measure did the apostle live thus himself -- it was the one thing he did; and he would have the saints to be living in it too.

In nothing, says he,

terrified by your adversaries [this is the other side]; which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God. For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake {Phil. 1:28, 29}.

Thus the very suffering which unbelief might interpret wrongly, and regard as a severe chastening, and so cause the heart to be cast down, instead of taking comfort before God, -- the suffering for Christ’s sake is a gift of His love, as much a gift as the believing in Christ for the salvation of the soul. For, in point of fact, through this epistle salvation is seen as going on from first to last, and not yet complete, being never viewed as such till the conflict with Satan is altogether closed. Such is the sense of it here. Hence he speaks of the conflict which they once saw to be in him, and now heard to be in him.

Next, not only did he exhort them not to be terrified by the power of Satan, which is itself an evident and solemn sign of perdition to those that oppose the saints of God; but he calls on them to cast out the sources of disunion among themselves; and this he does in the most touching way. They had been manifesting their mindful love for the apostle, who on his part was certainly not forgetful of its least token. If,
then, they really loved him, --

If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if there be any comfort of love, any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies {Phil. 2:1},

-- he would venture to seek another proof of it. That there was all this abundantly in these saints he did not doubt; they had just shown him the fruit of love personally. Did he want more for himself? Far, from it. There was another way which would best prove it to his heart; it was not something future secured to Paul in his need, which would be the way of nature, not of love or faith. Not so: Christ is always better, and so says he,

Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory {Phil. 2:2, 3}.

There is always danger of these, and the more so where there is activity among souls. There was evidently energy among these Philippians. This commonly is apt to give occasion for strife as well as vain-glory. No saints are outside the danger.

Nothing, then, would the apostle have done in strife or vain-glory;

but in lowliness of mind each esteeming other better than themselves {Phil. 2:3}.

Let me look at another as he is in Christ. Let me think of myself as one that is serving Him (oh, how feebly and failingly!) in this relationship, and it is an easy thing to esteem others better than myself. It is not sentiment, but a genuine feeling, thus

looking not each at his own things, but each also at the things of others {Phil. 2:4}.

Now the saint that has Christ Himself before him looks abroad with desires according to the activity of divine love.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself {Phil. 2:5-8}.

There are two chief stages of His humiliation flowing out of His perfect love. First of all He emptied Himself, becoming a slave and a man; and having thus come down, so as to take His place in the likeness of men, He, found in figure as a man, humbled Himself, becoming obedient even to the lowest point of degradation here below. He

became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father {Phil. 2:8-11}.

It will be observed that there is no such thing in the first instance as

to the glory of God,

when we hear of all bowing in the name of Jesus. To the confession of His Lordship is added
to the glory of God the Father.

The reason is, in my judgment, perfectly beautiful.

Jesus is His own name, His personal name. Jesus is Jehovah, although a man; consequently the bowing in that name to the glory of God the Father does not occur to the apostle. Why, then, is it so in the next instance? Because he looks at Jesus, not in His own personal right and glory, where necessarily all must bow, but rather at Him in His official place as Lord -- the place He has righteously acquired as man. This is wholly distinct from His own intrinsic eternal glory. He was made Lord and Christ. The moment you look at what He is made, then it is to the glory of Him who thus exalted Him. It was God the Father that made Him Lord and Christ, but God the Father never made Him Jehovah. He was Jehovah, equal with God the Father. Impossible that He could be made Jehovah. Reason and sense are out of the question, though reason must reject a creature's becoming God. Such a notion is unknown to scripture, and revolting to the spiritual mind. Hence we see the great importance of this truth. All error is founded on a misuse of a truth against the truth. The only safeguard of the saints, of those that love the truth and Himself, is simple subjection to the word of God -- to the whole truth He has revealed in scripture.

Evidently, therefore, two glories of Jesus are referred to here. There is His own personal glory; and this first. The other is what suits it, but a conferred position. If Jehovah so served, it was but natural that He should be made Lord of all, and so He is. It was due to His humiliation and obedience; and so it is here treated.

Thus, in both parts of the history of Christ, presented to us in no obscure contrast with the first Adam, we have first of all His own glory, who humbled Himself to become a servant. The very fact, or way of putting it, supposes Him to be a divine person. Had He not been God in His own being and title, it would have been no humiliation to be a servant, nor could it be indeed a question of taking such a place. The archangel is at best but a servant; the highest creature, far from having to stoop in order to become a servant, can never rise above that condition. Jesus had to empty Himself to become a servant. He is God equally with the Father. But having deigned to become a servant, He goes down lower still. He must retrieve the glory of God in that very death which confessedly had brought the greatest shame on God outwardly. For God had made the world full of life; He

saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it

\[\text{was very good} \{\text{Gen. 1:31}\}.

\] and Satan apparently won the victory over Him in it. All here below was plunged under the sentence of death through Adam's sin; and God's word could but seal it till redemption.

The Lord Jesus not only comes down into the place of servant in love among men, but goes down into the last fortress of the enemy's power. He breaks it completely, becomes conqueror for ever, wins the title for God's grace to deliver rightfully every creature, save only those who, far
from receiving Christ, dare to reject Him because of that very nature which He took on Him, and that infinite work on the cross which had caused Him suffering to the utmost in working all out for the glory of God. Oh, is it not awful to think, that the best proof of the love of Christ and of His glory is the very ground which the base heart of man turns into a reason for denying both His love and His glory? But so it is; and thus the food of faith becomes the poison of unbelief. But the day is coming when

every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth [Phil. 2:10].

Not that all shall be delivered and centred in Him, but that all must bow. All who believe shall surely shine in His glory; and the universal creation, which, belonging to Him as His inheritance, He will share with His own, shall be reconciled and delivered in due time. But there are the things, or if you will, the persons under the earth which can never be delivered. Yet these shall bow, no less than those in heaven, or on earth. In His name all must bow. Thus the difference between reconciliation and subjection is manifest. The lost must bow; the devils must bow; the lake of fire must own the glory of Him who has power to cast them there, as it is said,

unto the glory of God the Father [Phil. 2:11].

But all in heaven and on earth shall be in reconciliation with God and headed up in Christ, with whom the Church shall share the unbounded inheritance. (Compare Eph. 1 and Col. 1.) But all, even these in hell, must confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

†††

But now the apostle turns to the use that he makes of so blessed a pattern,

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence [Phil. 2:12].

It was the exact reverse in good of what the Galatians were in evil, for they had been cordial and bright when the apostle was with them; but directly his back was turned, their hearts were alienated. Even he who knew them well marvelled that they were so soon shifting, not only from him, but from the gospel, after he left them. But with the Philippians there was increased jealousy for Christ. They were more obedient in his absence than in his presence. Hence he calls upon them, as one that could not be with them to help them in the conflict, to work out their own salvation. Such is the force of the exhortation. This epistle is therefore eminently instructive to those who could not have an apostle with them. God was pleased, even whilst the apostle was alive, to set him aside and to prove the power of faith where he was not.

Hence he says,

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling
{Phil. 2:12}. It is not the dread of losing the Saviour of their souls, but because they felt for His name;

for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure {Phil. 2:13}. Therefore he intreated. them to

do all things without murmurs and reasonings, that they might be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom they shone as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life {Phil. 2:14-16}.

It is a description that might almost do for Christ himself, so high is the standard for those that belong to Christ. Christ was surely blameless in the highest sense, as His ways were harmless, --

holy, harmless, undefiled {Heb. 7:26}, as it is said elsewhere. Christ was Son of God in a sole and supreme sense. Christ was

without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation {Phil. 2:15}.

Christ shone as the true light in the world -- the light of life. Christ held it forth; nay, more, He was it. For what believer would deny that, however close the conformity, there is always that dignity and perfection which is proper to Christ, and exclusively His? Let us uphold the glory of His person, but, nevertheless, let us not forget how the apostle’s picture of the saint resembles the Master! Like another apostle (2 John 8) he does not hesitate to blend with all this an appeal to their hearts for his own service in their well-being.

That

(says he, after he had exhorted the Philippians thus to stand,)

I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain. Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith
{Phil. 2:16, 17}.

How truly he accounted himself less than the least of them! How gladly would he be a libation upon the sacrifice of their faith! He esteemed men better than himself. He too in love still keeps up the servant-character, and gives them as it were the Christ-character. This is the unfailing secret of it all -- the true source of humility in service.

For the same cause also do ye joy and rejoice with me. But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state {Phil. 2:18, 19}.

†††

And now there is the most lovely picture of Christ again; for it is always Christ here, and this again practically. Timothy was very dear to him, and was then with him; but he is going to part with the one that was so much the more valued by him in his solitariness and sorrow because of his circumstances at Rome. Indeed he esteemed others better than himself. He is just about to send Timothy from himself that he might know about them. For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state {Phil. 2:20}.

Timothy shared the unselfishness of the apostle’s heart.

For they all seek their own. It might have been thought that so much the more would Paul need his love and services. Whatever he needed, love is never itself but in unselfish action and suffering. I speak of
Christian love, of course.

For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s. But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel. Him therefore I hope to send presently, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me. But I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly. Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellow-soldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants [Phil. 2:21-25].

He loves, we see, to couple with the relationship to himself what was related to them. Epaphroditus was his fellow-servant, and indeed more than that --

my brother, and companion in labour, and fellow-soldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants. For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness.

Why? because he himself had been sick? No; but because that ye had heard that he had been sick [Phil. 2:25, 26].

How lovely that this it was that pained him -- unselfish love! the love of Christ everywhere!

For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him [Phil. 2:27].

Was this all the apostle had to say? Not so.

And not on him only, but on me also,

(what a difference is made when love interprets!)

lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be [not rejoicing here, but] the less sorrowful [Phil. 2:27, 28].

He did feel it. Love feels acutely -- nothing so much; but it triumphs.

Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation

(how would turn it again to practical profit as to others):

because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me [Phil. 2:29, 30].

This chapter then looks for the working of the gracious feelings of Christ Himself in the Christian individually, showing us, first, the fulness of them all in Christ in contrast with the first Adam. But it gives us also the effect of Christ in the saints eventually -- of Paul himself, of Timothy, of Epaphroditus, and indeed of the Philippian saints. It shows us grace practically in different measures and forms. But the grace of Christ wrought in them all; and that was the great joy and delight of the apostle’s heart.

In Phil. 3 it is not the display of intrinsic affection in Christ, or the gracious dispositions of Christ in the saints. Not the passive side of the Christian as being in the world, but the active comes before us. Accordingly, this being not so directly the subject of the epistle though a very important part of it, it comes in parenthetically in a large measure, not now in any wise as a question of truth or development of the mystery of Christ, as we saw in Eph. 3, but, nevertheless, as a parenthesis; for he resumes afterwards the internal side again, as we shall see in Phil. 4. Energy is not the best or highest aspect of Christianity. There is real power, there is strength from God that works in the saint; but the feelings of Christ, the mind of Christ morally, is better than all energy. Nevertheless, energy there is, and this assuredly judges what is contrary to Christ.

Here, accordingly, it is not the outgoings of love, but the zeal that burns indignantly as to what dishonours the Lord. This is one of the main features of our chapter.

Finally,

says he,

my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe. Beware of dogs [Phil. 3:1, 2].

In Matt. 23 we have woe upon woe pronounced upon scribes and Pharisees, and so it is here. As it was a true though distressing part for Christ to judge religious evil, something akin could not be absent here; but at the same time it was by no means a prominent characteristic of Christ’s task here below -- far from it. It was a necessary duty sometimes as things are on the earth, but nothing more; and so it is still.

Beware of evil workers; beware of the concision [Phil. 3:2].

For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh [Phil. 3:3].

This is the only allusion, as far as I know, to flesh in this epistle, but it is flesh in its religious form, and not as a source of evil lusts and passions. It is all judged, and its religious form not least, by Christ.

Though,

says he,

I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other

-- carrying on the same thought of the flesh --

if any other man thinketh that he hath matter of trust in the flesh, I more. Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless [Phil. 3:4-6].

And what did the apostle do with all this roll of fleshly advantages? It was seen laid in the grave of Christ.

What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ [Phil. 3:7].

Will it be said that this is what the apostle felt, and did, and suffered in the freshness of his first acquaintance with Christ? It was also what he carried up to the moment of writing to the Philippians as ardently as ever.

Yea,

said he,

and I count all things but loss.
It is not only his reckoning in the first fervour of love for the Saviour.

Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord [Phil. 3:8].

Such experience is both a real and a precious boon. Let us not mistake in this; let us not be driven from it by a too common misuse. That which men call by this name is really the trial of what flesh is under law much more than experience of Christ. But let us not be turned aside, and think that it is merely a question of believing and of knowing our place secure; but let us live of that very Christ who is our life. This is what he did, and accordingly this is the source, not merely of a firm faith and confidence as to the issue, but of present joy and all-overcoming power. This is what gives force to our affections, and rivets them on Christ. This is, accordingly, what flows forth in praise from himself, and in calling out praise from other hearts. So he says here,

For the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung {Phil. 3:8}.

Thus the two things are repeated -- the past judgment and the present power:

and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ {Phil. 3:8}.

This will be, no doubt, at the end of the journey: the faithful win Christ where He is. For it is not meant, looking to Him now, or having Him as one's life: to win Christ means having Him at the other side. He always looks there in Philippians.

It is not at all a question of what one has here. This has its most weighty place elsewhere; but when it is a question of experience, the end cannot be here. There is the present joy of Christ; but this does not content the soul. The more one enjoys Christ here, the more one wants to be with Him there.

That I may win Christ,

therefore he says;

and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law {Phil. 3:9}.

This was precisely what he desired when a Jew. Now, having seen Christ, if he could even bring his own righteousness into heaven, he would not. It would be mere independence of Christ if he could have stood without a single flaw, as blameless, in fact, as in a certain sense outwardly he was under the law, until the Spirit of God gave him to see what he was in God's mind. Then he found himself a dead man -- condemned and powerless. But supposing it possible to be clothed with the righteousness of the law, he would not have it now. He had got a better righteousness, and he desired nothing so much as to be found in Christ, having that which is through faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. Nothing but the righteousness that was of God as its source satisfied him. It is the only place in Scripture where the phrase means, not simply the righteousness of God in point of character, but the righteousness of God in point of source. Such is the meaning here. Elsewhere it is God's or divine righteousness. Here the object seems to be to make its difference from legal obedience more felt -- the contrast with the law more complete.

That I may know him {Phil. 3:10}.

Now here we have what is present: so that the passage presents some difficulty to souls because of intermingling the present with the future. Thus easily do we fall into error, because the human mind likes to have either one thing or another, and thus avoid all difficulty in Scripture, having each squared according to our notions. But it is not so that God has written His word. Nevertheless, God will surely teach His own, and knows how to clear up what is hidden from them. He has written His word not to perplex, but to enlighten. Thus the true bearing of the passage is, that from the first the eye of faith is fixed steadily on the end of the journey.

That I may win Christ, and be found in him {Phil. 3:8, 9} -- where not a, vestige of self remains, but all will be Christ, and nothing but Christ. This is the righteousness whose source is in God; it is also by faith of Christ, and not through the law, which, of course, would have man's righteousness if it could.

But now he adds,

That I may know him (speaking of entrance by faith into communion with Christ) --

that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection.

This is open to the heart now.

And the fellowship of his sufferings

-- again and certainly a present thing, not relating to heaven.

Being made conformable to his death {Phil. 3:10}:

-- this too is clearly in the world now.

If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection from the dead 16 {Phil. 3:11}.

16. There is no reasonable doubt that the received text is wrong, followed by the Authorised Version (of, instead of “from” the dead). The Alexandrian, Vatican, Sinaitic, Clermont, and St. Germain Uncials, supported by some of the cursive manuscripts, very many versions, and the chief Greek and Latin ecclesiastical writers read την ἡσυχασθεναι την ἐκ νεκρῶν. Codex F and G, by manifest error, read τὸν ἑκ, and this seems to have been corrected (or rather corrupted) in order to make sense into τὸν (omitting ἑκ) in E and L and the mass of cursive manuscripts. But in my opinion the sense, and even the Greek, seems bad; for on the one hand both ἡσυχασθεναι and the drift of the argument point to a resurrection of favour and blessedness, not to that in which the unjust must rise to judgment; while on the other hand τὸν νεκρῶν would imply the dead, i.e. all the dead, as a class. Hence I cannot but consider it a surprising error in Griesbach that he edited the received text in this place. After and Matthai followed according to their plan the manuscripts before them; but the latter was too good a scholar not to feel the difference, though he appears to impute it to a corrector for the sake of elegance in his second edition. Long before them, Mill had given his judgment in favour of the more ancient reading; and Webstein repeated it apparently with approval. Bengel hesitated; but Dr. Wells in this, as in many other instances, showed his sound judgment and quiet courage in rejecting the common text, and adopting that which has by far the best authorities.

Dr. S. T. Bloomfield indeed (Addit. Annotations in loc.) admits that the external testimony is quite in its favour, though it is hard to see what he means by the internal evidence being in this case denied; for he suggests (continued…)
Clearly we here look out of the world and into a state to come, when we have the consummation of our hopes and the end of the journey. This is what he calls “salvation.” It cannot be till the Christ is risen according to the pattern of Christ Himself.

Thus we see here the power of a risen and a heavenly Christ, not now treated doctrinally as in 1 Cor. 15 or 2 Cor. 5 and elsewhere, but as that which bears on the Christian for the constant experience of every day. Hence that which judgment and put aside religion after the flesh, righteousness after the law, all that was now left completely and for ever behind, and the saint is set on the road that nothing can satisfy him but being in the same glorious condition with Christ Himself. Hence he says,

16. (…continued) himself that θην ἔκ may have been a correction proceeding from those who thought that the sense which the context requires, “the resurrection from the dead,” could not be extracted from ἐγένετο τῷ νεκρῷ. The critical reading he owns has force and propriety; but he does not see why ἐγένετο τῷ νεκρῷ should not of itself have the same sense as that conveyed, with more propriety of expression (and for that reason likely to be adopted in the early Uncial MSS.), ἐγένετο τῇ νεκρῇ. Little probable is it that the reading ἐγένετο τῷ νεκρῷ should have been altered to ἐγένετο τῷ νεκρῷ. There is great reason to think that the ἔκ arose from those who thought it necessary to the sense, and did not see that it could be fetched from the ἐγένετο in ἐγένετο τῷ νεκρῷ. Hence I am inclined to retain ἐγένετο τῷ νεκρῷ as a popular and familiar mode of expression (suitable to the persons addressed), according to which the expressions εἰς τὴν θάνατον τῶν ἀνθρώπων εἰς τὴν θανάτον τῶν ἀνθρώπων and ἐγένετο — as at Rom. 4:16, and elsewhere — to the state of the persons in question, that state or kind of resurrection unto life of those who have died in the Lord, and whose resurrection will be a resurrection unto life and glory, their bodies being raised incorruptible, and both, body and soul united for ever with the Lord. See 1 Thess. 4:16-18.

I have transcribed this note at length, because it is a fair sample of Dr. B.'s critical, scholastic, and exegetical manner. Enough has been already said above, before I even knew of his reasoning, to prove how unfounded it is in every point of view. The internal evidence (i.e. the scope of the context) is as decided for the ἔκ as the weightiest external witnesses. How the text got gradually changed from the most correct form (not correction) in the early Uncials has been explained. When the existence of the resurrection of the just from that of the unjust got lost in Christendom, and all were merged in the error of one general indiscriminate resurrection, one can understand that people would not feel the impropriety of substituting τῶν for τῇ ἔκ (for as to τῇ ἔκ τῶν, of which Dr. B. speaks, it exists in no document whatever). There is therefore not the slightest ground to countenance the rather dangerous idea, that the apostle did not employ a phrase analogous to the correct one which is found elsewhere in the New Testament, and adopted “a popular and familiar mode of expression,” i.e. a really inaccurate mode. And why should our Lord adopt a correct form to the Sadducees (Luke 20 repeated in Acts 4), and Paul an incorrect one to the Philippians? Who can understand why it should be “suitable to the persons addressed,” on Dr. B.'s showing? Of the two, the converse would be more intelligible; but my conviction is that both the Lord and His apostle used similar and correct phraseology, as did the Holy Spirit elsewhere. And as to Rom. 4:17 (which was probably meant rather than 16), it has no bearing on the matter, as it is there merely a question of God's power displayed in quickening the dead, and calling things that are not in being into being, and in no way distinguishing the resurrection of life from that of judgment. When the state or kind of resurrection is meant to be expressed, the anomalous form is requisite, as we see in verse 24 of this very chapter, and regularly so. (See Rom. 1:14.) I believe, therefore, that ἐγένετο τῶν νεκρῶν, especially if ἔκ be supposed to be fetched (as Dr. B. says) from ἐγένετο, is incompatible with τῶν νεκρῶν, the one conveying the notion of a selected company, and the other of the dead universally. Modern editors of value, however differing in their system of recession agree in the ancient as against the received reading; so Scholz, Lachmann, Tischendorf, Elliott, Alford, Tregelles, Wordsworth, &c.

Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind [Phil. 3:12, 13].

This, carefully remember, does not mean forgetting sins. Far from losing sight of our past ways, it is a very wholesome thing indeed to remember them: we are never safe in forgetting what we are and have been. What he means by forgetting the things that are behind is, that we should not think of any progress we may have made in following Christ, -- that we should lose sight of everything calculated to give us self-satisfaction. This were to spoil all, because it would please the flesh.

It is our progress then that we are to forget. Let us be humbled on account of our sins. Self-judgment, where grace is known, is a most wholesome exercise of soul; and we shall have it in perfection even in heaven itself before the judgment-seat of Christ. One of the elements of heavenly happiness will be the calm and settled knowledge of all that we have been here below. This will not detract for an instant from the perfect enjoyment of Christ, but rather promote it so much the more, making it more evidently and always pure grace even in glory. Thus forgetting those things which are behind refers to the progress that we may make. True experience is still the great theme which the apostle has in hand here as well as in his own personal history. He was too much bent on what was before to be occupied with calling to mind what was behind him; it must have impeded him in the race.

Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise [i.e. differently] minded, this also will God reveal to you {Phil. 3:15}.

Differences there may be among the saints, and especially when we come to the question of experience. But in truth it may betray itself in doctrine and practice in various shapes.

And what is the true divine rule? Is it agreeing to differ? This is but a poor human resource, as unworthy of the saints as of the truth of God, who would not have us to wink at any mistake. It is no rule, but an evasion. There is, however, a sure and only divine standard: as far as we have attained, our call is to walk in the same path. And this is true from the first moment of our career as God's children. For, let me ask, what is our title to communion? What is it that brings us into the blessed fellowship that we enjoy? There is but one title, there can be no sufficient ground but the name of Christ -- Christ known and confessed in the Holy Ghost; and where He is simply before us, the progress is most real, if not always easy and sensible. It is not meant that there are no difficulties, but that Christ makes the burden light and all happy to the praise of God's grace; whereas any other means or measure detracts from His glory and draws attention to self.

Supposing, for instance, we mingle with Christ knowledge or intelligence about this truth or that practice, does it not give a necessary prominence to certain distinctive points, which so far must make Christ of less account? Even,
therefore, if you could have (what is impossible) ever so much real spiritual knowledge along with Christ, who would so much as notice these acquisitions in comparison with Christ? Let us merely take up a single point of the primary ground of fitness for fellowship, which is often a difficulty with the saints. Yet the truth as to this abides, not only at the starting-point, but all the way through. What is there that you can rightly plead but Christ’s own name? And this ground is one which always brings in the strength of the Holy Ghost, as it is based on God’s mighty work of redemption. If right here, we are at one, so to speak, with His present purposes. What is the Spirit now doing? He is exalting Christ. It is not merely exalting His work, or His cross; it is not so much His blood, as Christ Himself. The name of Christ Himself is the true centre of the saints; unto this the Spirit gathers. As he had said elsewhere before, so he says here,

Be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ {Phil. 3:17, 18}.

Thus, as at the beginning of the chapter, there was the energy that went out against the evil workers, with a religious mind after the flesh, so now there is the energy that bursts forth against those that were misusing Christianity, making it an earthly system, setting their mind on things here below, under the name of the Lord Jesus; and between the two, is set forth the positiveness, if one may so speak, of Christ Himself.

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It is plain, then, that in Phil. 2 the great spring of power is the love and the glory of Him who came down; who, even when He did so come, went down still lower, where none could accompany Him. Yet we may follow, and see conformity unto His death; but there was that in His death on the cross which could be His alone.

In Phil. 3 there is no coming down from glory in the power of divine love, resulting in His exaltation by and for the glory of God the Father after a new sort. Here we see One who is in glory, and on whom the eye of the believer is set; and accordingly the judgment of evil is from the side of heaven. The one thing that suits is to pursue the glory before him, till he is in the same glory along with Christ. This is the object set before us in Phil. 3. The one therefore, I say, is the passive side of the Christian; the other is his activity. The passive shines in Christ coming down; the active is realized by the eye that is fixed on Christ, who is actually in glory. This separates from all, and judges the best of man to be dung, as the former conforms the heart after His love.

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The last chapter is founded on both. The apostle takes up, no doubt, the sweet affections of Phil. 2, but then they are strengthened by the energy that Christ seen in glory imparts, as in Phil. 3. Hence he thus opens,

Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown {Phil. 4:1}.

One cannot overlook the amazing strength with which he speaks even of his affections.

My joy and crown,
my dearly beloved.

Not that there were not difficulties; there were many.

I beseech Evodia
(we may just notice the true form in passing: Euodias sounds like a man’s name, whereas here it is really a woman).

I beseech Evodia, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord. Yea [not and], I entreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which labour with me.

According to the true meaning it is not others, but those very sisters that he commends to Epaphroditus in desire for their blessing,

which labour with me in the gospel [or seeing that they shared the conflict of the gospel with me] {Phil. 4:2, 3}.

“Laboured” gives a wrong sense. Many hence have wrongly gathered that they were preachers. There is really no reason to suppose that they preached at all. What they did seems a much more proper thing, in my judgment, for a woman. They shared the conflict of the gospel; they partook of the reproach that covered those who preached it. This is lost in the idea of labouring in it. We must think rather of the conflict of the gospel: there was often for all concerned disgrace, and pain, and scorn.

Let nobody suppose me to insinuate that a woman is not in place when exercising, according to the Scripture, any gift God has given her. Women may have gifts as well as men. We are not to suppose that, because we are men, we monopolise all the gifts of Christ. Let us see to it that we walk according to the place which God has given us. At the same time, God’s word is to me plain as to the manner in which the gifts are to be exercised. And is there not evidently a path of unobtrusiveness (for the veil or sign of power on the woman’s head is no vain figure) which most befits a woman? I believe that a woman shines most where she does not appear. Hers is a more delicate place than that which becomes the man, and one which a man attempting it would awkwardly fill. But while a man is quite unfit to do a woman’s work, can it be doubted that a woman brings no honour to herself, or to the Lord, by attempting to do a man’s task? The Lord has laid down their places respectively with distinctness. It is ignorance and absurdity to answer such scriptures by the text, that in Christ there is neither male nor female. We do not speak of standing in Christ now, but of their allotted services. In this we hear of difference; and scripture does not obliterate but contrariwise asserts it, and treats the practical denial of it as a scandal brought in by Corinthian headiness. No doubt the new creation is essentially neither male nor female; it is not a race perpetuated in a fleshly way; but all things are of God and in Christ. Notwithstanding, it has been already explained that the man has a relative place as the image and glory of God, being set in a remarkable position between God and the woman in matters of outward decorum.

Returning, however, to the women Evodia and Syntyche, they had devoted themselves to an exceedingly happy and
prized service. They joined with those who preached the truth and partook of their obloquy. They helped them, and in that sense
laboured
if you will. At any rate they endured the conflicts of the gospel in its earlier days at Philippi. Why should women expose themselves? Why go in the way of crowds of soldiers or civil officers? Why should such as they face the unmanly officials that took advantage of the imperial government to treat with injury those identified with the gospel? Love does not calculate these costs and dangers, but goes calmly forward, come what will, trouble, scorn, or death. No wonder the apostle was grieved to think of differences among such women as these.

Help them
(says he)
with Clement also, and with my other fellow-labourers, whose names are in the book of life {Phil. 4:3}.

Finally, he calls them again to rejoice, and now with more emphasis than ever.

Rejoice in the Lord alway. In sorrow? Yes. In affliction, in prison, everywhere. Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice {Phil. 4:4}

He did not make a mistake. He did not forget, but meant what he said.

Again I say, Rejoice.
Let your moderation go along with it, because along with this joy there might be a certain enthusiastic spirit that would hinder calm judgment. But this is not the character of Christian joy.

Let your moderation be known unto all men {Phil. 4:5};
that is, the meekness and gentleness which bends to the blow, instead of resisting it in the spirit that ever asserts its rights and fights for them. Have rather that spirit which counts nothing as a right to be claimed, but all one has as gifts of grace to be freely used in this world, because one has Christ in view.

Let your moderation be known unto all men, strengthened by this consolatory truth, --
the Lord is at hand {Phil. 4:5}.

And this nearness of Christ I take simply to be the blessed hope here made a practical power. It is not the Lord at hand to succour one now and here from time to time. No one denies this, which is, or ought to be, no new thing for a Christian. He means the Lord, really, personally, at hand; as he had said in the end of the last chapter, that this was what we look for.

Our conversation is in heaven; from whence we wait for the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour {Phil. 3:20}
-- for this is the true meaning of it. And this puts the doctrine, as far as there is doctrine in the epistle, in a very clear light. There is no looking at Him as Saviour on the cross merely; but when He comes for us, there will be in the final sense (as ever in our epistle) “salvation.” Thus he anticipates the removal of the last trace of the first Adam; he looks for our being brought fully, even as to the body, into the likeness of the Second Man, the last Adam. This is salvation in truth. Hence he says,

We look for the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself {Phil. 3:20, 21}.

It does not matter how unlike they may be, or how opposed; it does not matter what vessels of shame and misery they may have been now;

He is able to subdue all things unto himself.

Then, as to our practical every-day expectation, the Lord is at hand.

And, accordingly, why should one be a prey to care, if this be really so?

Be anxious [or be careful] for nothing; but in everything
-- this is the resource --
in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God {Phil. 4:5, 6}.

Better not make them known to men; it is a dangerous snare. By all means let them be made known unto God. There is something which ought to be made known unto men, namely, the not fighting for your rights.

Let your moderation be made known unto men {Phil. 4:5}.

Let your requests be made known unto God.

It is not that you have failed, perhaps, or broken down in some particular. Certainly this is painful and humbling. But it is better for you to lose your character, than for Christ through you to lose His; for you are responsible to display the character of Christ.

Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.

Let your requests, whatever they may be, be made known unto God;
and not only so, but with thanksgiving {Phil. 4:5, 6}.

You may be perfectly sure of an answer when you make known your requests: therefore let it be with thanksgiving. And what is the result?

And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus {Phil. 4:7},

-- feeling, judgment, everything, guarded and governed by this precious peace of God. The peace which God has in everything He will communicate to keep you in everything; and not only so, but the heart, being free from care, will enter into what pleases Him. And therefore,
whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things {Phil. 4:8}.

Instead of occupying oneself with all one hears that would cast down, now that we have committed all that is miserable to God, we can go on delighting in the goodness of God, as well as in its fruits. In God there is ample supply. All we want is, that the eye of faith be a little open; but it is only Christ before the eye that keeps it open.

Then he turns to what had drawn out the epistle.

I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity {Phil. 4:10}.

So tender, so delicate is his sense, that he would not spare what was needful if there had been any want of thought, but at the same time he hastens to make whatever apology love could suggest.

Not, says he,

that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am,

-- this is the great design of the epistle; it was not truth that was made known simply, but experience that was grown into

-- I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through him who strengtheneth me {Phil. 4:11-13}.

At the same time he intimates his value for their love, and takes care that his was independence founded on dependence, -- an independence of circumstances which finds its strength in simple and absolute dependence upon God.

So the apostle lets them know that he owned their hearty love;

not, he says,

because I desire a gift.

For no personal end did he mention their grace;

but I desire fruit that may abound to your account {Phil. 4:17}.

It was not that he wanted more. We know well that, as men have sarcastically said, gratitude is a kind of fishing for fresh favours. There was the very reverse in Paul’s case. As he tells them, fruit that might abound to their account was all that his heart really yearned after. Their gift to him was

an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God {Phil. 4:18}.

What a God is ours, so to treat that which, connected with the world, Christ Himself calls

unrighteous mammon! {Luke 16:11}. 
Lectures Introductory to the Study of
The Epistles of Paul The Apostle

Lecture 7
Colossians

The most cursory reader discerns at once that the epistle to the Colossians is the counterpart of that to the Ephesians. They are in nowise the same, but may be viewed each as a supplement to the other. The epistle to the Ephesians develops the body in its rich and varied privileges; the epistle to the Colossians brings before us the Head, and not only this, but the glories of Him who holds that relation to the church. There was no doubt a suitability for each line of truth in the wants of the saints respectively addressed; nor do I think it can be intelligently questioned that the condition of the Ephesian saints was better than that of those at Colosse.

To the former the Holy Ghost could launch out into the fulness of our blessing in Christ. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is our God and Father; and He has blessed with every possible blessing, and in the highest sphere and on the best ground. There was no hindrance to the flow of the Spirit in unfolding the truth. To the Colossians the Holy Ghost has to speak about their state, and along with this to present the truth of Christ as a remedy for it; not so much as the centre of blessedness and joy in the communion of the saints, but as supplying the true and only divine corrective to the efforts of Satan, who would drag them down into tradition on the one hand, and into philosophy on the other, the too common snares of human nature, and the latter more particularly for cultivated and reasoning minds. It is evident, therefore, that to enter on the privileges of the church, the body of Christ, would have in nowise met the evil which the enemy was seeking to inflict on the Colossians. They needed to be drawn away from every theme and object but Christ Himself. They needed to learn especially the vanity of all that man’s mind delights in. They needed to know, I will not say, that Christ suffices only; but that there is such fulness of blessing and glory in Christ as utterly to eclipse and condemn all that flesh would glory in. Hence, too, a main part of the difference between these two epistles. There are many nice shades in detail; but I have referred now to that which is the principal point whence the two lines of truth diverge. It is, however, evident from what has been remarked, that the two letters do in the most remarkable manner correspond to each other; the one presenting the Head, the other the body. Thus they have a closer connection than any others in the New Testament.

We may proceed to trace now the course of the Spirit of God in this deeply instructive epistle. The apostle addresses the Colossian Christians in terms substantially similar to those which are addressed to the saints at Ephesus. Here he gives prominence, it is true, to their being

brethren {Col. 1:2}.

Of course the Ephesian saints were so; but here it is expressed. It was not so unmingled an address as where he views them simply as they were in Christ. The expression

brethren,

though of course flowing from Christ, brings forward their relationship by grace to each other.

Next we enter on the apostle’s thanksgiving. It was not so in the Ephesian epistle, where one of the richest developments of divine truth precedes any particular allusion to the saints in that city. Here he at once addresses himself, after the thanksgiving, to their condition and of course to their need. First, as usual, he owns what they had of God.

We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, for the hope which is laid up for you in heaven {Col. 1:3-5}.

It is not, as in the Ephesian epistle, the riches of the glory of God’s inheritance in the saints, but closely resembles a comparatively lower line of things which comes before us in the first epistle of Peter. It need hardly be said that they were equally true, and each in its place most appropriate, but not all equally elevated. The hope laid up for us in heaven supposes a position on the earth. The epistle to the Ephesians views the saint as already blessed by God in heavenly places in Christ. In the one they are waiting to be taken to heaven in an actual sense; in the other they belong already to heaven by virtue of their union with Christ.

Yet it remains true, that

the hope is laid up for you,

as he says,

in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; which is come unto you, as it is in all the world: and bringeth forth fruit and growth, as also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth {Col. 1:5, 6}.
All momentous and blessed, but nevertheless by no means the same fulness of privilege of which he could discourse at once in writing to the Ephesians.

As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellow-servant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ;
who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.
{Col. 1:7, 8}

This is the only allusion to the Spirit, as far as I remember, in the epistle. It does not present the Spirit of God as a person down here, though He is a person of course, but rather as characterizing the love. The love was not natural affection; it was love in the Spirit: but this is very far from the rich place given to His personal presence and action elsewhere.

On the other hand, the epistle to the Ephesians abounds with such allusions. There is not a chapter in it where the Holy Ghost has not a most important and essential place. If you look at the saints individually, He is the seal and the earnest. He is also the power of all their growth in understanding the things of God. Only through Him are the eyes of the heart enlightened to know what God has wrought and secured for the saints. So again by Him alone do all, Jews and Gentiles, draw near to the Father. In the Spirit are both built together for God’s habitation {Eph. 2}. He it is who has now revealed the mystery that was kept hid through ages and generations. He it is who strengthens the inner man to enjoy through Christ the fulness of God. He is only the constitutive power of the unity that we are exhorted to keep. He it is who works in the various gifts of Christ, welding them together, so that it may be truly Christ through His body. He it is, the Holy Spirit of God, who we are warned not to grieve. He it is who fills the saints, guarding them from the excitement of the flesh, and guiding into that holy joy which issues in thanksgiving and praise. For the Christian and the church must sing their own psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. He it is finally who gives vigour for all the holy conflicts we have to wage with the adversary. Thus it matters not what part of Ephesians is looked at. We have now traversed the varied contents of the epistle, and it is evident that the Holy Ghost forms an integral part of the divine truth unfolded in it from beginning to end.

This makes it so much the more striking, the epistle to the Colossians being the complement of an epistle so full of the Spirit, that there should be in the former so marked an absence of Him, that He is only referred to once, and only as characterizing the love of the saints. It may be added that what is said of the same truth is in Colossians attributed to Christ, or that life which we have in Christ. To the Ephesians, the Holy Ghost is treated as a divine person acting for the glory of Christ, but this in the saints and in the church. Also the reason seems obvious. When men’s eyes are turned away from Christ, the doctrine of the Spirit might add to the danger and delusion, as it has wrought in all ages to puff up men not established in Christ. For inasmuch as the Spirit does act in the church -- in man, if the eye be not on Christ and only on Him, the action of the Spirit, whether in the individual or the church, gives importance to both. In such a state dwelling on it would detract from Christ’s glory; whereas when Christ alone is the object of believers, they can bear to know and to dwell upon, and to enter into, and understand, the various operations of the Spirit, which turns so much the more to the glory of Christ.

Another reason is this, that the presence of the Spirit of God, both in the individual and in the church, is a most essential part of christian privileges, while, for the reasons already alleged, it was not for the well-being of their souls that it should be unfolded here. The whole point therefore of this epistle is a recall to Christ Himself, because of what had crept in through Satan’s wiles. The needed and only remedy was to turn the eyes of the saints from other objects, even their own privileges, and to fix them on Christ. Hence, though the Holy Ghost is really on earth, dwelling in the saint and in the church, yet under such circumstances, to occupy the mind even with the blessed Spirit, would clearly have interfered with His own great aim in glorifying Jesus. Therefore, as it seems, does He call away undividedly to Christ. When the soul has been in peace weaned from all else, and found all its joy and boast in Christ, it can then hear more freely. Not that there may not be danger even then; save that as long as the eye is on Christ there is none, because what is inconsistent with His name is refused. The Spirit, having secured His glory, is more at liberty as to every other topic.

In the next place, we have the apostle’s prayer:
For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and growing by the knowledge of God {1 Col. 1:9, 10}.

It is plain that however blessed this is, still it supposes wants, and a measure of weakness, and this for the ordinary walk of the Christian; that they might walk worthy of the Lord, says he. He could not say in this epistle “worthy of your vocation,” as in writing to the Ephesians. He does not even say worthy of Christ, but of the Lord.

That is, he brings in His authority, for there can be no mistake for the Christian more profound than to suppose that the presentation of the Lord as such is the more elevated for the saint. It is most true in its place; but it addresses rather the sense of responsibility than the communion of affections of the children of God. If a man does not own Him to be Lord, he is nothing whatever; but one may bow to Him as Lord, and yet be painfully insensible to the higher glory of His person, and to the depths of His grace. Alas! multitudes have so failed, nor is anything more common at this present moment, even as it was always so.

The Spirit of God, as in the Acts of the Apostles, began with the simplest confession of Christ’s name. This is habitually His way. That which brought in thousands on the day of Pentecost and afterwards was the preaching and the faith that Jesus was made Lord. But not a few of those that were baptized from early as in later days turned out untrue to
the glory of Christ. We can readily understand that the Spirit did not bring out the fulness of the glory of Christ then, but as it was needed. Nor is it denied that some souls enjoyed a remarkable maturity of intelligence, so that from the beginning they saw, believed, and preached Jesus in a deeper glory than His Lordship. There is no one that rises before our mind's eye more readily and strikingly in this respect than the apostle Paul himself. But the apostle was singular in this; for even those who did know that Christ was the Son of the living God, in the highest and eternal sense, seemed but little to have preached it, at any rate in their earlier testimony. As the withering evils of Satan came in, the value of that which their hearts clung to formed an increasing part of their testimony, until at last the full, undiminished, and even brightening truth of His divine glory was brought out in all its fulness. True, and known to some from the first, the Spirit would brook no hiding of it in order to meet the daring of men and the subtlety of the enemy, who were taking advantage of the lower glory of Christ, so as to deny all that was higher -- His deity and eternal Sonship.

It appears to me then that, in writing to the Colossians, the terms employed by the Spirit of God afford clear evidence that their souls at Colosse rested on by no means the same firm and lofty ground as that which the epistle to the Ephesians contemplates; and the apostle consequently could not appeal in their case to the same mighty motives which at once rose, by the Holy Ghost’s inspiration, in the apostle’s heart in writing the kindred epistle.

That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, urges he,

being fruitful in every good work {Col. 1:10}.

For Christianity is not a mere thing of doing this or not doing that; it is a growth, because it is of the Spirit in life and power. If, as men have fabled, spiritual beings sprang forth ready armed, as well as in fulness of wisdom and vigour, it would not be Christianity. Babes, young men, and fathers: such is in grace as in nature the divine way with us. God has been pleased to call the church a body; and so in truth it is. As also, looked at individually, the Christian is a son of God, so there should be a growth up to Christ in all things. There is scarce anything more offensive than a child who looks, talks, and acts the old man. Every right-minded person revolts from it as a lapsus naturae, and a piece of affectation or acting. So, in spiritual things, the mere taking up and repeating thoughts, deep and high but unproved experience, cannot be the fruit of the Spirit of God’s teaching. Nothing more lovely (whether spiritually, or even in its place naturally) than that each should be just what God has made him, only thenceforth diligently seeking increase of inward power by the operation of God’s grace. There is then a healthful progress in the Lord. While there is no doubt that which requires to be cut down or pruned on every side, there is a gradual development of divine life in the saints of God; and this, as being through the Spirit’s use of the truth, by no means can be all at once. In no case indeed is it really so.

Thus it is then that for these saints the desire is that they should steadily advance. In material science it is not so, in schools of doctrine it is not so: there is something altogether circumscribed, in known limits, and definite enough to satisfy the mind of man. All that is to be got in certain provinces may be acquired after no long study. The Spirit of God applies the truth of Jesus Christ, which resists all such thoughts as human. The Colossians from their dabbling with tradition and philosophy were in danger on this side. So, says he,

being fruitful in every good work, and growing (not exactly in, but) by the knowledge of God {Col. 1:10}.

But still there is growth supposed. How could it be otherwise if by the knowledge of God? He is the only divine source, sphere, and means of real growth for the soul. But there is far more than growth in knowledge, or even by the knowledge of God. There is not only the contemplative side but the active, and this makes the saint truly passive; for if we are strengthened, it is mainly not to do, but to endure in a world which knows not Christ. Thus we are strengthened with all might, according to the power of his glory, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness {Col. 1:11}.

How good as well as vast the mind of the Spirit of God! Who could ever have combined with God’s glory such a place for man too? No man, I will not say anticipated, but approached in thought such a portion for souls on earth. See how and for what the apostle gives thanks again. Although there were difficulties and hindrances, how much, he feels, there is for which to praise our God and Father:

Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet (and observe well, it is not merely for the certainty that He will, but in the peaceful assurance that He has made us meet) to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light {Col. 1:12}.

Human words fail to add to such a thought. His grace has qualified us now for His glory: such, as far as this goes, is the clear meaning of the Holy Ghost. He looks not at some advanced souls at Colosse, but at all the saints there. There were evils to be corrected, dangers to be warned against; but if he thinks of that which the Father has in view for them, and of them in view of His glory, less he could not say, neither could he say more. The Father has made them meet already for the inheritance of the saints in light; and this, too, fully taking into account the awful state of the heathen world, and their past personal wickedness when drawn to God in the name of the Lord Jesus,

who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love: in whom we have redemption [through his blood, is added to the Ephesians] even the forgiveness of sins {Col. 1:13, 14}.

At this point we come to one of the main and distinctive objects of the epistle. Who and what is the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption? Little did the Colossians conceive that their endeavour to add to the truth of the gospel was in reality to detract from His glory. Their desire, we may
be sure, was as well meant as any mistake can be. Like others, they may have reasoned that if Christianity had done such great things in the hands of fishermen, tax-gatherers, or the like (who could be of no great account in the world’s scale, or in the schools of men), what might it not accomplish if it were but arrayed in the wisdom of philosophy; if it possessed the ornaments of literature and science; if it went forth on its career of victory with that which attracts the feelings and commands the intellect among humanity? The Holy Spirit brings in that which completely judges and sets aside all such speculations. No one, no thing, can add to Christ’s power, lustre, or value in any one respect. If you knew Him better, you would feel it yourself. Infinitely vainer is the thought for any man to impart fresh worth to Christ, than for David to have met Goliath in Saul’s armour. Indeed, the trappings which men so cry up are a positive hindrance to Christ; and in the precise measure in which they are prized, they reduce their votaries to slavery, and the faith they profess to zero. Judge these same things, and they may become of some account to the glory of God. But treat them as means desirable to attract the world, or as objects to be valued for their own sake by Christians, and as they are intruders, so they will prove to be aliens, and enemies of the glory of Christ.

Christ is the image of God, in fulness and perfection; He only showed out the invisible God. Tradition never manifested the true God. Philosophy, on the contrary, made matters worse, as indeed did the resources of human religion. Christ, and Christ alone, has truly represented God to man, as He alone was perfect man before God. And as He is the image of the invisible God, so is He the first-born of all creation; for the Holy Spirit here brings together a kind of antithesis as to Christ in relation to God, and in relation to the creature. Of God He is the image, not exactly in an exclusive, but assuredly in the only adequate sense. Others may be -- as the Christian is -- we know, and man even in a certain and real way as a creature. But, as truly and fully making God known, there is none but Christ. He is the truth; He is the expression of what God is. This is the fountain of all true knowledge, and so Christ is the truth as to everything and every one. In this phrase, however, all that the apostle asserts is in relation to the invisible God. Utterly impossible that man should see Him who is invisible: he needed one to bring God down to him, and display His word and ways, and Christ is that one image of the invisible God.

Besides, Christ is the first-born of all creation. Not, of course, that He was the earliest on the earth like Adam. In point of time the world had grown comparatively old before Jesus appeared. How then could He that came and was seen in the midst of men four thousand years after Adam was made, -- how could He be in any sense first-born of all creation? We have not to imagine a reason, for the Spirit of God has given His own, and this will be found to set aside all others. Every thought of man is vain in the presence of His wisdom. Jesus is the first-born, no matter when He appeared. Had it been possible, consistently with other plans of God (which it was not), for Him to be the last (in point of fact) born here below, He had been the first-born all the same. Impossible that He could be aught but the first-born. And why? Because He was the greatest, the best, the holiest? For none of these reasons, though He was all this, and more. Still less was it because of anything conferred on Him, whether of power or office. On no such ground, nor on all together, was He the first-born. The word of God assigns one greater than all, which is the true and only key to the person and work of Christ:

For by him were all things created {Col. 1:16}.

Oh, what majesty, as well as adaptation to need, in the truth of God! It has only to be heard by a heart touched by grace to carry conviction. But alas! there is in fallen man, as such, a will that hates the truth, and despises the grace of God. Does it not prove both by being jealous of the glory of Christ? It remains, however, that He is the first-born of all creation, because He is the Creator of all things, above or below, material or spiritual:

For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible {Col. 1:16}.

It is not a question of the lower ranks of creation only, but takes in the highest:

whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him {Col. 1:16}.

Do you say, Yes, but why might not God create by the highest as an instrument? There is more said even here to maintain the full glory of Christ. All things were created by Him, no doubt; but they were created for Him also -- not by Him for the Father. They were created by Him, and for Him, equally with the Father. And as if this were not enough, we are further told that He is before all things, and by (é v) Him all things consist. He is the upholder of all creation, so that the very universe of God subsists in virtue of Him. Without Him all sinks at once into dissolution.

Nor is this all. He is the Head of the body -- one of the chief topics of this epistle. Such is His relationship to the church. And how is He the Head of the body? Not because He is the first-born of all creation simply, nay, nor because He is the creator of all. Neither His headship of all creation as the Heir of all things, nor His creatorial rights, would in themselves give a sufficient title to be the Head of the body. In it is another kind of blessedness and glory; for it a new order of existence appears; and not least of all beings we ought to understand this difference. Who can be so deeply concerned as the Christian? for if we have any part or lot in Christ, if we belong to the church of God, we ought clearly to know the character of our own blessing. Christ it is who determines this, as all else. But the distinctive character is that He is

the beginning, the first-born from the dead {Col. 1:18}

-- not merely the first-born of, but the first-born out of. He is the first-born from among the dead, as well as the Head and firstborn Heir of all subsisting creation. Thus it is that He rises into a new condition, leaving behind that which had fallen under vanity or death through its sinning chief, the first
Adam. He has annulled the power of him that had the power of
death -- that word so terrible for the heart of man, and
most surely foreign to the mind and heart of our God and
Father, but a stern necessity that came in through rebellion.

Where sin brought man, grace brought Christ. And the
glory of His person enabled Him in grace and obedience to go
down into depths never before fathomed; and out of the whole
scene, not of a rejecting guilty world only, but of the realm
of death (and such a death!) Jesus emerged. And now He is
risen from the dead, the beginning of a new order of
existence altogether; and as He is the Head, so the church is
His body -- founded, indeed, on Christ, but on Him dead and
risen. As such -- not born merely, but risen again from the
dead -- He is the beginning. All question, therefore, of what
existed before His death and resurrection is at once excluded.
He who believes this would understand that it was still an
unrevealed secret during Old Testament times. The dealings
of God were not only not on the principle of a body on earth,
united to a glorified Head, once dead and risen, but
incompatible with such a state of things. Thus whoever by
faith receives simply the intimation of this verse, as of a
crowd of other scriptures, has all this very needless
controversy closed for him; he knows and is sure by divine
teaching that Jesus was not merely the highest of that creation
which had been already, but the beginning of a new thing and
its Head. This He was pleased to begin in resurrection from the
dead. It was in no wise the old thing, elevated by the
glory of Him who had deigned to descend into it, but a new
state of things, of which the risen Christ is both the Head and
beginning; as it is said,

Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead;
that in all things he might have the pre-eminence
{Col. 1:18}.

As this gives us the new estate, and position, and relation
in which stands the glorious person of the Lord Jesus, so next
we have a view of His work suitably to the object of the
epistle:

For all the fulness was pleased in him to dwell
{Col. 1:19}.

I take the liberty of rendering the verse correctly, as is well
known to most of my brethren now present. There are few
here, it is to be supposed, who are not already aware that to
put in “the Father” (as is done in the Authorized Version in
italics) is to take away from the Son without warrant and
dangerously. It was not the Father, but the Godhead. It
pleased the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. So the
fulness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell in Him. Yet
even this did not reconcile man to God, but the very reverse
rather; it proved that man was irreconcilable as far as he was
concerned.

If a divine person was pleased to appear here below, and
to bring in unimagined goodness and power, dealing with
every need and every one with whom He came in contact,
and who sought or even accepted His gracious action, it
might have been supposed that man could not resist such
unhesitating love and unmeasured power. But the actual result
demonstrated beyond doubt that never before was witnessed
such hearty, universal, and causeless hatred as against Jesus
the Son of God. There was, there could be, no lack of the
attractiveness of love and power in Him who went about
doing good; yet miserable hearts did not turn to Him, save
where the grace of God the Father drew them to the only
adequate expression of Himself. None could pretend that He
had ever refused a single soul; none could say that they had
gone empty away. Their motives were far from good
sometimes. They might come for what they could get; but at
length they would not have Him or anything He had to give
on any terms. They had done with Him, and, as far as will
was concerned, they had done with Him for ever. The cross
terminated the awful struggle and heart-breaking sight of man
thus manifestly led captive of the devil at his will.

And what was to be done? Ah! this was the serious
question, and this it was which God was waiting to solve. He
meant to reconcile man spite of himself; He would prove His
own love to be the conqueror of his hatred. Let man be
unmendable, let his enmity be beyond all thought, God, in the
calmness of His own wisdom, and in the strength of His
unwearied grace, accomplishes His purpose of redeeming
love at the very moment when man consummates his
wickedness. It was at the cross of Christ. And so it was that,
when all seemed to fail, all was won. The fulness of the
Godhead dwelt in Jesus; but man would have none of it, and
proved it above all in the cross. Yet the cross was the precise
and only place where the foundation that cannot be moved
was laid. As he says,

having made peace through the blood of his cross, by
him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him,
I say, whether it be things on earth or things in
heaven {Col. 1:20}.

First the apostle brings in all things as a whole, the
universal creaturehood, earthly and heavenly; thus giving us
an adequate notion of the perfect triumph of God at the time
when it seemed as if Satan had completely succeeded through
man against the counsels of God. But is this all? Is it merely
that all the universe has thus, in the cross of the Lord Jesus,
a foundation laid for their reconciliation? There is a present
witness of the victory of Jesus. The universe goes on as
before, the lower creation at least subject to vanity; but God
(and it is like Him) hastens to use His victory, though not yet
as far as outward things are concerned. This remains for the
day of Christ’s glory, and will fill a most important part in
the purposes of God. But God has even now a far greater
purpose at heart. What could be more vast than the
reconciliation of all things in heaven and earth? The veriest
victims of Satan, the open enemies of Christ, the fiercest --
powerless let them be, but the fiercest in their will of
opposition against God -- are precisely those that God has
already reconciled to Himself; and this where Satan had but
just appeared to conquer in leading them to crucify Christ. In
that field of blood where His ancient people joined the
idolatrous Gentiles, and indeed incited them to plant the cross
for their own Messiah -- there it is that God’s grace has
established a righteous deliverance for such as He has
reconciled.

Satan is allowed apparently to go on as if he had won the
final victory; but God brings the truth of what He has done
into the heart where Satan had most of all deceived before.

   You that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind,
says he (for the full truth is brought before them as to their condition),

   enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death {Col. 1:21, 22}.

While He lived, this work was wholly unaccomplished. The incarnation, blessed and precious as it is, never reconciled man to God. It presented to us the person of Him who was to reconcile; in itself it was thus a most important step towards the reconciliation; but, in fact, there was no reconciliation yet for a solitary soul: the cross of Christ wrought it all.

   In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprovable in his sight {Col. 1:22}.

What a change!

But he adds:

   If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled {Col. 1:23};

and we must not weaken this. It is not at all, “since ye continue.” Scripture must not be sacrificed rudely to our seeming comfort. Besides, when men thus slur over its true force, and would extract consolation where God intends warning, it is a proof not of firm but of weak faith. For assuredly God is not trusted where there is so much as a desire thus to alter or turn aside a single word, for one’s own convenience or any pretext whatsoever. Yet there is nothing more common; it is precisely what men, and sometimes Christians to no small extent, are doing now very generally; and what have they gained by it?

A father’s stroke that chastises the erring is a mercy. To receive it as the faithful blow of our best friend in His own word may not seem the readiest way toward comfort; but the comfort that we get in the end from Him who thus smites is both real and stable, and rich in profit to the soul. But the apostle meant not so much to administer consolation to these Colossian saints as to caution them. They needed rather reproof, and they are warned that the course on which they were entering was slippery and perilous. The pursuit of tradition or of philosophy, as a graft on Christianity, continually tends to bring in that which poisons the springs of truth, and grace is always annulled by either. Therefore he might well press,

  If ye continue.

All the blessedness that Christ has procured is for those that believe; but this of course supposes that they hold Him fast. Hence it runs:

   If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven {Col. 1:23}.

The language does not in the smallest degree insinuate that there is any uncertainty for a believer. We must never allow one truth to be either shut out or enfeebled by another; but then we need also to remember that there are, and have always been, those that, having begun seemingly well, have ended by becoming the enemies of Christ and the church. Even antichrists are not from without in their origin.

   They went out from us, because they were not of us {1 John 2:19}.

There are no enemies so deadly as those who, having received enough truth to over-balance them and to abuse to their own self-exaltation, turn again, and would rend the church of God, wherein they learnt all that gives them power to be specially mischievous. The apostle could not but dread the slide on which the Colossians found themselves; and the more so as they themselves had no fears, but on the contrary thought highly of that which had attracted their minds. If there was danger, certainly it was love to admonish them; and in this spirit he therefore says,

   If ye continue in the faith, grounded and settled.

As for the apostle he lays before them another point. He was a minister both of the gospel, and, as is said a little later, of the church -- two very different spheres, seldom united in the same individual. He was minister of both, and of the latter, it would seem, in a peculiar and weighty sense: not merely as ministering to the church, but as the instrument that God has employed to make known to us its character and calling more than any other. Indeed we may say that Paul presents the gospel as the display of divine righteousness beyond all, while he alone develops in his epistles the mystery of Christ and the church. This may seem a strong statement, and I wonder at none feeling surprised, till they have rigidly examined it with the scriptures; for probably no one could believe it unless he had proved its truth.

But I must repeat that there is not a single apostle who so much as speaks of being justified by faith, except the apostle of the Gentiles. James notoriously presents what many think hard -- in my judgment quite reconcilable, equally inspired of God, and most important for man, but not the same thing, nor for the same end. It is somewhat startling at first sight to realize such a fact, but if it be a fact -- as I unqualifiedly assert -- is it not of great moment to understand it? Neither James nor Peter, neither John nor Jude, treat of justification before God by faith in Jesus. Who has done so? Paul only. I am very far from insinuating that Peter, James, John, Jude, and all the rest, did not preach justification by faith. But it was given to Paul, and to Paul alone, to communicate this great truth in his epistles; and he alone has used the well-known phrase. None of the others has touched on it -- not one. They have undoubtedly taught that which is consistent with it and even supposes it. They have pressed other truth, which is incompatible with anything else but justification by faith; he asserts it often and openly.

Thus the most perfect harmony reigns between all the apostles; but Paul was emphatically minister of the gospel, and minister of the church. Not only did he preach the one and teach the other (which the others no doubt did too), but he has committed to inspired writings the gospel as none other did; and he has, alone of all, brought out the church in the fullest way. He might well, therefore, say (and what a serious occasion for the Colossians that it was needful to say

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it as an admonition!) he was minister of both. Yet there were men not wanting then that denied him to be an apostle. The most honoured servants of God invariably stir up the keenest opposition from man. But woe to such iniquitous and ungrateful adversaries! and none the less because they name the name of the Lord. Some of old were not Jews nor Gentiles, but baptized men and women. It was they that yielded to these feelings of hostility. They might detract little or nothing as to his personal qualities; they might even affect to condescend and patronize. But that for which they were opposed to him was the very thing for which, most of all, they should have owned their debt under God. Satan knew well what he sought in alienating many a Christian from this blessed man of God, and in carping at his ministry, and the testimony he was given to bear.

The apostle, however, speaks of his service in these two respects: the gospel, which is universal in its aspect to every creature under heaven; and the church, which is a special and chosen body. As for the gospel, it is not a question whether every creature hears, but such is the sphere; and doubtless if the apostle could have preached to every individual in the world, he would have gladly done it. At any rate this was his mission. There was no class under ban, nor was any individual refused the beams of its heavenly light. In its own nature like the rays from the sky, it was the sun not for one part of the world alone, but for every quarter. So to the church he says,

I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church: whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation [or stewardship] of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God {Col. 1:24, 25}.

Space was left: a revelation was yet lacking. God had given the law; He had embodied His past ways in an inspired history of His people; He had given prophets to proclaim what was future. But for all that a gap was left on which, when filled up, types might more or less bear, wholly different from the history, and not more answering to the prophecy. How was it then to be filled up? Our Lord Himself marked the break in His reading of Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth. See the same thing in the famous seventy weeks of Daniel. You come to that space from time to time in the prophets. Paul was the one that God raised up to fill the gap. Not that others did not supplement this or that. As we know, the church is built on the foundation, not of Paul, but of His holy apostles and prophets. Mark and Luke, although they were not apostles, were surely prophets. The foundation of the apostles and prophets took in the New Testament writers in general. The apostle brings in his own special part. It was neither a gospel contributed, nor a sublime series of prophetic visions. His function was to fill up the word of God, --

Hence we learn, it may be seasonable to remark, that the shape given to the mystery here is not that Christ is exalted in heaven, and that the church, by the Holy Ghost sent down thence, is united to Him the Head there. This is the doctrine of the epistle to the Ephesians. Here we see the other side -- Christ in or among you Gentiles,

the hope of glory.

In the epistle to the Colossians, glory is always that which we are waiting for. There is no such thing here as our sitting in heavenly places. It is heavenly glory that is waited for, but only in hope. Christ was now in these Gentiles who believed the hope of a heavenly glory in prospect for them. It is another aspect of the mystery, but as true in its place as what we find in Ephesians; not so high, but in itself precious, and not less differing from the expectation raised by the Old Testament. What we read of there is that, when Christ had come, He forsworn sets up His kingdom, in which the Jews are promised to be His specially favoured subjects. They are not indeed to reign with Him: this was by no man and at no time promised to them. But they are to be the people in whose midst the glory of Jehovah will take up its abode. Here the apostle speaks of another system altogether: Christ come, but the glory not yet apparent, but only coming. Meanwhile, instead of the Jews enjoying glory along with Christ in their midst, rejected by the Jews, Christ is in the Gentiles; and they who receive His name are waiting for heavenly glory with Christ. It is a quite different state of things from what could be gathered from the Old Testament. Not a prophet, not even the smallest shred of any prophecy, reveals such a truth. It was an absolutely new truth, in contrast with the ancient and millennial order, yet altogether different from what is found in the Ephesians; nevertheless they both constitute substantive parts of the mystery.

Thus the mystery includes, first, Christ as Head above, we though here being united by the Holy Ghost to Him glorified. Secondly, Christ, meanwhile, is in or among the Gentiles here below. Were He among the Jews; it would be the introduction of the promised earthly glory. But it is not so. The Jews are enemies, and unbelieving; the Gentiles are specially the object of God's present ways. Having Christ among them, heavenly glory is their hope, even to share with Him that glory. This, then, shows Christ, in a certain sense, in the Gentiles here below; as, in the Ephesians, Christ is seen above and we in Him. There Jew or Gentile is all alike, and those who believe the gospel are by the Spirit united to Him as His body. Here the Gentiles in particular have Him in them, the pledge of their participating in His heavenly glory by and by. And as this was so blessed and novel a truth, the apostle states his own earnestness about it --

whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ {Col. 1:28}.

There is no slovenliness here: no careless assumption that, because you are members of Christ's body, all else must be right, and may be left; for he who knew best the faithful love of Christ is none the less urgent individually with every man.
Hence his unflagging expenditure of labour. Hence the spending of heart and thought that

    every man

might be thus built up in the truth, and especially the heavenly truth of Christ, which was entrusted to his stewardship and ministry,

    warning every man and teaching every man, that we may present every man full grown in Christ {Col. 1:28}.

This is the meaning of perfect.

There is no reference to a question of evil within, but of arriving at maturity in Christ, instead of babes, resting merely in forgiveness.

    Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily {Col. 1:29}.

Thus the striving of the apostle was by no means only in the way of evangelizing. There was much more than this. It influenced him deeply and habitually in all the anxieties of love.

For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; in whom [or rather which] are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge {Col. 2:1-3}.

The mystery is now revealed, even the relation of Christ and the church; the actual testimony of God's counsels in Christ to those who compose His body. And as a rule, it is always what God is actually doing that is the urgently needed truth. Special wants may spring up and claim attention at particular moments; but since Christ was set on high, this is the truth for the saints, and for a very simple and sufficient reason -- it is what God the Father designed for the day of salvation. It is of this Christ is the objective centre and Head. In this we have what the Spirit occupies Himself with as sent down from heaven. Satan being invariably the personal and persistent antagonist of Christ, whatever is God's purpose in Christ becomes peculiarly the object of Satan's hatred and hostility.

Hence, as the apostle Paul was one on whom God set particular honour in developing the mystery, and communicating it in inspired words also, so he was more than any other called to suffer the consequences in this present evil world. His labours were not merely indefatigable, but accompanied by the sorest trial and anguish of spirit, as well as continual detraction with public hatred and persecution. Everything which could break the heart of a holy man from day to day he passed through. Yet, carrying out his ministry with continual tears, he looked before men as one whom none of these things moved. Nevertheless, he lets the Colossians know what he went through for their sakes and other saints who were before his heart, even though unknown in the flesh.

    And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words. For though I be absent in the flesh,

yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ {Col. 2:4, 5}.

There was much that was blessed at Colosse; and the apostle loves to give full credit for it.

    As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving {Col. 2:6, 7}.

In fact, this was their fault: they were not content with Christ and Him only. Not appreciating His glory and fulness, they did not see that the secret of true wisdom and blessing is in going on to know more of Christ than is already possessed. Such is the only sure root of all blessing, and in this above all is real faith and spirituality shown. Is the heart satisfied with Him? Do we feel and know that we can add nothing to Him? Is it all we want to draw from Him?

    Then he brings in, accordingly, his first solemn caution.

    Beware,

says he,

    lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ {Col. 2:8}.

Here we have the mingling, I apprehend, of natural man's philosophy, and religious man's tradition. These things at first sight appear far apart, but they are not so in result. They may seem to be far as the poles asunder; but in point of fact, there is nothing that more shows an energetic spirit of evil at work in the world than the way in which he marshals and combines these two armies, that outwardly look enemies to each other. Have you not proved it? Somehow or another, freethinkers and superstitions men coalesce in reality. There is no feature of the present day more remarkable than the success with which Satan is massing, as it were, his forces, bringing together at the very same point, where they are wanted, these two parties; that is to say, the heavier arms of human tradition, and the lighter ones of man's philosophy. This is the reason why at each grave juncture you will find that ritualists will as a rule support rationalists, and rationalists will try to extenuate the proceedings of ritualists. They may wear the semblance of being altogether hostile to each other: they are both of them only hostile to the truth. They both are thoroughly and essentially ignorant of Christ; but the Christ that they ignore, for religion or reason, is that blessed Person not so much as He who here lived and laboured, as especially dead and risen. They use freely His name; they in word and bodily exercise do Him no small reverence; but without faith all is vain.

Beloved, the Christ that we know gives no glory to the first man; neither does He put honour on ordinances or human priesthood. How He would have been exalted, if He had consented to shed the halo of His own glory on the race as such! But our Lord is the Christ who condemned the first man. Fallen humanity by Him was detected and judged root and branch. This cannot be forgiven by all who cleave to the first man, on the side either of ordinances or of philosophy. How can man brook that he, and the world that he has built
up since he lost Eden, should be made nothing of? It is impossible to look for it from human nature. He who probed it all cannot be endured. We must and do judge all things as they are. This is truth about them; and He who is the truth told it out. The cross of Christ is the death-knell of the world in all its pretensions before God. His grave is man's grave. Brethren, the Christ that God has made known to us is the Christ that man scorned, cast out and crucified. But He is the Christ that God raised from the dead and seated in heavenly glory. And this is the truth that is so offensive to flesh in every form. Never will it be received, either by the world's religion, or by its philosophy.

How vain and perilous -- at least for themselves -- was the effort of the Colossians! They were endeavouring to strike an alliance between Christ and the world. They had really themselves slipped away in heart: no such hope had found favour otherwise. It was not wonderful that he said in Col. 1,

If ye continue in the faith rooted and grounded, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel {Col. 1:23}.

They had been moving away, not perhaps so rapidly as the Galatians; in faith they had been infirm. And now the apostle would recall them:

Walk in him, rooted and built up in him {Col. 2:6, 7}.

Let them beware of philosophy and tradition;

for in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily {Col. 2:9}.

It is not to be found in tradition, still less in philosophy.

Philosophy is an idol of man or nature, a blind substitute for the knowledge of God. It is false and ruinous, whether it leaves Him out or brings Him in -- whether it denies the true God, or makes everything a sham god. Atheism and Pantheism are the ultimate results of philosophy, and both in reality set God aside. As to tradition, it invariably puts man as far off from God as it can, and calls this religion. The truth in Christ is not merely that God came down to man in love, but that man, the believer in Christ, is now dead and risen in Him. Is Christ in the glorious presence of God? The Christian is one with Him. Accordingly, he brings in now for this object the twofold truth:

for in him,

says he,

dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him.

How blessed! If He is the fulness, you are made full in Him, which is the head of all principality and power {Col. 2:9, 10}.

Away, then, with every pretence to add to Him; away with all possible expedients to give lustre to Christ!

He is the head of all principality and power: in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the flesh [for so it runs] by the circumcision of Christ: buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen {Col. 2:10-12}.

Constructively, to my mind, this points to the great sign of His death. It is in baptism rather than in Him. Hence it seems to me not in whom, but rightly

wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God {Col. 2:12}.

Thus baptism is not limited to signifying death. Yet it is never the sign either of life or of bloodshedding, but of a state of privilege beyond. When the apostle was told to wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord, blood does not seem to have been meant, but water. For this is the sign not so much of what would expiate as cleanse. But the cleansing as well as expiation is by the death of Christ, out of whose side flowed both.

Here the doctrine carries one a little farther than either Rom. 6 or 1 Pet. 3. There is death and burial of all we were; but there is here at least resurrection with Christ -- death and resurrection. In Romans the emphatic point is simply death, because the argument of the apostle in Rom. 6 does not admit of going beyond the truth that the baptized believer is alive from the dead -- not exactly risen, but alive unto God. In Colossians the argument requires that our resurrection with Christ, as well as death and burial, should be distinctly stated. And so it is.

Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who has raised him from the dead {Col. 2:12}.

He applies the truth to the case in hand after this:

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven us all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us {Col. 2:13, 14}.

He does not say “against you,” because, in truth, the Colossian saints had never been under the law and its ordinances; they had been Gentiles. But whereas he said, that you, being dead,

were now thus raised, so he says,

blotting it out against us;

for all that we, poor Jews, could boast -- the ordinances -- were against us instead of being for us, and they are gone now.

Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ {Col. 2:14-17}.

Thus is seen first of all, in virtue of the dead and risen Christ in whom they believed, that they were quickened and all their trespasses forgiven, -- two things here strikingly united together. The very life that I have in Christ is a witness that my sins are forgiven. It is not merely the life of a Christ that lived in this world, but the life of Him that was lifted up on the cross, and bore my sins there. But now the work is done,
and the atonement is accepted before that new life is given me in Him risen.

One cannot therefore be quickened together with Christ without having one's trespasses, yea, all (for if not all, none) forgiven. The guilt which a broken law charged on the conscience is gone by an act infinitely more glorifying to God than the personal righteousnesses of all the men that ever lived, not to speak of the conscious pardon which is also secured to those who possess it. Had you to do with the law? The mighty work of Christ has entirely delivered from it. The sentence is blotted out; the power of Satan is spoiled openly; Christ risen triumphs over all. There is no new means of grace; there is no development, still less supplement to Christ. The one and same Christ it is who has settled everything.

As to the Jewish rites and feasts that some were endeavoured to re-impose, take for an instance the Sabbath, which is the stronger, because it was from the beginning of the first man, yet unfallen, and of course long before the Jewish people.

Let no man judge you {Col. 2:16}
is the exhortation. They were shadows. Have you not got the substance? Why be found running from the substance after the shadow?

Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding the head {Col. 2:18, 19}.

Thus the fact of prying into that which God has not revealed, and man has not seen, -- such as speculations about angels, -- is the patent proof that the heart is not really satisfied with its portion. This is not holding the Head. He who keeps fast Christ thus, in conscious union with Him, could never be craving after angels. In Christ the saint is above them, and leaves them to God without anxiety or envy. We know well that God is making a good use of them, and that, in point of fact, if we meddle, it can only be to loss and confusion.

And not holding the head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God {Col. 2:19}.

Next, the doctrine is applied still more definitely. Wherefore

says he,

if ye be dead with Christ

which is one grand part of his subject --

if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living [or alive] in the world, are ye subject to ordinances? {Col. 2:20}.

Of course it is not at all being dead to what a man had as a natural life in the world. Such is not the Christian life, which is really the life of Him that died and rose again. He died -- this is the point here -- and therefore I am dead too. But if I am dead, what have I to do with those things that only affect men as long as they live? Certainly they have no relation to me now risen with Him. A man alive in the world is under these ordinances, and owns them. Such was the position of Israel. They were a people living in the world, and the whole system of Judaism supposed and dealt with a people in the world.

In moral truth, as well as literal fact, the veil, shadowing their state, was not yet lifted up from the unseen world. But the first characteristic result of Christ's work on the cross was the veil that shut up the holiest rent from top to bottom. Thus it begins, not with the incarnation (for sin was not yet judged, nor man brought to God), but with the cross, with redemption. There was no Christianity -- i.e., no deliverance -- of man and setting him in the Second Man -- before Christ became first-born from among the dead. Clearly, therefore, the whole character of the new system depends, first, on the Deity of the incarnate Saviour, and, secondly, on the glorious truths of His atoning death and of His resurrection. Thus we should hold Him fast, not only in other respects, but in this special relation of

Head.

So he says,

If ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances?

Then he gives a specimen of these:

Touch not; taste not; handle not {Col. 2:21}.

But this is not the character of Christianity, but of Judaism. It pertains to a life in this world to say,

Touch not; taste not; handle not.

It is all well for a Jew, because he has got his abstinences and his restrictions. But this is not at all the divine way of dealing with the Christian. We are not Jews; we have our place in Christ dead and risen, or are nothing. Such prohibitory commands had their day; but the time of reformation is come. It is a question now of truth and holiness in the Spirit -- of Christ, in short. These restrictions dealt with meats and drinks, and such like things, which perish in the using. The Christian never stood on any such fleshly ground. He is dead with Christ; consequently he has passed out of the sphere to which such dealings apply.

Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh {Col. 2:23}.

Proud, fallen nature is satisfied even by these efforts to put down the body; whereas God would have the body to have a certain honour in its own place, and that of the Christian is the temple of the Holy Ghost. Thus in every way the ritualistic system is false, and a traitor to Him who died on the cross.

But there is far more than that:

If ye then be risen with Christ {Col. 3:1}.

Here we enter not merely what clears one out from the rudiments of the world, but what introduces us into the new thing. We need the positive as well as the negative; and as we have just had the latter, so the former now comes before us.
Instead of letting the reins free now to run in the race of improving the world and bettering society, or any of the objects that occupy men as such, the saints of God should abstain altogether. Many who really love the Lord are in this quite misguided as to the duty of the Christian here below.

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

And as if that were not precise enough, it is added,

Set your affection on things above {Col. 3:1, 2}.

It is rather

your mind;

for here, however important the state of the heart, it is a question simply of the whole bent and judgment.

Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth {Col. 3:2}.

It is not merely bringing the heavenly into them, so to speak; and decidedly not of joining the two things together. The Colossians, like others, would have liked this well enough; it is just what they were about, and the very thing that the apostle is here correcting. The apostle will not sanction such an amalgam, but refuses it; and we must remember that in these exhortations it was the Lord acting by the Spirit in His servant.

Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth; for ye are dead {Col. 3:2, 3}.

Note well again that it is not here man striving to become dead, which is a notion unknown to the revelation of God, new or old. In fact there was not even the thought of striving to be dead before the death of Christ came; and when He died, the Spirit in due time revealed not alone that He died for us, but that we died in Him. Thus no room was left for striving to die. The Christian owns his death in his very baptism; and what is wanted is not effort to attain, but the Spirit's power in acting on the truth by faith. This it is that always settles the difficulties in the great conflict that rages now as ever, and more than ever, between human religion and the truth of God. Since men have a certain knowledge of Christ's death, they are striving to die. It is the law in a new and impossible shape. That is the meaning of all that seems good in the world's piety. It is an effort to become dead to what is wrong; to cultivate what is felt to be glorifying to God; to avoid what is contrary to His will, and injurious to the soul. But does this so much as resemble the provision of grace for the Christian? Is this the truth? Must we not first and foremost be subject to the truth? If I have Christ as a Saviour at all, instead of struggling to die in the sense meant, I am called to believe that I am already dead.

It is remarkable that the two well-known and standing institutions -- I will not call them ordinances -- of Christianity, baptism and the Lord's supper, are the plain and certain expression of death in grace. When a person is baptized, this is the meaning of the act; nor has it any true force, but is an illusion, otherwise. For the baptized soul confesses that the grace of God gives death to sin in Him who died and rose again. The Jew looked only for a mighty King Messiah; the Christian is baptized into the death of Him who suffered on the cross, and finds not alone his sins forgiven, but sin, the flesh, condemned, and himself now viewed of God as dead to all; for nothing less is set forth in baptism. Thus it is from the first the expression of a most needed truth, which remains the comfort of grace throughout the whole Christian career, and is therefore never repeated. Again, on each Lord's day, when we are gathered together to Christ's name {Matt. 18:20}, what is before us according to God's word and will? A substantially similar blessing is stamped on the table of the Lord. When the Christians unite in breaking bread, they show forth the death of Christ till He come. It is not a mere duty that has to be done; but the heart is in presence of the objective fact that He died for us, His body. As believing in Him, this is our place. Such is the basis of the liberty wherewith Christ has set us free. It is a liberty founded on death, displayed in resurrection, known in the Spirit. Having this in the soul, one is entitled to have it in the body also at His coming. Besides, we are one bread, one body.

Hence we find the glorious future display referred to here:

When Christ, who is our life, shall appear {Col. 3:4};

for we have both

ye are dead,

and

your life is hid with Christ in God {Col. 3:3}.

We may be content to be hidden while He is hidden; but He is not always to be out of sight. The Christian will have all the desires of the new man gratified. Now he may have the blessed enjoyment of communion with Christ, but it is a Christ crucified on earth. His glory is in heaven. A man seeks to shine in the world now; it is a heartless if not heartless forgetfulness, that here He knew nothing but rejection.

Am I then false or true to the constant sign of my Master's death? Am I to court the honour of those who refused Christ, and gave Him a cross? Am I to forget His glory in the presence of God? Ought I not, in my measure of faith, to be the expression of both? Ought I not to share my Master's shame and dishonour here? Ought I not to wait to enter the same glory with the Christ of God? So it is said here,

When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory {Col. 3:4}.

Accordingly the path of Christian duty is grounded on these wondrous truths.

Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry {Col. 3:5}.

What a humbling consideration that those so blessed (dead, as we have said, and risen with Christ) are here told to mortify what is most shameful and shameless! But so it is. It is really what man is; and such is the nature which alone we had as children of Adam. These are alas! in the singularly energetic language of the Spirit of God here called the members of the
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man.

Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: for which things' sake, the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: in the which ye also walked sometime {Col. 3:5-7}.

It is no use denying the plain truth when ye lived in them {Col. 3:7};

it is blessed to know that we are dead now. Let us hearken,

But now, ye also put off all these.

Here we come not merely to that which is displayed in the forms of the corruption that goes on through things or persons outside us, as it were, but by inner feelings of violence:

But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth {Col. 3:8}.

Falsehood, too, is judged as it never was before,

Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds: and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him {Col. 3:9, 10}.

Not Adam, but Christ is the standard -- Christ who is God as well as man;

where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all {Col. 3:11}.

How blessed! --

Christ is all, and in all.

Thus the believer can look round full of joy upon his brethren; he can count up souls from every tribe, tongue, and station. Who has been overlooked in the comprehensive and active grace of our God? And what is he then entitled to see? Christ in them. And what a deliverance from self to see Christ in them! Yes, but Christ is all as truly as He is in all.

Oh, to forget all that which produces jealousy, pride, vanity, each and every feeling contrary to God and unifying to man; to be comforted and to comfort others with such a truth -- Christ is all, and Christ is in all! Such is God's word, and are we, or are we not, entitled to say so now? Sorrowful circumstances may, alas! require us to pronounce on evil ways in order to look into this evil doctrine or that; but the apostle speaks now of the saints in their ordinary and normal manner. Does not this still abide true? Am I entitled, as I look upon Christians henceforth, to see nothing but Christ in any and Christ in every one? Yes, Christ is in all, and Christ is all.

Put on, therefore

(says he, in the enjoyment of such grace. Now comes the positive character to be borne) --

Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved {Col. 3:12}.

How like the description is to Christ Himself! He was God's chosen One in the highest sense; He was the holy and beloved. Who ever appealed in distress, and did not find in Him bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering? Then follows that which could be said of us alone.

Yes, if any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye {Col. 3:13}.

Forgiving one another is fortified by His example who did no sin, neither was evil found in His mouth. Christ on earth was a blessed pattern of forgiveness and forbearance.

Even as Christ forgave you.

He now brings Him in openly, and to ourselves.

But there is a crowning quality:

And above all these things put on charity {Col. 3:14},

because this is, as nothing else can be, the fullest sign of that which God is Himself, the energy of His nature. His light may detect, but His love is the spring of all His ways. No matter what may be the demand, love is after all most essential and influential too. It lies at the bottom when we think of the ways of the saints of God here below. There is a figure especially characteristic of the divine nature morally considered -- I need not say light, as we are told more fully in the epistle to the Ephesians. Yet above all the saints are to put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness;

and let the peace of Christ rule {Col. 3:15},

for so it reads, not the peace of God, but the peace of Christ. Everything in our epistle is traced up to Christ as the head of all possible blessing.

So

let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts {Col. 3:15};

that is, the very peace which Christ Himself lived and moved in. Let His peace rule. He knows everything and feels everything. I may be perfectly certain, whatever may be my sorrow or travail of spirit about anything, Christ feels far more deeply (yea, infinitely deeper than any other) those that may excite any of us. Yet He has absolute peace, never broken or ruffled for an instant. And in us, poor feeble souls, why should not this peace rule in our hearts, to the which also we are called in one body?

And be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ

(it was God's word, but still called the word of Christ here) dwell in you richly in all wisdom {Col. 3:15, 16}.

There might be a word of God which was not in the same way the word of Christ. There are many portions of the scriptures that do not by any means suit or suppose the estate and path of the Christian.

And let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another {Col. 3:16}.

It is not Christ Himself, as in Eph. 3, the wondrous issue even now in us by the power of the Spirit; but, at least, in His word is found (what the Colossians needed) an active and
most pure spring of instruction and counsel, and mutuality of help by it. Such is the fruit of His word thus dwelling in us. Nor is this all.

In psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord {Col. 3:16}.

It matters little how well taught the saint may be, nor how he may know the moral beauty and the unfailing wisdom of the word, if positive fruit be not increased: if the spirit and power of worship abound not, there is something altogether short, or wrong.

And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him {Col. 3:17}.

Thus, even if there be not actually formal praise, the Lord looks for thankfulness of heart, as counting on love in everything.

After this follow particular exhortations, on which we need not at present dwell. We have wives and husbands, children and fathers, servants and masters, brought together successively up to the first verse of Col. 4, which should, of course, close Col. 3 rather than begin a new one.

Then come general injunctions.

Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving {Col. 4:2}.

Neither completeness in Christ, nor joyful sense of heavenly relationship, nor heed to our own relations in this life, should weaken for an instant, but rather minister to an increased sense of the need and value of depending on God. Nor is continuance in prayer all; but vigilant watch in the same, which does not let slip the just occasion for supplication; and as all things were to be done with thanksgiving, so prayer also, which would assuredly not forget the need of those in the forefront of the spiritual warfare and toil of love.

Watch in the same with thanksgiving; withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak {Col. 4:2-4}.

Nor, is there to be unwatchfulness, but consideration in love of those without.

Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man {Col. 4:5, 6}.

The fit time and suited speech, always in grace, not without faithfulness Godward, how good and needful they are!

Further, we see how Christian love delights to communicate and to hear. It was his confidence in their love; and this is shown not merely in his desire to hear about them, but in the conviction that they would like to hear about him. Can anything be sweeter than this genuine simplicity of affection and mutual interest? In a man it would be vain and curious: it is blessed in a Christian. No right-minded man, as such, could take for granted that others would care to know about his affairs any more than he theirs, unless indeed in case of a relation, or a friend, or a public and extraordinary personage. But here writes the lowly-minded apostle, in the full assurance that, though he had never seen them, or they him, it would be real and mutual gratification to know about one another from him who went between them. What a spring of power is the love of Christ! Truly charity is the bond of perfectness {Col. 3:14}.

And my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellow-servant in the Lord: whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your state, and comfort your hearts; with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here {Col. 4:7-9}.

Then come allusions to his various fellow-prisoners and fellow-servants, particularly noting Epaphras, who laboured fervently in prayer for them. This, I am sure, should not be weakened, brethren. We know that there is danger on all sides. We may have proved how sadly everything of the sort has been perverted; but there is a sense, and a most weighty one too, in which we cannot too much strengthen the links of love between the saints of God, and that too where there is a real holy ministry for their good. And this the apostle was doing, and particularly for one that came from them. We might well suppose that there was some hindrance to the full flow of affection on their part. But the apostle took every pains to show how great was the love of Epaphras for them; for his faithful spirit knew some little of that which the apostle knew well, -- that the more abundantly he loved, the less he was loved.

For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea {Col. 4:13}.

His was by no means a love inactive or limited. There was no such notion as only caring for the saints in his own particular place. Paul narrowed himself to no local ties, nor should we allow such a thing for an instant. All the saints belong to us, as we belong to all of them. And so he mentions particularly others, even if some little felt this link.

Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you. Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, Nymphas, and the church which is in his house. And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans {Col. 4:14-16}.

It is evident, therefore, that these apostolic epistles were meant to circulate among the saints. And perhaps this may be the key to what we are next told:

And ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea {Col. 4:16}.

The epistle to Laodicea is not said: so we have no sufficient reason to trouble ourselves about there being a lost portion of the inspired writings. There is no proof of the sort. I am aware that men have reasoned much about it; but this is a proof that evidence fails. Why should we heed conjecture? Had they prayed more, the result might have been to better purpose. Possibly apostles may have written epistles that were not intended for the permanent instruction of the church; but that what was so intended is lost we may resolutely deny from all we know of our God. Whatever insinuates it denies that He has adequately provided for His church here below: this
He has surely done in every form in His word. There is no imperfection in that word, neither does any ground exist to suppose that any part of it has vanished away. No doubt we may detect the flaws of man’s negligence, not knowing how to treat with becoming care the precious deposit of truth; but there is nothing more. That is to say, there may be a difference of reading here and there which impairs the full beauty and accuracy of the blessed word of God; but, as to the substance, the most timid may be assured that you have it in the worst editions of Christendom. Do not be uneasy at the talk of critics: it is natural for dealers to cry up their wares. They live in minute points and uncertainty.

As this epistle then is not said to have been addressed to Laodicea, we may gather that it was either from that church, or, if apostolic, going its round from one assembly to another. If the latter, it had got to Laodicea, whence the Colossians were to procure it in their turn.

Archippus was to take heed to the ministry he had received in the Lord. No doubt the hint is wanted by some of us still. May He make and keep us faithful!
Lectures Introductory

to the Study of

The Epistles of Paul The Apostle

Lecture 8

1 and 2 Thessalonians

There is a special interest in examining the epistles to the Thessalonians, more particularly the first, because, in point of fact, it was the earliest of the letters of the apostles; and as the first on the part of Paul, so also to an assembly found in the freshenss of its faith, and in the endurance of no small suffering for Jesus’ sake. This has given a colour to the character of the epistle. Besides, the very truth which most strongly characterized the assembly there -- the habitual waiting for the Lord Jesus -- was that which the enemy perverted into a means of danger. It is always thus. Whatever God has specially given to the church, whatever He has caused to be brought out in any marked manner at any time, is that which we may expect Satan to sap and undermine with all diligence. We might have supposed, a priori, that any characteristic truth would be that in which the children of God would be more earnest, and strong, and united. Undoubtedly it is that for which they are specially responsible; but for this very reason they are the object of the continual and subtle attacks of Satan in respect of it.

Now these epistles (for both in fact show us the same truth, but on different sides, guarding it against a different means used by the enemy to injure the saints) present on their very face, in great fulness of application, the hope of the Christian, and that which surrounds it and flows from it. At the same time, the Spirit of God in no way limits Himself to that one subject in all its parts; but as we receive the truth in its fulness in Christ, so we have the great elements of Christianity, as well as the attractive state of the believers in Thessalonica, formed by the hope which animated them, and by the truth in general seen in its light. The apostle writes to them in a manner to confirm their faith:

Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians, which is in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ {1 Thess. 1:1}. He does not mean by this to set forth any great advance, any high standing on the part of the believer, as has been sometimes drawn from these words, but rather the contrary. It was the infantine condition of the assembly of the Thessalonians which appears to have suggested this mode of address from the apostle. Just as the babe of the family would be an especial object of a father’s concern -- more particularly if peril surrounded it, so does the apostle cheer the church of the Thessalonians, by speaking of their being in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ. (Compare John 10:28, 29.) It is as children, not merely in the sense of being born of God, but as babes; and the Spirit of God views the assembly of the Thessalonians in this way. As a proof that this is correct, it may be noticed that there does not appear at this time to have been any regular oversight established in their midst. There is no hint of elders appointed here as yet, any more than at Corinth. There was no small vigour; but, at the same time, it had the stamp of youth. The fresh flow of affliction filled their hearts, and the beauty of the truth had but just dawned, as it were, on their souls. This, and more of kindred character, may be traced very clearly. And we find here an instructive lesson how to deal with the entrance of error, and the dangers that threaten the children of God, more particularly such as may be comparatively unformed in the common faith.

After his salutation the apostle, as usual, gives thanks to God for them all, making mention of them in his prayers, as he says:

Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father {1 Thess. 1:3}. From the outset we find the eminently practical shape which the truth had taken; as indeed must always be the case where there is the care and activity of the Spirit of God. There is no truth that is not given, both to form the heart, and to guide the steps of the saints, so that there may be a living and a fruitful service flowing to God from it. Such was the case with these Thessalonians; their work was the work of faith, and their labour had love for its spring; and more than that, their hope was one which had proved its divine strength by the power of endurance which it had given them in the midst of their afflictions. It was really the hope of Christ Himself, as it is said --

patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.

Thus, we see, all was kept in conscience before God; for this is the meaning of the words --

in the sight of God and our Father.

All this brings them before the soul of the apostle in confidence, as being simple-hearted witnesses, not only of the
truth, but of Christ the Lord.
For our gospel,
he says,
came not unto you in word only, but also in power,
and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye
know what manner of men we were among you for
your sake {1 Thess. 1:5}.
The apostle could unburden himself, and speak freely. With
the Corinthians he could not so open his heart: there was such
fleshly vaunting among them that the apostle speaks to them
with no small reserve. But here it is otherwise; and as there
was fervent love in their hearts and ways, so the apostle could
speak out of the very same love; for assuredly love was not
less on his part. Hence he could enlarge with joy on that
which was before him -- the manner in which the gospel had
come to them; and this is of no small consequence in the ways
of God. We should by no means pass by a due consideration
of the manner in which God deals either with individual
souls, or with saints, in any special place. For all things are
of God. The effect of a storm of persecution, accompanying
the introduction of the gospel, could not have been without its
weight in forming the character of the saints who received the
truth; and, yet more, the way in which God had wrought --
particularly in him who was the bearer of His message -- at
that time would not be without its modifying influence in
giving such a direction to it as would be for the Lord's glory
and praise. I doubt not, therefore, that the apostle's entrance
among them, the notable accompanying circumstances of it,
the faith and love that had been then tried -- of course,
habitually there, but, nevertheless, put at that juncture to the
proof to a remarkable degree at Thessalonica -- had all their
source in God's good guidance; so that those that were to
follow in the wake of the same faith, who would have to
stand and suffer in the name of the same Lord Jesus at a later
day, were thus strengthened and fitted as no other way could
have done so well, for what was to befall them.

The apostle, therefore, does not hesitate to say,
Ye became followers of us and of the Lord, having
received the word in much affliction, with joy of the
Holy Ghost: so that ye were ensamples to all that
believe in Macedonia and Achaia {1 Thess. 1:6, 7}.
And this was so true that the apostle did not need to say
anything in proof of it. The very world wondered how the
word wrought among these Thessalonians. Men were struck
by it; and what impressed even people outside was this -- that
they not only abandoned their idols, but henceforth were
serving the one living and true God, and were waiting for His
Son from heaven. Such was the testimony, and an
uncommonly bright one it is. But, indeed, simplicity is the
secret for enjoying the truth, as well as for receiving it; and
we shall find always that it is the sure mark of God's power
in the soul by His word and Spirit. For there are two things
that characterize divine teaching: real simplicity, on the one
hand, and, on the other, that definiteness which gives the
inward conviction to the Christian that what he has is the
truth of God. It might be too much to expect the
development, or, at any rate, a large exercise of such
precision as this among the Thessalonians as yet; but one may
be sure that if there was true simplicity at first, it would lead
into distinctness of judgment ere long. We shall find some
features of this kind for our guidance, and I hope to remark
upon them as they come before me.

But, first of all, take notice that the first description
which is given of them, in relation to the coming of the Lord,
is simply awaiting the Son of God from heaven. We do not
well to fasten upon this expression more than it was intended
to convey. It does not appear to me to mean anything more
than the general attitude of the Christian in relation to Him
whom he expects from above. It is the simple fact of their
looking for the same Saviour who had already come, whom
they had known -- that Jesus who had died for them and was
raised again from the dead, their Deliverer from the wrath to
come. Thus they were waiting for this mighty and gracious
Saviour to come from heaven. How He was coming they
knew not; what would be the effects of His coming they knew
little. They of course knew nothing about the time, no soul
does; it is reserved in the hands of our God and Father; but
they were, as became babes, waiting for Him according to
His own word. Whether He would take them back into the
heavens, or at once enter on the kingdom under the whole
heaven, I am persuaded they did not know at this time.

It seems therefore a mistake to press this text, as if it
necessarily taught Christ's coming in order to translate saints
into heaven. It leaves the aim, mode, and result an entirely
open matter. We may find ourselves sometimes forcing
scripture in this way; but be assured, it is true wisdom to
draw from scripture no more than it distinctly undertakes to
convey. It is much better, if with fewer texts, to have them
more to the purpose. We shall find ere long the importance of
not multiplying proof-texts for any particular aim, but of
seeking rather from God the definite use of each scripture.
Now all that the apostle has here in view is to remind the
Thessalonian saints that they were waiting for that same
Deliverer, who was dead and risen, to come from heaven. It
is likely that as His coming is presented in the character of
Son of God, it may suggest more to the spiritual mind, and
probably did suggest more to them at a later day. I am only
speaking of what is important to bear in mind at their first
conversion. It was the simple truth that the divine person,
who loved them and died for them, was coming back from
heaven. What would be the manner and the consequences
they had yet to learn. They were waiting for Him who had
proved His love for them deeper than death or judgment; and
He was coming: how could they but love Him and wait for
Him?

* * *

The second chapter pursues the subject of the apostle's
ministry in connection with their conversion. He had not left
them when they had been brought to the knowledge of Christ.
He had laboured among them.

For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto
you, that it was not in vain: but even after we had
suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as
ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to
speak unto you the gospel of God with much
contention {1 Thess. 2:1, 2}.
The apostle had gone on in persevering faith, undisturbed by that which had followed. He was not to be turned aside from the gospel. It had brought trouble on him, but he persevered.

For our exhortation, he says,

was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: but as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness: nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ {1 Thess. 2:3-6}.

Here we see how entirely his ministry had been above the ordinary motives of men. There was no self-seeking. It was not a question of exalting himself, or of earthly personal gain; nor, on the other hand, was there the indulging of the passions, either gross or refined. None of these things had a place in his heart, as he could appeal to God solemnly. Their own consciences were witnesses of it. But, more than that, love and tenderness of care had wrought toward them.

We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: so being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us {1 Thess. 2:7, 8}.

What a picture of gracious interest in souls, and of this, not in Him who has the full expression of divine love, but in a man of like passions with ourselves! For if we must ever look for the perfection of it in Christ alone, it is good for us to see the life and love of Christ in one who had to contend with the very same evils which we have in our nature.

Here, then, we have the lovely picture of the grace of the apostle in watching over these young Christians; and this he presents in a two-fold form. First, when in the most infantine condition, as a nurse he cherished them; but when they grew a little, he pursued his course,

labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, preaching unto you the gospel of God. As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children {1 Thess. 2:9-11}.

As they advanced spiritually, so the character of ministering to their need was changed; but it was the very same love in exhorting them as a father, which had cared for them as a nurse. This may be the beau idéal of a true pastor; but it is the picture of a real apostle of Christ, of Paul among the Thessalonians, whose one desire was that they should walk worthy of God, who had called them to His kingdom and glory.

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe {1 Thess. 2:13}.

Then follows a sketch of that suffering which faith entails, as sooner or later it must come; and as he had charged them to walk worthy of God, who had cheered them with the prospect of the unseen and eternal things, so he would have them to prove by their constancy and endurance that it was God's word which so powerfully wrought in them, spite of all man could do.

For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets -- not exactly their own prophets, but the prophets -- and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles {1 Thess. 2:14-16}.

What a contrast with the grace of God! The people who had the prestige of religion could not endure that the gospel should go to the despised Gentiles, their enemies. Yet why should they have been so careful of it, since they did not believe in it themselves? How came to pass this their sudden interest in the spiritual welfare of the heathen? Whence originated this unwearied zeal to deprive others of the gospel they themselves scorned? If the gospel were such an irrational and immoral and trumpery matter as they professed to consider it, how was it that they spared no pains to prejudice men against it, and to persecute its preachers? Men do not usually feel thus -- do not set themselves so bitterly and continuously against that which does not prick their consciences. One can understand it where there is the sense of a good of which they are not prepared to avail themselves: the rebellious heart vents itself then in implacable hatred at seeing it go to others, who peradventure would receive it gladly. It is man always the enemy, the persistent antagonist of God, and more particularly of His grace. But it is religious man, as the Jew was, here and everywhere -- man with a measure of traditional truth, who feels thus sore at the operations of God in His mighty grace.

But the apostle as he had shown us men the objects of the gospel, and the constant interest of grace in Christians, contrasted with those who hindered because they hated the grace of God, so he also lets them know the affectionate desire that was not weakened by absence from it, but rather the contrary.

But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire {1 Thess. 2:17}.

There is nothing so real upon earth as the love of Christ reproduced by the Spirit in the Christian.

Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us {1 Thess. 2:18}.

There is a reality for evil in Satan, the great personal enemy, as much in a certain sense as there is in Christ for good. Let us not forget it.

On the other hand, what is the encouragement to
suffering love and toil along the road?

What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing?
{1 Thess. 2:19}.

It matters little what the circumstances may be in regard to true ministry in the grace of Christ. Trial shows how superior it is to circumstances. Bodily presence or absence only tests it. Afflictions only prove its strength. Distance only gives room to its expression to those who are absent. The unfalling and only adequate comfort is the certain re-union of those who minister, and those who are ministered to, in the day when all opposition will vanish, and around the board where all the fruits of true ministry, whether of a nurse or of a father that exhorts those who are growing up in the truth, will be tasted in the joy of our Lord. The apostles and their companions in labour were content to wait for the reward of loving oversight exercised among the saints of God.

But this did not in the slightest degree hinder the apostle’s tender sympathy with those who were pressed down by any special sufferings. For Christianity is not dreamy or sentimental, but most real in its power of adapting itself to every need. It is the true deliverance from all that is fictitious, whether on the side of reason or of imagination in the things of God. Superstition has its perils; but quite as much has the dogmatism of mere intellect. Scripture raises the believer above both; yet the apostle shows what anxiety of feeling was his about the Thessalonians. He did not doubt the Lord’s watchful eye. Nevertheless all his heart was in movement about them. He had sent Timotheus when he could not go himself; and he was rejoiced to hear the good account which he thus gleaned through him, for he dreaded lest they might be shaken by the great wave of trouble that was sweeping over them. No doubt they had been prepared for this in a measure; for he had told them, when with them, that they were appointed thereunto.

But now, how cheered was his spirit to find that the tempter had been foiled! Timotheus had come with good tidings of their faith and love. Spite of all, they had good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you {1 Thess. 3:6}.

Love was still fervent, as in him, so in them.

Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith: for now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord {1 Thess. 3:7, 8}.

But in the midst of thanksgiving he prays for them.

We may notice two prayers particularly in this epistle. The first occurs at the end of 1 Thess. 3, and the second at the end of the last chapter, {1 Thess. 5}. The first is more particularly a review of the entrance of the gospel among the Thessalonian saints and of his own ministry, which was no doubt meant to be suggestive to them of the true character and method of serving the Lord in dealing with all men. He winds it up with prayer to the effect:

Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you. And the Lord make you to increase and abound one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: to the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints {1 Thess. 3:11-13}.

Here at once we come to very distinct guidance for our thoughts; and this in more ways than one. He prays not that they may be established in holiness, in order that they might love one another, but that they might abound in love, in order that they might be established in holiness. Love always precedes holiness. It is true from conversion -- from the beginning of the work in the soul -- and it is also true to the last. What first raises the heart to God is some faint sense of His love in Christ. I do not say anything at all like the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit given us. There may then be no power to rest on divine love; there can be no abounding in love in such a state. But, for all that, there is a hope of love -- if it be the feeblest thought; if it be only that there is bread enough and to spare {Luke 15:17} for the merest prodigal that betakes himself to the father’s house. If we look at God and Christ, and at the grace that suits the Father’s counsels and the Son’s work, I admit all this is a scanty measure -- a poor thing on their part, to give a servant’s portion in such a house. But it was no small prize for the heart of a sinner, darkened and narrowed by selfishness, and the indulgence of lust and passion. And what is sin in every form but selfishness? We know how this shuts up the heart, and how it destroys every expectation of goodness in others. The grace of God, contrariwise, works and kindles, it may be, a very little spark at first, but still a beginning of what is truly great, good, and eternal. Accordingly, as we read, the prodigal starts from the far country, and cannot rest -- though there was incomparably more earnestness on the part of the father to meet him, as well we know; for it was not the prodigal that ran to the father, but the father to the prodigal. And thus it is always. The same true working of love, however at first dimly seen, that wakes the sinner from his wretched bed of sin -- for rest it cannot be called -- this rouses him from the guilty dreams of death. On the other hand, it is the fulness of love which gives the heart to enter into the riches of grace towards us, shedding abroad, not an earnest of it, but itself in the heart. And this holiness, not in desire only, but real and deep, keeps pace with love.

It is not, of course, my present task to unfold the wonderful way in which that love has been proved to us. It does not come before me now, nor is it for me to leave my theme even to speak of its display in Christ, by whom God commends His own love to us, in that, while yet sinners, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, till we can joy in Himself through our Lord Jesus Christ. But I affirm that all practical holiness is the fruit of the love to which the heart has surrendered, and which it receives simply and enjoys fully. This, then, is true of the soul that is only seeking to know the grace of God.

But here he earnestly desires their growth in holiness, and prays for them that they might increase and abound in love one toward another, and
toward all men, even as we do toward you: to the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness [1 Thess. 3:12, 13].

And the manner in which this is connected with the coming of Christ here is very noticeable. He supposes it to be flowing out of love, and going on in holiness, proceeding unbroken, until the saint finds himself at last in the display of glory; not when Christ comes to take us up, but when God brings us with Him. Why (let me ask) is there not presented His coming to receive the saints in this chapter, as in the next? Because our walking in love and holiness is the question in the hand of the Holy Spirit; and this has the most intimate connection with Christ’s appearing, when we come with Him. And for this there is a simple reason. Where the walk comes in, we have clearly responsibility before the saints. Now the appearing of the Lord Jesus is that which will manifest us in the results of responsibility. Then we shall each see, when self-love call no longer darken our judgment of ourselves, or our estimate of others, when nothing but the truth shall remain and be displayed of all that has been wrought in us, or done by us. For the Lord will assuredly come to translate us to His presence; but He will also cause us to appear with Him in glory, when He appears; and when this moment arrives, it will be made manifest how far we have been faithful, and how far faithless. All will be turned to His own glory. Accordingly then in this chapter 1 Thess. 3 we see the reason why, as it appears to me, the Spirit directs attention to His coming with all His saints, not for them.

The next portion, or second half of the epistle, opens with practical exhortation. The early part insists on purity; then follow a few words on love. It might seem strange that it should be needful to guard these saints, walking as we have seen so simply and delightfully, against unclean offences even in the closest relations of life — that Christian men should be warned against fornication and adultery {1 Thess. 4:3-8}; but we know that so desperate is the evil of the flesh, that no circumstances nor position can secure, yea, even the joy of the blessing of God’s grace, without exercise of conscience and self-judgment; and hence these solemn admonitions from the Lord. It was particularly needed at that time and in Greece, because such sins were rather sanctioned than judged in the heathen world. Even mankind in later days have profited enormously by the change. They can now no doubt enrich themselves with truth, and talk largely about holiness; but how little they knew of either before they borrowed from Scripture! It is all stolen goods, every bit of real value. The men of whom they are the successors were unclean to the last degree. The Aristotles and Platons were really not fit for decent company. I admit our Grecians would scowl at such an estimate, or scorn it; but they lack the elements for forming an adequate moral appraisal, or they do not look the facts in the face, plain enough as they are. If knowingly they endorse or make light of such morals as Plato counted desirable for his republic, it cannot be doubted where they themselves are. Undoubtedly there were some fine speculations, but nothing more; for men thought that talking about morality would do as well as the thing itself. It is Christ, and Christ alone, that has brought in the very truth of God in word and deed. It was unknown to man before: still more the ultimate proof in the cross that He is love. Christ first displayed absolute purity in the very nature which had revelled in lust and passion heretofore.

But the Thessalonians in general might not have estimated its importance fully, being young in the truth. There was doubtless good reason why the apostle in writing to them had to lay great stress on moral purity. The fact is, that it was a matter of course then for men to live just as they listed. There was no restriction, except so far as mere human vengeance or punishments of the law might deter them. Men indulged themselves in anything they could do safely. And so indeed it is to this day, except so far as Christianity or the profession of it prevents them.

After speaking of purity, the apostle treats of loving one another, and adds that there was no need to say much about it. They themselves were taught of God; they knew what they were called to in brotherly love. But he does exhort them to be quiet and to mind their own business, working with their own hands, as he not only commanded them when in their midst, but exemplified it from day to day himself. He had it deeply at heart that they should walk reputedly toward those without, and have need of no one or thing.

But we come in the next place to a main topic of the epistle. They had fallen into a serious mistake as to some of the brethren that had fallen asleep. They feared that these departed saints would miss much at the coming of the Lord — in fact, that they would lose their part in the joyful meeting between the Lord Jesus and His saints. This at once shows us that we must not estimate the Thessalonian believers according to that standard which these mistakes helped to elicit from the Holy Ghost. We have the advantage of the entire development of the truth, much of which was the inspired correction of evils and errors. The New Testament, you must remember, was not then written; a very small part — one gospel, or at most perhaps two, and not one of the epistles. Thus, except the teaching that they had received from the apostle during his comparatively short stay in Thessalonica, they had little or no means of further instruction in the truth, and we know how easily that which is only heard passes away. We may learn from this the invaluable blessing we have, not merely in the word, but in the written word of God — scripture. However, at this time, for the most part, the New Testament books were not yet written. It was that part of scripture which most of all concerned these saints. We must not, therefore, wonder that they were ignorant of what had regard to their brethren who had fallen asleep. On the other hand, it is not meant that they entertained any fears of their being lost. This could not arise in the minds of souls grounded in what the apostle calls our gospel; and no charge is so much as hinted of any failure in this respect. Still a delay might have been conceived before they entered into full blessedness. One can understand their perplexity for want of light on what the Lord would do with them. They did not know whether they would then enter the kingdom, or how, or when. These were questions unsolved.

The Holy Ghost meets their difficulties now, and tells them to this effect:
I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him {1 Thess. 4:13, 14}.

Clearly we hear again of the Lord coming, and bringing these saints with Him. It is not the Lord, however, receiving them to Himself, but bringing them with Him. That is, we have once more the Lord coming in glory with His saints already glorified. When that moment comes, at any rate, they will be with Him. Such is the first statement of the apostle. But this very truth, which made part of their old difficulty, raises another difficulty. How could the saints that had fallen asleep come with Him now? How could all the saints appear in glory with Christ? They seem to have understood that when the Lord came, there would be saints here below waiting for Christ; and that these would somehow be with Him in glory. But they were utterly perplexed as to the saints that had fallen asleep. They did not know what to make of the interim -- if indeed they suspected an interim. They did not know the process by which the Lord would deal with those that had died; and it is now explained.

For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [shall in no wise anticipate] them which are asleep {1 Thess. 4:15}.

If they had remained alive, no difficulty had been felt in the case. Some in our day seem to feel a good deal surprised at such a difficulty as this; but the truth is that the sorrow of the Thessalonians arose from the simplicity of their faith, and men's feeling no difficulty now is partly owing to their lack of any genuine faith in it. Had they more faith, they might have their perplexities too, not at the end, but, as usual, at the beginning. It was certainly so with the Thessalonians at this time. It is always the effect of faith at first. Newly-entered light gives occasion to the perception of much which we cannot solve at once. But God comes in to the aid of the believer, and in His own grace and time solves one difficulty after another. Then the apostle clears it up thus:

We which are alive and remain unto the coming, [or presence] of the Lord, &c. {1 Thess. 4:15}.

The word coming means the fact of being present in contrast with absence.

We which are alive and remain unto the presence of the Lord shall not precede them which are asleep {1 Thess. 4:15}.

I take the liberty of changing the word prevent, which is old English, into a phrase which gives the same meaning, as prevent when the translation was made.

We shall not precede them which are asleep.

Thus, suppose we are waiting for Christ to come, and that He comes, we shall not be before those saints that have departed previously. How can this be? It is answered in the next verse.

For the Lord himself, says he,

shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord {1 Thess. 4:16, 17}.

Thus it is evident that, if there be a moment of difference, it is in favour of the sleepers, and not of those which remain alive. Those that are asleep are first wakened up. Bear in mind, sleep is for the body; the soul is never said or supposed in scripture to be asleep. But those who are asleep in their graves will be wakened up by the shout (καλεσμός) of the Lord Jesus; for the word means the call of a commander to his men that follow, or of an admiral to his sailors. It is from one who has a relation to others under his authority; it is not a vague call to those that may not own his command, but to his own people.

It is evident, therefore, that the notion entertained by some, that this shout must be heard by men in general, is refuted by these words, as well as other facts. Men in general have no such relation to the Lord. It is a shout that is heard by those to whom it appertains. Not a word, therefore, includes -- but, rather the contrary, shuts out -- those to whom Christ stands in no such connection. In other words, it is the Lord's call to His own, and accordingly the dead in Christ rise first, as the immediate fruit of it.

Then we, the living that remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord {1 Thess. 4:17}.

This at once dispels the difficulty as to those who were asleep. So far from missing the moment of meeting between the Lord and His own, they rise first; we immediately join them; and thus both together are caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with Him.

Then the apostle, having left with the Thessalonians the comfort of this about their brethren, turns to the day of the Lord, or His appearing.

But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night {1 Thess. 5:1, 2}.

The day of the Lord is invariably in Scripture that period when the Lord will come in manifest and awful judgment of sinful men. It is never applied to any dealing with the Christian as on the earth. We find a very particular application of it, which seems connected with the saints. This is not exactly called the day of the Lord, but the day of Christ {Phil. 1:10, 2:16}.

Confessedly there is a connection between the two. The day
of Christ means that aspect of the day of the Lord, in which those who are in Christ will have their special place in the kingdom assigned. Consequently, where it is a question of the fruit of labour in the service of Christ, reward of faithfulness, or anything of the kind, the day of Christ is mentioned.

But the day of the Lord, as such, is invariably the day of the Lord’s dealing in judgment with man as such on the earth. Of that day, then, the apostle felt no need to write. It was already known perfectly that the day of the Lord is coming as a thief in the night. This was a matter of Old Testament statement and phraseology. All the prophets speak of it. If you search from Isaiah to Malachi, you will find that the day of Jehovah is that moment of divine intervention when man is no longer allowed to pursue his own path, when the Lord God will deal with the world’s system in all its parts, when the idols of the nations shall all perish together with their benighted votaries. But the Lord Himself shall be exalted in that day, and His people shall be brought into their true place, and the Gentiles shall accept theirs. This will be the time of displayed divine government. Jehovah will take Zion as the central seat of His earthly throne, and all peoples shall submit to His authority in the person of Christ.

Hence, therefore, the apostle, when he speaks of the day of the Lord, alludes to it as already too notorious to need fresh words about it. The Thessalonians did not require to be instructed as to that. But this makes most plain the distinction of the manner in which the saints and mankind will be dealt with. When he treats of the Lord’s coming, they require to be instructed; where he speaks about the day of Jehovah, they do not. The day of Jehovah was matter of common knowledge from the Old Testament. To a scribe instructed thus, there was no doubt about its bearing. Not even a Jew disputed about it, and of course a Christian would be subject to the testimony of God in the Old Testament. But a Christian might not know that which most of all it was desirable for him to understand, -- the manner in which his own proper hopes would link themselves with the day of Jehovah.

It is exactly there many make such utter confusion; for they do not distinguish between the hope of the Christian and “the day” for the world. And this lets out a great secret -- the heart’s desire to think of the two things together. We can all understand that people would like to have the best of both. But it cannot be done. Hence in speaking of the day of the Lord (and I draw your attention to it, because we shall find its importance in the next epistle) he says,

When they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child {1 Thess. 5:3}. He does not say “you,” but they.

Why this difference? When he is speaking about the presence of the Lord, he says you, we;

but when treating of the day of Jehovah, he says they.

Indeed, the apostle excludes the believer; for he says, Ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief {1 Thess. 5:4}.

Besides, he gives a moral reason,

Ye are children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ {1 Thess. 5:5-9}.

Salvation here means complete deliverance not yet come -- the redemption of the body and not that of the soul alone. For Christ died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him {1 Thess. 5:10}.

Carefully remember that waking or sleeping here has reference to the body; it has no reference at all to anything of moral state. It is impossible that the Spirit of God should say that, whether in a right state or wrong, we should live together with Him. The Holy Spirit never makes light of the condition of sin. Nor is there anything more foreign to the tone of scripture, than that the Spirit of God should treat with indifference the question whether a saint was in a good or a bad state. He had no doubt just used the words wake or sleep in another sense; but he seems to me to assume the impossibility of a saint applying them in a moral sense when he pursues the subject farther. In 1 Thess. 5:6, for instance, the sleeping and waking are moral states; but when we come down to 1 Thess. 5:10, they refer to the question of life or death in the body, and not to the saints’ ways. In fact this manner of taking up words, and applying them in another sense, will be found to be one of the characteristics of the abrupt, animated, and forcible style of the apostle.

I should not make the remark if I had not known excellent men sometimes in considerable danger from overlooking this, and taking scripture in a narrow and pseudo-literal sense. But this is not the way to understand the Bible. It is one of the great misuses to which a concordance exposes those who are caught by verbal analogies, instead of entering into the scope of thought and real meaning.

We shall live with Him then.

Wherefore, he says,

comfort yourselves together, and edify one another {1 Thess. 5:11}.

Then he gives them certain instructions; and I add this observation, which is one of practical importance. He calls
upon these young believers to know those who laboured among them, and were over them, or took the lead in the Lord, and admonished them. They were to esteem them very highly in love for their work, being at peace at the same time among themselves.

This exhortation, always right, has, to my own mind, great wisdom and worth for us now; for the simple reason that, so far, we stand in a measure, as to circumstances -- though not from the same cause -- with these Thessalonian saints. Assuredly they were in a comparatively infantine condition, quite as much or more than those I am now addressing. Yet if saints, no matter how informed, then had among them those that laboured and were over them in the Lord, surely the same Lord gives still the same helps and governments. He raises up and sends His workmen in the world, and those who bring in that moral power and wisdom which enable some to take the lead. Hence it is beyond just controversy -- from the case of the Thessalonians (and it is not alone) -- that for some to be over others in the Lord did not depend on apostolical appointment. It is a defective and even mistaken idea to restrict it to this, though it is admitted that the apostles used to appoint such elders. But the essence of what we find here is, that in that appointment spiritual power and might did show itself in this way; and that the greatest of the apostles exhorts the saints to acknowledge those who were thus -- and only thus -- over them in the Lord, altogether independently of any apostolic act. No doubt the due external appointment was desirable and important in its place. But what of places (and I would add, what of times) where it could not be had?

These are our circumstances now; for no matter how much we might welcome and value such outward appointment, we cannot have it. Without the proper scriptural authority, who is to appoint? Any body unquestionably, and leaders especially, might imitate Paul and Barnabas, or Titus. But, assuredly, mere imitation is nothing, or worse; and those that take the lead, or are qualified to do so (see 1 Thess. 5:12, 13), are the persons to be appointed -- not to appoint, if we really bow to the Lord. More than this -- direct authority from the Lord for the purpose was needed. Where is it now? The moment you make an appointing power of your own, it is evident that its authority cannot rise above its source. If it is only a humanly given authority, it can exercise no more than a human power. But the apostle -- or rather the prescient Spirit of God -- meets various contingencies in the exhortation, and shows that a company of believers, even though not long gathered, might have more than one in their midst qualified to lead the rest, and entitled to respect and love on the score of their work, as thus labouring. If there be such now, (and who will deny it?) are the saints not called on to know them? Are there none who labour among them -- none that take the lead among them in the Lord? It is evident that there ought to be no flinching from such a truth as this. For the present and long-existing confusion of Christendom in no way neutralizes it, but rather creates a fresh reason for adhering to it, as to all scripture. No doubt it may not be always pleasant to high-minded men; but be assured, it is a thing of no small moment in its place.

Again, under the circumstances of Thessalonica, as there must have been danger of headiness, the apostle calls on the brethren to watch against unruly ways. The two things would be likely to go together: peace promotes love and respect. Disorderly folk {1 Thess. 5:14} are apt to know nobody over them in the Lord. Hence he calls on all to admonish them, to comfort the faint-hearted, to support the weak, to be patient toward all. Then follows a cluster of other exhortations on which I need not dwell now. My object is not so much to insist on the exhortatory part of the epistle, as to present the general thread of design that runs through each, so as to give a comprehensive view of its structure.

\* \* \* 

{2 Thessalonians}

THE SECOND EPISTLE takes up another difficulty. It was written in view of another abuse of the truth of the Lord's coming -- a danger that threatened the saints. As the first epistle was intended to guard the saints from an error about the dead, the second epistle was more particularly meant to correct them about the living. They were distressed at finding that some of their brethren died before the Lord came. So filled were they with the constant expectation of Christ from heaven, that it never occurred to them that a single Christian might depart from the world before His return. How they must have realized, in their habitual waiting, the nearness of that blessed hope! They now learnt that they need not sorrow on such a score; for the dead in Christ shall rise first, and then we, the living at His coming, shall be caught up with them to join the Lord together. But the second epistle grew out of another and more serious error. We have seen that they were greatly alarmed and agitated. The apostle was really uneasy about them lest the tempter should tempt them, and his labour come to nought -- lest, moved by their sore affliction, they should fall into fear about the awful day of the Lord, which the enemy knows well how to use.

Everybody who has read Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the lesser prophets knows what they tell us of the horrors for men when the day of Jehovah comes upon the earth, -- that it will be a day of dismay and darkness, when all earthly things are utterly confused, and the people of God seem about to be swallowed up by their enemies. False doctrine ever sets one truth against another; and it was not wanting among the Thessalonians at this time. For some sought to persuade them that the day of the Lord was even then arrived. They probably argued that their troubles were part of the circumstances of that day. Certainly they sought to shake them by pretending that the day of the Lord was actually there. There was such fearful persecution and trouble among them, that this might be plausibly enough mixed up as supporting the idea that the day of the Lord was begun. For this false rumour seems to imply that they must have given some sort of figurative colour to that day {1 Thess. 5:4}

(as it was certainly so used in Old Testament prophecy). At any rate, they must have supposed that the day of the Lord {1 Thess. 5:2}
did not necessarily require the presence of the Lord Himself. In other words, they might think, as many Christians since have imagined, that a dreadful time of trouble must befall the world before the Lord comes to receive His own to Himself above.

This second epistle was written to disabuse the minds of the Thessalonian saints; and indeed it directly tends to set all Christians free from any anxiety of the kind, though, of course, there may be persecution again, as there was then, and repeatedly afterwards, especially from Pagan and from Papal Rome. But this is wholly different from the dread which the enemy sought to infuse among the Thessalonians. The apostle accordingly sets himself to this task. First of all he comforts them.

Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith growth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth; so that we ourselves glory in you [2 Thess. 1:1, 3, 4].

It may be noticed that he leaves out

the patience of hope [1 Thess. 1:3].

How comes this? It was exactly the hope that was no longer bright in their hearts. So far the enemy had succeeded. They had been comforted, but they had lost somewhat of the light and joy of the hope. They were moved more or less by their tribulation; not perhaps so much by the outward pressure as by the insinuation of Satan through false teaching, which is a far more dangerous thing for the child of God. It is plain that the apostle merely mentions their faith growing, and their love increasing. He no longer praises nor names their patience of hope, but rather prays for them in 2 Thess. 3 in such a way as to show there was a lack in this respect. That is, he takes up two of the qualities mentioned in the first epistle, and not the third. This, which was bound up with the whole structure of the first epistle, is left out of the second. There was too good reason for it. For the time they had let it slip, as I have just explained. It is true that the apostle tells them,

we glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith

(hex does not speak of their “patience of hope”) in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure [2 Thess. 1:4].

They were holding on, and not giving up Christ; but their souls had not the former spring through Christ their hope. We shall have the evidence of this more fully soon.

There was

a manifest token,

says he,

of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer [2 Thess. 1:5].

So far it was well.

Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ [2 Thess. 1:6-8].

Observe the reason why he brings in that day.

It was a false doctrine about the day, which draws out an explanation of its nature and its relation to the coming of the Lord. When that day comes, it will not fall with its troubles on the children of God. In truth the Lord will then execute judgment on their enemies -- I do not mean on the dead till the close, but on the quick or living. It will be no more in some figurative and preparatory sense of exceeding affliction, or of natural overthrow; but its description here is the Lord Jesus revealed from heaven in flaming fire. There will be no doubt about its nature or effects. Every eye shall see Him.

That is, even 2 Thess. 1 plainly prepares us for the complete discomfiture of the illusory and alarming dreams which these false teachers had been foisting in under false colours among the Thessalonian saints. But he pursues the matter farther. He will take vengeance on two classes -- on those that know not God, and those that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These seem the Gentiles and the Jews respectively; but why do not we find here some allusion to the third class -- His relation to the church of God? Because those who compose the church are no longer here.

Thus it is shown that the Lord will deal with all on earth, -- not merged in one, but discriminated; for He executes judgment, and hence does not confound those who differ in a common class. There is thus a definite distinction drawn; but this so much the more precisely leaves out the Christian. Its force is more understood the more it is weighed. The apostle does not declare all at once, but prepares the way with much circumspection. When he says

them that know not God [2 Thess. 1:8],

he means the idolatrous Gentiles. Then he adds with another article,

and those that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ [2 Thess. 1:8]

(not, as we have it in English here, “and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus;” as if all were one and the same class). There are two classes, and therefore accuracy would seem to call on us to make the sense more definite --

and on them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

At all events, whatever mode of rendering may be preferred, I have no hesitation in saying that such is the sense of the Greek, and nothing else. They are the Gentiles, who knew not God, (or, as Bengel has it, “qui in ethnica ignorantia de Deo versantur,”) and the Jews, who might know God after a sort and to a certain point beyond Gentiles, but who did not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. (“Judaes maxime, quibus evangelium de Christo praedicatum fuerat.”) For unbelief is always convicted by the test that God employs; and the day of the Lord will deal with every form. The
Gentiles that know not God will be punished, and the Jews that abuse the forms of Old Testament revelation to disobey the gospel will not escape, still less nominal and apostate Christendom.

The reason why no notice is taken of Christians as then on earth we shall see assigned a little lower down: I merely now remark that he could not put himself in either of those two classes. It is evident that on whosoever that day is to fall it has no bearing on such. If therefore the Christians were troubled now, it was in no way the same character of trouble as that which shall be in the day of the Lord. The teaching of those who had spread this impression was utterly false; and if they claimed the highest sanction for it, they were worse than mistaken -- they were the guilty tools of Satan. But as to both the classes we have seen described by the apostle, they shall be punished with everlasting destruction,

both

from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believed [2 Thess. 1:9, 10]:

for this is the full force of it.

In the new age people will be blessed abundantly; but the blessing of the millennium does not exactly take the shape of belief. They shall behold the glory of the Lord. Such is their form as assigned by scripture. The earth shall be filled with the knowledge -- not with the faith, but with the knowledge -- of the glory of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea. It will be in countless cases the fruit of true divine teaching; but knowledge describes it better than faith; and we may easily understand the difference. They will behold the glory, they will look upon the Lord, no longer hidden but displayed. The blessed spoken of in our chapter are clearly those that have already believed. So indeed the apostle states:

Wherefore we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of the calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power; that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ [2 Thess. 1:11, 12].

Next (2 Thess. 2) he comes to the special error in question. Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . that ye be not soon shaken in mind nor troubled, neither in spirit nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of the Lord is present {2 Thess. 2:1, 2}.

It is well known that of the Lord

(not of Christ) is unquestionably required by the best manuscripts, and other ancient witnesses.

'Ενέστηκε does not mean “at hand,” but actually come. I do not enter into any long proof of this just now, having already done so elsewhere. Suffice it to say, that the word occurs in half a dozen places in the New Testament, and nowhere can bear any sense but the one alleged. Nor does it ever convey any such meaning as “at hand” in any correct Greek author. It has been so thought; but it is a mistake. It always means present, in contrast with future ever so imminent. So in two instances of the New Testament it stands over against future things; as when it is expressly said (in Rom. 8:38 and 1 Cor. 3:22),

things present and things to come.

The latter might be “at hand,” but not the former. The things to come are in pointed opposition to those actually arrived. Again, we have (Gal. 1:4)

this present evil world.

This is now only. The age to come is not evil but good. It is in contrast with the present. And so as to

for the time then present (Heb. 9:9)

and

for the present necessity (1 Cor. 7:26).

It is not a question of the future, but solely of the present; a necessity now, and at no other time. In short, it is the regular word for “present.” If a Greek meant to say “present” in contrast with the future, there was no more emphatic word to use. What, then, can be conceived more calculated to destroy the right understanding of this epistle than the common mistranslation? Such is the true sense of the word, I am bold, to say.

But clearly this gives an immense help to the understanding of the passage. The apostle appeals to the saints. It is not a question of teaching in this verse, but the apostle beseeches them by a certain powerful motive, which was still in their souls. He does not mean, “We beseech you concerning,” as some conceive, but as our English version says,

by {2 Thess. 2:1}.

It is a legitimate meaning of the preposition with words of entreaty. He uses the hope of being gathered to Christ at His coming as a motive why they should not listen to those misleading the saints. Now mark the character of this false teaching. It was not the excitement of hope, but of terror produced on the spirit. It caused them to shake, hindering them from a settled, holy, hearty waiting for Christ. The error occupied them with the terrors of some intervening trouble. The pretense was that all the afflictions they had been enduring were parts or signs of the well-known day of trouble, the day of the Lord. Not at all, says the apostle: the trouble of that day will befal the enemies, not the friends, of the Lord. As they knew that every believer loved His name, the notion propagated was wholly astray. It was morally false, as ignoring in the first place His unfailing and perfect love for them.

Therefore he could say,

We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, nor troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as by us, as that the day of the Lord is present {2 Thess. 2:1, 2}.

Do you not know that Christ is coming for you, and that the first aim and effect of His coming will be your gathering
together to meet Him in the air? Why, therefore, be uneasy at such a rumour about His day, with all its awful associations? You have been taught that from God; why be disturbed by this effort of the enemy, who falsely pretends to the Spirit and word, and an alleged letter of mine? That day will fall on the world. Indeed, the apostle had implied in the opening of this epistle, as well as in the latter part of his first, that the day of the Lord does not concern the saints, who were sons of light and of day. They would come accordingly with that day, instead of its overtaking them as a thief by night, because so it comes on whom it may. It comes from the Lord in His execution of judgment on a guilty world; and the very fact of their being sons of light ought to have proved that it cannot surprise such, because they belonged to the region whence it comes.

With striking pithiness he briefly points to the ways of deceit and darkness which accompanied the notion, and betrayed its real source. Truth refuses an admixture of falsehood; and the pretence that any had a spiritual intimation to themselves, or a word for others, that the day of the Lord was really come, was manifestly of the serpent, not of God. Such and so rapid are the steps of evil, one wrong leading to another. But the allegation that they had the apostle’s own authority for the delusion gave him a direct opportunity to contradict the error.

Let no man deceive you by any means: for [it shall not come] unless there shall come the apostasy first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition [2 Thess. 2:3].

These are two different things. The apostle affirms that the day cannot be before both. Christiendom will have abandoned the faith, and the man of sin must be revealed. What a prospect! Do the children of God believe it? We know the world has wholly opposite expectations. Those who allow themselves with so little seriousness to bear the excellent name of the Lord will openly fall away from the confession of the gospel; and then a suited leader into the gulf of perdition will soon appear for the apostates.

I am perfectly persuaded that some of the most important parts of Satan’s means of bringing about the apostasy are now actively at work. God has been graciously filling many hearts with joy and comfort of the truth. He has given not a few to believe these words, the moral signs of which are becoming daily more and more manifest. The apostasy again must come, and, in contrast with the man of righteousness, the man of sin be revealed, even the final Judas,

the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above every one called God, or an object of veneration; so that he sitteth down in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God [2 Thess. 2:3, 4].

How sharply in contrast with the Lord Jesus, who, though really God, in love became man, in order to accomplish the glorious counsels of God and man’s salvation by grace! This one is the son of perdition to the ruin of those who trust him. Although he be but a man, and the man of sin, he takes the place of being the true God here on earth, and this too, not in the world, but in the temple of God of that time. Thus he not merely takes the place of God here below, but actually as such enters His temple. I do not doubt that the temple will then be in Jerusalem; so that as Christiendom began at Jerusalem, the holy city will be its last scene of sinful pride and of divine judgment, though not its only place of judgment. Jerusalem! -- Rome! -- they are two names of most solemn import as to the subject to which I am briefly alluding.

Remember ye not that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time {2 Thess. 2:5, 6}.

It is no absolute restraint, but provision only; for he must be revealed in his own season.

The reference to previous teaching left the matter in comparative obscurity, and has given rise to a great deal of discussion. I think the true answer neither difficult nor uncertain. It is evident that what withholds or restrains must be a power superior to man or Satan, and of a nature totally opposite to the man of sin. As this is the embodiment, or rather head, of evil, so that which restrains his revelation would naturally be the power of good which suppresses as long as God pleases the full manifestation of the lawless one. There seems to be a good reason why the matter is put in this general, if not vague, manner. What withholds is presented as a principle or power in an abstract way, and not as a person only. It might, I suppose, assume a different shape at different times.

Thus we find ourselves within narrow limits in order to fix the restraint and the restrainer. The Thessalonians, who were but young in truth, already knew what restrains, that he might be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of iniquity [or “lawlessness,” which is the true force of the word] doth already work: only there is one who restrains now until he be taken away; and then shall the lawless one be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus shall consume with the breath of his mouth, and shall destroy with the appearing of his coming [or presence] {2 Thess. 2:6-8}.

Evidently, then, we find here a power that hinders the manifestation of the lawless one -- a power which is also a person. Where do we find one that effectually checks the plans of Satan, a person no less than a power? We need not consider long, but answer, without hesitation, the Spirit of God.

Undeniably He is both a power and a person; and save in Him it will be far from easy, if possible, to find an answer that combines these two distinct intimations, as well as both the character and the extent of the power involved. It can hardly be said to be the Spirit of God dwelling in the church, except in the most general way. We must recollect that the Holy Spirit not only dwells there, but also acts providentially in the government of the world. I am far from meaning that, when the church is gone, He will restrain the powers of the world much longer. There are men of the world who have no confidence in its stability; though it exercises no salutary fear
over their souls, and they cling to it all the same. I am sure that no Christian man should trust it for a moment. They are not called to promise fair things to that which cast out and slew the Lord of glory. They know that its doom is coming quickly, but not till they have formally rejected the truth, and accepted the man of sin. But no matter what the wicked will of man and the wiles of Satan may be, they will not be able absolutely to extinguish divinely-controlled government among men as soon as they desire. There is One that still restrains, who could always indeed, but who will cease only when, according to God, the time for the final outburst arrives. It does not, I think, terminate at once, even when the Lord shall have come and taken up His saints, both those that sleep and all those alive and waiting for Him. I say all,

for, you must remember, it is invariably assumed in scripture that every saint waits for Christ. The notion that a person may be a saint, and not looking for His coming, does not enter into the mind of the Holy Spirit. One may fall, of course, into a wrong state from bad teaching or careless ways; but if Christ is my life and righteousness, I shall surely love Him; and if so, I must want to see and be with Him in the condition of glory, where alone such life and righteousness, and the love that gave them, have their just display and results. Hence it is always assumed that every Christian is, in the knowledge of His love, waiting for Christ to come and receive us to Himself, that we may be with Him in the Father’s house before He executes judgment on the world. Till then the Spirit of God acts as a check on the designs of Satan; and even after the church is gone (as I think) He will restrain for a short space.

From the Apocalypse we learn that for a little while God carries out certain agencies of blessing. Not only does He not immediately cease to deal with souls, but we do not at once see either the apostasy or the man of sin. This is a consideration that bears on the question; for undoubtedly it is not the will of man that either sheds blessing on souls or restrains the proudest effort of Satan. After the church is taken up, then the Spirit of God works; and this doubly. He will bring souls into the knowledge of the testimony that God will then raise up to meet the existing circumstances, for His own glory as well as in His pitiful mercy to man. But, besides, He will even then restrain the powers that be from falling instantaneously into the devices of the devil. At a certain given moment, which the Revelation clearly defines, Satan will be cast down from heaven [Rev. 12:7-9], and will then bring forward his long-meditated plan. The empire that has disappeared from among men for so long, that the wise men of the world think its resurrection impossible -- the Roman empire -- will come forward clothed with a diabolical energy. This is the moment when the Spirit ceases to restrain.

Accordingly the Western empire will use all its might, and Satan will help it, to establish a politico-religious power in Jerusalem, who will be the head of the Jews, and at the same time the religious chief of the West. Such is the issue of idolatrous Christ-rejecting Judaism and of apostate Christendom. The man of sin will sit and be worshipped as God, in His temple at Jerusalem. This will enable the Roman empire still to carry on its political game of opposition to the Eastern powers. The West, I say, will support and be supported by the Antichrist, and consequently must share in the awful destruction that the Lord will Himself execute when He appears. Angels will do their part, and the breath of the Lord like a stream of brimstone; for they will be caught red-handed in their opposition to the Lamb, little knowing that He is Lord of lords and King of kings. As for the civil and religious leaders, the beast and the false prophet, they will be consigned to everlasting destruction, without even the form of trial [Rev. 20:19-21]. Nothing less awaits these last and seemingly greatest leaders of the world’s false glory. But, remember, the flower of the West (of these lands that boast of religion, and civilization, and progress) shall perish in this destruction of the revived imperial power and its Jewish ally.

I dare not prophesy smooth things to our own country and race. I believe that all these kingdoms of the West, now so confident in their resources and power, will fall helplessly into the hands of Satan at last. At Jerusalem the man of sin, as at Rome, the civil head of empire, with his confederate but subject kings, will be the two beasts of Rev. 13. It is not the time to enter into further details now; but I may state my conviction, that the man of sin, whom 2 Thess. shows enthroned in God’s temple, will be the accepted Messiah of the deceived Jews in Jerusalem, as the first beast is the imperial head at Rome; for the civil power will then be separate from the religious, and we all know how ardently men desire this now. But its accomplishment will have results far different from what most look for.

I confess I am struck by the solemn fact, that one cannot speak of these subjects, even at short intervals of time, without perceiving new features which, in principle, bring us more and more up to the brink of the precipice. I do then, from every point of view, warn all those who are looking for bright hopes on the earth, and promising improvement to men. It is serious to observe that the lawless one here described and reserved for such a destiny is related very nearly to the mystery of lawlessness which was then at work, as the apostle let us know, and which has gone on increasing, and is immensely increased now. It is true that the lawless one will not be revealed until the restraint of the Spirit of God over the world is removed. This appears to me to be the unforced deduction from the apostle’s statement, compared with the light thrown on the subject by other Scriptures, which, by common consent, treat of the same time and point. It is the Spirit of God ceasing to restrain in the world as well as in the church, since He will for a brief space both act on souls and restrain Satan in the world, after the church has been caught up to heaven.

This I consider a comprehensive and correct view of what is revealed. It is put generally here both as

he who withholds [2 Thess. 2:7]

and as

that which withholds [2 Thess. 2:6].

The particular form of withholding power might differ according, to varying circumstances. The Christians of old used to think the Roman empire withheld them. Nor was their
idea far from the mark; because the empire was assuredly among the powers ordained of God, as I do not doubt emperors, kings, presidents, &c., are still. But the hour hastens when the powers that be will cease to derive their authority from God; when the West above all will openly renounce the true God, and the beast will rise up from the abyss. Our chapter adds a true picture of the extent to which the man of sin will be allowed to go in diabolical imitation of what God wrought by Christ when here below. It is the hour of retribution, when the proud apostates who refused the truth accept and perish in the lie of the enemy. How blessed the lot of the saints which the apostle contrasts with this! (2 Thess. 2:13-17).

The next chapter (2 Thess. 3) closes the epistle with divers desires, and a prayer for them that the Lord would direct their hearts into the love of God, and into the patience of Christ. The key-note is thus maintained from first to last. As Christ waits to come, so should we, that we may meet Him then. But the apostle would not have this hope nor the Lord Himself dishonoured by the reproach of disorderly ways. And thus he nowhere more enjoins the duty of honourable industry, appealing to his own example, than in the epistles which most insist on Christ’s coming as the proximate and constant hope of the Christian. If any would pervert such a truth, or any other, to idleness and disorder, he was to be marked as unworthy of Christian companionship, not of course counted an enemy (like the wicked or heretics), but admonished as a brother. Idleness is fruitful of disorder and the foe of peace, which the apostle desired for them from the Lord of peace Himself always and in every way.

May we seriously heed the truth, and its immediate application to our consciences and ways! May God give us quiet energy without restlessness or excitement, but so much the more calmly, because of the realized nearness of the Lord’s return, and the solemn consequences for all mankind! Oh for an earnest, burning zeal; for self-denying love; for hearts devoted to Christ, which might warn men of their impending destruction, that, if they have not been won by His love, they may at least tremble at the hopeless inextricable ruin in which their unbelief will soon leave them for ever.
We enter now on the confidential communications of the apostle to some of his fellow-labourers, and tonight on the epistles to Timothy. The two have much in common, but they have also not a little that is distinct. The first epistle is characterized by laying down the order which becomes both individuals and the church of God viewed as His house. We shall find, I trust, how remarkably His care for godly moral order, which descends into the family, into the relations of children and parents, of servants and masters, of man and woman, is also bound up with some of the main doctrines of the epistle. At the same time, while this pertains more particularly to the first epistle, there is a striking expression which meets us on the very threshold, and belongs not merely to these two epistles, but also to that addressed to Titus. God is not here regarded as our Father, but as our Saviour God.

We have in harmony with this none of the special privileges of the family of God. The relationships before us are another character. Thus, we have nothing at all about the body of Christ; we hear nowhere again of the bride of the Lamb; but what tallies with God as a Saviour. It is not Christ our Saviour, though, of course, He is so; but there is broader truth pressed -- even of God our Saviour, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This prepares for much that we shall find. God, as a Saviour God, is certainly in contrast with His dealings under law, or in government. Nevertheless it takes in also His preserving care, which extends far beyond believers, though very especially toward believers. It embraces also that which is much deeper than presidential care, even the salvation which is in course of accomplishment through Christ. I do not say accomplished; because salvation here, as elsewhere, must not be limited simply to redemption, but goes out into the results of that mighty work on the cross, whereby the soul is kept all the way through the wilderness, and the body of humiliation changed into the likeness of the Lord’s glorious body.

Accordingly, Paul introduces himself as the apostle of Jesus Christ by commandment of God (1 Tim. 1:1).

Authority has a large place in these epistles; thence the apostle shows it was not his writing to his child Timothy in this respect without the Lord. It was not merely love, it was not simply that the Spirit of God empowered him to meet need, but he styles himself in it the apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Christ Jesus, our hope; to Timothy, my true child in faith: grace, mercy, and peace, &c. (1 Tim. 1:1, 2)

Another feature of these epistles meets us in the place which is given to mercy. I do not merely now refer to what has been often observed -- the introduction; but we shall find that mercy is wrought into the tissues and substance of the epistle. Mercy supposes the need, the constant wants, the difficulties, the dangers, of the saints of God. It supposes also that God is acting in love, and in full view of these difficulties. Hence we find that, while there is jealous care, there is also a remarkable tenderness, which appears every now and then, in these epistles; and this is just and beautiful in its season. The apostle was drawing toward the close of his career, and (although all be inspired, and he was a rare jewel even among the apostles) there is, I am persuaded, an evidence of a tone more suitable to the growing trials and necessities of the saints of God; a tenderness towards those that were faithful and tried, that is far more manifest here than in the earlier epistles. I do not say that all was not in its due time and measure, but we can well understand it. As a faithful servant, he had been for many years not only leading on, but sharing too the hardest of the fight, and had gone through perils such as had left many of his companions behind. Shame, afflictions, persecutions, the enticements of Satan too, had drawn away some that had been in the foremost ranks of old. He was now left with comparatively few of the familiar faces of those he had loved and laboured with so long.

We can easily understand, then, how calculated such circumstances were to draw out the expression of a love that was always there, but that would be in a more comely and suitable manner expressed at such a conjunction of circumstances. This we shall find in these epistles. He writes to Timothy as his genuine child; it is not at all the usual way in the earlier epistles. It was his Bethany. Here and now was the opening of that long pent-up heart. At the same time he was also laying an important commission on one that was raised up of God for the purpose, who was comparatively young, who would soon have to fight his way without the sympathy and the countenance of one that had been so blest.
to him. Hence he says here,

Grace, mercy, and peace.

He felt his need, but certainly the mercy was not lacking in
God, but rich and ready to flow.

Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and
Jesus Christ our Lord. As I besought thee to abide
still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia
{1 Tim. 1:2, 3}.

We see the love that even an apostle adopts towards his child
in faith. It was not at all a peremptory word, though full of
earnest desire for the work of the Lord. He wishes Timothy
to stay,

that thou mightest charge some not to be teachers of
other doctrine, nor to give heed to fables and endless
genealogies, which minister questions, rather than
God’s administration 17 which is in faith.

Then he explains what the nature of this charge was. Often, I fear, “commandment” gives the English reader a
wrong impression. I do not say that “commandment” is not
correct, but that so naturally do people in Christendom turn
to what we call the Ten Commandments, or ten words of the
law, that whenever the word “commandment” occurs, you
may expect many, even children of God, who might and
ought to know better, at once unconsciously turning back to
the law. But so far was this from being the writer’s thought
here, that we shall find him in a moment deprecating most
strongly that whole system of idea as a misuse of the law.
What the apostle means by the commandment is the charge
that he was laying on his child in the faith and fellow-labourer
Timothy. The end of the charge or commandment
is love out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience,
and of faith unfeigned {1 Tim. 1:5}.

It was, in point of fact, not merely that charge that he was
giving him, but the charge touched the truth of the gospel; it
was the care of the faith, jealousy for the revelation of God
Himself, our Saviour God in Christ. The end of all this was
love, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned.

And so then, as remarked already, far from leaving the
smallest reason for any perversely to confound this with the
law, the apostle instantly turns to that perpetving of the law,
which is so natural to the heart of man.

From which some having swerved have turned aside
unto vain jangling; desiring to be law-teachers;
understanding neither what they say, nor whereof
they affirm {1 Tim. 1:6, 7};

and thereupon he parenthetically, as disposing of this matter,
shows what the lawful use of the law was. They were not to

suppose that he meant that God could make anything without
a real use. As there is no creature of God that has not its
value, so certainly the law of God has its right field of
application, and its own proper use. Thus he vindicates God
in what He has given, as well as afterwards in what He has
made, and nowhere so much as in this epistle do we find this.

At the same time it is evident that he consigns the law to
what we may call a comparatively negative use. The use of
the law is to condemn, to kill, to deal with evil. This never
could be the full expression of God. It does keep up a witness
to God’s hatred of evil no doubt; those that are presumptuous
it leaves without excuse. But a Christian, who takes up the
law as the rule of his own life, must in the very first instance
give up his place as being in Christ, and abandon that
righteousness of God which he is made in Him. The law was
not enacted for the Christian. It is not, of course that any
Christian deliberately intends such folly; but this is really
what the error implies. The very principle of taking the law
for himself is the abandonment (without knowing or intending
it) of all his blessing in Christ. To apply it thus is ignorance of
the mind of God. It was never designed for such a
purpose. But there remains the lawful use of the law. It was
made not the the righteous, but for an unrighteous man.
Clearly what Satan here aimed at was to put the saints under
the law. But the apostle will not hear of it, treating it as
simply condemnatory of the bad, and in no way either the
power or the rule of what is good for the believer.

Knowing this, that the law is not made for a
righteous man, but for lawless and disobedient, for
ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for
smirters of fathers and smirters of mothers, for
manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile
themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars,
for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing
that is contrary to sound doctrine {1 Tim. 1:9, 10}.

A weighty sentence, and eminently characteristic also of
these epistles. The time was appropriate for it. The saints (at
Ephesus especially) had heard a great deal of heavenly truth.
There was also an effort, as we see, to correct what was
supposed to be a defect, in those that were living on heavenly
fare, by supplementing their truth with the law. But this is all
wrong, cries the apostle. It is an unwitting denial not only of
Christians, but even of your place as righteous men. Very
different from this is the true and divine principle. But
sound doctrine

is brought in here; and we shall see how very beautifully this
is applied in the epistle at a later point. For a moment he just
touches on the wholesome thought, then turns to a higher one.
There is in Christ that which lifts entirely out of nature, and
puts one before God according to all that is in his heart -- his
counsels of glory for us in Christ. In fact, immediately after
this he calls what he preached the
gospel of the glory

(“the glorious gospel,” as it is styled in our version.)
of the blessed God {1 Tim. 1:11}.

According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God,
which was committed to my trust {1 Tim. 1:11}.

17. The true reading, represented by Ν (Cod. Sin.) and all other uncials
save the Clermont, and almost if not all the cursive manuscripts, is οἰκονομία, dispensation, in the sense of administration, or stewardship.
Even Matthew joins the rest of the critics, with the Complutensian Polyglott,
against the received οἰκονομία, which he considers a mere blunder of δ
for β by Eusmus’s printers. But this does not account for the Latin, Syriac
(save later), Gothic, &c.; even supposing δ was the slip of the scribe. It is
evident that ἤσοδωμα” is not the point in question, but the right order of
the house of God, and this in faith. Internal evidence is thus as strong as
eternal to the true reading.
He takes great pains to show that no glory that is revealed in Christ, no blessedness in our total clearance from flesh, no setting of the believer free before God in Christ Jesus, impairs, but, on the contrary, gives importance to sound doctrine.

By sound doctrine we shall find that he brings in the nicest care for the least relations of this life, as flowing from the grace and truth of God. This is the true guard against an abuse of heavenly truth; not putting persons under law, which is inevitable bondage and condemnation, that brings no glory to God, nor power or holiness to the man. But at the same time heavenly truth, so far from being inconsistent, never shines so much as when it is seen in the smallest details of walk in the home, in the family, in the ordinary occupation, in the bearing and tone of a man in his life day by day. It is not merely in the assembly; neither is it in worship only; it is not certainly in ministerial work alone, but in the quiet home. The relationship of a servant to his master gives a blessed opportunity in its place for showing out what the truth of the glory is to faith, and what the strength of the grace which is come to man in Christ the Lord. This is what we shall find in these epistles to Timothy -- that the apostle combines in his own wonderful way his reference to ordinary duty, and even enters into the smallest matters of this life, according to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God. He refers to his own case; for he was so much the better a preacher of the gospel, because he so deeply felt himself an object of the grace of God, who revealed it in Christ to him. What can be conceived more remarkably characteristic of the man? The bearing of the passage is therefore intensely personal and practical.

And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, appointing me unto ministry {1 Tim. 1:12}.

He does not forget this, but he takes care to assert another and a far nearer and more immediate want --

who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and insolent: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus {1 Tim. 1:13, 14}.

This accordingly brings out a statement of the gospel:

Faithful is the word, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy {1 Tim. 1:15, 16}.

It is always mercy, as may be observed. It is not so much a question of righteousness; justification is not here prominent, as in other epistles.

I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting {1 Tim. 1:16}.

This draws out his ascription of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord; and then he repeats the words of the fifth verse:

This charge I commit unto thee {1 Tim. 1:18}.

It is not the law, nor any supposed adaptation of it, to direct the path of those who receive the gospel.

This charge, he maintains, is the commandment of our Saviour God. It is that which He is sending out now, and nothing else.

This charge I commit to thee, child Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou mightest war the good warfare; holding faith, and a good conscience, which some having put away, concerning faith have made shipwreck {1 Tim. 1:18, 19}.

There again we find the same mingling of the faith and good conscience as we had earlier. Some having put away, not the faith, but a good conscience, made shipwreck of the faith. Thus, no matter what you may hold or appear to delight in, abandoning jealousy over your ways, giving up self-judgment in the great or small matters which each day brings before us, is fatal. It may be a very little sin that is allowed, but this, where it is unjudged in God's sight, becomes - the beginning of a very great evil. Having put away a good conscience, their ship no longer answers the helm, and as to faith they make shipwreck:

of whom is Hymenæus and Alexander, whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may be instructed not to blaspheme {1 Tim. 1:20}.

Satan's power is regarded and really is in the outside world. The apostle had delivered these men to him. The power to torment and harass the soul with fears does not belong to the house of God, where, as we shall find, His presence is known, and this is incompatible with fear, with doubt, with question of acceptance and of blessing in His sight. The apostle had given up to the enemy these men, who had abandoned all that was holy, not only in practice, but also afterwards, as a consequence, in faith. They were consigned to Satan, not necessarily to be lost -- surely not; but that they might be so troubled, by proving what the power of Satan is by the flesh, and in the world, that they might be thus brought back broken in all their bones, and glad to find a refuge again in the house of God. Better surely not to need such discipline; but, if we do need it, how precious to know that God turns it to account in His grace, that they might be thoroughly dealt with and exercised in the conscience!

In the next chapter (1 Tim. 2) the apostle carries on his care as to what was becoming. This, you will find, is a main topic of the epistle. It is not merely instruction for saints, or conversion of sinners, but also the comeliness that belongs to the saints of God -- their right attitude toward those without as well as those within. In it we begin with what is toward those in authority, that are without.

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and givings of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in eminence; that we may pass a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and gravity {1 Tim. 2:1, 2}.

May it not be a question whether we are sufficiently careful and exercised in heart, as to that which becomes us in this respect? Do we really enter on our due place of intercession,
and exercise that which becomes us before God, as having so blessed a function -- the mind of God in this world, and care for those that seem to be outside our reach? But in truth to stand in this world in known and near relationship with a Saviour God, with One that we know, at once brings before us also those that are outside. Christianity fosters no spirit of harsh unruely independence. And what then becomes us in respect of them? Prayer, intercession, even for the highest, let them be kings or in eminence; they need it most. Nothing but the strong sense of the infinite blessing of the place that grace has given us could lead to or keep up such prayer. But sometimes we are apt to settle down in the enjoyment of the grace, without reflecting on that which becomes us as to those outside it. From pre-occupation within, how often we forget those without!

But the reason goes deeper.

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who desires that all men should be saved {1 Tim. 2:3, 4};

speaking now of His gracious willingness. Not His counsels but His nature rises before us. We must be blind if we fail to see that a great point in these epistles is the good and loving nature of God, that would have us look at all men without exception. It is another thing how far the counsels of God work, how far the effectual work of His grace is applied; but nothing alters God's nature. And this is true both in the spirit of grace that becomes the saints, and also in their zealous care for the glory of God. Hence he says:

There is one God, and one mediator between God and men {1 Tim. 2:5}.

This is always the ground and character of the First and Second of Timothy. It is not the Father and His family; it is God and man. And it is not merely God as He once dealt with Israel, for then this Mediator was not. There was a promise, but the Mediator of grace was not come. But now, apart from the heavenly relations that are ours, and much that we know and enjoy by the Holy Ghost in our hearts here below, there is this that needs to be looked after and maintained, that is, the public character -- if we may so speak -- of the Christian, and that which belongs to him thus broadly before men. It is the testimony of God as a Saviour God, of a God that has to do with men. Accordingly He has revealed Himself in a Mediator. Thus he speaks of Him:

There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, the testimony in its own season.
Whereunto I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not), a teacher of Gentiles in faith and truth {1 Tim. 2:5-7}.

His general exhortation is pursued, but still in view of the due and decent outward order, of that which met the eye even of an unconverted person.

I will therefore that the men
-- that is, not women --
that the men pray in every place, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and disputing {1 Tim. 2:8}.

There are occasions and places where it would be wholly unsuitable for women to speak, but as to men they pray everywhere. There is no place where it is not in season, but let it be

without wrath and disputing,
or
reasoning.

Either would be altogether opposed to the spirit of prayer. Prayer is the expression of dependence on God; and wrangling on the one hand, and all angry feeling on the other, even supposing it might have some righteousness about it, still are unsuitable to prayer. Thus, what may have its place may really be uncomely in drawing near to God. A spirit of reasoning would be quite as out of place.

But with regard to woman he says,

In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in orderly guise, with modesty and sobriety; not with plaits and gold, or pearls, or costly array {1 Tim. 2:9};

It does not matter what may be the particular taste and habits of the day or of the country, the Christian woman, as much as the Christian man, ought to be above the age, and unlike the world. And indeed it is this very want that he here takes occasion to connect with Christianity itself in its outward order before man; so that we may truly desire that our Saviour God should not lose, as it were, His character in and by His people; for this is the great point that the apostle is so full of in these epistles. Such is the way in which a woman can contribute to a right and godly testimony as well as a man.

But he pursues it a little more. He says,

Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man {1 Tim. 2:11, 12};

In truth he really goes somewhat beyond this. A woman might say, "I do not usurp authority; I only exercise it." But this precisely is what is wrong. It is forbidden to be exercised. Nothing therefore can be more exclusive. It does not matter, if the man may be weak and the woman strong; it would have been better they had thought of this before they became husband and wife. But even thus no excuse avails; the woman is not to exercise authority over the man; nor (need I add?) in any other relationship. For this he traces things to their roots.

Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being quite deceived was in transgression {1 Tim. 2:13, 14};

That is, he decides things with that marvellous power which God gave him beyond any of the other apostles of tracking the stream to its source, both in man and to God; and this ruling of the case he deduces from the unquestionable facts of the beginning of divine history as to the man and woman. The man was not deceived, in a certain sense: so much the worse; he was a bold sinner. The woman was weak and misled by the serpent; the man deliberately did what he did -- with his eyes open. Adam sinned against God knowingly. Of course it was dreadful and ruinous; nevertheless this shows the difference in their character from the outset. Men as a class
are not so liable to be deceived as woman. She is more open
to be taken in by appearance. The man may be ruder and
worse -- bolder in his sin, but still the Lord remembers this
even to the last. At the same time the apostle mingles this
with that which is the lot of women here below:

But she shall be preserved in childbearing, if they
continue in faith and charity and holiness with
sobriety [1 Tim. 2:15].

It is not merely if
she,
but if
they
continue. How serious is the word for both man and woman!
In the government of God He mingles the most solemn things
with that which is the most thoroughly personal, showing how
He would have the conscience exercised, and jealous care
even on such a matter as this. I do not agree with those who
refer the childbearing to the Incarnation.


And now he comes (1 Tim. 3), not so much to comely
order as to the outside, or as to the relation of man and
woman, but to the ordinary governments and helps of the
saints. He takes up what was of a graver kind, and touching
more on spiritual things, namely, bishops (or elders); then
deacons; and this leads him naturally to the house of God.

Faithful is the word. If any one aspireth to oversight,
he desireth a good work. The overseer then must be
blameless, husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of
good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;
not given to wine, no striker; but patient, not a
brawler, not covetous; one that ruleth well his own
house, having his children in subjection with all
gravity [1 Tim. 3:1-4].

It is plain that this is not at all a question of spiritual gift. One
might be endowed with a good gift and yet not have a well-
regulated house. Perhaps the wife might not behave properly,
or the children be unruly: no matter what his gift, if the wife
or the family were a dishonour, he could not be an overseer
(for this is the simple and true meaning of “bishop”).

In early days persons were brought in to the confession
of Christ who had been Pagans, and trained up in its habits.
Some of these had more than one wife. A true and gifted
Christian one might be; but if such were his unhappy
position, he was precluded from exercising formal oversight.
The evil of polygamy could not be corrected at that time by
strong measures. (Since then in Christendom it is dealt with
as criminal.) To dismiss his wives would be wrong. But the
Holy Spirit by such an injunction applied a principle which
was destined to undermine, as in fact it did undermine,
polygamy in every form. There was a manifest censure
conveyed in the fact, that a man with two or more wives
could not be set in the charge of elder or deacon. A man was
not refused as a confessor of Christ, nor was he forbidden to
preach the gospel, because such might have been his sad
circumstances at home. If the Lord called him by His grace,
or gave him as a gift to the church, the church bowed. But an
elder or bishop was to be one that not only had a suitable gift
for his work, but also in the family or in his circumstances
must be free from all appearance of scandal on the name of
the Lord. He must have a good report, and be morally
irreproachable in himself and his household. There might be
trial or sorrow, -- few families were without both; but what
is spoken of here is something that damaged the public repute
of the assembly. For this very reason the grand point for local
oversight was moral weight. It was not only the ability to
inform, counsel, or rebuke, but in order to do all this
efficiently a certain godly influence proved at home and
abroad. In the practical difficulties with which an elder or
bishop would be called to interfere continually in an
assembly, there should never be room for those whose
conduct might be in question to point to flaws in his own
home, or in his own open life and spirit. Thus wisely and
holily did the Spirit demand that he should be a person of
good report himself, that neither past ways nor present habits
should in the least degree compromise the office; and again,
with a stainless reputation as well as a man of some spiritual
experience in his family --

one that ruleth well his own house, having his
children in subjection with all gravity; not a novice,
lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the
condemnation of the devil [1 Tim. 3:4-6].

These things would not apply to a man’s ministry in the
word. A Christian may begin to preach almost as soon as he
believed the word of truth, the gospel of salvation; but for
one to be clothed with a public and responsible place as elder
in an assembly is another thing altogether.

As a rule the apostle never appointed persons elders
directly after they were converted. A certain time was
needful for the Spirit of God to work in the soul, and
discipline them in the midst of their brethren. They would
then and thus manifest certain capabilities and moral qualities,
and acquire weight, which would make them respected and
valued, besides gaining experience in godly care for the well-
being of the saints of God. All these things, where there were
circumstantial requisites, relative and personal suitability,
would mark out a person for this office.

Besides, though this is not said here, in order to be an
overseer, one must be appointed by a valid authority; and the
only one recognised by Scripture is an apostle or an apostolic
delegate. Thus the Christians that a superficial observer of the
present day might tax with inattention to godly order in these
respects are in truth those alone who are really adhering to it.
For manifestly to set up men in such a position of charge
without a proper validating authority is really to vitiate all in
its very springs. Those who refuse to exceed their powers are
clearly in the right, -- not those who imitate the apostles
without warrant from the Lord. I am perfectly satisfied
therefore that those now gathered {together} to His name
have been mercifully and truly led of God in not presuming
to appoint elders or bishops. They do not possess the needful
authority more than others; and there they stop, using, and
blessing God for, such things as they have. Appointment must
always raise the question, who they are that appoint. And it
is impossible for an honest man of intelligence to find a
scriptural answer, so as to sanction those who pretend to
God alone can vouchsafe or keep it good.

Truly, there are often difficulties that arise in the church of God, and prudence might suggest many plans to meet the difficulty; but then it is the house of God, not merely the house of the prudent or the good. It is a divine institution. It has nothing in common with well-intentioned men doing their best. Let the matter be ever so simple, whether it be a question of discipline or order, it should express the truth of God applied to the case. This shows the exceeding solemnity of either advising or resisting any course that might be the will of God in any particular matter. Excellent desires, zeal, honesty, are in no way sufficient for the purpose. God can employ the most feeble member of the assembly; but still ordinarily one looks for better guides. One might expect that while God would give no allowance to a man presuming on gift or experience, -- because the moment you begin to assume to yourself or to others, there is danger, -- but nevertheless, surely one might expect that God would, by suitable means, bring out that which is wholesome, and true, and godly -- in short, what would express His own mind on any given subject.

These are among the reasons why the apostle maintains it here. We have it viewed in its outward comely order in this world, but the principle of the maintenance of this, and nothing less than this, always remains true. No renewed state gives any reason for abandoning it. The great thing is never to let details swamp the principle. There is always a way for those who, consciously weak, distrust themselves; and this is to wait, to refuse to act until God shows His way. Faith waits till it gets a distinct word from God. No doubt it is hard to be at one's wits' end, but it is a good thing for the soul. So here: he bids Timothy to take heed to these things, in case he himself tarried.

And what is that truth especially which characterizes the church? This is another instance of the tone of the epistle.

Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness.

Mark the expression

mystery of godliness,
or piety. It is not simply the mystery of Christ in the church, but the

mystery of godliness.

God was manifested in flesh, was justified in Spirit, was seen of angels, was preached among Gentiles, was believed on in [the] world, was received up in glory {1 Tim. 3:16}.

It is not God reigning over a people here below. This was no mystery, but the wonted expectation of all Israel, indeed, of saints before Israel. They expected the Messiah, the Redeemer to come, the One that would make good the promises of God. But now

God was manifested in flesh, was justified in Spirit.

The power of the Holy Ghost had shown itself all through His
life, had been proved to the uttermost in His death, and now marked Him out as Son of God in resurrection. He was seen of angels, not of man alone; He was preached among Gentiles, instead of being found on a throne amongst the Jews; He was believed on in the world [1 Tim. 3:16], instead of manifestly governing it by power. Another state of things altogether is present: it is Christianity; but Christianity viewed in the person of Christ Himself, in the grand bearings of His own person and His work; not as forming a heavenly body, nor even pursuing the special privileges of the habitation of God through the Spirit; but laying the foundation for the house of God, as the scene and support of His truth and moral order before the world. The whole matter is closed by Jesus, not only believed on in the world, but received up in glory [1 Tim. 3:16].

Now what is the reason why this is brought in here? It seems to be set in contrast with the speculations of men (1 Tim. 4) who wanted to interweave with Christianity certain dreams of a fancied spirituality above the gospel. What was this scheme? They fancied that the gospel would be a still better system if the converts would eat no meat; if they would not marry, and so on. This was their notion of bringing in some “higher life,” superior to anything that the apostles had taught. How does he meet them? He shows here the mystery of godliness [1 Tim. 3:16]; but along with this, and immediately after it, he brings in the most necessary fundamental truth. This is the point that has much struck my mind in speaking of 1 Timothy at this time.

That is to say, there is a combination of God’s revelation in Christ, in most essential and even lofty features, with the plainest and simplest truth of God as to creation. Now, you will find that the way in which false doctrine enters is in contrast with this. Men thus break down, who despise common duties; they are far too good or too great for occupying themselves with the homely things that become a Christian man or woman. They may perhaps weave the love of Christ (we will suppose) into some highflew speculations; but they set aside that which connects itself every day with moral propriety. Oh, how often has this been the case! how one could easily recount one name after another, if it would become any so to do! Such then is the way in which error is prone to show itself. The man who most of all brings out what is heavenly and divine is he who should be devoted and obedient in the simplest duties of every day. This very epistle is the witness of it. Whereas the moment one sanctions the principle of making little of the family relations, setting aside duty, neglecting it personally, and making it even a boast to do so, as if jealousy for the Lord’s glory were mere legalism, the result will be that, while they set aside the common claims of every day’s duty, the conscience is ruined, and shipwreck of the faith is inevitable. They first cast aside a good conscience, and then the faith itself comes to nothing.

Thus the apostle brings the reader into close juxtaposition with the mystery of godliness, or, as it is emphatically called, the mystery of piety. The glorious person of Christ is traced through from His manifestation in flesh, or incarnation, until He is beheld received up in glory.

The work of God proceeds in the church on earth founded on this. In contrast with it 1 Tim. 4 follows up:

But the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons; in hypocrisy of liars, tainted in their own conscience, forbidding to marry: [bidding] to abstain from meats, which God created to be received with thanksgiving of those that are faithful and know the truth [1 Tim. 4:1-3].

Some necessary changes are here made, so as to convey what seems to me the meaning. Then he proceeds:

For every creature of God is good, &c. [1 Tim. 4:4, 5].

We can hardly descend to anything lowlier than this.

But these airy speculators had completely forgotten God. They despised the simple self-evident truth that every creature of God is good. So, too, we see that they put a disparagement on the basis of family life, and the social system — marriage. Not to marry through devotedness to God’s work may be right and most blessed; but here it was a pretension to superior sanctity. As a principle and practice, Christian people were urged not to marry at all. Now the moment that this ground is taken, the same apostle who tells us what he believed to be the best thing (namely, to be free from fresh ties, so as to care only for the Lord), defends resolutely the sanctity of marriage, and resents the blow struck at the creatures of God. It was really a slight of His outward love, and of His providential arrangements. Danger threatens wherever there is a virtual setting aside of God’s rights, no matter what the plea. Oriental philosophy, which tinctured some of the Greeks, fostered these high soarings of men. As usual, Paul brings in God, and the dream is dissipated. The moment you use anything so as to set aside the plain duty of every day, you prove yourself to be losing the faith, to have slipped from a good conscience, to have fallen a victim to the enemy’s deceits; and what will be the end of it?

The apostle then gives personal counsel to Timothy, of a very salutary character. As he also desires that none should despise his youth, so he urges that he should be a model of the believers, in word, conversation, love, faith, and purity. He was to give himself to reading, to exhortation, to teaching, and not to neglect his gift, given him through prophecy, in the imposition of the hands of the presbytery or elderhood. Nothing simpler, nor more wholesome. It might have been thought that one so specially endowed as Timothy was not called to occupy himself thus, and be wholly in them, that his profiting should appear to all. But no; grace and gift create a corresponding responsibility, instead of absorbing from it. Timothy must give heed to himself, as well as to the teaching; and he must continue in them, instead of relaxing after a rigorous beginning. Depend upon it that those who
seek to give out had better take care that they take in; that both labourers and those laboured amongst may ever grow in the truth. Doing thus, Timothy would save both himself and those that heard him.

In 1 Tim. 5 the apostle gives needful directions to Timothy as regards an elder. He was not to be rebuked sharply, but to be entreated as a father. Undoubtedly Timothy stood in a prominent place of trust and service; but this gave no exemption from the comeliness that becomes every one -- especially a young man. The apostle had maintained his post of honour in the preceding chapter; now he will not let him forget the due consideration of others. How often does overfrankness drop words which rankle in the memory of an elder, easily floated over when love flows freely, but when it ebbs, an occasion of shipwreck! Again,

younger men as brethren; the elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity {1 Tim. 5:1, 2}.

Nothing more beautiful, more tender, more holy; nothing more calculated to edify and cement the saints to the glory of God, whilst His wisdom enters into all circumstances, with an easy elasticity which is characteristic of His grace.

So too we find divinely-furnished regulations as to those who ought to be chargeable to the assembly -- what was right in the case of the younger widows -- what was desirable as to younger women in general; and then again the obligations toward elders, not now when faulty, but in their ordinary functions and service.

Let the elders that preside well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine {1 Tim. 5:17}.

But what if they were charged with wrong?

Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Then that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear {1 Tim. 5:19, 20}.

Prejudice and partiality must be eschewed at all cost. Finally, care must be taken to avoid any compromise of the name of the Lord. Thus the well-known sign of blessing in the outward act of laying on hands was to be done circumspectly.

Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure {1 Tim. 5:22}.

There is condescension even to so small a point seemingly as to tell him not to be a water-drinker. It would seem that Timothy’s scrupulous conscience felt the dreadful habits of those times and lands so as to bring him into bondage; but the apostle, not in a mere private note, but in the body of the inspired letter itself, sets aside his scruples, and bids him

use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities {1 Tim. 5:23}.

I am aware that men have cavilled at this, yielding to their own thoughts of what they deem fit subjects for the pen of inspiration; but if we exclude anything whatever from the range of the Spirit, of God, we make it to be merely a question of the will of man. And what must issue from this? There is nothing either too great or too little for the Holy Spirit. Is there anything that may not, that ought not, to be a question of doing God’s will? Thus, if a person takes wine, or anything else, except to please God, and is not in danger on the score of morality, certainly he has lost all adequate sense of his own place as a witness of the glory of God. How happy ought we to be that God gives us perfect liberty! only let us see to it that we use it solely for His praise.

In the last chapter (1 Tim. 6) comes the question of servants and their masters, which also it was important to regulate; for we all know that a servant might turn to a selfish account that his master and himself were brethren in Christ. It is all very well for the master to say so; and certainly he should never act without bearing in mind his own spiritual relationship to his servant; but I do not think it becomes a servant to say “brother” to his master. My business is to know him as my master. No doubt it would be grace on his part to own me as his brother. Everything therefore where grace is at work will be found to have its blessed place. Whoever thought differently (and such have never been wanting) was puffed up, and could only suggest evil.

Then he touches on the value of piety with a contented mind in contrast with the love of money, and its various snares in this age as in all that are past. These things will be found dealt with successively, until at last the apostle calls on the man of God to flee these things himself, and to pursue the path of righteousness, &c., as well as strive in the good combat of faith; otherwise a man of God was in no degree free from danger. He was to lay hold of eternal life, to which he had been called, and had confessed the good confession before many witnesses, and this in view of the great event which will display our fidelity or the lack of it -- the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which in its own time the blessed and only Potentate shall show. At the same time he calls on him to charge them that are rich neither to be high-minded nor rely on aught so uncertain. What would give weight to the charge? That he was above such desires himself, trusting in the living God, who affords us all things richly for enjoyment. Let them be rich in good works, liberal in distributing, ready to communicate, laying up for themselves a good foundation for the future, that they may lay hold of what is really life.

O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of false-named knowledge, which some professing have erred concerning the faith. Grace be with thee {1 Tim. 6:20, 21}.

★ ★ ★

{2 Timothy}

Turning to the SECOND EPISTLE, we find that, although there is the same grand truth of the Saviour God maintained, the state of things had become sensibly worse, and the hour for the apostle’s departure from the world was drawing near. Accordingly, there is a depth of feeling that one may safely say far exceeds the first epistle, although it had shown so much tenderness and care both for Timothy and the faithful of those days. But now there were other reasons for it, namely, that Christians were neglecting godliness and order.
They had been long accustomed to the truth, and alas! human nature began to show itself out in indifference. There was no longer the freshness of a new thing; and where the heart was not kept up in communion with the Lord, the value of divine things was less felt, if it did not quite fade away. Accordingly, in much grief of heart, the apostle writes to his tried and trembling child in the faith, and seeks to strengthen him, above all things not to be discouraged, and to make up his mind to endure hard things.

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise [2 Tim. 1:1].

It is not “the commandment,” as of authority, but according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus [2 Tim. 1:1].

The crumbling away of everything here was before the apostle; and accordingly it is one of the peculiar features of this second epistle, that he brings out that which never can decay -- which was before there was a world to dissolve -- namely, that life which was in Christ Jesus before the world began.

Thus the apostle comes to the close of his ministry, and touches upon the line of St. John. There is no part of John’s doctrine more strikingly characteristic than life in Christ. Now we see that when Paul was touching the confines of that difficult and most perilous moment when John was to be left alone, he brings out as his last note that very truth which John was to develop with special care and fulness.

To Timothy, my dearly-beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers [2 Tim. 1:2, 3],

-- what singular language this from Paul! How comes it so?

Paul the aged {Philemon 1:9},
as he says, was just about to leave this world. Activity of service was no longer before him. This he had known most extensively, but it was closed; no longer had he before him any prospect of having to fight the battles of the church of God. He had fought the good fight of faith. Others must do that kind of work in future. But now before his heart -- just as in principle before the dying Lord Himself, wonderful to say -- two things come together: a deeper sense of what is in God, as revealed in Christ Himself, before there was any creation at all; and on the other hand so much the deeper sense also of what could be owned in nature. Now these seem to many very difficult indeed to combine. They appear to think that if you hold life in Christ to be the one thing that is most precious, to be the prize that your heart reverts to, all owning of anything short of this would be out of place; but it is exactly the contrary. When the Lord was entering on His ministry He says,

Woman, what have I to do with thee? {John 2:4}.

But when dying upon the cross, He calls to John to behold His mother. We find a precisely similar kind of combination in Paul. Of course it was infinitely higher, it is needless to say, in the Master; but the servant was as closely as possible following in His steps.

It is beautiful to trace this double working and current of the apostle -- that is, what is imperishable, above and beyond nature; and, along with this, the utmost value put on everything that he would own in those naturally bound up with him -- those of either family that feared God.

I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears [2 Tim. 1:3, 4].

He had not said a word about them before. There was infirmity in the character of Timothy. There might be a mixture of timid shrinking from pain and shame. He was one that needed to lean on an arm stronger than his own. It was a part of his lot. Thus it was that God had made him: there was no use denying it. But the apostle at the same time owns, and loves to own, that which another might perhaps despise. There was no despising natural links or spiritual here, far from it.

Timothy, again, winced under trials -- too sensitive to sights, disappointments, and the manifold griefs that came upon him. But the apostle remembered it all, felt deeply for if not with him, and greatly desiring to see him once more. His own desire after going to the Lord did not prevent this, but the reverse:

that I may be filled with joy: when I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also {2 Tim. 1:4, 5}. I refer to this just to remark that such links as these, which are connected with nature, all come before the apostle’s mind, at the very moment when a spurious feeling would have judged it precisely the time to banish and forget them. There are persons who think that the approach of death is intended to blot out everything here. Not so the apostle Paul. In that large heart which weighed so justly and with single eye, there was a deepening feeling as to all that he saw around him; there was a realizing of the importance of things of which he had said not a word before. For him the light of eternity already shone strongly on present things, instead of taking him completely out of them. And this, I believe, is much to be considered.

I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear (it was what Timothy was manifesting),

but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord (there must, I suppose, have been some ground for the exhortation),

nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel, according to the power of God: who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began {2 Tim. 1:6-9}. 

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Here we have him recurring to that which was entirely outside nature, and before its very platform existed. At the same time there is the carrying on his full notice of everything found here below that would be a source of comfort to one who anticipated the ruin of Christendom.

Afterwards he also speaks of his own work and of that which he was suffering. Instead of hiding either from Timothy, he points all out to him. He wants to accustom his mind to expect hardship instead of shirking it. He tells him further to

hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us (2 Tim. 1:13-14).

At the same time he shows also his sense of the kindness of a particular individual and his family.

The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; but, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me (2 Tim. 1:16-17).

It appears it was not merely in Rome.

The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day.

The same tone of mercy is equally promised in this epistle as in the last.

And in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well (2 Tim. 1:18).

In 2 Tim. 2 he turns to another theme, he instructs and exhorts Timothy as to communicating (not authority, or status, or gift, but) truth to others. It is not a question here about elders, but what would abide all the same when elders could not be duly appointed. He is now looking at the state of disorder in the house of God, instead of contemplating it in its public integrity, as in the first epistle. There was a state of things coming when it would be impossible to have local charges chosen according to the full sanction which they had in apostolic days. Indeed it may be well to remark here, that we never read of Timothy appointing bishops or elders. Possibly he did appoint them; but there is no scriptural proof of it. Titus, we know, did so; but God took care that it should never be positively stated about Timothy. The peculiar task confided to the latter was care of doctrine much more than of outward order. As far as appointment went, Titus had a commission to establish elders in each city of Crete; but not so Timothy, as far as the inspired records speak.

Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men (2 Tim. 2:1, 2).

We must not be afraid of a manifest duty because it has been abused. There are those who shrink from helping on others in order to the work and doctrine of the Lord. This I cannot but consider as a proof of want of faith. What is a man well taught in the truth for, if not to communicate his knowledge to others that are faithful, but not equally instructed in the word of God? Surely if it is an urgent call to convey what we know of Christ and the truth to those that know nothing, it is a great privilege to help to contribute a greater knowledge of the truth to those that know little. The great thing is to do the will of God, let others say what they please; and so the apostle Paul exhorts Timothy. It is to be supposed that the younger labourer cowered somewhat, unwilling to incur the odious charge, so easily made but hard to refute, of setting himself up and taking the place of some great one. This might deter a sensitive saint from his duty. But, says the apostle, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

This was to touch the right chord in his heart. Had the Lord Jesus not sent him? Why then yield to the enemy? Assuredly he would rejoice to scare Timothy from the field of serving Christ, and would shrink from no means to secure it.

And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also (2 Tim. 2:2).

He would not have him to be spreading doubtful opinions; but what he had heard from the apostle himself he need not scruple to give out freely. Let me remark, that there are comparatively few indeed that receive truth without help of others directly from God. A great many certainly flatter themselves that they are thus favoured; but the cases are uncommon where it is more than pretence. The fact is that God loves to make His children mutually dependent; and if we are only humble, there are very few saints from whom we may not derive some good, though not always in the same way. Nor do I at all see that any Christians should be above learning, if others can teach. At any rate the apostle presses this very strongly on Timothy. He was to communicate the things he had learnt of Paul, that they might be able to teach others also.

Next he comes to a more personal need.

Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. To take pains and to endure are requisite even in what pertains to this life.

No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life (he must be unencumbered, and undivided in his object); that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier. And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully (2 Tim. 2:3-5).

He must take care of the manner in which he strives. And then again

the husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits (2 Tim. 2:6).

Rather he must

labour before he partake of the fruits.

That is, he must first labour, and then partake of the fruits. God takes care of His people, and ensures them a blessed end. At the same time He will have them undividedly for Himself; and He is also jealous of the way in which they seek
even the ends of God.

Then the apostle puts before him a blessed model of that which he had before his own soul.

Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things. Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel [2 Tim. 2:7, 8].

This is a very striking word. For he does not say Jesus Christ simply in His connection with the church, but of the seed of David,

the fuller of the promises, and object of the prophecies. Even if we look at Him so, He was raised from the dead. Resurrection is the form and character of the lowest blessings of which Jesus is the dispenser; much more is He risen to exalt God in the highest. Death and resurrection, then, are thus put before this servant of God; the more remarkably, because the point here is a practical and not a doctrinal question. He was to remember, then,

that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel: wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil-doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound [2 Tim. 2:8, 9].

Paul suffered as he taught: a single eye to Christ and His grace made him consistent.

Put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers. Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings [2 Tim. 2:14-16].

It was thus Paul treated the proud reasonings and speculations of man; withal briefly touching on those that had gone entirely astray -- Hymenæus and Philetus. It was not merely now that they had made their consciences bad and slipped away from faith. Their own word would eat as a canker, and do harm to others as well as to themselves,

who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some [2 Tim. 2:18].

This was to reverse the lesson of a risen Christ, and to open the way for all laxity. It was a kindred error, though in an opposite direction, to that which false teachers sought to infuse among the Thessalonians: there that the day of the Lord was come, producing panic; here that the resurrection was past, leading to ease. The one was suited to upset the young, the other to beguile the old.

Then the apostle brings out most important directions for the days that were then coming in, but now come, and more. Questions are before him more serious than a maintenance of order. How are we to walk so as to please the Lord when disorder reigns, claiming to be the only true order? In a measure, no doubt, the truth is in Christendom, and only there; for one cannot look for the truth in Judaism or heathenism now. Judaism had its divine institutions and hopes, but the truth is found in Christendom only; nevertheless in Christendom, who fails to discern Jewish elements and heathenish enormities? How is a man to walk in such a state of things as this? In the former epistle, Timothy was told how to behave in the house of God, as yet in order; but now we are told how to behave in such a state of things as the present disorder.

The foundation of God standeth sure [or, the firm foundation of God standeth], having this seal. The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, let every one that nameth the name

-- not of “Christ,” but --

of the Lord depart from iniquity [2 Tim. 2:19].

I must do so, if I own Him only in the indispensable truth of His Lordship -- if I own Him simply as the One that has authority over my soul. And a less confession than this God never permitted the church to accept; nor in fact in Jerusalem itself was less ever accepted than the naming the name of the Lord. God had made Jesus to be Lord and Christ, preached Peter on that day of power, when as yet much lay hid, and the great instrument of the revelation of the mystery was still shrouded in the darkness of midnight. But, if one confesses the name of the Lord, the word is imperative:

let him depart from iniquity.

The disorder might be so great that we might make mistakes in our anxiety; but

The Lord knoweth them that are his.

On the other hand, if a soul confesses the name of the Lord, he must have done with iniquity.

This of itself indicates that the epistle provides for a time when it is no longer simply a question of recognising persons coming out of the world. It is needful to exercise judgment now. One must try disorders and prove profession. Truth and holiness and endurance are wanted, not authority or outward order. Why cannot a man be as simple now as in apostolic times? Why not baptize at once every soul around? It would not be accordant with the mind of God. It is a duty in the present state of confusion to use scriptural means; and here we have our warrant, as in the epistles we find more. Whatever therefore may be right in certain cases, the assembly of God ought never to be forced to put every case on the same dead level -- ought never to be bound by any special process, as if it were unalterable. The cause of this is the present confusion, and accordingly the apostle brings a picture of it before Timothy’s mind.

In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work [2 Tim. 2:20, 21].

That is, it is not enough that I should walk with the Lord individually, but I must clear myself of association with that which is contrary to His name. Such is the meaning of purging himself. It is not the question of discipline -- dealing with evil ways; but here we are in a state of things where we are in danger of being mixed up with vessels unto the Lord’s dishonour. Nothing can sanction this. I am not at liberty of
course to leave Christendom, I dare not get out of the great house at all; indeed I cannot (at any rate without becoming an apostate) leave the house of God, however bad its state may be. This is evidently not the true remedy -- to abandon the confession of Christ: only an apostate could think of it. On the other hand, it is unholy to tamper with evil. Therefore it is incumbent for the Christian to look to this gravely, -- never to be dragged by the fear of breaking unity into accrediting what dishonours the Lord. Now this is in particular a difficulty for saints, when they have revived before the soul the blessedness of maintaining the unity of the Spirit. It can never cease to be a Christian's duty to maintain the unity of the Spirit; but it is not maintaining the unity of the Spirit to couple with the name of the Lord that which is fleshly and sinful. It is well to be exclusive of sin, but of nothing else. It is well to maintain the largest heart for everything that is really of Christ. But we must exclude that which is contrary to His name; and the very same desire to prove one's love, one's faith, one's appreciation of Christ, will make one anxious not to be dragged into that which is not for His glory,

If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.

But then another thing. He lets Timothy know that while he laid this on others, he must look carefully to his own ways.

Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace [2 Tim. 2:22].

It is not simply now to follow these, as urged in the first epistle (1 Tim. 6:11); but he adds a most characteristic word in the second epistle. And this, I apprehend, is the reason. He forbade his going on in association with those that disown the Lord, with vessels to dishonour; but he tells him to follow these things

with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart

{2 Tim. 2:22}.

Therefore, isolation is never desirable, though it may be sometimes necessary. But no man ought to separate himself from the children of God, unless it be a dire necessity for the Lord; it is clearly not according to Christ. It seems to me, I confess, that if there were simplicity of faith, the Lord would give one eyes to see some at least that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart.

Thus we have everything cared for here; the state of confusion is clearly depicted, as it then was beginning, and as results have proved yet more. How gracious of the Lord to point out the path for the saint, separate from that which grieves the Lord, yet enjoying all that He sees good for us of the privileges of Christianity! Otherwise this might have seemed to be (what unbelief taunts and stigmatizes it, spite of His sanction) pride of heart and presumption. And the comfort is that, if prepared to cleave to the will of the Lord alone, we shall have, through His grace, fellowship with the true-hearted.

Follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. And a servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle toward all, apt to teach, forbearing, in meekness correcting those that oppose, if perhaps God may give them repentance for acknowledgment of the truth, and they may for his will wake up out of the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him [2 Tim. 2:22-26].

This was always the becoming tone; but now it is imperiously necessary, as well as wise and good.

Then in 2 Tim. 3 he proceeds to show us not merely a picture of the condition that Christianity will fall into, but, besides, a state of things that would be produced by this confusion. Here we find the perilous times fairly brought before us.

Men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unhateful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God [2 Tim. 3:2-4].

Things are very much taking this direction of late, and at the present moment. Take what is called physical Christianity -- a stupid, gross, and heathenish phrase, but just enough to show where people are drifting to. It answers not a little to the kind of thing set forth here. As we know, there may be over it all a certain form of godliness, but underneath it is really wickedness. This the apostle guards Timothy against, and indeed ourselves. He warns him how seduction would go on more and more, but

from such turn away [2 Tim. 3:5].

No matter what the reasons or excuses for joining with them, turn away.

Then he points out the two principal guards for the faithful, in such a perilous state. The first is the moral character of the source or channel whence Timothy had derived what he knew.

Thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions {2 Tim. 3:10-11}.

It is the whole spiritual experience, so to speak, of the apostle. He was to continue in the things which he had learned, and had been assured of, knowing of whom he had learned them -- a very important point. Persons sometimes say it does not matter who taught; but God does not treat the matter so lightly. It is often a very great safeguard for the saint of God: for, after all, it makes no small difference who says this or that. A word altogether unbecoming in one mouth might be most proper in another. The apostle well knew that the God who had brought these glorious truths to man, the God that had manifested His grace, had given a witness of their reality in the man from whom he had learned them; and this was meant to have an enduring effect on the conscience and heart of Timothy. For it is not dogma pure and simple, it is not mere instruction; and we may thank God for it. It is an immense blessing that we have the truth not only in a book, but in a practical shape, the truth that comes out of the heart and from the lips of living men of God. Accordingly the
apostle reminds Timothy of this.

At the same time there is not the smallest slight of the only and abiding standard. He brings out the infinite value of the Scriptures, that is of what was written, the one transcendent resource for perilous times when we have not the presence and personal help of apostles. It is not merely what had been preached, but what is in a permanent shape for the good of the saints of God here below, which elicits the remarkable assertion of its peculiar worth.

Every scripture

-- for this is the proper force of the passage --

Every scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works {2 Tim. 3:16, 17}.

The closing chapter (2 Tim. 4) then gives his solemn charge, and at the same time his own expression of what was before him. As Timothy was about to enter upon a new phase of his ministry, without the apostle’s presence or living counsel, the latter charges him with great emphasis,

before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word, be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine {2 Tim. 4:1, 2}.

And the reason why he makes it so urgent not to be turned aside was, that the time would come when men would not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts they should heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they should turn away their ears from the truth, and should be turned unto fables.

But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing {2 Tim. 3:5-8}.

Thus he looks not to the coming of the Lord to receive him to Himself, but to the

appearing of the Lord,

which is the usual side of the truth taken in these epistles. The reason is obvious. The coming of the Lord will in no way manifest the faithfulness of the servant; His appearing will.

At

that day {2 Tim. 4:8}

will be the display of whatever has been endured, as well as done, for the Lord’s sake.

With this prospect he comforts Timothy no less than his own spirit; but at the same time he speaks as to joining him, with a glance at one that had forsaken him.

Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me {2 Tim. 4:10, 11}.

He was comparatively alone. If he does not hide the sorrowful view of an old fellow-labourer’s cooling in zeal, with all its dangers, the consolation is also before Timothy both of those that go on in faithful labour, and of one at least restored.

Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry {2 Tim. 4:11}.

So we find that God knows how to temper the bitter with the sweet, always doing the right thing in the right place and time.

Thus he comforts Timothy at the same time that he admonishes him. In the midst of all, he is told to bring the cloak that he left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments. This again has stumbled the minds of men. They cannot understand an inspired apostle talking about a cloak in the midst of a divinely given pastoral charge. The reason is manifest: they themselves savour of the things of men, and not of God. There is nothing that more shows God than His ability to combine that which is eternal with care for the smallest things of this life. It was not then an indifferent matter to God. The Holy Spirit would make it to be most practical and precious. Be assured, that if you do not bring the Spirit of God into these matters, perhaps your cloak, perhaps a book, will become a snare to you. To many a man and woman has a little bit of dress done no small injury, just because they think it is too little for the Spirit of God to direct them in.

The cloak,

then says he,

that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books,

-- not only the clothing, but even that which he is to read, -- especially the parchments (2 Tim. 4:13);

-- what he was going to write on, probably.

Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words {2 Tim. 4:14, 15}.

Finally, we have his assertion of the blessed Lord’s care, and his confidence in Him that He would preserve him from all evil to His heavenly kingdom; closing this solemn and touching epistle (it would seem the last words he wrote) with salutations to various saints.
Lectures Introductory
to the Study of
The Epistles of Paul The Apostle

Lecture 10
Titus and Philemon

The epistle to Titus has much in common with those to Timothy, as all must observe; not only as being addressed to a fellow-servant, and indeed a son in the faith, but in general similarity of character. Like them, its objects are pastoral, as being addressed to a companion in labour, whose work lay among the assemblies of God. Nevertheless, there is no portion but what has its own special design; nor could there be a single scripture lacking without positive loss to the saints, and, indeed, to God's glory by us.

In writing to Titus, we shall see the apostle giving more prominence to external order than in the epistles to Timothy. We have observed already that although in these epistles the Holy Ghost does not develop the higher and special privileges of the saints of God, nevertheless the church, in its earthly place of responsibility, is brought largely before us. It is the house of God; first in order, next in disorder. The one gave the measure of responsibility; the other furnished provision for the guidance of those whose desire is towards the Lord, and who would shrink from the least approach to presumption. These are instructed of the Spirit to be faithful, without fear or favour; leaving with God all consequences, and judging simply as in conscience before Him. Hence they have it laid upon them as a positive obligation to carry themselves in such a way as the love and humbleness of a saint of God might have hesitated to take, without a peremptory word from the Lord. Of course, there is no real ground to charge such with presumption; but faith, in its language and ways alike, looks so to those who do not possess it. Much more are they open to it who despise His word, and ignore their own state. Those who purge themselves from the vessels of honour are found in the lowliest place of all -- that of obedience.

But in writing to Titus the apostle does not take up so much the question of the house of God, either in its responsible order, or in the provision which the Lord makes for the worst of times. He introduces himself as

a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ,
according to the faith of God's elect, and the
acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness
{Titus 1:1}.

It is evident, therefore, that it is more a question of the truth here than of the house of God. It is that which is not only not perishable, but whose value is increasingly felt when in face of the ruins of Christendom. The house of God, alas! we know, might be grievously affected. Called to be the pillar and the support of the truth, it nevertheless might be grossly corrupted, as, in point of fact, it has been; but the faith of God's elect abides, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness is always a duty. In the very nature of things this does not change. God holds to it and maintains it, and so do those who bow to His word.

There is great force, therefore, in the description --
the faith of God's elect.

I do not mean that the latter designation is limited to the epistle to Titus. The apostle employs it in the epistle to the Romans, and there, too, with very marked emphasis, in closing his grand recapitulation of the Christian privileges -- the ordinary standing blessing of the saints of God -- in presence of all that could harm them. He takes the ground of a challenger. Let what will be brought against them,

Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?
It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth?
{Rom. 8:33, 34}.

In the present case it is not a question of furnishing Christians with a knowledge of their privileges, and a maintenance of them against all antagonists, as in Rom. 8, but the calm yet serious writing of the apostle to a confidential fellow-servant, in which, as at an earlier day, so now in one of his latest communications, he still holds this blessed word,

God's elect.

But he adds another element --
the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness.

There is no small importance in this acknowledgment. The faith of God's elect is not to be hidden under a bushel; it must be owned before men and the enemy, as well as learnt from God. It is to be confessed without compromise, no matter what the difficulty. The acknowledgment -- not the belief only -- of the truth must never be given up, and in its most practical shape --

the truth which is after godliness; in hope of eternal
life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the
world began {Titus 1:1, 2}.

There we touch again that which came before us in the
second epistle to Timothy; but a few words more may be now
added. The occasion was exactly suitable for it. The value of eternal life is proved when all that is connected with the testimony of God among men has received a severe shock. In this lies the blessedness of seeing how truly that into which we are brought is of God. There was a creation formed of God on a ground of responsibility. Its tenure depended on the fidelity of man. Soon all was ruined; but in the midst of this havoc God wrought, according to His own wisdom, and in various ways, for the purpose of making manifest the whole question of the state of the creature in relation to Himself. Now, late in the world’s history, the Son of God is come, who was Himself that eternal life which was with the Father, and has displayed it in every possible circumstance here below.

Here we have another order of things, the truth in fact revealed -- grace and truth. Those who are called to follow and to confess the Saviour have themselves proved that, looked at in their responsibility, they too had brought shame and confusion on the name of the Lord. So far from God giving up His glorious counsels, the truth of eternal life is brought out far more fully in the decay of Christian profession. In the sad flood of evils that had swept over Christendom, this was just the moment when the Holy Ghost saw fit to call attention not merely to the grace of God saving sinners, and the faithfulness of God keeping His own children, but to the character of the life which was their portion in Christ. Thus, therefore, the apostle here refers to it in the introduction to this epistle.

In hope (says he) of eternal life, which God that cannot lie

-- an expression evidently used because of the character of the persons to whom he is writing, who are, indeed, but a sample of what man has always proved himself, even such as bear the name of Christ. God, at any rate, that cannot lie, promised it,

before the world began {Titus 1:2}.

Nor can anything touch this life; but the value is now more felt of this eternal life that was in Christ before the world began. It had come down into this scene; it had been utterly rejected by man; but it nevertheless became the possession of faith in Christ. Now it shines. It was not merely a reality, not merely that believers had it in Christ; but now the Holy Ghost causes them to take notice of it, brings out the value of it, and strengthens them in the confidence of it. After all, that eternal life in the hope of which they had been formed and called by the power of the Spirit of God, that eternal life which God who could not lie promised before the world began, was now their known portion. They had it in Christ. It is also of exceeding encouragement, and indeed a truth of immense import for souls, both in itself and in the fact, that the Holy Ghost brings us into the more distinct apprehension and enjoyment of the wondrous bliss of possessing the very eternal life of Christ, when all that can decay has already shown the most fatal symptoms at work.

In accordance with this, it may be profitable to observe the ways of God. It was before the world began, no doubt; but in due time it had been manifested. He had

in due time manifested His word through preaching

{Titus 1:3}.

This gives us to see the very special place that Christianity has in the ways of God. We do not often take notice of what is after all a very striking and evident fact, that, for very much the largest period of this world’s history, no such thing was known as preaching. We are so used to think of preaching, that we do not always weigh what it means, or what a light it casts on the character of God, and on that blessing which He has now given us in Christ. All through the previous history of the world, the creature as such was the object of the divine dealings. Now it is not so. Christ is the object before Him; and our best blessing of grace through redemption is that we have Him as our very life. Oh that God’s children, with all simplicity, laid hold of this truth! What a place it gives us as passing through the world! I am not merely speaking of being secured. The heart continually lowers eternal life to a simple question of being delivered from wrath, and going to heaven, perhaps, through a process of judgment. Were this all true, how short of Christianity! How much more to know, with the authority of a God that cannot lie, and in all the breadth that preaching gives, that we no longer belong to this creation, in virtue of the only life we have as saints; that God has now made it a revealed certainty, that the eternal life which was in Christ, and which Christ was, is now for ever ours in Him. Accordingly God has manifested His word now through preaching, showing the universality of the testimony of grace in contrast with the narrow limits of law. Thus, when the special separation of Christians takes place, when God attaches unto Himself His children here below, He makes them conscious that they do not belong to the world; yet is it coincident with the gospel sent forth everywhere. His church is gathered out from the world at the same time that His word goes all over the whole world. These two points are very characteristic of Christianity; and they are of immense importance for the soul to seize clearly, and not let slip.

Let me just sum up briefly again. First of all the life that we have received in Christ shuts us up, as it were, to Him, and gives us the consciousness that we belong as Christians to an order of being which never can be impaired or corrupted -- of course, therefore, to that which has no connection whatever with the world, or with the creature that has slipped through sin into ruin. That eternal life, which is ours now, was in the Son of God, and this before there was a world made or lost. While man’s probation in various forms went on, it was hidden; when the world was manifestly lost, as in the rejection of the Lord Jesus, it was manifested by preaching. Up to this time the dealings of God were comparatively narrow, and had either individuals or a particular race as their object -- all this while there was no revelation of eternal life at all. Now there is, and with increasing distinctness, when it became evident that Christendom itself proved no exception to the past ages of man’s failure. Thus, when all had closed in the cross, God still waits till Christendom was a judged thing, too, in principle. Then it is that the Spirit of God, not exactly gives us the life in Christ, but makes us know that we have the life that was true in Christ when the gospel went out. But when
the gospel was being corrupted, as far as men could, or rather when there were the manifest germs of Christendom everywhere showing the ruin of the latest and highest testimony of God, then it is that God directs fresh attention to the kernel of the blessing conveyed to us. Come what will, eternal life is our portion. Let the world dissolve by judgment, let the creature perish morally by its own sin, eternal life never can. That eternal life was in Christ; that eternal life is now given to us; that eternal life God would have us to enter into more than ever, enjoying it at its fullest worth at the very time when there seems nothing else to enjoy, when it becomes simply a question of falling back on that which never can be lowered or destroyed. Such, then, is the due time

he manifested his word through preaching {Titus 1:3}.

Thus there is the other point -- what goes out, as well as shuts us up to Christ, giving the true principle of separation to God in the most blessed manner: for it has nothing to do with assuming or pretending to anything. Setting up of ourselves is wholly excluded. How can a man, according to nature, vaunt of another who proves his own good-for-nothingness? All evil boasting, all that is injurious, is of self; but that which is our only just ground of exultation is in Jesus Christ our Lord. Consequently, though we have in Him a worthy object of boast, it flows from the grace of God, and is thus the fountain of genuine humility in His sight. We are thus shut up, so to speak, in the circle of divine life; it may seem a narrower one, but, in truth, there is nothing that can rival it in point of large and deep affection -- not alone resting on those within, but actively going out; for along with the fact that we have Christ Himself as our actual and eternal life -- life in the Son -- our changeless portion, there is an increasing and world-wide manifestation through preaching.

True, you will find that, whenever children of God take up one of these truths to the exclusion of the other, there is invariably very great damage done to souls. Thus, take some whose hearts go out to what they consider the only desirable aim, that is, the spread of the good news through evangelizing. It is a blessed work; but it is never safe when exclusive. Again, look at another section of God’s children, all whose comfort is confined to the circle of what is elect, or Christian. But the truth embraces both. It is excellent to hold fast Christ, and to know that we have eternal life in Him; but do you not see that when God was pleased to make this known, in the person of His Son, is just the time when the glad tidings are sent out by His grace to all men, breaking through every question of race, tongue, law, or any other distinction you please? When a ministration of death and condemnation was in question, a limit was good and wise; when eternal life, and remission of sins in Christ’s name were the burden, God could not, would not, keep the good news pent up to one only class of the human family.

Preach the gospel to every creature {Mark 16:15}.

It is evident that in all this, lower glories disappear from view. It is no longer a question of the Messiah as such. The title of Son of David did connect Christ with a particular nation. But now, when we behold a far deeper glory of Christ brought out, there is an unlimited manifestation of God’s word through preaching,

which is committed unto me {Titus 1:3},
says the apostle. In point of fact, it will be found that Peter, for instance, speaks but little of this great truth. He does tell us of life; he makes much of our blessed Lord Himself as the Living Stone; he treats of the saints of God as living stones, as also of their being begotten again by the word of God. But he never handles the subject either in the comprehensive, or in the precise, manner of the apostle Paul. If he writes, it is only to those that were of the dispersion. Both his epistles are addressed to believers of the circumcision. It would be unnatural, therefore, that there should be either depth or breadth comparable to that which appears when St. Paul presents it. I need not now dwell on James or Jude, who are manifestly distinct. John does take up the very point at which Paul leaves off; for his special work was to show life eternal. But then he traces it as a question, first, of divine life in the person of Christ, for the purpose of maintaining His glory; and, secondly, as that life, or divine nature, in the saints of God. He does not present it in its connection with the ruin of Christendom, neither does he treat it explicitly in his epistle as a testimony to man at large. Paul presents it both in the counsels and in the ways of God; John, rather as bound up with His nature, first in Christ, and then in the saints. Both are admirably suited to the objects of God, but they are different, however harmoniously they may blend.

The apostle then gives his salutation,

To Titus, mine own child in the common faith:

grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour {Titus 1:4};

and next proceeds to instruct him as to the object for which he was writing.

For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and establish elders in every city, as I had appointed thee. If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children, not accused of riot or unruly. For the overseer must be blameless {Titus 1:5-7}.

Here we have positive regulations, as well as principles laid down, that were to guide the conduct of Titus. One main part of his commission was the appointment of men in certain exterior charges.

A difficulty may be felt by some children of God. They may enquire, how is it, if these charges were not intended to be continued, that the Holy Ghost inspired these directions? I believe that they are of the utmost practical value in two ways: first, negatively, and second, positively; negatively, inasmuch as they enable us to judge the pretensions of those who appoint, and of those that are appointed. By their help, we can see that those who boast most of ministerial order are the very men who palpably offend against these scriptures as well as others. It will always be found, and more particularly in a day of difficulty and darkness, that there is no security except by dependence on the Lord and cleaving to His word.
Not only do the simple and the humble find themselves kept of the Lord’s grace, but the truest order will prove to be among them. Wherever order is confidently vaunted of, be not surprised to discover a real departure from that which the Lord prescribes. His word invariably refutes, as His Spirit never formed, so self-complacent a tone.

But then there is a more direct value still. Undoubtedly there are some things wanting now; and I for one believe that it is of God that they should be wanting in the present state of Christendom. Where would be the moral fitness of sound exterior order, when the condition is deplorably bad, the world is rampant, the word exercises small authority, and the Spirit of God is systematically hindered and quenched? As to the matter of appointing these local officers, the apostles were the pillars of authority. The absence of apostles, and consequently of such a delegate as Titus, is fatal to those who set up to have everything fully and literally according to the word of God. For my part, far from considering this fatal for God’s glory in the present state of Christendom, I believe that the presence of apostles would be an enormous anomaly. The reason is simple. Anything would be unreasonable now that tends to weaken the sense -- first, that God’s mind, God’s truth -- no matter what it may be about -- abides unchangeable and obligatory; and, secondly, that God takes account of the present scattering of His children, and would have us to feel the havoc that has been wrought in Christendom. Now suppose the apostles (as we cannot but suppose they must) adhere to nothing but the word of God, what could keep them from seeming to deny the relationship of the mass of misled Christians, carried away by error, self-will, human tradition, &c., contrary to the word? God was pleased, in view of the corruption already begun, and still graver departure from His word that was impending, to cause that there should be no perpetuation of the apostles; that there should be consequently a lack felt, which could not be made good, yet essential to that outward order which men would most loudly pretend to when it was irreparably lost.

Thus the path of lowly obedience is easily proved to be the only safe and sound one; because it refuses to swerve from God’s word; it acknowledges the absence of a validating authority which none on earth possesses; it justifies the Lord, who is adequate for all exigencies, and provides amply for every present need; it confesses the ruined state of God’s testimony in the earth, while it owns whatever of Himself there may be, and wherever it is. Yet none the less, but the more, it adheres to the word of God, as the only and the sufficient warrant of faith and conduct in a state of ruin. The directions that the apostle gives are not in vain, though neither you nor I can do all that Titus did. To do so would be presumption. He was expressly left in Crete, and charged by the apostle to appoint elders there; and we are not. There is no disobedience nor neglect on our part, but rather fear of God, and maintenance of godly order in not exceeding our real powers. But there is manifest haughtiness in all who imitate an apostle, or an apostolic delegate, without warrant from the Lord, and infringing His word in that imitation. Who on earth now can authorize like Paul? Who can appoint like Titus? Certainly not a minister of the Crown, or an ordinary preacher, or a synod of preachers, still less a Christian congregation.

God took care that the direction should not be in a general epistle, nor in one addressed to an assembly. In the epistles to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, &c. no such orders are given, any more than in those of James, Peter, or John. When the apostle addresses the church in any place, he never lays down injunctions about the appointment of elders or bishops. Had it been so, either the leading brethren, or perhaps the saints as a whole, would have been too ready to take the matter into their own hands. As it is, there is no possible excuse for it. Directions are given to individuals who had a special place in the work and church of God. No other was qualified so to do. Thus Apollos and Silas never attempt it, while Titus does. An inspired epistle was addressed to him. No doubt there was a suitability in his gift; but besides that he has an outward authority and inspired credentials, on which he was entitled -- nay, bound -- to act. Where is there such a person at the present time? Hence, therefore, for any one to act upon the fact that Titus was thus empowered by the Spirit of God would be altogether invalid. But then for that reason these directions, far from being obsolete, are of permanent value.

To this use I would now direct attention, that although we cannot, in the absence of apostles, have the due outward authority to clothe men with local charges in this or that place, still, if we see those in whom the qualities are really found, -- if we see men who possess that which the Spirit of God treats as suitable for the overseer or elder, it is evident that it is the positive duty of the children of God to own this in their persons. No doubt an unfaithful heart would take advantage of the fact that they had never been formally installed as elders. A believer with the spirit of godly obedience would if possible be more careful to own and honour in the absence of any such outward title. Thus a state of ruin always tests the heart more than when things are in primitive order. When all is in its normal state, even the careless, or those that sooner or later turn out refractory, are overawed by the strength of the current that runs in the right direction; but when that current becomes weaker, and shallows begin to show themselves, and all sorts of obstructions in the way, then is precisely the moment when real faith and humility of heart are not only displayed by the saints, but are specially honoured of the Lord. Observe it, for instance, in the messages to the seven churches; so that we may surely see that the grace of the Lord is never defeated or in vain.

We cannot now nominate, then, because we are not apostles, nor even apostolic delegates. Still we are wholly wrong if we do not profit by that which the word of God has laid down as to local charges. We can gather from these and other scriptures at least enough for our practical warning and guidance. We are thus kept from the confusion of gifts with them, which is the parent of the clerical system -- Popish, national, or dissenting; and we can discern what remains and what exists no longer.

If any be blameless, husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly (Titus 1:6).
Thus moral weight is the main point here. And this is much to be heeded. It is not a question of eminent gift. In dealing with the practical difficulties of the saints of God, spiritual power and experience, of course free from outward reproach, personal or relative, are of the greatest possible value. These are the men who really do act on souls for good day by day in the jar of circumstances, and justly so. Others may possess far more ability, either for spreading the gospel or for unfolding the word of God. I do not mean that in dealing with practical difficulties men are duly qualified for eldership who cannot aptly wield the word in application to passing things. But it is clear that an elder or bishop is not necessarily a teacher, though he should be apt to teach -- able to use the word so as to convince gainsayers and encourage the weak. All this is evident on the surface of scripture; but it does not constitute exactly a doctoral gift. It might not go beyond house to house service. I believe therefore that it still remains a positive duty and an important part for the children of God to take heed that they be not absorbed in those that are called to a large public work. No doubt in Christendom generally the error is complete; but those who seek to purge themselves from the vessels to dishonour may not have considered this with the gravity it deserves.

While giving then evangelists and teachers their place, we should also value those who in a simpler and less obtrusive way are devoting themselves day by day to strengthen the links of affection, and to repress the sources of disorder which, as we all know, continually spring up in Christian assemblies. Now these are the persons that were of old by competent authority appointed elders or overseers, as it is said here,

the overseer must be blameless, as God's steward, not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, not a striker, not given to filthy lucre; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers

{Titus 1:7-9}.

And if we see men of such ways and endowments labouring now, surely they are to be respected and acknowledged as the men who have the qualities and do the work of elders, though from circumstances their formal appointment is no longer possible.

What made this to be the more urgently needful, even for these Gentile minds, among the Cretans as well as elsewhere, was the Jewish element, the constant fruitful cause of trouble, and in two ways that we might not reasonably expect to see united.

There are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: whose mouths must be stopped

{Titus 1:10, 11}.

Not that I mean necessarily Jews, when speaking of the Jewish element. Alas! the evil of Judaism infects Gentiles; the spirit of tradition pervades some, legalism imbues others very largely. These are the persons who give especial trouble, whose mouths, we are told,

must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake

{Titus 1:11}.

To this end is used the testimony of one of their own prophets. This witness, says the apostle, is true. One of themselves, not wanting in patriotism, had conscience enough to confess that

Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies

{Titus 1:12}.

Therefore Titus was to rebuke them sharply. What sin and folly to brand care for their souls as lack of charity or love of domination! Let us remember the whole case for our own profit and guidance.

Although men have, alas! common qualities of evil, and, no matter where they are found, the same corrupt nature, the Spirit of God takes national character into account, and more particularly in practical service. This requires wisdom, and also experience, where our lot may be cast. So in connection with the overseers of whom he had been speaking. Elders are a local charge. They are not like teachers and preachers, many of whom went about visiting various lands and widely-scattered towns in their wide circuit among the nations. Elders as such were necessarily limited in that function to the quarters in which they lived, though they might have gifts which would carry them elsewhere. For them it was the utmost importance to bear in mind the particular tendencies of those among whom they lived and laboured. The apostle here acts and speaks on this himself. He refers to the sentiment uttered by one of their own poets; for a poet is often truer than a philosopher, and a religious zealot can never be trusted. Your boasted “thinker” loses himself for the most part in dreamy speculations of the closet. A poet may be frivolous indeed, but after all he lets out the real character; it may be in his own person, but at any rate he ordinarily expresses the feeling of the age and place in which he lives, if not the heart in its depths. And this was what one of their own poets, whom the apostle cites, tells about his countrymen. Here Paul was not writing to the church. It might be a matter of doubt whether to speak out so bluntly to themselves; but there could be no question of its importance as information for the fellow-servant to bear in mind in their midst.

Their national character must be taken into account; for though this is a small thing where the grace of the Spirit is in question, it becomes a serious handle to the enemy of souls, who turns the various workings of flesh to his purpose of opposition to the glory of Christ. Their slippery turn of mind would expose them to receive Jewish fables, as these would to misuse the law in general. This was the twofold mischief of which I wish to say a few words. Not merely does the law generate habits of tradition, of slavish adherence to human prescription in the things of God, which so soon are apt to rise up to the destruction of practical faith, but along with this goes what might not at first be suspected -- imaginativeness; Jewish fables, as he says. And it is remarkable how the famous repository of Rabbinism to this day wears this twofold character: on the one hand, the most servile adherence to the letter, without the least insight into the spirit of Holy
Scripture; and, on the other hand, the wildest fictions to feed the fancies of women and children. How contrasted is the word of God, that affords the most healthy exercise for heart and conscience, according to the faith of God’s elect!

There is nothing like scripture for delivering from both snares. The word of God never gives us a mere line of duty to be followed. In scripture the duties are the expressions of life, in the relationships wherein God has set us; and the main object of every teacher should be not to impose anything as a bare work, to be done blindfold and unintelligently, but to bind up with Christ Himself the course of God’s will we have to follow, so that each servant may be led into direct communication with the Master, and look to His grace alone for all needed wisdom and strength, in carrying out whatever may be His call. Thus, even supposing the teacher disappears in any way, Christ abides, and that which is according to Him tells on the heart. The Christian might not have been able to see it without the teacher; but all else vanishes away when the man is, so to speak, brought face to face with Christ and His word.

Such, according to God, is the object of all teaching; never to interpose the teacher, nor the mere letter of a duty, between the soul and the Lord, but to blend the smallest practical duty with His will, and grace, and glory, who is our life. This is what the apostle did himself, as he sought also to guard Titus, and direct him, as his pleni potentia -- if I may so say -- acting among the Cretans. And it is no easy task to keep souls from that which is the devil’s substitute for the truth -- fables; and the law misused. For these shut out the word of God, which is the one alimen of faith. On the one hand, the law appealed to man in flesh, instead of judging him for dead. On the other hand, Jewish fables filled the imagination, instead of the heart and mind being drawn out by the blessed entrance into the life of Christ, and carrying it out here below according to the word.

After this he adds another point of instruction:

Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure {Titus 1:15}.

How true! Unbelief always degrades even the precious word of God, turns it into a path of self, and in effect severs it from Christ. This accordingly is to make nothing pure. On the other hand, the power of the saint of God is the Holy Spirit acting on that life which is in Christ. He is speaking of practical ways here below. How great then is the spring that the believer possesses! Would that those who teach always knew where their secret of strength lies! It is the ability to mingle Christ with everything that comes before us, and that is incumbent on us. Hence, in contrast with the power of faith, which makes all things pure to the pure, the apostle speaks most solemnly of the character of those that believe not.

They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him, being abominable and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate {Titus 1:16}.

What a filling up of the picture Christendom manifests at this day!

The next chapter (Titus 2) turns from the question of those that guide and govern in each assembly and district to the saints themselves. Titus is exhorted to speak the things which become sound doctrine, taking in first aged men and aged women, and then young women and young men. It is all remarkably simple, homely, and wholesome. There is nothing that more marks Christianity than this very elasticity and breadth. Where there is not humility or true greatness, people are afraid of little matters; they shrink instinctively from touching on work-a-day details. The power of Christ makes everything sweet and precious, and lends dignity to the very smallest thing that occupies the heart and mind. How blessed that there is not a person you may have to do with who does not become to you an object for drawing out the grace of Christ. May we cultivate the desire that there may be the growing manifestation of our life, according to His image who is its source and only perfect exemplar!

Hence, therefore, the Holy Spirit, by the apostle, puts before Titus things and persons exactly as they were, and as He would have them be.

That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine; teachers of good things; that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed {Titus 2.2-5}.

There are those who might think these exhortations uncalled for, setting up their judgment, and regarding it as a slight on Christians, as if it were impossible that godly men and women could fall into such snares as taking too much wine, or violence in word and deed. But we must remember that the corruption of the best thing is the worst; and if Christianity has unbound fetters, liberty may be used to shameful excesses. It was wise and needful to exhort young women, among the rest, to be keepers at home, to mind their children, as well as to be obedient to their husbands. I believe you will find that the starting-point of many a Christian’s ruin is apt to begin practically, with high-minded inattention to the small duties of daily life. How many persons, who afterwards fell into the depths of gross sin, failed originally in something that looks trivial and commonplace, which even natural conscience would recognize and rebuke!

The true safeguard, then, of the saints’ well-being is an exercised conscience, in self-judgment before God, with dependence on Him, whilst withal the heart enters into that blessed truth which the apostle himself put before Titus -- eternal life in Christ before the world began. What can be more completely out of the scene of present things than that which is here presented? But if there be what my soul knows I have got, unchanging, before time, and entirely outside the first creation, God reveals it to me that it may be proved and manifested in the family, with the children, with men at large, with the aged and the young of either sex. There is no relationship, there is not a single thing of the most ordinary kind, that does not become a test. And this is particularly shown in what follows:
Young men likewise exhort to be sober-minded. In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works {Titus 2:6, 7.}

For the example of an eminent servant of God is of great consequence; therefore he adds,

In doctrine showing uncorruption, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you {Titus 2:7, 8.}

But this also draws out in a remarkable way what to my mind is very characteristic of Christianity. I refer to the great price that God sets on the poor, yea, the very slave. None but God so thought of them then, though even infidelity has filched it from the Bible to work into the aggrandisement of the first man since, and at no time more than in our day, for the final struggle.

Writing to a cherished fellow-servant, when the apostle comes to the slaves, he breaks out into one of the finest developments of the doctrine of grace found in this epistle, or anywhere. If God pays particular attention to any, it is to those that man as such despised. If God makes much of one, it is because circumstances particularly expose that one to be passed by.

Exhort slaves, then says he,

to be obedient unto their masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again; not purloining {Titus 2:9, 10.}

What Christian slaves? To what might not Satan tempt, and into what might not those fall, especially, who regard it as impossible!

Not answering again; not purloining, but showing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things {Titus 2:9, 10.}

Here he opens to us the lovely view of what the doctrine of God our Saviour is.

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation unto all men hath appeared, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present age; looking for that blessed hope, and the appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ {Titus 2:11-13.}

Thus we have in the most truthful, terse, and luminous terms the foundation, the walk, and the hope of the believer. The foundation is not a law which puts man to the proof, discovering his vanity and the impossibility of so standing in the presence of God, but holding out in its ordinances the pledges of good things to come. The good is come; the test of the first man, and the shadows are not before the Christian. They had their place in schooling the flesh, if it could be; but the time is arrived for realities, which never pass away; and the greatest reality of all is that which God has revealed to us in the Saviour, and His great salvation. It is the saving grace of God, therefore; for man deserves it not, and, as a lost sinner, has no claim on the God he despises and rebels against. But it holds out salvation unto all, and so it has appeared. It is neither hidden nor limited. When it was a question of the law, bringing death and condemnation, its range was restricted; when it is salvation that goes forth, how could a God of grace confine it in boundaries narrower than the need of ruined man? I do not speak of how far it takes effect, but I say that God sends it wherever there are wants, and that He loves to display it where there is the most palpable ruin.

The grace of God, therefore, that bears salvation to all men, has appeared, instead of a law directed to a particular nation. Nothing is farther from the revealed truth of God than the theory that, when we are saved of grace, we are put back again under the law. Rather does the grace which saves teach us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts; for God will make us feel what we are, what our nature is; but then it is grace that makes us judge what we are, and most truly teaches us to detect its evil and lusts.

Observe, too, that it is not a question simply of fleshly but of worldly lusts. All was hatred to God, and discontentedness with that which He gives us as our portion. Hence insatiable yearning is indulged after that which we have not. These are worldly lusts; but God’s grace teaches us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly as to ourselves, righteously as to those around us, godly in His sight, and all this in the present world where we find ourselves, once sinners but now brought to God.

Nor is this all. The heart wants that which may lift it above all present things; and God does not fail to supply it. He fills not the imagination but the heart, and this with a bright vision of divine and enduring glory, so much the more needed where there is, alas! the reality of sin and misery and sorrow all around.

Looking therefore for that blessed hope, and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ {Titus 2:13.}

If grace has appeared, we know that glory is about to appear. God does not mean to have the world always wretched; He intends to put down His enemies with a high hand; He will not consent that His saints shall ever more be exposed to the efforts and wiles of Satan, who lures men to his deceits and their own destruction. The falsehood of either ameliorating human nature or improving the world will soon end in worse confusion and in the sorest judgment. What a comfort for the Christian to have the certainty that God will take it in hand! It is His fixed mind so to do. Hence, therefore, we have a blessed hope, as sure as the faith that rests on His grace that has already appeared.

But when His glory appears, it will be that of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. It is the glory of no secondary God. Any subordinate sense is here repudiated explicitly. If there is any difference, there is always maintained in scripture the utmost care to assert the glory of the Lord Jesus. His humiliation in grace placed Him in circumstances where His supreme glory might be questioned; man readily took advantage of it; and Satan, always the antagonist of the Son of God, has prompted men to abuse His grace so as to deny His glory. But He, the Saviour, the Lord Jesus, is our great
God as well as Saviour, and, if this be His glory, it is the very same Jesus who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. Thus the heart, when it looks forward to the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, finds in Him who will usher in the glory the very One who gave Himself for us in self-sacrificing, atoning love. Hence the affections are kept in the liveliest play, and all dread, so natural to be felt at the approach of the glory of the great God and Saviour, is a denial of the love we have already and so fully proved in Him,

who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, &c. {Titus 2:14}.

These things, says he,

speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee {Titus 2:15}.

In the last chapter (Titus 3) the exhortation is pursued, as to what was more outside.

Put them in mind to be subject to principalties and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men {Titus 3:1, 2}.

There are two reasons given to confirm the saints in this. The first is that we ourselves were once so evil; the second is that God has been so good to us.

For we ourselves were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another {Titus 3:3}.

What could be worse?

But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done

-- we have done the very reverse --

but according to his mercy he saved us,

-- and how? --

by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost {Titus 3:4, 5}.

It is not to be thought that these two things are exactly the same. The washing of regeneration looks at our old condition, outside of which it places us; the renewing of the Holy Ghost looks more at that inward work which is made ours by the Spirit of God. The former appears to be set forth in baptism; the latter refers rather to our connection with the new creation. According to the language of the day, the one is a change of position or objective, the other is subjective and inward. This seems the difference between the two. And this is carried on in the next verse more fully. Speaking of the renewing of the Holy Ghost, it is added,

which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour {Titus 3:6}.

It is not merely that God continues the work He has always wrought in souls. There never was a time, since sin came into the world and grace followed, when souls were not born again. It must be so, unless all were left to perish. None could enter the kingdom of God unless they had a nature capable of understanding and enjoying the true God. This, of course, the Christian has; but then the Christian should not only know that he has this new nature, but that he has it after the richest sort and fullest measure --

which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Here we learn the blessed truth of Christianity. There is no disparagement done to what was of old among the saints; but, on the other hand, there is no hiding the transcendent blessedness of the Christian. Of no Old Testament saint could it be said that it was shed abundantly. This was suitable and only imparted when our Lord Jesus accomplished redemption. God would put honour on Christ and His cross in every way; so that, as the fruits of His infinite work, the richest blessing is lavished on the Christian now. This is what is referred to here --

which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, that being justified by his grace we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life {Titus 3:6, 7}.

Thus he binds together the doctrine which met us in the preface of the epistle with the rest; but that which comes before us at the close as at the first -- eternal life, has justly an immense place here.

Then in the closing verses he -- gives some needed practical exhortations.

This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works {Titus 3:8}.

It is a beautiful trait to find the apostle, near the end of his course, so exceedingly simple. Not that the depths of truth were not prized by him or not intimated. But plain every-day need goes along with the deepest truth (and there is no deeper or more blessed way of looking at the saint than as having life in Christ which was before the world began). While the unearthly place of the saint is affirmed, there is the greatest care to maintain these small matters so often overlooked and neglected. Is not all this worthy of God? It tells its own tale to every heart that can appreciate what the blessedness of the truth is. How needful for us to be reminded of that which such high truth might seem to leave out of sight! But it is not so with the Spirit of God.

Nor does he speak only of those within.

Avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain. A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject {Titus 3:9, 10}.

By “heretic” is not meant necessarily one who holds false doctrines. 19 Such is the sense that is in modern usage put

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19. Pravity of doctrine, as to Christ’s person at least, constitutes the ground
upon the word. In scripture a

heretic

might be sound enough in doctrine. The evil is making his own particular views, &c. the occasion and badge of a party. Supposing, for instance, a person were to press his private opinions of the law of Moses, or the second coming of Christ, and make either these or anything else an indispensable condition for reception as a Christian, or of Christian fellowship, such a course would stamp him as a heretic. Nor am I now raising a question of his thoughts (right or wrong) either about the law or the Second Advent: the use made is the evil here. At the same time one finds commonly that where men despise practical grace and godliness, their doctrine sooner or later is apt to turn out unsound. Fundamental error as to Christ is called in scripture antichrist. A man that overthrows His personal glory is not merely a heretic (in the Biblical meaning) but an antichrist; and this must be dealt with in the most stringent and peremptory manner if we pretend to obey God's word. Nothing less is due to Christ. 2 John goes far beyond 2 Thess. 3 or even 1 Cor. 5. It is not merely a question of our own soul, though it is certainly perilous for any to treat it lightly, but there is a holy duty to Christ; and it is our bounden obligation to the slighted Son of God that we never make terms of compromise or neutrality with His dishonour. The only scriptural procedure is to deal unsparingly with such evil doctrine as is fatal to the glory of our Lord and Saviour. Need I say that He ought to be infinitely dear to us -- dearer than friends, life, or even the church itself?

But a

heretic

here is quite another thing. It supposes the making of a party. Disputes within lead to heresies without (Gal. 5). When a man has turned his back on the assembly, when he leaves the table of the Lord, and this because of his own views, drawing others after him, you have not a schismatic only but the

heretic

of these passages. Consequently there is no question of removing such an one from the midst of the saints; he is away; he has gone himself, and would form a party outside. I fear that the present distractions of Christendom blind many to this sin. How often we hear believers indulging in words of this sort as to such: "Ah yes; but still yes; but still he is a dear brother, and we ought to go after him and try to win him back." What does the apostle say of a man who is a heretic, even to such a confidential labourer as Titus?

After one first and a second admonition shun

{Titus 3:10}.

Have nothing more to do with him. And this is the more instructive because certainly Titus was no common man. He stood in a post of special authority, and was surely gifted with suitable wisdom and power for the extraordinary office that the Lord called him to; but even he was not to be tampering with this evil thing. Titus himself is forbidden to have intercourse with him after a first and second admonition. And it is found constantly in practice, as I have known cases myself over and over again, that when a Christian presumes to trust his own mind, feelings, or instinct, in the face of such a warning as this, the result is not that the party-man is won, but that he gains another adherent. There are then two "heretics," we may say, instead of one. Our best wisdom is implicit subjection to God's word; whilst the man who, with the best of intentions, tries to correct according to his own mind and heart him that forms a party away from the Lord and His table, enters into temptation, and gets drawn into that evil or some other erratic course himself. There is neither fidelity nor even security except in rejecting such ways and persons, and the word of God is the only just and divine measure of rejecting. We must always stand on the authority, and seek simply the just application of the word of God. The one question for us is, "What is the case to which the scripture applies?" The moment you have ascertained that this or that is what the scripture means, then simply obey, trusting the Lord, no matter what may be the reproach. People may denounce or detract: if we cleave to the Lord and His word, it matters not. The reproaches of men are no more than the dust of the balance. The one thing is to do the will of God. He that does His will abides for ever.

The reason assigned here confirms what has been said, and makes all very plain.

A man that is a heretic after a first and second admonition shun; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself

{Titus 3:10, 11}.

The whole root of it is self. He first takes up his own opinion and, contrary to the word of God, presses it on others. Not that it must be heterodox in itself; the opinion may be sound enough, but the use made is sectarian. He that prefers his own opinions and line to the church is self-condemned. Sometimes indeed the opinions may be quite erroneous; but this matters little. The question is not whether one's view is erroneous or not: to go out because of it is purely selfish, and contrary to Christ. The party-maker is pressing his will or view for ends of his own; and he that does so sins -- yea, as it is said here, is self-condemned.

The word

heresies (1 Cor. 11:19)

may confirm what is after all a very important point, especially at the present time, in regard to Christendom. The apostle tells the Corinthians that there were already divisions or schisms among them, and says that

there must be also heresies [1 Cor. 11:19]

among them. There is no connection whatever necessarily between a schism and a false doctrine; but there is a most vital link between a schism within leading to a party without. The schismatics still met at the same table of the Lord. But the apostle lets them know that if they made splits within, these are sure to work with increase of evil till the fomenters go without as a fixed party there. Divisions already existed within the Corinthian church. These if unjudged would end in
open heresies or
sects (as in the margin)
outside. But the result would be in God’s hand that the
approved were to be made manifest.

This is a graver matter than many might imagine. What
a call to us always and resolutely to resist the first germs of
evil! It matters not what the occasion may be. Take that
which may pain and grieve deeply: we are entailed in the
grace of the Lord to be above it; and the more right we may
be, the more we can afford to be gracious. Let us leave
results in the hands of the Lord. If ever so right, still, if one
fights for self, it will effectually hinder the vindication which
the Lord can give in His own due time. From the very fact of
your fighting people will never give you credit for singleness
of eye. It always stirs up opposition in others. No sooner do
you leave it in the hands of the Lord than He appears, and
will make it perfectly manifest who is on His side and who is
against Him.

There is another thing, too, that must claim our notice
for a moment. The apostle speaks about sending a faithful
labourer to Titus.

When I shall have sent Artemas unto thee, or
Tychicus, be diligent to come unto me to Nicopolis:
for there I have determined to winter {Titus 3:12}.

Of course, such directions were in accordance with the action
of the Holy Ghost. It is a great mistake to suppose that there
may not be such a thing as arrangement in ministry. Need I
say that what was wrong in itself would not be consecrated by
an apostle’s doing it? An apostle inspired by the Holy Ghost
would never in writing call for a thing that was contrary to
the mind of the Lord. Now Paul does speak of sending to
Crete one or other of his fellow-labourers in whom he had
confidence; and it was quite right. It is a matter that requires
wisdom from above, because one might send a wrong person.
But the principle is caring for the work of the Lord, and not
leaving things as if it were contrary to truth and the Lord to
have an interest even where you cannot be. The notion that
such things must be untouched through fear of trenching on
the Lord is a fallacy; it is contrary to this word of God and others
also. Scripture authorizes care in this kind of way. If
I could be a means of sending or inclining the heart of a
servant of the Lord to a place where he was calling another
servant from it, it would be my duty to do it. Not that this
should be meddled with unless the Lord give assurance of His
own mind in the matter; but it is not a thing to be left, as if it
were contrary to faith to desire such a thing. The apostle here
proves to my mind the clear contrary.

On the other hand, it is not everybody that possesses a
competent judgment about such a matter; and there, too, is
need of the Lord’s own power. The word and the Spirit of
God are amply sufficient, although we have neither apostles
nor the charges that depended on them. Now, what He tells
the apostle here is (and, I have no doubt, was meant in the
long run) for the instruction of the saints of God.

When I shall send Artemas or Tychicus, bring Zenas
the lawyer, and Apollos on their journey diligently,
that nothing be wanting unto them {Titus 3:12, 13}.

He adds a few words of great practical moment:

Let ours also learn to maintain good works for
necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful {Titus 3:14}.

It was not merely a question of man supplying his own wants;
we ought to have a heart for others. It is a great joy that God
uses one for the good of another; and as He does so
spiritually, He would have the saints also consider the value
of an honest occupation; not merely to provide for necessary
uses, but also not to be unfruitful. What a joy is the joy of
grace, the joy of believers over circumstances, the joy that
makes us feel we are identified, in our measure, with the
great and blessed work of God here below!

{Philemon}

Various considerations call on me to be comparatively
brief on the epistle to PHILEMON. This has altogether a
different character from the epistles that have lately been
occupying us. Here the Holy Ghost by the same apostle takes
up a domestic matter, and makes it the occasion of the
sweetest application of the grace of God.

From his prison he writes to one that evidently was his
friend, one at a former day, yea, for ever, deeply indebted to
him, insomuch as he was brought to a knowledge of Christ
through him. Now Paul informs him of another no less
indebted to him in the grace of Christ, and this none other
than Onesimus, the slave of Philemon. Wonderful ways of
God! He had deserted, and probably otherwise defrauded
(Philemon 1:18), his excellent master -- an act which even the
most worthless lord could not but punish with the utmost
severity. Onesimus had left Philemon, we may be sure, for
nothing justifiable, and thus proved himself a vile person,
who could not appreciate goodness. But what is too hard for
the Lord, who led him into Paul’s path, converted him, and
turned his heart and steps back to his master?

This circumstance becomes the occasion of an inspired
epistle. The church throughout all ages profited, and the
grace of Christ unfolded therein by Paul the apostle! Oh,
what a God is ours! And what a word is His, delivering from
the world, and from the thoughts and feelings of nature! How
far have we derived blessing by it? Is this what would
commend itself to our souls? Does aught else draw out the
admiration and the thankfulness of our hearts?

Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ {Philemon 1}:
thus he opens the letter. He would not put his request on the
ground of his apostleship, lest he might bring in the force of
authority, where all that would meet and reflect Christ in the
matter must turn on the state and the willing answer of his
heart to whom he was appealing in grace.

Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our
brother,
for the desire was not confined even to Paul, but Timothy
gladly joined himself with this most touching communication
of Paul --

unto Philemon our dearly beloved {Philemon 1}.
There was no doubt as to right and wrong: Onesimus was inexcusable; but love abides, and can never fail. To love and count on love is of faith, and prevails. But Philemon was not only an object of tender affection, but a fellow-labourer (Philemon 1), and the nature of the case made it expedient, unlike the usual character of apostolic addresses, to add the household.

Again, observe, his wife is remembered. She would thus feel that she was not left out in the delicate ways of grace, but is included, as in the injury, so now in the good the apostle wished them to manifest.

And to our beloved Apphia (Philemon 2).

A mistress might have particular reason to feel the misconduct of a slave. Whatever the special motive, she, at any rate, is addressed, and coupled with her husband in it. She is thus given a direct interest in its new phase, but it was the interest of grace.

The apostle brings in Archippus also, honoured with the title of our fellow-soldier (Philemon 2).

It is the same individual whom he exhorted at the close of Colossians to take heed to the ministry he had received in the Lord. Let him not forget to cast in whatever help he could render in this charge of grace. Small or great, let all be done to the Lord. Finally, Paul includes the church in Philemon's house. There were others in the Lord, either of the household or in the habit of meeting there.

How blessed is grace, and how large! And all this movement of heart about a runagate slave! Yet it is defined within the right bounds. The assembly, and only the assembly, in Philemon's house are comprehended in the appeal. The saints at Colosse are not included; -- why, we can all appreciate. Further, mark the wisdom of it. In any other case the assembly had been the first; but here mark the lovely ways of God, who now pursues a different course. After all, the slave is Philemon's, who therefore is put first. There never is a change, not even of order, in the word of God, but what has some adequate divine motive, and the beauty of grace and truth in it. Never is an insertion or omission of a casual sort: all flows from a wise purpose, which would be impaired, though we may not all be spiritual enough to say how, were a single feature of it either left out or superadded. It is all a vital organism; every part of the living body of truth is needed for His own glory.

The formula usually introducing the longest epistle to the greatest assembly follows.

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (Philemon 3).

Then Paul addresses Philemon personally:

I thank my God, making mention of thee always at my prayers, hearing of the love and faith which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all the saints,

(his was about to be tried whether his love would stand true toward all the saints,) so that the communication of thy faith may become effectual in the acknowledging of every good thing which is not "in you," which really gives no sense in the passage, but "which is" in us" (according to the best and most ancient authorities) unto Christ Jesus (Philemon 4-6).

Thus Paul thoroughly acknowledges the grace and faith that was in him generally; but the question remained, whether Philemon would answer to that which was in Paul's heart in writing about Onesimus. His participation in the faith was owned; but was it now to operate in practical communion between them? Paul would do nothing as from authority in such a case: this would be to become a director, not an apostle of Christ. Everything here must be of grace. Hence he adds,

For we [or I] had [the best reading] great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother (Philemon 7).

Philemon seems to have been a man habitually given to acts of love, and thus a continual channel of refreshment by grace among God's children. But the most excellent of men have broken down occasionally by the pettiest things that entice or provoke self.

And now there was a matter which might touch Philemon's sense of injury -- he might have and retain a keen sense of the wrong Onesimus had done him as a Christian master. How often persons who were amiability itself in all respects that had come to our view prove quite unprepared for something which grates against their feelings in an unexpected quarter! What the apostle desired was, for others as for himself, that they should live Christ in everything. So he says,

For love's sake I beseech thee, being such an one as Paul

-- not merely

the prisoner,

which had been already pleaded as to his actual circumstances, and soon to be repeated with emphasis, but now he takes another ground, Paul --

the aged (Philemon 9).

Would Paul,

the prisoner and

the aged,

have a feeble ineffectual claim on the heart of Philemon? Not Paul the apostle in any case; yet was he not a whit behind the chief. And indeed he proves how well he knew -- not that he now forgot -- the distinctive value of his apostleship, by keeping it hidden wherever the assertion of it might (not to say must) have marred the free exercise of grace. Accordingly,

being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ, I beseech thee for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten;

and not this merely, but begotten

in my bonds (Philemon 9, 10).

This would make him specially an object of interest and
affection to one who venerated and delighted in the apostle. If Philemon loved Paul, he would love his child; and Onesimus was his child, as he says. He names him at least as emphatically his child as either Titus or Timothy; but more than this, he was a son born as neither Timothy nor Titus was -- begotten in his bonds -- bonds destined in the grace of God to be more fruitful for the instruction of saints than his most free service and world-wide labours; for Paul was never so honoured in the service of God for the leading up of the church of God as when he was bound a prisoner in Rome.

It was at this time, and under such circumstances, that Onesimus was born in the faith. It is true that once he was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me {Philemon 11}

-- a allusion to his name, as is well known, and which becomes yet more evident in Philemon 20. He had been unserviceable before, but now Paul assures himself that grace will not fail its effectual work --

whom I have sent back: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels: whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel; but without thy mind would I do nothing {Philemon 12-14}.

The apostle would have Philemon's good to be not as of necessity but of willingness. The delicacy of feeling, and the sense of propriety that grace forms, are truly exquisite. There is nothing that maintains right so much as grace. At the same time it relinquishes its own dues, it maintains those of others! This is of all importance for our souls to heed. The contrary alas! habitually appears. A person abuses grace in humbling another: the use of grace is to humble one's self, showing all godly respect to every other in our place. I do not deny that there is that which becomes others in their place: surely no saint is exempt from the exercise of grace. But with this I have nothing to do in the way of dictation, whatever one's desires. I have to do with the grace that has reached my own soul; and this ever gladly accords to others that which is their due or more. There is nothing that truly delivers from the spirit of self but the mighty grace of God.

The apostle so writes to his friend and brother.

For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldst receive him for ever; not now as a slave, but above a slave, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord? {Philemon 15, 16}.

There cannot be a more exquisite apology for one whose return might have recalled painful feelings, and who, in fact, was so guilty in law that his master would have been by it justified in the sternest measures. But the grace in Christ, while it makes evil more heinous, changes all, because it brings in that love which met our own yet greater need and guilt, and the mercy that has left no room for blessing, however feebly we enjoy and appreciate it. Onesimus had failed in the very first duty of a slave; he had denied, in fact, his relationship to his master. But now the apostle takes simply and solely the ground of grace, and appeals to the heart of Philemon in the presence of all Christ had done for him, and through the same instrument who had been used toward his bondman. This he knew would dissipate the smallest cloud of suspicion that might otherwise have hung over Onesimus on his return to his master. As he says here,

If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides {Philemon 17-19}.

The great practical lesson, beloved, we ought all to gather from this is that it is not merely a question of doing the right thing, but of the way in which it should be done. It is too often thought by many that if only the object be right, this is enough. But not so: Christ is as much the way as He is the end. If it is not Christ along every step of the road, the best intentions often turn out productive of very grave disorder; and for this simple reason, that we are incompetent for anything of ourselves: Christ alone can guide us through.

This is just what is taught in the epistle before us. Who but God would have thought of bringing in Christ at every point of that which concerned Onesimus? But now, that He has so spoken, this is precisely the privilege of the Christian. It is the introduction of Christ, not merely for the regulation of elders and young men, widows, households, and the like. It is not merely the regulation of outward order by the application of the same name: Titus does this. But the epistle to Philemon lets us into another atmosphere, for it shows us Christ brought in, yea, the name of Christ and the grace of Christ bound up with all the relations of the family, with matters that might seem to belong solely to the domain of human rights or wrongs, wherein it was for a master in his generosity to forgive. Here, too, we are taught how to live Christ.

I am aware some, enamoured of theories, and savouring the things of men rather than of God, would think it dreadful to discuss or deal with the relations of a master and a slave. Why not condemn the whole principle, root and branch? But this is not Christ. The Spirit of God does not establish a mere code of human rights. Christianity is not a system of earthly righteousness; it is the unfolding of the grace of Christ, and of heavenly hopes. It is the bringing of souls to God, who by that cross delivers them from all wrongs, spite of their guilt and His most deserved judgment. It elevates them above these rights, not in pride of heart, but bowed down by the rich mercy of the Lord. Nothing so maintains the rights of others; but at the same time it is no question of adhering to our own. It is a question of using the grace of Christ, and thus of glorifying God.

Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord. Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt do also more than I say. But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you {Philemon 20-22}.

Salutations follow in Philemon 23-25.

Throughout the Spirit speaks to the renewed affections. What the effect of this epistle may have been it is not for us
to say, as not knowing. But it appears to me not doubtful. The heart that could stand out against such appeals of grace, from such a quarter, was far from Philemon. But is it not a call to you and to me, as living, fresh, applicable, and imperiously needed, if we value nothing so much as Christ? The literal circumstances are changed, no doubt; but why is it given here? Why is it that such an epistle should have been inspired? Why was it not a private communication? It is as necessary in its own place as any one of the epistles we have had before us: I do not mean to the same degree, but as necessary, if in truth our object is to glorify our Lord Jesus.

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Lectures Introductory

to the Study of

The Epistles of Paul The Apostle

Lecture 11

Hebrews 1 – 6

The epistle to the Hebrews differs in some important respects from all those which have been before us; so much so that many have questioned whether it be the writing of the apostle Paul, of Apollos, of Barnabas, &c. Of this my mind has no doubt. I believe that Paul, and no other, was the author, and that it bears the strongest intrinsic traits of his doctrine. The style is different, and so is the manner of handling the truth; but the line of truth, though it be affected by the object that he had in view, is that which savours of Paul beyond all: not of Peter, or John, or James, or Jude, but of Paul alone.

One good and plain reason which has graven a difference of character on the epistle is the fact, that it goes outside his allotted province. Paul was the apostle of the uncircumcision. If writing for the instruction of Jews, as he here clearly was, to believers or Christians that had once been of that nation, he was evidently outside the ordinary function of his apostolic work.

There is another reason also why the epistle to the Hebrews diverges very sensibly and materially from the rest of the writings of St. Paul, that it is not, strictly speaking, an exercise of apostleship at all, but of the writer (apostle though he were) as a teacher, and here a teacher clearly not of Gentiles, as he says elsewhere, but of Jews. Now it is plain, if he that was an apostle and preacher and teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth was led by the Holy Spirit to address the saints that were of the old Jewish fold, there must have been a marked departure from his usual methods in the manner of using and presenting the truth of God to these. But we have this blessed result of his acting outside his own ordinary sphere, that it is the finest and indeed the only specimen of teaching properly so called in the New Testament. It is not a revelation given by prophetic or apostolic authority; and for this reason, I presume, he does not introduce himself at all. It is always a failure when the teacher as such is prominent. The point for such an one is, that the teaching (not himself) should arrest and instruct. But in revealing truth the person whom God employs in that work is naturally brought before those addressed; and hence the apostle took particular care, even if he did not write an epistle, to put his name to it, introducing himself at the beginning through the amanuensis that he employed, and with scrupulous care adding his own name at the end of each epistle.

In writing to the Hebrew believers it is not so. Here the apostle is what indeed he was. Besides being apostle of the uncircumcision, he was a teacher; and God took care that, although expressly said to be a teacher of Gentiles, his should be the word to teach the Christian Jews too; and, in fact, we may be assured that he taught them as they never were taught before. He opened the scriptures as none but Paul could, according to the gospel of the glory of Christ. He taught them the value of the living oracles that God had given them; for this is the beautiful characteristic here. Indeed the epistle to the Hebrews stands unique. By it the believing Jew was led into a divine application of that which was in the Old Testament -- that which they had habitually read in the law, Psalms, and prophets, from their cradle we may say, but which they had never seen in such a light before. That mighty, logical, penetrating, richly-stored mind! that heart with such affections, large and deep, as scarce ever were concentrated in another bosom! that soul of experience wonderfully varied and profound! -- he was the one whom God was now leading in a somewhat unwonted path, no doubt, but in a path which, when once taken, at once approves itself by divine wisdom to every heart purified by faith.

For if Peter, as is known, were the apostle of the circumcision pre-eminently, it was through him that God first of all opened the door of the kingdom of heaven to the Gentiles; and if the apostle Paul, with the concurrence of the heads of the work among the circumcision, had gone to the Gentiles, none the less did the Spirit of God (it may be without asking those who seemed to be somewhat at Jerusalem) employ Paul to write to the believers of the circumcision the most consummate treatise on the bearing of Christ and Christianity upon the law and the prophets, and as practically dealing with their wants, dangers, and blessing. Thus did God most carefully guard in every form from the technical drawing of lines of rigid demarcation to which even Christians are so prone, the love of settling things in precise routine, the desire that each should have his own place, not only as the proper sphere of his work, but to the exclusion of every other. With admirable wisdom indeed the Lord directs the work and the workmen, but never exclusively; and the apostle Paul is here, as just shown, the proof of it on one side as Peter is on the other.
What is the consequence under the blessed guidance of the Spirit? As the great teacher of the believers from among the Jews, we have, after all, not Paul, but through him God Himself left to address His own, in the words, facts, ceremonies, offices, persons so long familiar to the chosen people. Paul does not appear. This could hardly have been by any other arrangement, at any rate not so naturally.

God,
says he,

having in many measures and in many manners spoken in time past to the fathers in the prophets, at the last of these days spoke to us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds [Heb. 1:1, 2].

Paul would show them thus the infinite dignity of the Messiah whom they had received. Never would Paul weaken the personal rights or the official place of the Anointed of Jehovah. Contrariwise, he would lead them on to find what they had never yet seen in their Messiah, and, wonderful to say, he founds his proofs, not on new revelations, but on those very words of God which they had read so superficially, the depths of which they had never approached, nor had they so much as suspected. The facts of Christianity they knew; the linking of all scripture with Christ’s person, and work, and glory they had yet to discover.

But mark the manner of the writer. He is careful to establish the thread of connection with God’s word and ways of old; and yet there is not a single epitome which more elaborately throughout its entire course sets the believer in present relationship to Christ in heaven; I think one might be bold to say, none so much. From the very starting-point we see Christ, not merely dead and risen, but glorified in heaven. There is no doubt that the writer meant his readers to hold fast, that He who suffered all things on earth is the same Jesus who is now at the right hand of God; but the first place in which we hear of Him is as Son of God on high according to Heb. 1, and there it is we see Him as Son of man according to Heb. 2. It was there, in fact, that Paul had himself first seen the Lord. Who then was so suitable to introduce Jesus, the rejected Messiah, at the right hand of God, as Saul of Tarsus? On the way to Damascus that staunchest of Jews had his eyes first opened -- blinded naturally, but enabled by grace so much the more to see by the power of the Holy Spirit the glorified Christ.

It is to Christ in heaven, then, that Paul, writing to the Christian Jews, first directs their attention. But he does it in a manner which shows the singularly delicate tact given him. True affection is prudent for its object when peril is nigh, and delights to help effectually, instead of being indifferent whether the way of it wounds those whose good is sought. In no way are the former messages of God forgotten in the days of their fathers. Nor would one gather from this epistle that its writer laboured among the Gentiles, nor even that there was a calling of Gentile believers in the Lord Jesus. The epistle to the Hebrews never speaks of either. We can understand, therefore, how active-minded men, who occupied themselves with the surface -- the method, the style, the unusual absence of the writer’s name, and other peculiarities in the phenomena of this epistle, too readily hesitated to attribute it to Paul. They might not attach much moment to the general tradition which ascribed it to him. But they ought to have looked more steadily into its depths, and the motives for obvious points of difference, even were it written by Paul.

Granted that there is a striking absence of allusion to the one body here. But there was one nearer and dearer to Paul than even the church. There was one truth that Paul laboured yet more to hold up than that one body, wherein is neither Jew nor Greek -- the glory of Him who is the head of it. Christ Himself was what made the assembly of God precious to him. Christ Himself was infinitely more precious than even the church which He had loved so well, and for which He gave Himself. Of Christ, then, he would deliver his last message to his brethren after the flesh as well as Spirit; and as he began preaching in the synagogues that He is the Son of God (Acts 9), so here he begins his epistle to the Hebrews. He would lead them on, and this with gentle but firm and witting hand. He would deepen their knowledge lovingly and wisely. He would not share their unbelief, their love of ease, their value for outward show, their dread of suffering; but he would reserve each folly for the most fitting moment. He would lay a vigorous hand on that which threatened their departure from the faith, but he would smooth lightly lesser difficulties out of their way. But when he gained their ear, and they were enabled to see the bright lights and perfections of the great High Priest, there is no warning more energetic than this epitome affords against the imminent and remediless danger of those who abandon Christ, whether for religious form, or to indulge in sin. All is carried on in the full power of the Spirit of God, but with the nicest consideration of Jewish prejudices, and the most scrupulous care to bring every warrant for his doctrine from their own ancient yet little understood testimonies.

It is evident, however, even from the opening of the epistle, that though he does not slight but uphold the Old Testament scriptures, yet he will not let the Jews pervert them to dishonour the Lord Jesus. How had God spoken to the fathers? In many measures and in many manners. So had He spoken in the prophets. It was fragmentary and various, not a full and final manifestation of Himself. Mark the skill! He thereby cuts off, by the unquestionable facts of the Old Testament, that over-weening self-complacency of the Jew, which would set Moses and Elias against hearing the Son of God. Had God spoken to the fathers in the prophets? Unquestionably. Paul, who loved Israel and estimated their privileges more highly than themselves (Rom. 9), was the last man to deny or enfeebly it. But how had God spoken then? Had He formerly brought out the fulness of His mind? Not so. The early communications were but refracted rays, not the light unbroken and complete. Who could deny that such was the character of all the Old Testament? Yet so cautiously does he insinuate the obviously and necessarily practical character of that which was revealed of old, that at a first reading, nay, however often read perfunctorily, they might have no more perceived it than, I suppose, most of us must confess as to ourselves. But there it is; and when we begin to prove the divine certainty of every word, we weigh and
weigh again its value.

As then it is pointed out that there were formerly many portions, so also were there many modes in the prophetic communications of God. This was, beyond doubt, the way in which His revelations had been gradually vouchsafed to His people. But for this very reason, it was not complete. God was giving piecemeal His various words,

here a little, and there a little {Isa. 28:10, 13}.

Such was the character of His ways with Israel. They could not -- man could not -- bear more till redemption was accomplished, after the Son of God Himself was come, and His glory fully revealed. Now when promises were given to the fathers, they did not go beyond the earthly glory of Christ; but known to Him were all things from the beginning, yet He did not outrun the course of His dealings with His people. But as they manifested themselves in relation to Himself, and alas! their own weakness and ruin, higher glories began to dawn, and were needful as a support to the people. Hence, invariably, you will find these two things correlative. Reduce the glory of Christ, and you equally lower your judgment of the state of man. See the total absolute ruin of the creature; and none but the Son in all His glory is felt to be a sufficient Saviour for such.

The apostle was now being led by the Holy Ghost to wean these believers from their poor, meagre, earthly thoughts of Christ -- from that so common tendency to take the least portion of the blessing, contenting ourselves with that which we think we need, and which we feel to be desirable for us, and there sitting down. God, on the contrary, while He does adapt Himself to the earliest wants of souls, and the feeblest answer to Christ by the Spirit of God working within us, nevertheless has in His heart for us what suits His own glory, and this He will accomplish; for faithful is He who has promised, and He will do it. He means to have all that love the Saviour like Him; and all that He purposes to do for the Saviour's honour, He has perfectly unfolded to us. No doubt, this supposes the resurrection state, and it never can be till then; but He graciously works now, that we may learn by degrees that only such a Saviour and Lord -- the effulgence of His glory, and full expression of His substance, the Son of God Himself -- could suit either God or us.

Accordingly, while he intimates thus that all was but partial, being piecemeal and multiform, in the revelations from God to the fathers, he lets them know, in the next verse, that the same God had, in the last of these days,

spoken unto us in His Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds

{Heb. 1:2}.

If such and so great were His glory, what must not be the word of such a Son? What the fulness of the truth that God was now making known to His people by Him? Was this to slight the glory of the Messiah? Let them rather take heed that there be no oversight of Him on their part; none could justly put it to the account of God. For who was He, this Messiah, that they would fain occupy themselves with as a king, and would have confirmed, had it been possible, to aggrandize themselves -- the ancient people of God? The brightness of God's glory, the express image of His substance; the upholder, not of Israel or their land only, but of all things

by the word of his power {Heb. 1:3}.

But hearken --

when he had by himself purged our sins,

was not the whole Jewish system purged out by such a truth?

when he had by himself purged our sins.

It is to the exclusion of every other instrument. Help there was not; means there could not be. He Himself undertook and achieved the task alone; and, when He had thus done it,

sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high;

being made so much better than the angels, as he

hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name

than they {Heb. 1:3, 4}.

This furnishes the first part of the doctrine on which the apostle insists. If any beings had special account or stood highly exalted in a Jew's eye, the holy angels were they; and no wonder. It was in this form that Jehovah ordinarily appeared, whenever He visited the fathers or the sons of Israel. There were exceptions; but, as a rule, He who made known the will and manifested the power of Jehovah in these early days to the fathers is spoken of habitually as the angel of Jehovah. It is thus He was represented. He had not yet taken manhood, or made it part of His person. I do not deny that there was sometimes the appearance of man. An angel might appear in whatever guise it pleased God; but, appear as He might, He was the representative of Jehovah. Accordingly, the Jews always associated angels with the highest idea of beings, next to Jehovah Himself, the chosen messengers of the divine will for any passing vision among men. But now appeared One who completely surpassed the angels. Who was He? The Son of God. It ought to have filled them with joy.

We may easily understand that every soul truly born of God would and must break forth into thanksgiving to hear of a deeper glory than he had first perceived in Christ. We must not look on the Lord according to our experience, if there has been simplicity in the way God has brought us to the perception of His glory; we must endeavour to put ourselves back, and consider the prejudices and difficulties of the Jew. They had their own peculiar hindrances; and one of their greatest was the idea of a divine person becoming a man; for a man, to a Jew, was far below an angel. Are there not many now, even professing Christians (to their shame be it spoken) who think somewhat similarly? Not every Christian knows that a mere angel, as such, is but a servant; not every Christian understands that man was made to rule. No doubt he is a servant, but not merely one so accomplishing orders, but having a given sphere, in which he was to rule as the image and glory of God: a thing never true of an angel -- never was, and never can be. The Jews had not entered into this; no man ever did receive such a thought. The great mass of Christians now are totally ignorant of it. The time, the manner, and the only way in which such a truth could be known, was in the person of Christ; for He became not an

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angel but a man.

But the very thing that to us is so simple, when we have laid hold of the astonishing place of man in the person of Christ -- this was to them the difficulty. His being a man, they imagined, must lower Him necessarily below an angel. The apostle, therefore, has to prove that which to us is an evident matter of truth -- of revelation from God -- without argument at all. And this he proves from their own scriptures.

For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? {Heb. 1:5}.

Now it is true that angels are sometimes called sons of God,

but God never singles out one and says, “Thou art my Son.” In a vague general way, He speaks of all men as being His sons. He speaks of the angels in a similar way, as being His sons. Adam was a son of God -- apart, I mean, from the grace of God -- as a mere creature of God into whose nostrils He breathed the breath of life. Adam was a son of God, angels were sons of God; but to which of the angels did God ever speak in such language as this? No, it was to a man; for He was thus speaking of the Lord as Messiah here below; and this is what gives the emphasis of the passage. It is not predicated of the Son as eternally such; there would be no wonder in this. None could be surprised, assuredly, that the Son of God, viewed in His own eternal being, should be greater than an angel. But that He, an infant on earth, looked at as the son of the Virgin, that He should be above all the angels in heaven -- this was a wonder to the Jewish mind; and yet what had in their scriptures a plainer proof? It was not to an angel in heaven, but to the Babe at Bethlehem, that God had said,

Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee {Heb. 1:5; see also Psa. 2:7; Acts 13:33};

and, again,

I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son {Heb. 1:5}.

-- words said historically of David’s son; but, as usual, looking onward to a greater than David, or his wise son, who immediately succeeded him. Christ is the true and continual object of the inspiring Spirit.

But next follows a still more powerful proof of His glory:

And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him {Heb. 1:6}.

So far from any angel approaching the glory of the Lord Jesus, it is God Himself who commands that all the angels shall worship Him.

And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire {Heb. 1:7}.

They are but servants, whatever their might, function, or sphere. They may have a singular place as servants, and a spiritual nature accomplishing the pleasure of the Lord; but they are only servants. They never rule.

But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows {Heb. 1:8, 9}.

Not a word is said about His fellows until God Himself addresses Him as God. The angels worshipped Him: God now salutes Him as God; for such He was, counting it no robbery to be on equality with God, one with the Father.

But this is far from all. The chain of scriptural testimony is carried out and confirmed with another and even more wondrous citation.

God

may be used in a subordinate sense. Elohim has His representatives, who are, therefore, called gods. Magistrates and kings are so named in scripture. So are they styled, as the Lord told the Jews. The word of God came and commissioned them to govern in earthly things; for it might be no more than in judicial matters. Still, there they were, in their own sphere, representing God’s authority, and are called gods, though clearly with a very subordinate force. But there is another name which never is employed in any sense save that which is supreme. The dread and incommunicable name is Jehovah.

Is, then, the Messiah ever called Jehovah? Certainly He is. And under what circumstances? In His deepest shame. I do not speak now of God’s forsaking Christ as the point of view in which He is looked at, though at the same general time.

We that believe can all understand that solemn judgment of our sins on the part of God, when Jesus was accomplishing atonement on the cross. But there was more in the cross than this, which is not the subject of Psa. 102, but rather the Messiah utterly put to shame by man and the people; nevertheless taking it all -- for this was His perfection in it -- from the hand of Jehovah. It is under such circumstances He pours out His plaint. Jehovah raised Him up, and Jehovah cast Him down. Had atonement, as such, been in view here as in Psa. 22, would it not be put as casting Him down, and than raising Him up? This is the way in which we Christians naturally think of Christ in that which is nearest to the sinner’s need and God’s answer of grace. But here Jehovah raised Him up, and Jehovah cast Him down, which evidently refers to His Messianic place, not to His position as the suffering and afterwards glorified Christ, the Head of the church. He was raised up as the true Messiah by Jehovah on earth, and He was cast down by Jehovah on earth. No doubt man was the instrument of it. The world which He had made did not know Him; His own people received Him not, neither would have Him. Jewish unbelief hated Him: the more they knew Him, the less could they endure Him. The goodness, the love, the glory of His person only drew out the deadly enmity of man, and specially of Israel; for they were worse than the Romans: and all this He, in the perfectness of His dependence, takes from Jehovah. For Himself, He came to suffer and die by wicked hands, but it was in the accomplishment of the will and purpose of God His Father. He knew full well that all the power of man or Satan would
not have availed one instant before Jehovah permitted it. Hence all is taken meekly, but with none the less agony, from Jehovah's hand; and less or other than this had not been perfection. In the midst of Messiah's profound sense and expression of His humiliation to the lowest point thus accepted from Jehovah, He contrasts His own estate, wasted, prostrate, and coming to nothing. He contrasts it with two things. First, the certainty of every promise being accomplished for Israel and Zion He unhesitatingly anticipates; whilst He, the Messiah, submits to be given up to every possible abasement. He then contrasts Himself with the great commanding truth of Jehovah's own permanence. And what is the answer from on high to the holy sufferer? Jehovah from above answers Jehovah below; He owns that the smitten Messiah is Jehovah -- of stability and unchangeableness equal with His own.

What need of further proof after this? Nothing could be asked or conceived more conclusive, as far as concerned His divine glory. And all that the apostle thinks it necessary to cite after this is the connecting link of His present place on the throne of Jehovah in heaven with all these ascending evidences of His divine glory, beginning with His being Son as begotten in time and in the world; then His emphatic relationship to God as of the lineage of David -- not Solomon, save typically, but the Christ really and ultimately; then worshipped by the angels of God; next, owned by God as God, and, finally, as Jehovah by Jehovah. All is closed by the citation of Psa. 110:1, which declares that God bids Him sit as man at His right hand on high till the hour of judgment on His foes. It is one of the most interesting psalms in the whole collection, and of the deepest possible moment as preparatory both to what is now brought in for the Christian (which, however, is hidden here) and to what it declares shall be by-and-by for Israel. Thus it is a sort of bridge between old and new, as it is more frequently quoted in the New Testament than any other Old Testament scripture.

Therefore (as should be the conclusion, though commencing the next chapter)

we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels

-- clearly he is still summing up the matter --

was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward: how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard? {Heb. 2:1-3}.

It is striking to see how the apostle takes the place of such as simply had the message, like other Jews, from those who personally heard Him: so completely was he writing, not as the apostle of the Gentiles magnifying his office, but as one of Israel, who were addressed by those who accompanied with Messiah on earth. It was confirmed unto us,

says he, putting himself along with his nation, instead of conveying his heavenly revelations as one taken out from the people, and the Gentiles, to which last he was sent. He looks at what was their proper testimony, not at that to which he had been separated extraordinarily. He is dealing with them as much as possible on their own ground, though, of course, without compromise of his own. He does not overlook the testimony to the Jews as such:

God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and distributions of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will {Heb. 2:4}.

Now he enters on another and very distinct portion of the glory of Christ. He is not only the Son of God, but Son of man; and they are both, I will not say equally necessary, but, without doubt, both absolutely necessary, whether for God's glory or for His salvation to whomsoever it may be applied. Touch Christ on either side, and all is gone. Touch Him on the human side, it is hardly less fatal than on the divine. I admit that His divine glory has a place which humanity could not possess; but His human perfection is no less necessary to found the blessing for us on redemption, glorifying God in His righteousness and love. This accordingly the apostle now traces. Jesus was God as truly as man, and in both above the angels. His superiority as Son of God had been proved in the most masterly manner from their own scriptures in the first chapter. He had drawn his conclusions, urging the all-importance of giving heed, and the danger of letting slip such a testimony. The law, as he had said elsewhere, was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. He had just said, if it was firm, and every transgression and disobedience received just recompence of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation? Outward infraction and inner rebellion met their retribution. The sanction of the gospel would be commensurate with its grace, and God would avenge the slightings of a testimony begun by the Lord, farther carried on and confirmed by the Holy Spirit with signs, wonders, powers, and distributions according to His will.

Now he takes the other side, saying,

Unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come {Heb. 2:5}.

Whatever may have been God's employment of angels about the law, the world to come was never destined to be subjected to them. It is the good pleasure of God to use an angel where it is a question of providence, or law, or power; but where it comes to be the manifestation of His glory in Christ, He must have other instruments more suitable for His nature, and according to His affections.

For one has somewhere testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands {Heb. 2:6, 7}.

Thus we see the first question raised is one as to the littleness of man in comparison with that which God has made; but the question is no sooner raised than answered, and this by one who looks at the Second Man and not at the first. Behold then
man in Christ, and then talk, if you can, about His littleness. Behold man in Christ, and then be amazed at the wonders of the heavens. Let creation be as great as it may be, He that made all things is above them. The Son of man has a glory that completely eclipses the brightness of the highest objects. But also He shows that the humiliation of the Saviour, in which He was made a little lower than the angels, was for an end that led up to this heavenly glory. Grant that He was made a little lower than the angels, what was it for?

We see not yet all things put under him. But we behold Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; so that by the grace of God he should taste death for everything {Heb. 2:8, 9}.

Nor was this the only object; He was crowned with glory and honour as fruit of His sufferings unto death; but it had a gracious object as well as a glorious end;

so that by the grace of God he should taste death for everything;

for thus was the only door of deliverance for what was ruined by the fall, and this because it was the only means of morally vindicating God, who yearned in love over every work of His hands. There can be otherwise no efficacious because no righteous deliverance. It may be infinitely more, but righteous footing it must have; and this the death of Christ has given. Flowing from God’s grace, Christ’s death is the ground of reconciliation for the universe. It has also made it a part of His righteousness to bring man thus out of that ruin, misery, and subjection to death in which he lay. It has put into the hands of God that infinite fund of blessing in which He now loves to admit us reconciled to Himself.

The apostle does not yet draw all the consequences; but he lays down in these two chapters the twofold glory of Christ -- Son of God, Son of man; and following up the latter, he approaches that which fitted Him, on the score of sympathy, for the priesthood. I do not mean that Jesus could have been High Priest according to God because He was man. Not His manhood but His Godhead is the ground of His glory; nevertheless, if He had not been man as well as Son of God, He could not have been priest. As for atonement so for priesthood, that ground was essential. But it was for man, and therefore He too must be man. So it is here shown that it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one {Heb. 2:10, 11}.

Remark, it is not all one.

We never reach that height in the epistle to the Hebrews; never have we the body here, any more than unity. For the body we must search into some other epistles of Paul, though unity we may see in another shape in John. But the epistle to the Hebrews never goes so far as either. It does what was even more important for those whom it concerned, and, I add, what is of the deepest possible moment for us. For those who think that they can live according to God on the truth of either Ephesians or of the epistles of St. John, without the doctrine of the epistle to the Hebrews, have made a miserable mistake.

Say what men will, we have our wants, as traversing this wilderness; and although we might like to soar, it cannot long, if at all, prosper. We have, therefore, the adaptation of Christ as priest to the infirmities that we feel, and so much the more because of an exercised conscience towards God, and a realizing of the desert sin has made -- this defiled scene of our actual pilgrimage.

Accordingly, in the latter part of the chapter, the apostle begins to introduce the great truths which form so large a part of the epistle to the Hebrews. He speaks of Christ, the Sanctifier:

He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one.

He means one and the same condition, without entering into particulars.

For which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren {Heb. 2:11}.

There is a common relationship which the Sanctifier and the sanctified possess. It might be supposed, because He is the Sanctifier and they are the sanctified, that there could be no such communion. But there is:

for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren.

He never called them so, till He became a man; nor did He so fully then, till He was man risen from the dead. The apostle here most fittingly introduces Psa. 22. &c.:

Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee. And again, I will put my trust in him {Heb. 2:12, 13}.

He is proving the reality of this common relationship of the Sanctifier and the sanctified. He, like themselves, can say, and He alone could say as they never did,

I will put my trust in him.

Indeed Psa. 16 was the expression of all His course as man -- trust in life, trust in death, trust in resurrection. As in everything else, so in this, He has the pre-eminence; but it is a pre-eminence founded on a common ground. It could not have been true of Him, had He not been a man; had He been simply God, to talk of trusting in God would have been altogether unnatural and impossible. As for Him then, though the Sanctifier, He and they were all of one. And so further:

Behold I and the children which God hath given me {Heb. 2:13}.

Here is again a different but equally good proof of mutual relationship.

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on
him the nature of angels {Heb. 2:14-16}.
This last should be, that He does not take up angels; He does not help them. They are not the objects of His concern in the work here described;
but he takes up the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest
-- here you have the object of all the proof of His being man
-- in things pertaining to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people {Heb. 2:16, 17}.
I use the word
atonement,
or expiation, as being decidedly preferable to reconciliation. You cannot talk of reconciling sins. It is not a question of making sins right. They are atoned for; people are reconciled. Those who have been sinners are reconciled to God; but as to sins they do not admit of being reconciled at all (which is a mistake). There is need of a propitiation, or expiation, for the sins of His people.

For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted {Heb. 2:18}.

Temptation to Him was nothing but suffering: He suffered, being tempted, because there was that intrinsic holiness which repelled, but, at the same time, most acutely felt the temptation.

Thus the apostle enters on the vast field that will come before us a little while longer to-night. He has laid the basis for the high-priesthood of Christ. He could not have been such a High Priest, had He not been both divine and human; and he has proved both, in the fullest manner, from their own scriptures.

But before he enters upon the unfolding of His high-priesthood, there is a digression (the two chapters that follow, I apprehend, linking themselves with the two we have considered). Thus,

Christ as Son over his own house {Heb. 3:6}
answers pretty much to the first chapter, as the rest of God by-and-by answers to the second chapter; for I hope to prove it is to be in the scene of future glory. In writings so profound as the apostle’s, one generally hails the least help towards appreciating the structure of an epistle: let the reader consider it.

We need not dwell long on these intervening chapters. It is evident that he opens with our Lord as
apostle and high-priest of our confession {Heb. 3:1},
in contrast with the apostle and high priest of the Jews. Moses was the revealer of the mind of God of old, as Aaron had the title and privilege of access then into the sanctuary of God for the people. Jesus unites both in His own person. He came from God, and went to God. The holy brethren, then, partakers of a heavenly calling (not earthly like Israel’s), are told to consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, even Jesus, who is faithful to Him that appointed Him, as also Moses in all his house. Moses,
as a servant {Heb. 3:5},
he takes care particularly to say, in everything shows the superiority of the Messiah.

For he was counted worthy of greater glory than Moses, by how much he that built it hath more honour than the house {Heb. 3:3}.

He becomes bold now. He can venture, after having brought out such glory to Christ, to use plainness of speech; and they could bear it, if they believed their own scriptures. If they honoured the man who was God’s servant in founding and directing the tabernacle (or house of God in its rudimentary state), how much more did the ancient oracles call attention to a greater than Moses -- to Jehovah-Messiah, even Jesus. How plainly this chapter pre-supposes the proofs of the divine glory of Christ! We shall see also His Sonship presently.

And Moses was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of the things to be spoken after; but Christ, as Son over his house, whose house are we {Heb. 3:5, 6}.

Christ, being divine, built the house; Christ built all things. Moses ministered as servant, and was faithful in God’s house; Christ as Son is over the house;

whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end {Heb. 3:6}.

There were great difficulties, circumstances calculated especially to affect the Jew, who, after receiving the truth with joy, might be exposed to great trial, and so in danger of giving up his hope. It was, besides, particularly hard for a Jew at first to put these two facts together: a Messiah come, and entered into glory; and the people who belonged to the Messiah left in sorrow, and shame, and suffering here below. In fact, no person from the Old Testament could, at first sight at least, have combined these two elements. We can understand it now in Christianity. It is partly, indeed, to the shame of Gentiles, that they do not even see the difficulty for a Jew. It shows how naturally, so to speak, they have forgotten the Jew as having a special place in the word and purposes of God. They consequently cannot enter into the feelings of the Jew; and by such the authority and use of this epistle was grievously slighted. It is the self-conceit of the Gentile (Rom. 11), not their faith, that makes the Jewish difficulty to be so little felt. Faith enables us to look at all difficulties, on the one hand measuring them, on the other raising us above them. This is not at all the case with ordinary Gentile thought. Unbelief, indifferent and unfeeling, does not even see, still less appreciate, the trials of the weak.

The apostle here enters into everything of value for the way. Although it is perfectly true that the Son is in this place of universal glory, and in relation to us, Son over His house (God’s house having an all-comprehending sense and a narrower one), he explains how it is that His people are in actual weakness, trial, exposure, danger and sorrow here below. The people are still travelling through the wilderness, not yet in the land. He immediately appeals to the voice of the

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Spirit in the Psalms:

Wherefore -- (as the Holy Ghost saith, To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.) -- take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To-day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end; while it is said, To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses {Heb. 3:7-16}.

What is pressed here is this: that the people of God are still in the path of faith, just like their fathers of old before they crossed the Jordan; that now there is that which puts our patience to the proof; that the grand thing for such is to hold fast the beginning of the assurance firm unto the end. They were tempted to stumble at the truth of Christ, because of the bitter experiences of the way through which they were going onward. To turn back is but the evil heart of unbelief; to abandon Jesus is to turn away from the living God. To be fellows or companions of the Messiah (Psa. 45) depends on holding fast the beginning of the assurance to the end; for, remember, we are in the wilderness. Following Christ, as of old Moses, we are not arrived at the rest of God.

But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief {Heb. 3:17, 19}.

This leads us to the very important, but often misunderstood, chapter Heb. 4. What is the meaning of the rest of God?

Not rest of soul, not rest of conscience, any more than of heart. It is none of these things, but simply what the apostle says, God's rest. His rest is not merely your rest. It is not our faith seizing the rest that Christ gives to him that trusts Himself, as when He says,

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest {Matt. 11:28}.

He did not say, “I will give you God's rest.” It was not the time, nor is it of that nature. God's rest is the rest of His own satisfaction. His rest is a change of all the present scene of trial and toil, the consequences of sin. Of course the people of God must be formed for the scene, as well as it for them. They are incomparably more to God than that which they are going to fill. But the scene has its importance too. It would not suit God, if it would suit us, to be ever so blessed in such a world as this. He means to have a rest as worthy of Himself as the righteousness we are made in Christ is worthy of Himself now. As it is His righteousness, so will it be His rest. Therefore it is not merely, as Gentiles are apt to suppose, the bringing of comfort into the heart, and the spirit filled with the consciousness of blessings from God and of His grace to us. The Jew, too, had, in another direction, a miserably inadequate conception of it; for it was earthly, if not sensual. Still, what a Jewish believer often staggered at, what he felt to be a serious riddle for his mind, was the contrast between the circumstances through which he was passing, and the Christ of which the prophets had spoken to him. Now the apostle does not in any way make light of the grief by the way, nor forget that the pilgrimage in the desert is the type of our earthly circumstances. He takes the scriptures that speak of Israel journeying toward, but not yet in, the pleasant land, applying them to the present facts, and at the same time he sets before them in hope the rest of God.

Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us were glad tidings preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we who have believed do enter into rest {Heb. 4:1-3}.

That is, we are on the road. He does not say that we have entered, nor does he mean anything of the sort, which is clean contrary to the argument and aim. It is altogether a mistake, therefore, so to interpret the passage. The very reverse is meant, namely, that we have not entered into the rest, but, as the hymn says, we are on our way, I will not say to God, but assuredly to His rest. We are entering into the rest, having got it before us, and on to that rest we move; but we are not yet there.

We which have believed do enter into rest, as he said. As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest {Heb. 4:3}.

It is quite true that it is the Holy Ghost’s object to bring the rest close to us, so as to make us always conscious of the little interval that separates us from the rest of God; but still, let the interval be ever so short, we are not there yet, we are only going towards it. For the present, our place, beyond controversy, is viewed as in fact in the wilderness. According to the doctrine of this epistle (as of the Romans, the Corinthians, and the Philippians) to present us as in heavenly places would be altogether out of place and season. To the Ephesians he does develop our blessing as in and with Christ in the heavens. There it was exactly consonant to the character of the truth; for it is truth, and of the highest order. But as far as the Epistle to the Hebrews goes, we should never have learnt this side of the truth of God, or its appropriation to us: for we are only regarded in our actual place, that is, marching through the desert.

Here objections, which might be founded on the scriptures of the Old Testament, are met. There were two, and only two, occasions of old whence it might be argued that there had been an entrance into God's rest.

The first was when God made the creation; but was there any entering of man into that rest? God, doubtless, rested from His works; but even God is never said then to have
rested in His works. Was there anything that satisfied God or blessed man permanently? All was good, yea, very good; but could God rest in His love? Surely not, till all could be founded on the basis of redemption. Before all worlds God meant to have this. Nothing but redemption could bring into His own rest. Consequently, a rest capable of being spoilt, and all requiring to be begun over again in a new and more blessed way, never could meet the heart or mind of God. This, accordingly, is not His rest; it served as a sign and witness of it, but nothing more.

Then we come down lower to the second instance of deep and special interest to Israel. When Joshua brought the people triumphantly into the possession of Canaan, was this the rest of God? Not so. How is it disproved? By the self-same Psalm --

If they shall enter into my rest {Heb. 4:3},
written afterwards. So wrote David,

To-day, after so long a time {Heb. 4:7}.

Not only after the creation, but after Joshua had planted the people in the land, a certain day is determined in the future. For if Jesus [i.e., Joshua] had brought them into rest, he would not have spoken afterwards about another day. They had not entered into it yet.

The "rest" was still beyond. Is it not future still? What has there been to bring people into the rest of God since then? What is there to be compared with creation, or with His people settled in Canaan by the destruction of their foes? That which Gentile theology has brought into the matter, namely, the work of the Lord on the cross, or the application of it to meet the needs of the soul -- precious as it was to the apostle, as it must be to faith -- has no place whatever in the apostle's argument. If so, where does he bring it into the context? The idea that this is the point debated is so perfectly foreign and futile, that to my mind it demonstrates exceeding prepossession, if not looseness, of mind, as well as a lack of subjection to scripture, in those who allow their theories to override the plain word of God, which is here conspicuous for the absence of that infinite truth.

The apostle, therefore, at once draws the conclusion, that neither at creation, nor in Canaan, was the rest of God really come. The latter part of the Old Testament shows us how Israel got unsettled, and finally driven from their land; though it also predicts their future ingathering. The New Testament shows us the rejection of the Messiah, the ruin of Israel, the salvation of believers, the church formed of such in one body, (whether Jews or Gentiles,) but in the stronger contrast with the rest of God. Consequently, the rest is but coming, not come; it is future. This is the application:

There remaineth therefore a rest
(or sabbatism)
to the people of God. For he that hath entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his works, as God did from his own {Heb. 4:9, 10}.

I must ask you thus to alter the passage, the authorised version giving it wrongly. The emphasis is taken out of one place, and put into another, without the slightest reason.

What he deduces is,

Let us use diligence therefore to enter into that rest {Heb. 4:11}.

The meaning is, you cannot be labouring and resting in the same sense and time. All must confess that when you rest, you cease from labour. His statement is that now is the time not for rest, but for diligence; and the moral reason why we labour is, that love -- whether looked at in God Himself, in His Son, or in His children -- love never can rest, where there is either sin or wretchedness. In the world there is both. No doubt for the believer, his sins are blotted out and forgiven, and hope anticipates with joy the final deliverance of the Lord. But as to the course of this age and all things here below, it is impossible to think or speak of rest as these are, not even for our bodies, as part of the fallen creation. There ought not to be rest, therefore, beyond what we have by faith in our souls. It would be mere sentimentalising; it is not the truth of God. I ought to feel the misery and the estrangement of the earth from God; I ought to go -- however joyful in the Lord -- with a heart sad, and knowing how to weep, in a world where there is so much sin, and suffering, and sorrow. But the time is coming when God will wipe away tears from all eyes, yea, every tear; and this will be the rest of God. To this rest we are journeying, but we are only journeying. At the same time we should labour: love cannot but toil in such a world as this. If there be the spirit that feels the pressure of sin, there is the love that rises up in the power of God's grace, bringing in that which lifts out of sin and delivers from it. So he says,

Let us be diligent therefore to enter into that rest {Heb. 4:11}.

Allow me to say a word to any person here who may be a little confused by old thoughts on this subject. Look again a little more exactly into the two chief calls of the chapter (Heb. 4:1, 11), and let me ask you if it be safe and sound to apply them to rest for the conscience now? Are souls who have never yet tasted that the Lord is gracious to be summoned to fear? And how does the call to labour or diligence square with the apostle's word in Rom. 4:4, 5, where justification by faith, apart from works, is beyond cavil the point of teaching? What can be the effect of such prejudices of interpretation (no matter who may have endorsed them) but to muddle the gospel of God's grace? Thus it seems to me clearly and certainly such a notion is proved to be false. The test of a wrong notion is that it always dislocates the truth of God; often, indeed, like this, running counter to the plainest and most elementary forms of the gospel itself. Thus, take the text already referred to --

To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly {Rom. 4:5}

-- the popular misinterpretation sets people working to enter into rest for their conscience. But the doctrine is as false as the written word is true; and the meaning of that which is before us, is not rest now for the soul by faith, but the rest of God, when He has made a scene in the day of glory as worthy of Himself as it will be suited for those whom He loves.

Accordingly, we are next shown the provision of grace,
not for the rest of glory, but for those who are only journeying on towards it here below. And what is that provision? The word of God, which comes and searches, tries and deals with us, judging the thoughts and intents of the heart; and the priesthood of Christ, which converts and strengthens, and applies all that is needed here--the grace and mercy of our God.

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need {Heb. 4:16}.

And now (Heb. 5) we enter upon the priesthood; for it is a priest that we want who stand already accepted by sacrifice. Not a priest, but a sacrifice, is the foundation of all relationship with God; but we need along the way a living person, who can deal both with God for us and for God with us. Such a great High Priest who passed through the heavens, yet able to sympathize with our infirmities, we have in Jesus the Son of God. How little these Jews, even when saints, knew the treasure of grace that God had given in Him whom the nation abhorred! As previously, the apostle takes the proofs from their own oracles. It is not a question of revealing, but of rightly applying, by the Holy Ghost, the word they had in their hand.

For every high priest taken from among men is established for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins {Heb. 5:1}.

It might seem scarcely credible that these words could be applied to Christ. But there is nothing too bad for the heart of man; and these are mistakes of the heart. They do not arise from intellectual feebleness. It would be folly so to judge of Grotius, for instance. They spring from unbelief. Call it ignorance of Christ and of the scriptures, if you will, but it is not found only with the ignorant, as men would speak. I am sure we ought to have great compassion for the honest ignorance of simple-minded men. But, as in other sad cases, the error is often combined with ample learning, of the schools, though with lamentable lack of divine teaching even in foundation truth. I do not deny that God may deign to use anything in His service; but these men confide in their learning and their powers generally, instead of becoming fools that they may become wise, which is the truest learning according to God, if one may speak of "learning" in respect of that wisdom which comes down from the Father of lights.

Thus men, confident in their own resources, have dared to apply this description of priesthood to Christ. They have failed to see that it is a distinct contrast with Christ, and not at all a picture of His priesthood. It is evidently general, and sets before us a human priest, not Jesus -- God's High Priest. If there be analogy, there is certainly the strongest contrast here. An ordinary priest is able to exercise forbearance toward the ignorant and erring, since he himself also is compassed with infirmity.

And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins {Heb. 5:3}.

Did Christ need to offer for Himself, yea, for sins? This blasphemy would follow, if the foregoing words applied to Christ.

And no one taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, even as Aaron. So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest {Heb. 5:4, 5}.

Now he teaches a point of contact, as the other was of contrast. All you can procure from among men is one that can feel, as being a man, for men after a human sort. Such is not the priest that God has given us, but one who, though man, feels for us after a divine sort. And so, we are told, that Christ, while He was and is this glorious person in His nature and right, nevertheless as man did not glorify Himself to be made an high priest;

but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to-day have I begotten thee; as he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec {Heb. 5:5, 6}.

The same God who owned Him as His Son, born of the Virgin, owned Him also as Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. And in this order too: first, Son (on earth); next, the true Melchisedec (in heaven, as we shall find). Albeit true God and Son of God, in everything He displays perfect lowliness among men, and absolute dependence on God: such also was His moral fitness for each office and function which God gave Him to discharge. Mark, again, the skill with which all is gradually approached--how the inspired writer saps and mines their exorbitant (yet after all only earthly) pretensions, founded on the Aaronic priesthood.

Such was the great boast of the Jews. And here we learn out of their own scriptures another order of priesthood reserved for the Messiah, which he knew right well could not but put the Aaronic priesthood completely in the shade.

Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

At the same time, it is plain that there is no forgetfulness of the suffering obedience of Christ's place here below; but He is presented in this glory before we are given to hear of the path of shame which ushered it in.

Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him, called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec {Heb. 5:7-10}.

The apostle had much to say, but hard to be interpreted, because they were become dull of hearing. It is not that the word of God in itself is obscure, but that men bring in their difficulties. Nor does His word, as is often thought, want light to be thrown on it; rather is it light itself. By the Spirit's

20. I see no ground whatever for applying the citation from Ps. 2 to the resurrection of Christ. Acts 13, which is usually quoted to prove it, really distinguishes the raising up of Jesus as Messiah, the Son of God here below, from his resurrection which is made to rest on Isa. 55 and Ps. 16. Neither does Ps. 2 set forth His eternal Sonship, all-important a truth as it is, and clearly taught by John above all.
power it dispels the darkness of nature. Many obstacles there are to the entrance of light through the word, but there is none more decided than the force of religious prejudice; and this would naturally operate most among the Hebrew saints. They clung too much to old things; they could not take in the new. We may see a similar hindrance every day. What Paul had to say of the Melchisedec priesthood was hard to explain to them, not because the things were in themselves unintelligible, but they were dull in hearing.

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye again have need that one teach you the elements of the beginning of the oracles of God {Heb. 5:12}.

There is nothing, I repeat, which tends to make dulness in spiritual things so much as religious tradition. The next to it in dead weight, and in other respects more daringly dangerous, will be found to be philosophy. At any rate, it is remarkable that these are the two occasions of this reproach from the apostle. So he wrote to the Corinthians, who generally admired rhetoric, and had no small confidence, like other Greeks, in their own wisdom. They did not consider Paul, either in style or topics, at all up to the requirements of the age -- at least in their midst. How cutting to hear themselves counted babes, and incapable of meat for grown men, so that, being carnal, they must have milk administered to them! The apostle had to put them down, and tell them, with all their high-flown wisdom, they were such that he could not discourse to them about the deep things of God. This, no doubt, was a painful surprise for them. So here the same apostle writing to the Hebrew believers treats them as babes, though from a different source. Thus we see two errors totally opposed in appearance, but leading to the same conclusion. Both unfit the soul for going on with God; and the reason why they so hinder is because they are precisely the things in which man lives. Whether it be the mind of man or his natural religiousness, either idolizes its own object; and consequently blindness ensues to the glory of Christ.

Hence the apostle could not but feel himself arrested by their state. He shows also that this very state was not merely one of weakness; but exposed them to the greatest danger; and this is pursued not on the philosophical side so much as on that of religious forms. We have already seen both at work in Colosse, as I have just pointed out the snare that the wisdom of the world was to the Corinthians. But on the Hebrews he presses their excessive danger of abandoning Christ for religious traditions. First of all these hinder progress; finally they draw the soul aside from grace and truth; and, if the mighty power of God does not interfere, they ruin. This had been the course of some: they had better be watchful that it be not their own case. He begins gently with their state of infantine feebleness; and then in the beginning of the following chapter he sets before them the awful picture of apostasy.

For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil {Heb. 5:13, 14}.

Therefore, (adds he, in Heb. 6)

leaving the word of the beginning of Christ, let us go on to perfection {Heb. 6:1}.

He proves that we cannot safely linger among the Jewish elements when we have heard and received Christian truth; that not merely blessing, not simply power and enjoyment, but the only place even of safety is in going on to this full growth. To stop short for them was to go back. Let those that had heard of Christ return to the forms of Judaism, and what would become of them?

Then he speaks of the various constituents that make up the word of the beginning of Christ (i.e., Christ known short of death, resurrection, and ascension). He would have them advance,

not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and faith in God, of a teaching of washings and imposition of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment {Heb. 6:1, 2}.

Not that these were not true and important in their place: no one disputed them; but they were in no way the power, nor even characteristic, of Christianity. They go in pairs; and a mere Jew would hardly object; but what is all this for the Christian? Why live on such points?

And this (i.e. going on to full growth)

will we do if God permit. For it is impossible [as to] those once enlightened, and that tasted the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and that tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and fell away, to renew [them] again to repentance, seeing they crucify for themselves and expose the Son of God {Heb. 6:3-6}.

It is a question of persons drawn into apostasy after having enjoyed every privilege and power of the gospel, short of a new nature and that indwelling of the Spirit which seals renewed souls till the day of redemption. For them rejecting the Messiah on earth under Judaism God gave repentance and remission of sins; but if they gave up the risen and glorified Christ, there was no provision of grace, no third estate of Christ to meet the case. It is not the case of a person surprised into sin; nay, not even the very awful case of one who may go on in sin, sorrowful to think that it may be so with one of whom we had hoped better things. But here there is another evil altogether. They were those who might be ever so correct, moral, religious, but who, having confessed Jesus as the Christ after the outpouring of the Spirit, had lapsed back into Jewish elements, counting it perhaps a wise and wholesome check on a too rapid advance, instead of seeing that in principle it was an abandonment of Christ altogether. The full case here supposed is a thorough renunciation of Christian truth.

The apostle describes a confessor with all the crowning evidences of the gospel, but not a converted man. Not a word implies this either here or in 2 Peter. Short of this he uses uncommonly strong expressions, and purposely so: he sets forth the possession of the highest possible external
privileges, and this in that abundant form and measure which God gave on the ascension of the Lord. He says it all, no doubt, about the baptized; but there is nothing about baptism as the ancients would have it, any more than, with some moderns, the progressive steps of the spiritual life. There is knowledge, joy, privilege, and power, but no spiritual life. Enlightenment is in no sense the new birth, nor does baptism in scripture ever mean illumination. It is the effect of the gospel on the dark soul -- the shining on the mind of Him who is the only true light. But light is not life; and life is not predicated here.

Further, they had tasted of the heavenly gift {Heb. 6:4}. It is not the Messiah as He was preached when the disciples went about here below, but Christ after He went on high; not Christ after the flesh, but Christ risen and glorified above.

But, again, they were made partakers of the Holy Ghost {Heb. 6:4}. Of Him every one became a partaker, who confessed the Lord and entered into the house of God. There the Holy Ghost dwelt; and all who were there became partakers after an outward sort (not χορηχοι but μεταχορηχοι) of Him who constituted the assembly of God's habitation and temple. He pervaded, as it were, the whole atmosphere of the house of God. It is not in the least a question of a person individually born of God, and so sealed by the Holy Spirit. There is not an allusion to either in this case, but to their taking a share in this immense privilege, the word not being that which speaks of a joint known portion, but only of getting a share.

Moreover, they tasted the good word of God {Heb. 6:5}. Even an unconverted man might feel strong emotions, and enjoy to a certain extent, more particularly those that had lain in Judaism, that dreary valley of dry bones. What fared was the gospel of grace! Certainly nothing could be more miserable than the scraps which the scribes and Pharisees put before the sheep of the house of Israel. There is nothing to forbid the natural mind from being attracted by the delightful sweetness of the glad-tidings which Christianity proclaims.

Lastly, we hear of the powers of the age to come {Heb. 6:5}. This seems more than a general share in the presence of the Holy Ghost, who inhabited the house of God. They were positively endowed with miraculous energies -- samples of that which will characterize the reign of the Messiah. Thus we may fairly give the fullest force to every one of these expressions. Yet write them out ever so largely, they fall short both of the new birth and of sealing with the Holy Ghost. There is everything, one may say, save inward spiritual life in Christ, or the indwelling seal of it. That is to say, one may have the very highest endowments and privileges, in the way both of meeting the mind, and also of exterior power; and yet all may be given up, and the man become so much the keener enemy of Christ. Indeed such is the natural result. It had been the mournful fact as to some. They had fallen away. Hence renewal to repentance is an impossibility, seeing they crucify for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame.

Why impossible? The case supposed is of persons, after the richest proof and privilege, turning aside apostates from Christ, in order to take up Judaism once more. As long as that course is pursued, repentance there cannot be. Supposing a man had been the adversary of Messiah here below, there was still the opening for him of grace from on high. It was possible that the very man that had slighted Christ here below might have his eyes opened to see and receive Christ above; but, this abandoned, there is no fresh condition in which He can be presented to men. Those who rejected Christ in all the fulness of His grace, and in the height of glory in which God had set Him as man before them, -- those that rejected Him not merely on earth, but in heaven, what was there to fall back on? what possible means to bring them to a repentance after that? There is none. What is there but Christ coming in judgment? Now apostasy, sooner or later, must fall under that judgment. Such is the force of the comparison.

For land which hath drunk in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing: whose end is for burning {Heb. 6:7, 8}. But we are persuaded better things of you, beloved {Heb. 6:9}.

There might seem too much ground for fear, but of the two ends he was persuaded respecting them the better things, and akin to salvation, if even he thus spoke: for God was not unrighteous, and the apostle too remembered traits of love and devotedness which gave him this confidence about them. But, says he,

We earnestly desire that each of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: that ye be not slothful, but followers of those who through faith and longsuffering inherit the promises {Heb. 6:11, 12}.

Here is given a remarkable instance of the true character of the epistle; namely, the combination of two features peculiar to the Hebrews. On the one hand are the promises, the oath of God, taking up His ways with Abraham; and, on the other hand, the hope set before us, that enters into what is within the veil. We may account for the former, because the writer was not confining himself to that which fell within the proper sphere of his apostleship. But, again, had he been writing according to his ordinary place, nothing was more strictly his line of testimony than to have dwelt on our hope that enters within the veil. The peculiarity of the epistle to the Hebrews lies in combining the promises with Christ's heavenly glory. None but Paul, I believe, would have been suited to bring in the heavenly portion. At the same time, only in writing to the Hebrews could Paul have brought in the Old Testament hopes as he has done.

Another point of interest which may be remarked here is the intimation at the end compared with the beginning of the chapter. We have seen the highest external privileges -- not only the mind of man, as far as it could, enjoying the truth,
but the power of the Holy Ghost making the man, at any rate, 
an instrument of power, even though it be to his own shame 
and deeper condemnation afterwards. In short, man may have 
the utmost conceivable advantage, and the greatest external 
power even of the Spirit of God Himself; and yet all comes 
to nothing. But the very same chapter, which affirms and 
warns of the possible failure of every advantage, shows us the 
weakest faith that the whole New Testament describes coming 
into the secure possession of the best blessings of grace. Who 
but God could have dictated that this same chapter (Heb. 6) 
should depict the weakest faith that the New Testament ever 
acknowledges? What can look feeblier, what more desperately 
pushed, than a man fleeing for refuge? It is not a soul as 
coming to Jesus; it is not as one whom the Lord meets and 
blesses on the spot; but here is a man hard pushed, fleeing for 
very life (evidently a figure drawn from the blood-stained 
fleeing from the avenger of blood), yet eternally saved and 
blessed according to the acceptance of Christ on high.

There was no reality found to be in those so highly 
favoured of the early verses; and therefore it was (as there 
was no conscience before God, no sense of sin, no cleaving 
to Christ) that everything came to nought; but here there is 
the fruit of faith, feeble indeed and sorely tried, but in the 
light that appreciates the judgment of God against sin. Hence, 
although it be only fleeing in an agony of soul to refuge, what 
is it that God gives to one in such a state? Strong consolation, 
and that which enters within the veil. Impossible that the Son 
should be shaken from His place on the throne of God: so is 
it that the least believer should come to any hurt whatever. 
The weakest of saints more than conqueror is; and therefore 
the apostle, having brought us to this glorious point of 
conclusion, as well as shown us the awful danger of men 
giving up such a Christ as that which we have presented to us 
in this epistle, now finds himself free to unfold the character 
of His priesthood, as well as the resulting position of the 
Christian. But on these I hope to enter, if the Lord will, on 
another occasion.
Lectures Introductory
to the Study of
The Epistles of Paul The Apostle

Lecture 12
Hebrews 7 – 13

The apostle now resumes his great theme, Christ called a Priest of God for ever after the order of Melchisedec. He alludes, in the beginning of our chapter, to the historical facts of Genesis. We must bear in mind that Melchisedec was a man like any other. There is no ground, in my judgment, for the thought of anything mysterious in the facts as to his person. The manner in which scripture introduces him is such as to furnish a very striking type of Christ. There is no necessity for considering anything else, but that the Spirit of God, forecasting the future, was pleased to conceal the line of Melchisedec’s parentage, or descendants if any, of their birth or death. He is suddenly ushered upon the scene. He has not been heard of by the reader before; he is never heard of again in history. Thus the only time when he comes into notice he is acting in the double capacity here spoken of: King of righteousness as to his name, King of Salem as to his place, blessing Abraham on his return from the victory over the kings of the Gentiles in the name of the Most High God, and blessing the Most High God the possessor of heaven and earth in the name of Abraham.

The apostle does not dwell on the detailed application of His Melchisedec priesthood, as to the object and character of its exercise. He does not draw attention here to the account, that there was only blessing from man to God, and from God to man. He does not reason from the singular circumstance that there was no incense, any more than sacrifice. He alludes to several facts, but leaves them. The point to which he directs the reader is the evident and surpassing dignity of the case -- the unity too of the Priest and the priesthood; and this for an obvious reason.

The time for the proper exercise of the Melchisedec priesthood of Christ is not yet arrived. The millennial day will see this. The battle which Abraham fought, the first recorded one in scripture, is the type of the last battle of this age. It is the conflict which introduces the reign of peace founded on righteousness, when God will manifest Himself as the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth. This is, as is well known, the special characteristic of the millennium. Heaven and earth have not been united, nor have they been in fact possessed for the blessing of man by the power of God, since sin severed between the earth and that which is above it, and the prince of the power of the air perverted all, so that what should have been, according to God’s nature and counsels, the source of every blessing, became rather the point from which the guilty conscience of man cannot but look for judgment. Heaven, therefore, by man’s own conviction, must be arrayed in justice against earth because of sin. But the day is coming when Israel shall be no more rebellious, and the nations shall be no longer deceived, and Satan shall be dethroned from his bad eminence, and all idols shall flee apace, and God shall be left the undisputed and evidently Most High, the possessor of heaven and earth. In that day it will be the joy of of Him who is the true Melchisedec, to bring out not the mere signs, but the reality of all that can be the stay and comfort of man, and all that sustains and cheers, the patent proof of the beneficent might of God, when

no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly {Psa. 84:11}.

But meanwhile, confessedly, the Spirit of God directs attention, not to the exercise, but to the order of the Melchisedec Priest. If we have to wait for the exercise at a future day, the order is as true and plain now as it ever can be. Indeed, at no time will its order be more apparent than at present; for I think there can be little doubt to any unbiased Christian who enters with intelligence into the Old Testament prophecies, that there is yet to be an earthly sanctuary, and, consequently, earthly priests and sacrifices for Israel in their own land; that the sons of Zadok, as Ezekiel lets us know, will perpetuate the line at the time when the Lord shall be owned to be there, in the person of the true David their King, blessing His people long distressed but now joyful on earth. But this time is not yet come. There is nothing to divert the heart from Christ, the great High Priest in the heavens. No doubt all will be good and right in its due season then. Meanwhile Christianity gives the utmost force to every type and truth of God. The undivided place of Christ is more fully witnessed now, when there are no others to occupy the thought or to distract the heart from Him, as seen by faith in glory on high.

Hence the apostle applies the type distinctly now, as far as the order {Heb. 7:2, 3} of the priesthood goes. We hear first of Melchisedec (King of righteousness), next of Salem or peace; without father, without mother, without genealogy. Unlike others in Genesis, neither parents are recorded, nor is there any hint of descent from him. In short, there is no mention of family or ancestors,

having neither beginning of days, nor end of life
-- neither is recorded in scripture; --
but made like unto the Son of God, abideth a priest continually [Heb. 7:3].

The next point proved is the indisputable superiority of the Melchisedec priesthood to that of Aaron, of which the Jews naturally boasted. After all, the telling fact was before them that, whoever wrote the epistle to the Hebrews, it was not a Christian who wrote the book of Genesis, but Moses; and Moses bears witness to the homage which Abram rendered to Melchisedec by the payment of tithes. On the other hand, the priests, Aaron’s family, among the sons of Levi,

have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is of their brethren, though

they come out of the loins of Abraham {Heb. 7:5}.

Thus Melchisedec,

whose descent is not of Aaron nor of Levi,

like Jesus,

received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had

the promises! {Heb. 7:6}.

And without all contradiction the less is blessed of

the better {Heb. 7:7}.

No argument could be more distinct or conclusive. The other descendants of Abraham honoured the house of Aaron as Levitical priests; but Abraham himself, and so Levi himself, and of course Aaron, in his loins honoured Melchisedec.

Thus another and a higher priesthood was incontestably acknowledged by the father of the faithful.

And, as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth
tithes, payed tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in
the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him
{Heb. 7:9, 10}.

This leads to another point; for the change of the
priesthood imports a change of the law.

If therefore perfection were by the Levitical
priesthood, (for under it the people received the
law,) what further need was there that another priest
should rise after the order of Melchisedec; and not
be called after the order of Aaron? {Heb. 7:11}.

This change was clearly taught in the book of Psalms. It was not only that there had been at the beginning such a priest, but that fact became the form of a glorious anticipation which the Holy Ghost holds out for the latter day. Psa. 110, which, as all the Jews owned, spoke, throughout its greater part at least, of the Messiah and His times, shows us Jehovah Himself -- by an oath, which is afterwards reasoned on -- signifying that another priest should arise after a different order from that of Aaron.

The priesthood being changed, there is made of
necessity a change also of the law. For he of whom
these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of
which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is
evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood.
And it is yet far more evident: for that after the
similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest
{Heb. 7:12, 15}.

Thus the Pentateuch and the Psalms bore their double
testimony to a Priest superior to the Aaronic.

Further, that this Priest was to be a living one, in some
most singular manner to be an undying Priest, was made
evident beyond question, because in that Psalm it is said,

He testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the
order of Melchisedec {Heb. 7:17}.

This was also a grand point of distinction. Where could they
find such a Priest? where one competent to take up that word
for ever?

Such was the Priest of whom God spoke.

For,

there is verily a disannulling of the commandment
going before for the weakness and unprofitableness
thereof (for the law made nothing perfect)
{Heb. 7:18, 19}.

He uses in the most skilful manner the change of the priest,
in order to bring along with it a change of the law, the whole
Levitical system passing away --

but [there is] the bringing in of a better hope.

Such is the true sense of the passage.

For the law made nothing perfect

is a parenthesis. By that hope, then,

we draw nigh unto God {Heb. 7:19}.

But again the solemn notice of Jehovah’s oath is enlarged

on.

Inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest:
(for those priests were made without an oath

-- no oath ushers in the sons of Aaron --

but he with an oath by him that said as to him, The
Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for
ever after the order of Melchisedec;) by so much was
Jesus made a surety of a better covenant
{Heb. 7:20-22}.

And, finally, he sums up the superiority of Christ in this, that

they truly were many priests, because they were not
suffered to continue by reason of death: but he,
because of his continuing for ever, hath the
priesthood intransmissible {Heb. 7:23, 24}.

There was but one such Priest.

In every point of view, therefore, the superiority of the
Melchisedec priest was demonstrated over the line of Aaron.
The fulfilment of the Melchisedec order is found in Christ,
and in Him alone. The Jews themselves acknowledge that
Psalm 110 must be fulfilled in Christ, in His quality of Messiah. Nothing but stupid, obstinate, unbelieving
prejudice, after the appearance of the Lord Jesus, could have
suggested any other application of the Psalm. Before Jesus
came, there was no question of it among the Jews. So little
was it a question, that our Lord could appeal to its
acknowledged meaning, and press the difficulty His person
created for unbelief. By their own confession the application
of that Psalm was to the Messiah, and the very point that
Jesus urged upon the Jews of His day was this -- how, if He
were David’s Son, as they agreed, could He be his Lord, as
the Psalmist David confesses? This shows that, beyond question, among the Jews of that day, Psa. 110 was understood to refer to the Christ alone. But if so, He was the Priest after the order of Melchisedec, as well as seated at Jehovah's right hand -- a cardinal truth of Christianity, the import of which the Jews did not receive in their conception of the Messiah. Hence throughout this epistle the utmost stress is laid on His being exalted in heaven. Yet there was no excuse for a difficulty on this score. Their own Psalm, in its grand prophetic sweep, and looking back on the law, pointed to the place in which Christ is now seated above; and where it is of necessity He should be, in order to give Christianity its heavenly character.

The doctrine follows:

Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost.

He does not mean by this the worst of sinners, but saving believers to the uttermost, bringing through every difficulty those that come unto God by him.

A priest is always in connection with the people of God, never as such with those that are outside, but a positive known relation with God --

seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens {Heb. 7:25, 26}.

This statement is so much the more remarkable, because in the beginning of this epistle he had pointed out what became God. It became Him that Christ should suffer. It became us to have a Priest,

holy, harmless, undefiled, made higher than the heavens.

What infinite thoughts are those that God's word gives; as glorifying for Himself as elevating for our souls! Yet who beforehand would have anticipated either? It became God that Christ should go down to the uttermost; it became as that He should be exalted to the highest. And why? Because Christians are a heavenly people, and none but a heavenly Priest would suit them. It became God to give Him to die; for such was our estate by sin that nothing short of His atoning death could deliver us; but, having delivered us, God would make us to be heavenly. None but a heavenly Priest would suffice for the counsels He has in hand.

Who needeth not daily, therefore says He,

as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's {Heb. 7:27}.

He always keeps up the evidence of the utter inferiority of the Jewish priest, as well as of the accompanying state of things, to that of Christianity.

For this he did once, when he offered up himself.

For the law maketh men priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath which was since the law, a Son perfected (or consecrated) for ever {Heb. 7:27, 28}.

This was the very difficulty that the Jew pleaded; but now, in point of fact, it was only what the Psalm of Messiah insisted on, the law itself bearing witness of a priest superior to any under the law. Holy Scripture then demanded that a man should sit down at the right hand of God. It was accomplished in Christ, exalted as the great Melchisedec in heaven. If they were Abraham's children, and not his seed only, surely they would honour Him.

◆◆◆

Hence, in Heb. 8, the apostle draws his conclusion.

Now of the things that are being spoken of this is a summary: We have such an high priest, who is set down on [the] right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the holies, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man {Heb. 8:1, 2}.

In Heb. 1 it is written, that having by himself made purification of our sins, he sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high {Heb. 1:3}.

The point there is personal glory. No other seat was suitable to such a One. He sat down there as of His own right and title, but nevertheless making a part of His divine glory to be witnessed in, as indeed His person was necessary to make His blood efficacious to the purging of our sins. But in Heb. 8 He sits there not merely as the proof of the perfectness with which He has purged our sins by Himself alone, but as the Priest; and accordingly it is not merely said “on high,” but in the heavens.

Such is the emphasis. Accordingly observe the change of expression. He has been proved to be a divine person, and the true royal priest of whom not Aaron only but Melchisedec was the type. Hence the right hand of the throne is introduced, but, besides,

of the Majesty in the heavens.

So that, let the Jews say what they might, there was only found what answered to their own scriptures, and what proved the incontestable superiority of the great Priest whom Melchisedec shadowed out, and of whom it was now for the Christian justly to boast. He is minister of the holies and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not of man.

Now the tone becomes bolder with them, and shows clearly that the Jew had but an empty form, a foreshadow of value once, but now superseded by the true antitype in the heavens.

Here, too, he begins to introduce what a priest does, that is, the exercise of his functions.

For every high priest is constituted to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer. For if he were on earth, he should not even be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: who serve the representation and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was oracularly told when about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern that was shown to thee in the mountain. But now hath he
obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant (Heb. 8:3-6).

Thus, before he enters on the subject of the sacrifices at length, he takes notice of the covenants, and thence he draws a conclusion from the well-known prophecy in Jeremiah, where God declares that the days were coming when He would make a new covenant. What is the inference from that? He presses the fact of a new principle, as well as an institution established on better promises, upon the Jews. For why should there be a new covenant, unless because the first was faulty or ineffectual? What was the necessity for a new covenant if the old one would do as well? According to the Jews it was quite impossible, if God had once established a covenant, He could ever change; but the apostle replies that their own prophet is against their theory. Jeremiah positively declares that God will make a new covenant. He argues that the word

new (Jer. 31:31)

puts the other out of date, and this to make room for a better. A new covenant shows that the other must have thereby become old, and therefore is decaying and ready to vanish away.

All this is a gradual undermining the wall until the whole structure is overthrown. He is labouring for this, and with divine skill accomplishes it, by the testimonies of their own law and prophets. He does not require to add more to the person and facts of Christ than the Old Testament furnishes, to prove the certainty of Christianity and all its characteristic truths with which he occupies himself in this epistle. I say not absolutely all its great truths. Were it a question of the mystery of Christ the Head, and of the church His body, this would not be proved from the Old Testament, which does not reveal it at all. It was hid in God from ages and generations {Col. 1:26}. There are types that suit the mystery when it is revealed, but of themselves they never could make it known, though illustrating particular parts when it is. But whether we look at the heavenly supremacy of Christ over the universe, which is the highest part of the mystery, or at the church associated with Him as His body, composed of both Jew and Gentile, where all distinction is gone, no wit of man ever did or could possibly draw this beforehand from the Old Testament. Indeed, not being revealed of old, according to the apostle, it is altogether a mistake to go to the Old Testament for that truth.

Hence in Hebrews we never find the body of Christ as such referred to. We have the church, but even when the expression

church

occurs, it is the church altogether vaguely, as in Heb. 2:12, or viewed in the units that compose it -- not at all in its unity. It is the assembly composed of certain individuals that make it up, regarded either as brethren, as in the second chapter {Heb. 2:11}

(In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee {Heb. 2:12}),

or as the church of the first-born ones, as in Heb. 12:23,

persons who drew their title from Christ the first-born Heir. There we have those that compose the church, in allusion to Christ, contrasted with the position of Israel as a nation, because of the nearness which they possess by the grace of Christ known on high.

It may be observed, too, that the Holy Ghost appears but little in this epistle. Not of course that one denies that He has His own proper place, for all is perfect as to each person of the Trinity and all else, but never to this end. For a similar reason we never find life treated in the epistle, nor righteousness. It is not a question of justification here. We hear of sanctification often, but even what is thus spoken of throughout is rather in connexion with separation to God and the work of Christ, than the continuous energy of the Holy Ghost, except, as far as I remember, in one practical passage

Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord {Heb. 12:14}.

In other cases the epistle to the Hebrews speaks of sanctification by God’s call, and Christ’s blood. I refer to the fact just to exemplify on the one hand the true bearing of the epistle, and what I believe will be discovered in it, and on the other hand to guard against the mistake of importing into it, or trying to extract from it, what is not there.

Heb. 9 brings us into the types of the Levitical ritual, priesthood and sacrifice. Before developing these, the apostle refers to the tabernacle itself in which these sacrifices were offered.

There was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; which is called holy. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called holy of holies; which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold {Heb. 9:2-4}.

Carefully observe that it is the tabernacle, never the temple. The latter is not referred to, because it represents the millennial glory; the former is, because it finds its proper fulfilment in that which is made good in the Christian scheme now. This supposes the people of God not actually settled in the land, but still pilgrims and strangers on the earth; and the epistle to the Hebrews, we have already seen, looks emphatically and exclusively at the people of God as not yet passed out of the wilderness; never as brought into the land, though it might be on the verge; just entering, but not actually entered. There remains, therefore, a sabbath-keeping for the people of God. Thither they are to be brought, and there are means for the road to keep us moving onward. But meanwhile we have not yet entered on the rest of God. It remains. Such is a main point, not of Heb. 4 only, but of the epistle. It was the more urgent to insist on it, because the Jews, like others, would like to have been settled in rest here and now. This is natural and pleasant to the flesh, no doubt; but it is precisely what opposes the whole object of God in Christianity, since Christ went on high till He come again, and therefore the path of faith to which the children of God are called.

Accordingly, then, as suitting this pilgrim-path of the Christian, the tabernacle is referred to, and not the temple. And this is the more remarkable, because his language is
essentially of the actual state of what was going on in the
temple; but he always calls it the tabernacle. In truth, the
substratum was the same, and therefore it was not only quite
lawful so to call it, but if he had not, the design would have
been marred. But this shows the main object of the Spirit of
God in directing us for the type that applies to the believer
now to an unsettled pilgrim-condition, not to Israel
established in the land of promise.

To what, then, is the allusion to the sanctuary applied?
To mark that as yet the veil was unrent.

Into the second [goes] the high priest alone once
every year, not without blood, which he offered for
himself, and for the errors of the people: the Holy
Ghost this signifying, that the way of the holies was
not yet made manifest, while as yet the first
tabernacle was standing: which is a figure for the
present time, according to which are offered both
gifts and sacrifices that could not, as pertaining to the
conscience, make him that did the religious service
perfect; which stood only in meats and drinks, and
divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on
them until the time of reformation [Heb. 9:7-10].

With all this Christianity is contrasted.

But Christ being come a high priest of good things to
come, by the better and more perfect tabernacle, not
made with hands, that is, not of this creation, nor by
blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood
entered in once into the holies, having obtained
eternal redemption [Heb. 9:11, 12].

Here the words “for us” had better be left out. They really
mar the sense, because they draw attention not to the truth in
itself so much as its application to us, which is not the point
in Heb. 9, but rather of Heb. 10. Here it is the grand truth
itself in its own character. What is the value, the import, of
the sacrifice of Christ viewed according to God, and as
bearing on His ways? This is the fact. Christ has gone into
the presence of God,
having obtained eternal redemption.

For whom it may be is another thing, of which he will speak
by-and-by. Meanwhile we are told that He has obtained (not
a temporary, but)
eternal redemption.

It is that which infinitely exceeds the deliverance out of
Egypt, or any ceremonial atonement ever wrought by a high
priest for Israel. Christ has obtained redemption, and this is
witnessed by the token of the veil rent from top to bottom.
The unrent veil bore evidence on its front that man could not
yet draw near into the holiest -- that he had no access into the
presence of God. This is of the deepest importance. It did not
matter whether it was a priest or an Israelite. A priest, as
such, could no more draw near into the presence of God in
the holiest than any of the common people. Christianity is
stamped by this, that, in virtue of the blood of Christ, once
for all for every believer the way is made manifest into the
holiest of all. The veil is rent: the believer can draw near, as
is shown in Heb. 10; but meanwhile it is merely pointed out
that there is no veil now, eternal redemption being obtained.

Thus does the apostle reason on it:

For if the blood of bulls and goats, and the ashes of
an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the
purifying of the flesh
(which the Jew would not contest):

how much more shall the blood of Christ, who
through the eternal Spirit offered himself without
spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works
to do religious service to the living God? And for
this cause he is mediator of the new covenant, that
by means of death, for redemption of the
transgressions under the first covenant, the called
might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance
{Heb. 9:13-15}.

Thus the power of what Christ had wrought was now brought
in for future ends; it was not merely retrospective, but above
all in present efficacy while the Jews refuse Christ.

The allusion in the last clause to the eternal inheritance
(for everything is eternal in the Hebrews, standing in decided
contrast with Jewish things which were but for a season)
leads the Holy Spirit to take up the other meaning of the same
word, which was and is rightly enough translated covenant.
At first sight every one may have been surprised, especially
those that read the New Testament in the language in which
God wrote it, at the double meaning of the word which is
here translated
covenant.

It (διαθήκη) means “testament” as well as “covenant.” In
point of fact the English translators did not know what to
make of the matter; for they give sometimes one, sometimes
the other, without any apparent reason for it, except to vary
the phrase. In my judgment it is correct to translate it both
ways, never arbitrarily, but according to context. There is
nothing capricious about the usage. There are certain
surroundings which indicate to the competent eye when the
word “covenant” is right and when the word “testament” is
better.

It may then be stated summarily, in few words, unless I
am greatly mistaken, that the word should always be
translated “covenant” in every part of the New Testament,
except in these two verses; namely, Heb. 9:16, 17. If,
therefore, when you find the word “testament” anywhere else
in the authorized version, you turn it into “covenant,” in my
opinion you will not do amiss. If in these two verses we bear
in mind that it really means “testament,” growing out of the
previous mention of the “inheritance.” I am persuaded that
you will have better understanding of the argument. In short,
the word in itself may mean either; but this is no proof that it
may indifferently or without adequate reason be translated
both ways. The fact is, that love of uniformity may mislead
some, as love of variety misled our English translators too
often. It is hard to keep clear of both. Every one can
understand, when once we find that the word means almost
always “covenant,” how great the temptation is to translate
it so in but two other occurrences, especially as before and
after it means “covenant” in the same passage. But why
should it be “testament” in these two verses alone, and
“covenant” in all other places? The answer is, that the
language is peculiar and precise in these same two verses,
requiring not a covenant but a testament, and therefore the sense of testament here is the preferable one, and not covenant. The reasons will be given in a moment.

First of all, as has been hinted, that which suggests "testament" is the end of verse 15 --

They which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance {Heb. 9:15}.

How is it that anybody ordinarily gets an inheritance? By a testament, to be sure, as every one knows. Such has been the usual form in all countries not savage, and in all ages. No figure therefore would be more natural than that, if God intended certain persons called to have an inheritance, there should be a testament about the matter. Accordingly advantage is taken of an unquestionable meaning of the word for this added illustration, which is based on the death of Christ,

Where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator {Heb. 9:16}.

That the word (διαθέμενος) in this connection means "testator" appears to me beyond just question. I am not aware that it is, nor do I believe that it could be, ever used in such a sense as "covenanting victim," for which some contend. It often means one who arranged or disposed of property, or anything else, such as a treaty or covenant.

Let us next apply the word "covenant" here, and you will soon see the insuperable difficulties into which you are plunged. If you say, "For where a covenant is, there must also of necessity be the death of the covenanter" -- the person. Now is it an axiom, that a covenant-maker must die to give it force? It is quite evident, on the contrary, that this is not only not the truth which all recognize when stated, but altogether inconsistent with the Bible, with all books, and with all experience. In all the covenants of scripture the man that makes it has never to die for any such end. Indeed both should die; for it usually consists of two parties who are thus bound, and therefore, were the maxim true, both ought to die, which is an evident absurdity.

The consequence is, that many have tried (and I remember making efforts of that kind myself, until convinced that it could not succeed) to give ὅ διαθέμενος, in the English Bible rightly rendered "the testator," the force of the covenanting victim. But the answer to this is, that there is not a single writer in the language, not sacred only but profane, who employs it in such a sense. Those therefore that so translate our two verses have invented a meaning for the phrase, instead of accepting its legitimate sense as attested by all the monuments of the Greek tongue; whereas the moment that we give it the meaning assigned here rightly by the better translators, that is, the sense of "testator" and "testament," all runs with perfect smoothness, and with striking aptitude.

He is showing us the efficacy of Christ's death. He demonstrates its vicarious nature and value from the sacrifices so familiar to all then, and to the Jew particularly, in connection with the covenant that required them. Now his rapid mind seizes, under the Spirit's guidance, the other well-known sense of the word, namely, as a testamentary disposition, and shows the necessity of Christ's death to bring it into force. It is true that victims were sometimes slain in ratifying a covenant, and thus were the seal of that covenant; but, first, they were not essential; and, secondly and chiefly, ὅ διαθέμενος, the covenant or contracting party had in no case to die in order to make the contract valid. On the other hand it is notoriously true, that in no case can a testament come into execution without the testator's death -- a figure that every man at once discerns. There must be the death of him who so disposes of his property in order that the heir should take it under his testament. Which of these two most commends itself as the unforced meaning of the passage it is for the reader to judge. And observe that it is assumed to be so common and obvious a maxim that it could not be questioned.

For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator {Heb. 9:16}.

The addition of this last clause as a necessary condition confirms the sense assigned. Had he merely referred to the covenant (i.e. the sense of the word which had been used before), what would be the aim of the "also?" It is just what he had been speaking of throughout, if covenant were still meant. Apply it to Christ's death as the testator, and nothing can be plainer or more forcible. The death of Christ, both in the sense of a victim sacrificed, and of a testator, though a double figure, is evident to all, and tends to the self-same point.

For a testament is of force after men are dead (or, in case of dead men, ἐκτὸς νεκροῖς): since it is never of force when the testator liveth {Heb. 9:17}.

But now, returning from this striking instance of Paul's habit of going off at a word (διαθήκην), let us resume the regular course of the apostle's argument.

Whereupon neither the first [covenant] was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself, and all the people, saying, This [is] the blood of the covenant which God hath enjoined unto you. And he sprinkled likewise with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. And almost all things are according to the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. It was therefore necessary that the representations of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ is not entered into holies made with hands, figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear before the face of God for us {Heb. 9:18-24}.

Thus distinctly have we set before us the general doctrine of the chapter, -- that Christ has suffered but once, and has been offered but once; that the offering cannot be severed from the suffering. If He is to be often offered, He must also often suffer. The truth on the contrary is, that there was but one offering and but one suffering of Christ, once for all; in witness of the perfection of which He is gone into the presence of God, there to appear for us. Thus it will be observed, at the end of all the moral and experimental
dealings with the first man (manifested in Israel), we come to a deeply momentous point, as in God’s ways, so in the apostle’s reasoning. Up to this time man was the object of those ways; it was simply, and rightly of course, a probation. Man was tried by all sorts of tests from time to time. God knew perfectly well, and even declared here and there, the end from the beginning; but He would make it manifest to every conscience, that all He got from man in these His varied dealings was sin. Then comes a total change: God
takes up the matter Himself, acting in view of man’s sin; but in Jesus, in the very Messiah for whom the Jews were waiting, He has put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and has accomplished this mighty work, as admirably befitting the goodness of God, as it alone descends low enough to reach the vilest man, and yet deliver him with a salvation which only the more humbles man and glorifies God. For now God came out, so to speak, in His own power and grace, and, in the person of Christ on the cross, put away sin -- abolished it from before His face, and set the believer absolutely free from it as regards judgment.

But now once in the consummation of the ages
{Heb. 9:26},
this is the meaning of the end of the world;
it is the consummation of those dispensations for bringing out what man was. Man’s worst sin culminated in the death of Christ who knew no sin; but in that very death He put away sin. Christ, therefore, goes into heaven, and will come again apart from sin. He has nothing more to do with sin; He will judge man who rejects Himself and slights sin, as He will appear to the salvation of His own people.

And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation {Heb. 9:27, 28}.

It is perfectly true that, if we think of Christ, He was here below absolutely without sin; but He who was without sin in His person, and all His life, had everything to do with sin on the cross, when God made Him to be sin for us. The atonement was at least as real as our sin; and God Himself dealt with Christ as laying sin upon Him, and treating Him, the Great Substitute, as sin before Himself, that at one blow it might be all put away from before His face. This He has done, and done with. Now accordingly, by virtue of His death which rent the veil, God and man stand face to face. What, then, is man’s actual estate?

As it is appointed unto men once to die,
-- wages of sin, though not all, --
but after this the judgment,
or the full wages of sin, --
so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many;
-- this He has finished; --
and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

He will have nothing more to do with sin. He has so absolutely swept it away for those who believe on Him, that when He comes again, there will be no question of judgment, as far as they are concerned, but only of salvation, in the sense of their being cleared from the last relic or result of sin, even for the body. Indeed it is only the body that is here spoken of. As far as the soul is concerned, Christ would not go up to heaven until sin was abrogated before God. Christ is doing nothing there to take away sin; nor when He comes again will He touch the question of sin, because it is a finished work. Christ Himself could not add to the perfectness of that sacrifice by which He has put away sin. Consequently, when He comes again to them that look for Him, it is simply to bring them into all the eternal results of that great salvation.

In Heb. 10 he applies the matter to the present state of the believer. He had shown the work of Christ, and His coming again in glory. What comes in between the two? Christianity. And here we learn the direct application. The Christian stands between the cross and the glory of the Lord Jesus. He rests confidingly on the cross, that only valid moral basis before God; at the same time he is waiting for the glory that is to be revealed.

For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins {Heb. 10:1, 2}.

No Jew could or ought to pretend to such purgation as its result.

I should like to ask whether (or how far) all the believers here assembled can take this as their place with simplicity. You, as a Christian, ought to have the calm settled consciousness that God, looking on you, discerns not one spot or stain, but only the blood of Jesus Christ His Son that cleanses from all sin. You ought to have the consciousness that there is no judgment for you with God by-and-by, however truly He, as a Father, judges you now on earth. How can such a consciousness as this be the portion of the Christian? Because the Holy Ghost bears this witness, and nothing less, to the perfectness of the work of Christ. If God’s word be true, and to this the Spirit adheres, the blood of Christ has thus perfectly washed away the sins of the believer. I mean his sins now; not sin as a principle, but in fact, though it be only for faith.

The worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.

It is not implied that they may not sin, or that they have no consciousness of their failure, either past or present.

Conscience of sins means a dread of God’s judging one because of his sins. For this, knowing His grace in the work of Christ for them, they do not look; on the contrary, they rest in the assurance of the perfection with which their sins are effaced by the precious blood of Christ.

This epistle insists on the blood of Christ, making all to
Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Epistles of Paul the Apostle

turn on that efficacious work for us. It was not so of old, when the Israelite brought his goat or calf.

In those sacrifices, referring to the law to which some Hebrew Christians were in danger of going back,

there is a remembrance made again of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins {Heb. 10:3, 4}.

Therefore all such recurring sacrifices only call sins to remembrance; but what the blood of Christ has done is so completely to blot them out, that God Himself says,

I will remember them no more {see Heb. 8:12}.

Accordingly he now turns to set forth the contrast between the weakness and the unavailingness of the Jewish sacrifices, which, in point of fact, only and always brought up sins again, instead of putting them away as does the sacrifice of Christ. In the most admirable manner he proves that this was what God was all along waiting for. First of all,

Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God {Heb. 10:5-7}.

There we find these two facts. First, in God’s counsels it was always before Him to have One more than man though a man to deal with this greatest of all transactions. There was but One that could do God’s will in that which concerned man’s deepest wants. Who was this One? Jesus alone. As for the first Adam and all his race, their portion was only death and judgment, because he was a sinner. But here is One who proffers Himself to come, and does come.

In the volume of the book it is written of me

-- a book which none ever saw but God and His Son. There it was written,

Lo, I come to do thy will, O God.

Redemption was the first thought of God -- a counsel of His previous to the dealings with man which made the necessity of redemption felt. God meant to have His will done, and thereby a people for Himself capable of enjoying His presence and His nature, where no question of sin or fall could ever enter.

First, He makes a scene where sin enters at once. Because His people had no heart for His promises; He imposed a system of law and ordinances that was unjudged in them, which provoked the sin and made it still more manifest and heinous. Then comes forth the wondrous counsel that was settled before either the sin of man, or the promises to the fathers, or the law which subsequently put man to the, test. And this blessed person, single-handed but according to the will of God, accomplishes that will in offering Himself on the cross.

So it is said here,

Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first

(that is, the law),

that he may establish the second {Heb. 10:9}.

(that is, God’s will, often unintelligently confounded by men with the law, which is here set in the most manifest contradiction). Next the apostle, with increasing boldness, comes to the proof from the Old Testament that the legal institution as a whole was to be set aside.

He taketh away the first.

Was this Paul’s doctrine? There it was in the Psalms. They could not deny it to be written in the fortieth psalm.

Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God {Heb. 10:5-7, see Psa. 40:6-8}.

All he does is to interpret that will, and to apply it to what was wrought on the cross.

By the which will

(not man’s, which is sin, but God’s)

we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all {Heb. 10:10}.

This leads to a further contrast with the action of theAaronic priest.

Every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: but this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God {Heb. 10:11-12}.

Jesus sits down in perpetuity. This is the meaning of the phrase, not that He will sit there throughout all eternity. Εἶς τὸ διηνεκές does not express eternity (which would be εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, or some such form of words) but “for continuance.” He sits there continually, in contrast with the Jewish priest, who was always rising up in order to do fresh work, because there was fresh sin; for their sacrifices never could absolutely put away sin. The fact was plain that the priest was always doing and doing, his work being never done; whereas now there is manifested, in the glorious facts of Christianity, a Priest sat down at God’s right hand, a Priest that has taken His place there expressly because our sins are blotted out by His sacrifice. If there was any place for the priest, one might have supposed, to be active in his functions, it would be in the presence of God, unless the sins were completely gone. But they are completely gone; and therefore at God’s right hand sits down He who is its witness.

How could this be disputed by one who simply believed Psa. 110? For there is seen not only the proof that the Messiah is the One whom God pronounced by an oath

a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec {Psa. 110:4},

but the glorious seat He has taken at the right hand of God is now worked into this magnificent pleading. Christianity turns everything to account. The Jew never understood his law until the light of Christ on the cross and in glory shone upon it. So here the Psalms acquire a meaning self-evidently true, the moment Christ is brought in, who is the truth, and nothing less. Accordingly we have the third use of the seat Christ has
taken. In Heb. 1 we saw the seat of personal glory connected with atonement; in Heb. 8 it is the witness of His priesthood, and where it is. Here it is the proof of the perpetual efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ. We shall find another use before we have done, which I hope to notice in its place.

But the Holy Ghost’s testimony is not forgotten. As it was God’s will and the work of Christ, so the Holy Ghost is He who witnesses to the perfection of it. It is also founded on one of their own prophets.

This is the covenant,
says he,
that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin [Heb. 10:16-18].

Then we hear of the practical use of all.

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holy by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our hope [for so it should be] without wavering (for he is faithful that promised); and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching [Heb. 10:19-25].

But the higher the privilege, the greater the danger of either despising or perverting it.

In the Heb. 6, we saw that the Spirit of God brings in a most solemn warning for those who turn their back on the power and presence of the Holy Ghost, as bearing witness of Christianity. Here the apostle warns those that turn their back on Christ’s one sacrifice. It is evident that in these we have the two main parts of Christianity. The foundation is sacrifice; the power is of the Holy Ghost. The truth is, that the Holy Ghost is come down for the purpose of bearing His witness; and he that deserts this for Judaism, or anything else, is an apostate and lost man. And is he better or safer that slights the sacrifice of the Son of God, and goes back either to earthly sacrifices or to lusts of flesh, giving a loose rein to sin, which is expressly what the Son of God shed His blood to put away? He who, having professed to value the blessing of God, abandons it, and rushes here below into the sins of the flesh knowingly and deliberately, is evidently no Christian at all. Accordingly it is shown that such an one becomes an adversary of the Lord, and God will deal with him as such.

As in Heb. 6 he declares that he is persuaded better things of them, than that they would abandon the Holy Ghost; so here he expected better things than that they would thus dishonour the sacrifice of Christ. In that case, he says, God was not unrighteous to forget their work and labour of love; in this case, he lets them know that he had not forgotten the way in which they had suffered for Christ. There it was more particularly the activity of faith; here it is the suffering of faith.

This leads into the life of faith, which was a great stumbling-block to some of these Christian Jews. They could not understand how it was they should come into greater trouble than before. They had never known so great and frequent and constant trial. It seemed as if everything went against them. They had looked for advance and triumph and peace and prosperity everywhere; on the contrary, they had come into reproach and shame, partly in their own persons, partly as becoming the companions of others who so suffered. But the apostle takes all this difficulty by the horns, as good as telling them, that their having suffered all this was simply because it is the right road. These two things, the cross on earth and glory on high, are correlative. As they are companions, so do they test a walk with God; one is faith, the other is suffering. This, he maintains, has always been so; it is no novelty he is preaching. Accordingly the epistle to the Hebrews, while it does put the believer in association with Christ, does not, for all this, dissociate him from whatever is good in the saints of God in every age. Hence the apostle takes care to keep up the real link with the past witnesses for God in faith and suffering, not in ordinances.

In the beginning of Heb. 11 we are told what faith is. It is --

the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen [Heb. 11:1].

It is no definition of what it is to believe, but a description of the qualities of faith.

For by it the elders obtained a good report [Heb. 11:2].

How could any believers put a slight upon it?

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God [Heb. 11:3] -- a simple but a most sublime truth, and one that man never really found out -- that we are entirely dependent on faith for after all. The wise men of the present day are fast giving up the truth of creation. They do not believe that God called all things into being. The greater number of them may use the word “creation,” but it must never be assumed that they mean what they say. It is wise and necessary to examine closely what they mean. Never was there a time when men used terms with a more equivocal design than at the present moment. Hence they apply some terms to the work of God in nature similar to what they apply to His work in grace. The favourite thought is “development,” and so they hold a development or genesis of matter, not a creation: matter continually progressing, in various forms, until at last it has progressed into these wise men of our day. This is precisely what modern research amounts to. It is the setting aside of God, and the setting up of man; it is the precursor of the apostasy that is coming, which again will issue in man taking the place of God, and becoming the object of worship, instead of the true Creator. Nor is it that redemption only is denied, but creation also; so that there is very great importance in maintaining the rights and the truth of God in creation.
Therefore it is well to stand clear of all men's schemes and thoughts, ever rising up more and more presumptuously, because they mainly consist of some slight in one way or another on the word of God. A simple word of scripture settles a thousand questions. What the wise men of antiquity, the Platos and Aristotles, never knew -- what the modern sages blunder about, without the slightest reason, after all -- the word of God has made the possession of every child of His.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth [Gen. 1:1].

There is no indulgence of human curiosity. We do not know the steps of His work, until we come to the preparation of an abode for man. Nothing can be more admirable than this reserve of God. We are not told the details of what preceded the great week when God made the man and the woman. I am not going to enter into any statement of facts as to this now, but there is no truth in its own place more important than that with which the apostle commences in this chapter, namely, that

through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God [Heb. 11:3].

It is not only that we believe it, but we understand it thereby. There is nothing more simple; at the same time it is just one of those questions that God has answered, and this so as to settle the mind perfectly, and fill the heart with praise. Man never did nor could settle it without the word of God. There is nothing here below so difficult for the natural mind; and for the simple reason that man can never rise above that which is caused. The reason is obvious -- because he is caused himself. Therefore is it that men so naturally slip into, or rest on, second causes. He is only one of a series of existing objects, and consequently never can rise above that in his own nature. He may infer that there must be; but he never can say that there is. Reason is ever drawing conclusions; God is, and reveals what is. I may, of course, see what is before my eyes, and may so far have sensible evidence of what exists now; but it is only God who can tell me that He in the beginning caused to be that which now is. God alone who spake it into being can pronounce upon it. This is just what the believer receives, feeds on, and lives accordingly.

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God.

It is possible that the word

worlds,

which is a Hebraistic word, belonging to the Alexandrian Jews particularly, may embrace dispensations; but undoubtedly the material world is included in it. It may mean the worlds governed by dispensations; but still that the idea of the whole universe is in it cannot be fairly contested by competent minds.

The worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen

-- which would not be the case if it was only a dispensation --

were not made of things which do appear [Heb. 11:3].

Having laid this as the first application of faith, the next question is -- when man fell, how was he to approach God? The answer is, by sacrifice. This then is brought before us.

By faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain [Heb. 11:4].

The third point is how to walk with God, and this again is by faith. Thus in every case it is faith. It owns the creation; it recognizes sacrifice as the only righteous means of being accepted with God -- the only means of approaching Him worthily. Faith, again; is the only principle of walk with God; as it is, again, the only means of realizing the judgment of God coming on all around us.

Here, it is plain, we have the chief lineaments of revealed truth. That is to say, God is owned in His glory, as Creator of all by His word. Then, consequent on the fall, comes the ground of the believer's acceptance; then his walk with God, and deliverance from His judgment of the whole scene, in the midst of which we actually are. Faith brings God into everything (Heb. 11:1-7).

But then comes far more definite instruction, and, beginning with Abraham, the details of faith. The father of the faithful was the one first called out by promise. At first it was (Heb. 11:8) but the promise of a land; but when in the land he received the promise of a better country, that is, a heavenly, which raised his eyes to the city on high, in express contrast with the earthly land. When he dwelt in Mesopotamia, he had a promise to bring him into Canaan; and when he got there, he had a promise of what was higher to lead his heart above. At the end of his course there was a still heavier tax on him. Would he give up the one that was the type of the true Seed, the progenitor, and the channel of the promised blessing, yea, of the Blesser? He knew that in Isaac his seed was to be called. Would he give up Isaac? A most searching and practical question, the very unseen hinge in God Himself on which not Christianity only, but all blessing, turns for heaven and earth, at least as far as the fallen creation is concerned. For what did the Jews wait in hope? For Christ, on whom the promises depend. And of what did Christianity speak? Of Christ who was given up to death, who is risen and gone above, in whom we find all the blessing promised, and after a better sort. Thus it is evident that the introduction of the last trial of Abraham was of all possible moment to every one that stood in the place of a son of Abraham. The severest and final trial of Abraham's faith was giving up the son, in whom all the promises were infolded, to receive him back on a resurrection ground in figure. It was, parabolically, like that of Christ Himself. The Jews would not have Him living. The Christians gained Him in a far more excellent way after the pattern of resurrection, as Abraham at the close received Isaac as it were from the dead.

Then we have the other patriarchs introduced, yet chiefly as regards earthly hopes, but not apart from resurrection, and its connexion with the people of God here below. On these things I need not now dwell farther than to characterize all, from Abraham inclusively, as the patience of faith (Heb. 11:8-22).
Then, having finished this part of the subject, the apostle turns to another characteristic in believers -- the mighty power of faith which knows how to draw on God, and breaks through all difficulties. It is not merely that which goes on quietly waiting for the accomplishment of the counsels of God. This it was of all consequence to have stated first. And for this simple reason: no place is given herein to man’s importance. Had the energetic activity of faith been first noticed, it would have made more of man; but when the heart had been disciplined in quiet endurance, and lowly expectancy from God, then he could be clothed with the energy of the Spirit. Both are true; and Moses is the type of the latter, as Abraham of the former. Accordingly we find everything about Moses, as well as done by him, extraordinary. His deliverance was strange; still more his decision and its results. He goes out, deliberately and knowingly, just at the time of life when a man is most sensitive to the value of a grand sphere of influence, as well as exercise of his powers, wherein, too, he could have ordinarily exerted all in favour of his people. Not so Moses. He acted in faith, not policy. He made nothing of himself, because he knew they were God’s people. Accordingly he became just the more the vessel of divine power to the glory of God. He chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward {Heb. 11:25, 26}.

And what then?

By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king {Heb. 11:27}.

This was in the ways of God the necessary moral consequence of his self-abnegation.

Through faith he instituted the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned {Heb. 11:28, 29}.

These two last verses bear witness to the grace of God in redemption. In the blood of the Lamb, sprinkled on the doorposts of Israel, we see the type of God’s judgment of their sins; neat, in the passage of the Red sea, the exhibition of His power, which, in the most conspicuous way, saved them, and destroyed for ever their enemies. But whether the one or the other, all was by faith.

But mark another striking and instructive feature of this chapter. No attention is paid here to the march through the wilderness, any more than to the establishment in the land, still less to the kingdom. We have just the fact of their passing through the Red sea, and no more: as we have the fall of Jericho, and no more. The intention here was not to dwell either on the scene in which their waiting was put to the test, the wilderness, or on anything that could insinuate the settled position of Israel in the land. As to the pathway through the wilderness, it had been disposed of in Heb. 4. The grounds why Canaan could not consistently be made prominent in this epistle as a present thing, but only as a hope, we have already seen.

This deeply interesting chapter closes with the reason why those who had thus not only lived but died in faith did not get the promise:

God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect {Heb. 11:40}.

What was this better thing?

Can there be a doubt that Christianity is meant? that good portion which shall not be taken away from those who cleave to the Crucified, who is now exalted in heaven? One can well understand that the apostle would leave his readers to gather thus generally what it must have been. God then has provided some better thing for us. He has brought in redemption in present accomplishment, and at the same time He has given scope for a brighter hope, founded on His mighty work on the cross, measured by Christ’s glory as its present answer at the right hand of God. Hence He crowns the noble army of witnesses with Christ Himself.

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, laying aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking off unto Jesus the captain and completer of faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God {Heb. 12:1, 2}.

This is a different way of looking at His session there. In all the other passages of the epistle the meaning of the word is, that He took His seat, or simply sat down there. It is the fact that there He sat down; but in this place it will be observed that His taking His seat there is the reward of the life of faith. As the result of enduring the cross, having despised the shame, the word for sitting down here has a remarkably beautiful shade of meaning different from what is given in all the other occurrences. Its force implies that it is not merely what He did once, but what He is also doing still. Attention is drawn to the permanence of His position at the right hand of God. Of course it is true that Jesus took His seat there, but more is conveyed in the true form of the text (κεκατερουμένον) here.

This, however, only by the way. Beyond question the Lord is regarded as the completer of the whole walk of faith in its deepest and, morally, most glorious form. Instead of having one person illustrating one thing, another person another, the Lord Jesus sums up the perfection of all trial in His own pathway, not as Saviour only, but in the point of view of bearing witness in His ways for God here below. Who ever walked in faith as He? For indeed He was a man as really as any other, though infinitely above man.

From this practical lessons of great value are drawn.

For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And ye have forgotten the
exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children {Heb. 12:3-5}.

Thus the first part of the chapter shows us simply what God holds out to the new man; but the epistle to the Hebrews never looks at the Christian simply in the new man, but rather as a concrete person. From the beginning to the end of it the Christian in Hebrews is not thus dealt with apart from the old nature, as we may see him regarded in the ordinary epistles of Paul, where the old and the new man are most carefully separated. It is not the case in the epistles of James and Peter, with which so far the epistle to the Hebrews agrees. The reason I take to be, that the apostle meets the Jewish believer where he is, as much as possible giving credit for what was really true in the Old Testament saints, and so in the Jewish mind. Now it is evident that in the Old Testament the distinction was not made between flesh and spirit in the way in which we have it brought out in the general doctrine of Christianity.

The apostle is dealing with the saints as to their walk; and as he had shown how Christ alone had purged the sins of the believer, and how He is on high, as the Priest in the presence of God, to intercede for them in their weakness and dangers; so now, when he is come to the question of the walk of faith, Christ is the leader of that walk. Accordingly, this is an appeal to the hearts which cleave to Christ the rejected King, and Holy Sufferer, who is now in glory above. He necessarily completes all as the pattern for the Christian. But then there are impediments as well as sin, by which the enemy would keep us from the race set before us; whilst God carries on His discipline in our favour. And the apostle shows that we need not only a perfect pattern in the walk of faith, but chastenings by the way. This, he says, must be from a father who loves his true and faulty children: others enjoy no such care. First of all, it is love that calls us to the path that Christ trod; next, it is love that chastens us. Christ never needed this, but we do. He reasons that, while our parents only chastise us the best way they can (for after all their judgment might not be perfect), the Father of spirits never fails. He has but one settled purpose of goodness about us; He watches and judges for our good, and nothing but our good. He has set His mind upon making us patterns of His holiness. It is what He carries on now. Fully does He allow, as connected with this, that the chastening seems not joyous but grievous. We begin with His love, and shall end in it without end. He only removes obstructions, and maintains our communion with Himself; surely this ought to settle every question for the believer. If we know His perfect love and the wisdom of it, we have the best answer to silence every murmuring thought or wish of the heart.

There is nothing more serious than to set grace against holiness. Nowhere does the apostle give the smallest occasion for such a thought. So here he tells them to

follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: looking diligently lest any man lack the grace of God {Heb. 12:14, 15}.

It is not a question of the law, which a Jew might naturally conceive to be the standard of the will of God now as of old for Israel. How easily we even forget that we are not Jews but Christians! Reason can appreciate not grace but law; and so people are apt, when things go wrong, to bring in the law. It is quite legitimate to employ it in an à fortiori way, as the apostle does in Eph. 6. For assuredly if Jewish children honoured their father and mother on legal grounds, much more ought Christian children on grounds of grace.

Another great call was, to beware lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright {Heb. 12:15, 16}.

Thus you see, either corrupt passion on the one hand, or profanity on the other, are unspARINGLY condemned by the grace of God. If the law could show little mercy in such a case, the grace of God views all sin as intolerable.

This leads him, from speaking of Esau’s case, to add as a known fact, that afterward, when he desired to have inherited the blessing, he was rejected (for he found no place of repentance), though he sought it carefully with tears. That is, he sought carefully with tears the blessing given to Jacob; but there was no room left for repentance, simply in the sense of change of mind; for, I suppose, the word here has that sense, which sometimes, no doubt, it has. In its ordinary usage, it has a much deeper force. Every change of mind is far from being repentance, which doctrinally means that special and profound revolution in the soul when we take God’s part against ourselves, judging our past ways, yea, what we are in His sight. This Esau never sought; and there never was one who did seek and failed to find it. Esau would have liked well to have got or regained the blessing; but this was given of God otherwise, and he had forfeited it himself. Arranged all beforehand, neither Isaac’s partiality nor Jacob’s deceit was able to divert the channel. His purpose utterly failed to secure the blessing for his profane but favourite son. He saw his error at last, and put his seal on God’s original appointment of the matter.

And here we are favoured with a magnificent picture of Christianity in contrast with Judaism. We are not come to Sinai, the mountain that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and a voice more terrible than that of the elements. To what then are we come? To mount Zion. And what is its distinctive character as here introduced? If we examine the historical facts as found in the Old Testament story, what is it rises up before all eyes as to Zion? When does it first appear? After the people had been tried and found wanting; after the priests had wrought, if possible, greater corruption; after the king of Israel’s choice had reduced them to the lowest degradation. It was therefore a crisis after the most painful accumulation of evils that weighed on the heart of Israel. But if people and priest and king were proved thus vain, God was there, and His grace could not fail. Their abject ruin placed them just in the circumstances that suited the God of all grace. At that very moment therefore the tide begins to turn. God brings forward His choice, David, when the miserable end of Saul and Jonathan saw the Philistines triumphant, and Israel disheartened as they had scarce been beyond that moment. The hill of Zion up to this time had
been the constant menace of the enemy against the people of the Lord; but in due time, when David reigned, it was
wrested out of the hands of the Jebusites, and became the
stronghold of Jerusalem, the city of the king. Thenceforward
how it figures in the Psalms and prophets! This then is the
monument for such as we are. Let blinded Jews turn their
sightless eyeballs to the mountain of Sinai. Let men who can
see only look there, and what will be found? Condensation,
darkness, death. But what at Zion? The mighty intervention
of God in grace -- yea, more than that, forgiveness,
deliverance, victory, glory, for the people of God.

For not merely did David receive from Jehovah that
throne, but never were the people of God lifted out of such a
state of distress and desolation, and placed on such a height
of firm and stable triumph as under that one man's reign. He
had beyond all mere men known sorrow and rejection in Israel;
yet he himself not only mounted the throne of Jehovah,
but raised up His people to such power and prosperity as was
never reached again. For although outwardly, no doubt, the
prosperity lasted in the time of Solomon, it was mainly the
fruit of David's suffering, and power, and glory. God
honoured the son for the father's sake. It remained for a brief
season; but even then it soon began to show rents down to the
foundations, which became apparent too, too quickly in
Solomon's son. With Zion then the apostle justly begins.
Where is the mountain that could stand out so well against
Sinai? What mountain in the Old Testament so much speaks
of grace, of God's merciful interference for His people when
all was lost?

Rightly then we begin with Zion, and thence may we
trace the path of glory up to God Himself, and down to the
kingdom here below. Impossible to rise higher than the
Highest, whence therefore the apostle descends to
consequences. Indeed we may say that the whole epistle to the
Hebrews is just this: we start from the foundation of grace up
to God Himself in the heavens; and thence springs the
certainty that the stream of grace is not exhausted, and that
undoubtedly it will issue in unceasing blessing by-and-by for
the earth, and for the people of Israel above all, in the day of
Jehovah.

Accordingly we have a remarkable line of blessing
pursued for our instruction here.

Ye are come unto mount Zion,
which was the highest Old Testament point of grace on earth.
Others doubtless could speak of their Ararat, their Olympus,
their Ætna; but which boasted of the true God that loved His
people in the way that Zion could? But would a Jew infer
hence that it was only the city of David he was speaking of?
Let him learn his error.

And unto the city of the living God, (not of dying
David,) the heavenly Jerusalem {Heb. 12:22}
(not the earthly capital of Palestine). This I take to be a
general description of the scene of glory for which Abraham
looked. He could know nothing of the mystery of the church,
Christ's body, nor of her bridal hopes; but he did look for
what is called here the
heavenly Jerusalem,
that city
whose maker and builder is God {see Heb. 11:10}.

In this phrase there is no allusion whatever to the church; nor
indeed anywhere in the Hebrews is there any reference to its
distinctive portion in union with its Head. When it says that
Abraham looked for the city, it means a blessed and ordered
scene of glory on high, which eclipsed the Holy Land before
his eyes. This, however, does not mean the church, but rather
the future seat of general heavenly bliss for the glorified
saints.

Then he adds:
And to myriads of angels, the general assembly
{Heb. 12:22}
-- for such is the true way to divide the verse --
and to the church of the firstborn, &c. {Heb. 12:23}.

This proves that the city of the heavenly Jerusalem does not
mean the church, because here they are certainly
distinguished from each other, which therefore completely
settles all the argument that is often founded on Abraham's
looking for a heavenly city. It was not the church, I repeat,
but what God prepares above for those who love Him. True,
the apostle John uses this very city as the figure of the bride.
But this essential difference separates between the city for
which Abraham looked and the bride so symbolised in the
Apocalypse. When the apostle Paul speaks of
the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem
{Heb. 12:22},
he means the scene of future heavenly blessedness; whereas
when John speaks of the new Jerusalem descending out of
heaven from God, he means, not where but what we are to
be. The difference is very great. The epistle sets before us the
seat of glory prepared on high; the Revelation speaks of the
bride represented as a glorious golden city with figures
beyond nature. The one is what may be called the objective
glory; the other is the subjective condition of those that
compose the bride, the Lamb's wife.

Having brought us to see the
church of the firstborn which are written in heaven,
the apostle next can only speak of
God the Judge of all {Heb. 12:23}.
He describes Him thus in His judicial character. The reason
appears to be, because he is going to tell us of the Old
Testament saints. They had known God in His providence and
dealings on the earth, though looking for a Messiah and His
day. Hence, therefore, he now introduces us
to the spirits of just men made perfect {Heb. 12:23}.
These evidently are the elders of olden times. None but the
Old Testament saints, as a class, can all be in the separate
state: not the church, or New Testament saints, for we shall
not all sleep; nor the millennial saints, for none of them will
die. The reference is therefore plain and sure.

Then we hear of
Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant
{Heb. 12:24}
-- the pledge of Israel's full and changeless blessing. Lastly,
he points
to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better than Abel {Heb. 12:24};
the assurance that the earth shall be delivered from its long
sorrow and slavery.

Thus the chain of blessedness is complete. He has shown us the symbolic mount of grace in Zion, contrasted with Sinai
the mountain of law. If the one figured the imposed measure of man’s responsibility, which can only but most justly
condemn him, in the other we behold the mountain of God’s grace after all was lost. Then follows the heavenly glory, to
which grace naturally leads; then the natural inhabitants of the heavenly land, namely, the angels --
and to myriads of angels, the general assembly.

Then he shows us others higher than these, by a divine call --
and to the church of the firstborn, which are written
in heaven {Heb. 12:22, 23}.

They do not belong to heaven like the angels; but God had an
eternal purpose, which brought them by an extraordinary favour there. And then, in the centre of all, we have God Himself. But having looked up to Him who is above all, he speaks of the highest group next to God in His judicial
character, namely, the Old Testament saints. Then he descends to a new or fresh covenant (not καίνις, as elsewhere, but νέας), the recently inaugurated covenant for
the two houses of the ancient people. Although the blood on
which that covenant was founded may be now long shed, when the covenant comes into force for them, will it not be
as fresh as the day the precious Victim died and shed His blood? The reference here I cannot but regard as exclusively to
the two houses of Israel. And as thus were shown the people immutably blessed (for salt shall not be wanting to that covenant) in the scene that will soon come, we finally hear of the earth itself joyful in the curse removed for ever. It is
the blood that speaketh better than Abel
{Heb. 12:24}.

For the martyred saint’s blood the earth cried to God for vengeance; but Christ’s blood proclaims mercy from God, and
the millennial day will be the glorious witness of its
depth, and extent, and stability, before the universe.

The rest of the chapter brings in, accordingly, the closing
scene, when the Lord comes to shake everything, and
establish that blessed day. But although it will be the shaking of all things, not of earth only but also heaven, yet, marvellous to say, such confidence of heart does grace give,
that this, which may be regarded as the most awful threat,
turns into a blessed promise. Think of the shaking of heaven and earth being a promise! Nothing but absolute establishment
of heart in God’s grace could have gazed on a destroyed
universe, and yet call it a
promise {Heb. 12:26}.

But it is the language for us to learn and speak, as we are called to rest on God and not on the creature.

+ + +

The last chapter {Heb. 13} follows this up with some
practical exhortations as to brotherly love continuing; then as
to kindness to strangers, or hospitality; finally, as to pity for
those in bonds.

Be mindful of those in bonds, as bound with them;
and of those which suffer adversity {Heb. 13:3}.

Again he insists upon the honour and purity of the marriage
tie, and the abhorrence that God has for those that despise
and corrupt it, and the sure judgment which will come upon
them. He presses a conversation without covetousness, and a
spirit of content, founded on our confidence in the Lord’s
care.

At the same time he exhorts the believers as to their
chiefs, that is, those who guided them spiritually. It is likely
that the Hebrew believers were somewhat unruly. And their
relation to their leaders he puts forward in various forms.
First, they were to remember those that once ruled them.
Those were now gone from the scene of their trials and labours, of
whom, considering the issue of their conversation,
imitate the faith {Heb. 13:7}.

This naturally leads the apostle to bring before them One
that never ends --
Jesus Christ [is] the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever {Heb. 13:8}.

Why should His saints be carried away with questions about
meats and drinks? He is the same unchangingly and
evermore, as He has ever been.

Be not carried about with divers and strange
dogmas. For it is a good thing that the heart be
established in grace {Heb. 13:9}.

See how this word, this thought, always predominates in the
epistle. Why turn back to
meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein {Heb. 13:9}? --

Had they been taunted with having no altar, with
possessing nothing so holy and so glorious in its associations?
It was only owing to the blindness of Israel. For, says he,
we have an altar,

yea, more than that, an altar,
whereof they have no right to eat which serve the

tabernacle {Heb. 13:10}.

You that go after the tabernacle (as he persists in calling it,
even though now the temple) have no title to our altar, with
its exhaustless supplies. To us Christ is all.

But this becomes the occasion of a remarkable allusion,
on which I must for a moment dwell. He draws attention to
the well-known rites of the atonement day; at any rate, if not of
that day exclusively, wherever there was a beast the body
of which was burnt without the camp, and the blood carried
within the veil. Do you not discern in this striking combination the distinctive features of Christianity? Alas! it is
not the dulness of Jewish prejudice only, but exactly what
is denied by every system of which men boast in
Christendom. For these very features did Judaism despise the
gospel. But let not the Gentile boast, no less unbelieving, no
less arrogant, against true Christianity. Christendom precisely
takes the middle ground of Judaism between these two
extremes. The mean looks and sounds well, but is utterly false for the Christian. The two extremes, offensive to every lover of the via media of religious rationalism, must be combined in Christianity and the Christian man, if he is to maintain it unimpaired and pure. The first is, that in spirit the Christian is now brought by redemption, without spot or guilt, into the presence of God. If you believe in Christ at all, such is your portion -- nothing less. If I know what Christ’s redemption has accomplished for all who believe, I must know that God has given me this. He honours the work of Christ, according to His estimate of its efficacy, as it is only according to His counsels about us for Christ’s glory. Of this we saw somewhat in Heb. 10. And what is the effect of it? As a Christian I am now free, by God’s will, to go in peace and assurance of His love into the holiest of all -- yes, now. I speak, of course, of our entrance there only in spirit.

As to the outer man also, we must learn to what we are called now. The apostle argues that, just as the blood of the beast was brought into the holiest of all, while the body of the same animal was taken outside the camp and burnt, so this too must be made good in our portion. If I have an indisputable present title of access into the holiest of all, I must not shrink from the place of ashes outside the camp. He that possesses the one must not eschew the other. In these consists our double present association by faith, while on the earth. The apostle earnestly insists on them both. We belong to the holiest of all, and we act upon it, if we act rightly, when we worship God; nay, when we draw near to God in prayer at all times. Brought nigh to God by the blood of Jesus, we have perfect access, so that there is nothing between God and us; for Christ suffered once to bring us to God, as He intercedes that we may have communion with Him in this place of nearness. Our being brought to God supposes, and is founded on the fact, that our sins are gone perfectly by His one offering; otherwise no madness is greater than indulging such a thought. If it be not the truth, it would be the height of presumption indeed. But far from this, it is the simple fact of the gospel.

He suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust,
says another apostle,
that he might bring us
-- not to pardon, nor to peace, nor to heaven, but --
to God {1 Pet. 3:18}.

Compare also Eph. 2. We are brought, then, washed from our sins, to God, and, according to this epistle, into the holiest of all, where He displays Himself. The real presumption, therefore, is to pretend to be a Christian, and yet to doubt the primary fundamental truth of Christianity as to this.

But the bodies of those beasts were burnt without the camp: my place, so far as I in the body am concerned, is one of shame and suffering in this world.

Are those two things true of you? If you have and prize one alone, you have only got the half of Christianity -- yea, of its foundations. Are they both true of you? Then you may bless God that He has so blessed you, and given you to know as true of yourself that which, if not so known, effectually prevents one from having the full joy and bearing the due witness as an unworliday and simple-hearted servant of Christ here below. It is true, He does not always call at once into the place of reproach and suffering. He first brings us into the joy and nearness of His presence. He satisfies us with the perfectness with which Christ has washed us from our sins in His blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father. But having done this, He points us to the place of Christ without the camp.

Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp,
bearing his reproach {Heb. 13:13}.

This was the very thing that these Jewish Christians were shrinking from, if not rebelling against. They had not made up their minds to suffer: to be despised was odious in their eyes. Nor is it pleasant to nature. But the apostle lets them know that if they understood their true blessing, this was the very part of it that was inseparably bound up with their present nearness to God, as set forth typically by the central and most important rite of the Jewish system. This is the meaning of the blood carried within, and of the body burnt without.

Let us then seek to combine these two things: perfect nearness to God, and the place of utter scorn in the presence of man. Christendom prefers the middle course; it will have neither the conscious nearness to God, nor the place of Christ’s reproach among men. All the effort of Christendom is first to deny the one, and then to escape from the other. I ask my brethren here if they are looking to God strenuously, earnestly, for themselves and for their children, not to allow but to oppose as their adversary every thing that tends to weaken either of these truths, which are our highest privilege and our truest glory as Christians here below. What a surprise to the Hebrew believers to find such truths as these so strikingly shown out in type even in the Jewish system!

But the apostle goes farther, as indeed was due to truth. These characteristics he proves to be really found in Christ Himself. He is evidently gone into the holiest of all in His own person. But how? What had immediately preceded this? The cross. Thus the cross and heavenly glory must go together. The gracious Lord gives and designs that we should take His own place both in heaven and here.

Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp.

This is just the closing practical word of the epistle to the Hebrews. God was going openly to set aside the Jewish system, as it had already been judged morally in the cross of Christ. When the Messiah was crucified, Judaism was in principle a dead thing: if it was in any sense kept up, it was no more than a decent time before its burial. But now God sends His final summons, founded on their own ritual, to His people who were hankering after the dead, instead of seeing the Living One on high. He as it were repeats,

Let the dead bury the dead {Matt. 8:22; Luke 9:60}.

The Romans will do the last sad offices. But as for you who believe in Jesus, wait not for the Romans; let Judaism be nothing but a corpse, which does not concern you.

Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp,
bearing his reproach {Heb. 13:13}.
This was a final call; and how gracious! If God had reserved the epistle to the Hebrews until after He sent forth His armies and burned up their city, destroying their polity root and branch, it might have been retorted that the Christians valued the Jewish ritual as long as it was available, and only gave it up when earthly temple and sacrifice and priest were gone. But God took care to summon His children outside -- to abandon the whole system before it was destroyed. They were to leave the dead to bury their dead; and they did so. But Christendom has wholly failed to profit by the call, and is doomed to perish by a judgment yet more solemn and wide-spread than that which swept away the ancient temple.

Another point follows, connected with what we have had before us, and demanding our attention. Instead of pining after that which is about to be destroyed, or repining at the call to go out to the place of Christ’s shame on earth, Christianity, which replaces Judaism now, may well cause us to offer

the sacrifice of praise to God continually.

There are two kinds of sacrifice to which we are now called.

By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, confessing his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased {Heb. 13:15, 16}.

That may have a higher character, these a lower; but even the highest is never to supersede or make us forgetful of the lowest.

Then comes a second exhortation as to their guides, or leading men among the brethren. (Compare Acts 15: 22.)

Obey your leaders, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as those that shall give account {Heb. 13:17}.

There is no sanction here, of course, of the vulgar and outrageous error that pastors give an account of the souls of their flock. It is an idea that superstition hatched, for the purpose of spuriousy exalting a clerical order. The meaning is, that spiritual guides shall give an account of their own behaviour in watching over other souls; for it is a work that calls for much jealousy over self, patience with others, painstaking labour, lowliness of mind, and that hearty love which can bear all, endure all, believe all. There is then the solemn admonition of the account they are to render by-and-by. They watch as those that shall give an account. Now is the time for self-denying labour, and endurance in grace; by-and-by the account must be given to the Lord that appointed them. And the apostle would that their work of watching might be done with joy, and not groaning, for this would be unprofitable for the saints.

But even the apostle felt his own need of the prayers of the faithful, not because he had gone wrong, but because he was conscious of no hindrance to his work from a bad conscience.

Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience; in all things willing to live honestly. But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner {Heb. 13:18, 19}.

Then he commends the saints to God.

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, in virtue of the blood of the everlasting covenant, perfect you in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for the ages of the ages {Heb. 13:20, 21}.

Finally, he beseeches his brethren to bear the word of exhortation. Such is pre-eminently the bearing of this epistle to those who had no such frequent opportunities of profiting by his teaching as the Gentile churches. We can understand, therefore, both the delicacy that thus entreated them, and the meaning of the added words,

for also in few words I have written to you {Heb. 13:22}.

Nor does it seem so natural for any as the great apostle to inform them of his child and fellow-labourer:

Know that the brother Timothy is set at liberty; with whom, if he come pretty soon, I will see you. Salute all your leaders, and all the saints. They from Italy salute you. Grace be with you all. Amen {Heb. 13:23, 25}.

Thus the apostle closes this most striking and precious epistle, brimful to overflowing with that which had an especial and very touching interest to a Jew, but nevertheless needed as certainly by us, and as rich in instruction for us in this day as for those at any time that has passed away. For let me say this as a parting word, and I say it advisedly, because of circumstances that might well be before our hearts, -- no deliverance, however enjoyed, no place of death to law, world, or sin, no privilege of union with Christ, will enable a soul to dispense with the truths contained in this epistle to the Hebrews. We are still walking here below; we are in the place therefore where infirmity is felt, where Satan tempts, where we may fail through watchfulness. The greater part of the affections of the Christian are drawn out toward our Saviour by all this scene of sin and sorrow through which we are passing on to heaven. If we formed our Christian character practically on such epistles as those to the Ephesians and Colossians alone, depend on it there may not be the hard lines of the law, but there will be very far from the fervent affections which become him who feels the grace of Christ. Be assured it is of the deepest possible moment, to cherish the activity of Christ’s present love and care for us, the activity of that priesthood which is the subject of this epistle. Holding fast the permanence of the blotting out of our guilt, may we nevertheless and besides own the need of such an One as Christ to intercede for us, and deal in grace with all our feebleness or faults. The Lord forbid that anything should enfeeble our sense of the value and necessity of such daily grace. There may be that which calls for confusion of face in us, but there is unceasing ground also for thanksgiving and praise, however much we have to humble ourselves in the sight of God.
Lectures
Introductory to the Study of
The Acts, the Catholic Epistles,
and
the Revelation
Preface

The third and concluding series of these Lectures, delivered in London between 21st April and 14th May of this year, and corrected from short-hand notes, is now in the mercy of God brought to a completion. It is hoped that they may serve as a stimulus and help to a comprehensive study of the scriptures surveyed. The inspired history of the church as planted of God here below, as well as of the characteristic ministry of the two great apostles who laboured among the circumcision and the uncircumcision, here passes before us. This is followed by a sketch of the letters of James and of Peter, of John and of Jude. The whole is wound up by a summary view of the grand book of Christian prophecy, which discloses the consequences, under God’s government, of the ruin of Christendom up to the end, when God is all in all. May the reader be strengthened of the Spirit all the better to enjoy the rich pasture provided in the exhaustless depths of God’s own word!

Guernsey, 4th December, 1869.
Lectures Introductory

to the Study of

The Acts, the Catholic Epistles,

and

the Revelation

Lecture 1

The Acts of the Apostles 1 – 7

First of all we see man in an entirely new place -- man risen from among the dead and ascending to heaven. The risen ascended man, Christ Jesus, is the new starting-point of the dealings of God. The first man afforded the great and solemn and saddening lesson of human responsibility. The cross had just closed the history of the race; for Jesus in no way shrank from all that was connected with the creature responsible here below, but met it to God’s glory. He alone was capable of doing all; He alone solved every question; and this as a perfect man, but not a perfect man only, because He was very God. Thus was glory brought to His Father all through His life, -- to God as such in His death; and glory to God not merely as one who was putting man to the test, but who was removing from before His face the root and the fruits of sin; for this is the wonderful specialty of the death of the Lord Jesus, that, in Him crucified, all that had hindered, all that had dishonoured God, was for ever met, and God infinitely more and after a better sort glorified than if there never had been sin at all.

Thus on the setting aside of the old creation, the way was clear for man in this new place; and we shall see this in the blessed book before us -- the Acts of the Apostles, although I am far from meaning that the title is an adequate statement of its contents: it is but its human name, and man is not capable even of giving a name. It is a book of deeper and more glorious purpose than acts of the apostles could be, however blessed in their place. Flowing down from the risen man in heaven, we have God Himself displaying fresh glory, not merely for but in man, and this so much the more because it is no longer a perfect man on earth; but the working of the Holy Ghost in men of like passions as ourselves. Nevertheless, through the mighty redemption of the Lord Jesus, the Holy Ghost is able to come down holily and righteously, willing in love to take His place, not merely in the earth, but in that very race that had dishonoured God down to the cross of Christ, when man could go no lower in scorn and hatred of that one man who in life and death has thus changed all things for God and for us.

Accordingly this first chapter, and more particularly the verses (Acts 1:1-11) that I have read, show us the groundwork, by no means unconnected with all that follows, but the most fitting introduction, as the facts were the necessary basis of it; and this the more strikingly because at first sight no man perhaps could have understood it thus. Indeed I doubt that any believer could have scanned this until there was a fair measure of intelligence in the revealed truth of God. And I do not mean merely now that truth which, being received, constituted him a believer, but the large infinite truth which it is the object of the Holy Ghost to bring out in this book as also throughout the New Testament. At first sight many an one may have found a difficulty why it was that the Spirit of God, after having in the gospel of Luke shown us Jesus risen and Jesus ascended, should take it up again in the beginning of the Acts. If we have had such questions, we may at least learn this lesson, that it is wise and good, yea, the only sound wisdom for us, and that which pleases our God, to set it down as a fixed maxim that God is always right, that His word never says a thing in vain, -- that if He appear to repeat, it is in no way repetition after a human infirm sort, but with a divine purpose; and as the resurrection and the ascension too were necessary to complete the scheme of truth given us in the gospel of Luke, so the risen man ascending to heaven was necessary to be brought in again as a starting-point by the very same writer, when God gives by him this new unfolding of the grace and ways of God in man.

We see then the Lord Jesus risen from the dead. We have the remarkable fact that He does not act independently of the Holy Ghost in His risen character any more than as man here below. In short, He is man, although no longer in that life which could be laid down but risen again; and the blessedness of man always is to act and speak by the Holy Ghost. So with the Lord Jesus, until the day in which He was taken up, it is said, after that He, through the Holy Ghost, had given commandments unto the apostles whom He had chosen. Resurrection does not supersede the Holy Ghost. The action of the Holy Ghost may be very different in resurrection, but there is still the blessedness of the power of the Spirit of God working by Him even though risen from the dead. It is not only that the disciples needed the Spirit of God, but that Jesus was pleased still through the Holy Ghost to deal with us so.
But this is not all. Assembled with them, He explains that the Holy Ghost was to be given to themselves, and this not many days hence. It was the more important to state this great truth, because He had said a short time before

Receive ye the Holy Ghost {John 20:22};

and the ignorance that is natural to us might have used the words in John 20 to deny the further power and privilege that was about to be conferred in the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. They were both of the deepest importance. It is not for us to compare for our preference. But of this I am persuaded, that to have the Holy Ghost according to the Lord’s words on the resurrection-day has its own blessedness as decidedly as the gift of the Holy Ghost sent down from above: the one being more particularly that which forms the intelligence of the new man; the other, that power which goes forth in testimony for the blessing of others. I need not say the order too was perfect, -- not in power for others first, but as spiritual intelligence for our own souls. We are not fit vessels for the good of others until God has given us divine consciousness of a new being according to Christ for ourselves.

But there is more still. It was necessary too that they should know the vast change. Their hearts, spite of the blessing, had little realized the ways of God that were about to open for them. Thus not only do we hear the Lord intimating that the promise of the Father must be poured out upon them, but further, even after this, they asked Him whether He was at this time about to restore again the kingdom to Israel. This furnishes, as our foolish questions often do, the inlet for divine instruction and guidance. We need not always repress these enquiries from the Lord: it is well to let that which is in the mind come out, especially if it be to Him. Nor must His servants be impatient even at the curious questions of those that least understand; for the importance is not so much in that which is asked as in the answer. Certainly this was ever the case with our Lord and the disciples.

It is not for you,
says He,
to know the times and the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own authority, but ye shall receive power {Acts 1:7}.
The measures and the fit moments that had to do with earthly changes were in the sole control of Him to whom all belonged.

But ye shall receive power
(for the two words are different),
after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me {Acts 1:8}.

Ye shall receive power when the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth {Acts 1:8}.

Then we have the finishing touch, if one may so say, to this introduction. The Lord ascends to heaven, but not with whirlwind nor with chariot of fire. It is not simply that He was not, for God took Him, as is said of Enoch, but in a way more suitable to His glory it is written here that he was taken up, and a cloud
(the special token of the divine presence)
received him out of their sight {Acts 1:9}.

While they looked steadfastly toward heaven, they hear from the angels who stood by them in white, that this Jesus that was taken up from them should thus come in like manner as they had beheld Him going into heaven.

Thus the only true foundation is laid, and heaven becomes the point of departure -- not the earth, nor the first man, but the second man, the last Adam, from the only place that was suitable for Him according to the counsels of God. Such is the basis of Christianity. Altogether vain and impossible, had not redemption been accomplished, and a redemption by blood and in the power of resurrection. Redemption in se does not give us the full height and character of Christianity: man risen, and ascended to heaven, after the full expiation of sins on the cross, is necessary to its true and complete expression.

A further scene follows, by no means possible to be absent without a blank for the spiritual understanding. It must be proved manifestly that God had given even now a new place of blessing, and a new power too, or spiritual competency, to the disciples. At the same time they would have to wait for power of the Spirit in gift to act on others. Accordingly we see the disciples together,

continuing with one accord in prayer and supplication {Acts 1:14};

and in those days Peter stands up, and brings before them the gap made in the apostolic body by the apostasy and death of Judas. Observe how he brings out with an altogether unwonted force the scripture that applied to the case. This was in virtue, not of the promise of the Father for which they were waiting, but of that which they had already from Jesus risen from the dead. Hence without delay the disciples proceed to act. Peter says,

Of these men which have companioned with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be a witness with us of his resurrection {Acts 1:21, 22}.

It will be noticed that the words “ordained to be” are left out. Every one ought to be aware indirectly, if not from his own knowledge, that there is nothing in Greek to represent them. There is not, and there never was, the smallest pretence of divine authority for their insertion. It is hard to say how godly men endorsed so pure an interpolation -- with what object can be easily surmised: it does not require a word from me.
And they appointed two, Joseph calledBarsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias {Acts 1:23}.

For these two had qualifications, as far as man knew, suitable to the requirements for an apostle, being the companions of the earthly path of the Lord Jesus. They had seen Him risen from the dead. Unable to judge between them definitely, the rest spread the matter before the Lord who must choose His own apostle. The mode of the disciples in this case, it is true, might seem peculiar to us; but I have no doubt that they were guided of the Lord. There is no reason from scripture to believe that Peter and the others acted hastily, or were mistaken. The Spirit of God in this very book sanctions the choice that was made that day, and never alludes to Paul as the necessary twelfth apostle. To do so would be, in my judgment, to weaken if not to ruin the truth of God. Paul was not one of the twelve. It is of all consequence that he should be permitted to retain a special place, who had a special work. All was wisely ordered.

Here then they prayed, and said,

Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen {Acts 1:24}.

Man never chooses an apostle; apostles did not, could not, elect an apostle: the Lord alone chose. And so they gave forth their lots after a Jewish fashion. The twelve apostles were clearly, as it seems to me, in relation to the twelve tribes of Israel,

and they gave forth their lots {Acts 1:26}.

This was sanctioned of God in the Old Testament when Israel was before Him; it will be sanctioned of God when Israel returns on the scene in the latter day. No doubt, when the assembly of God was in being, the lot disappears; but the assembly of God was not yet formed. All would be in order in due time.

They gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon

Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles {Acts 1:26}.

We shall find a little later, yet before Paul appears, that the twelve {Acts 6:2} are recognised. So says the Spirit of God.

But now, when the day of Pentecost was running its course, they were all with one accord together; for God put the disciples in waiting in the attitude of expectation and prayer and supplication before Him. It was good that they should feel their weakness; and this was indeed the condition of true spiritual power, as it always is for the soul (if not for testimony, certainly for the soul).

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance {Acts 2:2-4}.

The manner of the Holy Spirit’s appearing thus it is well to notice. It was exactly adapted to the intent for which He was given. It was not, as in the gospels, a testimony to the grace of the Lord, although nothing but grace could have given Him to man. It was not, as we find it afterwards in the Revelation, where mention is made of the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. The tongues were parted; for it was not a question of people being now made to speak of one lip. God was meeting man where he was, -- not setting aside the ancient judgment of his pride, yet graciously condescending to man, and this to mankind as they were. It was no sign of government, still less of government limited to a special nation. The parted tongues clearly showed that God thought of the Gentile as of the Jew. But they were as of fire;

for the testimony of grace was none the less founded on righteousness. The gospel is intolerant of evil. This is the wonderful way in which God now speaks by the Holy Ghost. Whatever the mercy of God, whatever the proved weakness, need, and guilt of man, there is not nor can be the least compromise of holiness. God can never sanction the evil of man. Hence the Spirit of God was thus pleased to mark the character of His presence, even though given of the grace of God, but founded on the righteousness of God. God could afford fully to bless. It was no derogation from His glory; it was after all but His seal on the perfection of the work of the Lord Jesus. Not only did He show His interest for man, and His grace to the evil and lost, but, above all, His honour for Jesus. There is no title nor ground so secure for us. There is no spring of blessing that we are entitled so to boast of as the Lord: there is none that so delivers from self.

21. The true reading, as attested by N, A, B, C, D (corr.), and many ancient versions, is αὐτοῖς (not αὐτοῦν, as in D, E, the mass of cursive, &c.). The meaning is, “they gave lots for them.” This meets the chief reasoning founded on the common text which Mosheim urges with his usual force against the view in which, he confesses, all the commentators agree (i.e., in representing Matthias as having been chosen an apostle by lot, agreeably to the ancient Jewish practice). It is evident of no consequence who they were that set forth or appointed (προσελέραξαν) the two: some, like Alford, arguing that the whole company thus produced them; others, like Mosheim, contending that it must in all propriety have been the eleven apostles. I think that the vagueness of the phrase, without a defined subject, shows that the stress laid on either side is a mistake. It suffices to say, that two candidates were brought forward, possessed, as far as either apostles or disciples could say, of adequate qualifications. The Lord alone could decide: to Him all looked after the manner so familiar to the people of God. But Mosheim’s conclusion destroys the whole point, besides doing violence to the text by confounding καθίστασιν “lot” with ἐπιλοχία vote or suffrage. It would bring in man’s will and voice where the prayer just offered was an abandonment of it for the intervention of the heart-searching God. This, no doubt, was natural to one who was swarey by Lutheran prejudice, and strengthened by the practice which undoubtedly prevailed (from the third century at latest), the assembly deciding by suffrage, not by lot, between the candidates proposed by those who took the lead in their affairs. There seems little difficulty in understanding a Hebrew extension of the word “gave” (1 Sam. 14:41) for the more common “cast”; and as to the pronoun, it is as (continued...)

21. (...continued)

intelligible and correct in the dative, as in the genitive it is perplexing in sense, and, I think, inaccurate in form; for the article would be requisite with the substantive if it were the true reading. Compare J. L. Mosheimii de rebus Christianorum ante Const. M. Comm. Sac. Pr. § xiv. pp. 78-80.

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At this time too there were dwelling at Jerusalem men from all nations, we may say, generally speaking, under heaven --

Jews, devout men {Acts 2:5}.

And when it was noised abroad that the Holy Ghost had thus been given to the congregation of disciples

the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speaking in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all of these which speak Galilæans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judæa, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new (or sweet) wine. But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judæa, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem {Acts 2:6-14}.

For he first addresses them on a narrower ground than that into which he afterwards branches out, and both with a wisdom that is not a little striking. Here he is about to apply a portion of the prophecy of Joel. It will be seen that the prophet takes exactly the same limited ground as Peter does. That is, the Jews, properly so called, and Jerusalem, stand in the foreground of Joel's prophecy: so admirably perfect is the word of God even in its smallest detail.

The point he insists on, it will be noticed, was this -- that the wonder then before them in Jerusalem was after all one for which their own prophets ought to have prepared them.

This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel {Acts 2:16}.

He does not say that it was the fulfilment of the prophet, Men, divines, have so said, but not the Spirit of God. The apostle simply says,

This is that which was spoken.

Such was its character. How far it was to be then accomplished is another matter. It was not the excitement of nature by wine, but the heart filled with the Spirit of God, acting in His own power and in all classes.

And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaids I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: and I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved {Acts 2:17-21}.

There he stops, as far as Joel is concerned.

Then, Acts 2:22, he addresses them as men of Israel,

not merely of Judæa and Jerusalem, but now breaking out into the general hopes of the nation, he at the same time proves their common guilt.

Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death; because it was not possible that he should be holden of it {Acts 2:22-24}.

And this the apostle supports by what David had spoken in Psa. 16:

I foresaw the Lord always before my face {Acts 2:25}.

The same psalm affords the clearest proof that the Messiah (and no Jew could doubt that the Messiah was in question there) would be characterised by the most absolute trust in God through all His life: that He was to lay down His life with trust in God just as unbroken and perfect in death as in life; and finally that He would stand in resurrection. It is the psalm therefore of confidence in God that goes right through life, death, resurrection. It was seen in Jesus, and clearly not applicable to David its writer. Of all whom a Jew could have put forward to claim the language of such a psalm, David would have been perhaps the uppermost one in their hearts.

But it was far beyond that famous king, as Peter argued:

Men [and] brethren, 22 let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.

This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses {Acts 2:29-32}.

Thus the fresh and notorious facts as to Jesus, and no one else, completely agreed with this inspired testimony to the Messiah. Nor was it confined to a single portion of the Psalms.

Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear {Acts 2:33}.


22. It may be well to guard the English reader from supposing that two classes are intended. The phrase is literally “men-brethren,” and means simply men who were brethren. -- Let me add, that the true text in the last clause of Acts 2:30 is simply, “to seat from the fruit of his loins on his throne.”
But David is not ascended into the heavens. Thus Peter cites another psalm to show the necessary ascension of Messiah to sit at the right hand of Jehovah, just as much as he had shown resurrection to be predicted of Him as of no other; for he says himself, Jehovah said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool {Acts 2:34, 35}.

Who was the man that sat at God’s right hand? Certainly none could pretend it was David, but his Son, the Messiah; and this entirely corresponded with the facts the apostles had beheld personally.

Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ {Acts 2:36}.

Thus the proof was complete. Their psalms found their counterpart in the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus the Messiah. God had made Him both Lord and Christ; for here the testimony is very gradual, and the wisdom of God in this we may well admire and profit by. In meeting the Jews, God condescended to put forth the glory of His own Son in the way that most of all attached itself to their ancient testimonies and to their expectations. They looked for a Messiah. But apparently all was lost; for they had refused Him; and they might have supposed that the loss was irretrievable. Not so: God had raised Him from the dead. He had shown Himself therefore against what they had done; but their hope itself was secure in the risen Jesus, whom God had made to be Lord and Christ. Jesus, spite of all that they had done, had in nowise given up His title as the Christ; God had made Him such. After they had done their worst, and He had suffered His worst, God owned Him thus according to His own word at His own right hand. Other glories will open there too; but Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, as Paul says, was to be raised from the dead according to his gospel. Timothy was to remember this; and Paul can descend to show the connection of the glorious person of the Lord Jesus with the Jew on earth, as he loved for his own relationship to behold Him in heavenly glory. Thus the link with the expectations of the earthly people, though broken by death, is reset for ever in resurrection.

Surprised, grieved, alarmed to the heart by that which Peter had thus forcibly brought before them, they cry to him and the other apostles,

Men [and] brethren, what shall we do? {Acts 2:37}.

This gives the opportunity for the apostle to set out in the wisdom of God a very weighty application of the truth for the soul that hears the gospel:

Repent,
says he, which is a far deeper thing than compunction of heart. This they had already, and it leads to that which he desired for them:

Repent, and be baptized 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 {Acts 2:38}.

There is no true repentance unto life without faith. But it is according to God that repentance is put forward here rather than faith. The Jews had the testimony of the gospel, as well as the law; and now it had been pressed on them by Peter. Because they believed that testimony, brought home to their consciences, as we have seen, their hearts were filled with sorrow.

But the apostle lets them know that there is a judgment of self that goes far below any outburst of grief, -- any consciousness and hatred, even of the deepest act of evil, as undoubtedly the crucifying of Jesus was. Repentance is the abandonment of self altogether, the judgment of what we are in the light of God. And this was to be marked, therefore, not only by the negative sign of giving themselves up as altogether evil before God, but by receiving the rejected and crucified man, the Lord Jesus. Hence, to be baptized each one of them in His name for the remission of sins follows;

and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

This, therefore, is entirely distinct from faith or repentance. Believing, they had of necessity a new nature, they had life in Christ; but receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost is a privilege and power beyond; and in this case it was made to be attendant on one's being baptized as well as repenting, because in Jews it was of the utmost moment that they should give a public witness that all the rest and confidence of their souls lay in Jesus. Having been guilty of crucifying the Lord, He must be manifestly the object of their trust. And so it was that they were to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

But indeed this gift is always consequent on faith -- never identical with it. This is as sure as it is important to assert and to insist on, as well as to believe. It is no question of notion or tradition, the subject of which runs in quite another direction. I do not even allow it to be an open question, nor a matter of opinion; for plainly in every instance of each soul, of whom Scripture speaks, there is an interval however short. The gift of the Holy Ghost follows faith, and is in no way at the same instant, still less is it the same act. It supposes faith already existing, not unbelieving; for the Holy Ghost, though He may quicken, is never given to an unbeliever. The Holy Ghost is said to seal the believer; but it is a seal of faith, and not of unbelieving. The heart is opened by faith, and the Holy Ghost is given by the grace of God to those that believe, not in order to their believing. There is no such thing as the Holy Ghost given in order to believe. He quickens the unbeliever, and is given to the believer. Although we do not hear of faith in the passage, yet from the fact that the converted only were called on to repent, we know that they must have believed. True believing necessarily goes along with true repentance. The two things are invariably found together; but the gift of the Holy Ghost is consequent on them both.

And so the apostle explains. He says,

For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call {Acts 2:39}.

His words seem to carry a sense beyond Israel: how far he entered into the force of them himself it is not perhaps for
any of us to say. We know that afterwards, when Peter was called upon to go to the Gentiles, he found difficulties. It is hard to suppose, therefore, that he fully understood his own words. However this may be, the words were according to God, whether or not fully appreciated by Peter when he uttered them. God was going to gather out of the Jews themselves and their children, but, more than more, those that were afar off, as many as the Lord our God should call.

And then we have the beautiful picture that the Spirit of God gives us of the scene that was now formed by His own present here below.

Then they that [gladly] 23 received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls {Acts 2:41}.

They were added to the original nucleus of disciples, and continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, [and] in breaking of bread and prayers {Acts 2:42}.

Thus, after being brought into the new association, there arose a need of instruction; and the apostles were pre-eminently those that God vouchsafed in the infant days of His assembly. Inasmuch as it was of the utmost importance that all should be thoroughly established in the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ, they had a place peculiar to themselves, as above all others chosen of the Lord to lay the foundation of His house, and to direct and administer in His name, as we see through the New Testament. And then as the fruit of it, and specially connected, there was the fellowship

of which we next read. Next followed the breaking of bread, the formal expression of Christian fellowship, and the special outward sign of remembering Him to whose death they owed all. Finally, but closely following the Lord's supper, came the prayers,

which still showed that, however great might be the grace of God, they were in the place of danger, and needed dependence here below.

And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common {Acts 2:43, 44}.

This peculiar feature is found in Jerusalem, beautiful and blessed in its season, but, I have no doubt, special to the Jerusalem condition of the church of God. We can easily understand it. In the first place all that composed the church were at that time in the same place. We can feel readily, therefore, that there would be a real and strong family feeling, but I doubt whether their mutual affections then rose higher than the sense of their being God's family. They really did constitute the body of Christ; they were baptized by one Spirit into one body; but to be that one body, and to know that such they were, are two very different things. The development was reserved for another and still weightier witness of the glory of the Lord Jesus. But having in its strength the sense of family relationship, the wonderful victory of grace over selfish interests was the fruit of it. If he or she belonged to the household of God, this was the governing thought -- not one's own possessions. Grace gives without seeking a return; but grace on the other side seeks not its own things, but those of Christ.

Another trait is, that all savoured of divine as well as family life. The breaking of bread every day, for instance, was clearly a striking witness of Christ ever before their hearts, though also a kindred effect of the same feeling. Thus they sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, as one might have need.

And they continued daily with one accord in the temple {Acts 2:46}.

This is another peculiarity. There was by no means as yet a manifest severance of the tie with Judaism, at least with the circumstances of its worship. We know that in principle the cross does make a breach, and an irreparable one, with all that is of the first man; but the power of old habits with the joy that overflowed their souls made them for the moment to be, I may say, better Jews. There was that now within which was far stronger liquor than had ever filled the old skins of the law, and these were sure to be broken in no long time. But for the present nothing was farther from the disciples' minds: they continued daily with one accord in the temple. Along with it was joined this new element -- breaking bread at home; not

from house to house {Acts 2:46},
as if it were a migratory service. There is no real ground to infer that they shifted the scene of the Lord's supper from one place to another. This is not the meaning. The margin is correct. They broke bread at home, in contrast with the temple. It might be the very same house in which the breaking of bread always took place. They would naturally choose the most suitable quarters, which combined convenience as to distance with commodiousness in receiving as many brethren and sisters as possible.

Thus these two features were seen to meet together in the Pentecostal church -- the retaining of Jewish religious habits in going up to the temple for prayer, and at the same time the observance of that which was properly Christian -- the breaking of bread at home. No wonder the new-found joy overflowed, and they were found

eating their meat with gladness and singleness of heart {Acts 2:46}.

There is no reason to confound the breaking of bread with eating their meat. They are two different things. We find the religious life, so to speak, expressed in their going up to the

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23. It appears to me that ἐλαχιστῶς, "gladly," was inserted in the commonly received text against the best testimony, as well as internal reasons. For the great uncials (N, A, B, C, D, &c.), supported by the Vulgate and Ethiopic, omit the word, which was probably suggested by Acts 21:17, where it falls in as admirably as here it sounds somewhat out of season. Nearly the same authorities concur in omitting καί, "and," between "the fellowship" and "the breaking of bread." This serves to strengthen the view that "the fellowship" goes with "the teaching of the apostles," though put as two objects instead of being combined by a single article in one idea; and it would throw the "breaking of bread and the prayers similarly together.”
temple, and in their breaking bread at home. We find the  
effect upon their natural life in their  
eating their meat with gladness and singleness of  
heart, praising God, and having favour with all the  
people {Acts 2:46, 47}.  
There is the same double character.  
And the Lord added to the church,  
or “together,” (for there is a fair question that may be raised  
as to the text in this last clause)  
daily such as should be saved {Acts 2:47},  
or those that God was about to separate from the destruction  
that was impending over the Jewish nation, and, further, to  
bring by a blessed deliverance into the new Christian estate.  
The word σωζομένους does not express the full character  
of Christian salvation which was afterwards known. Of  
course we know that they were saved; but this is not what the  
word in itself means. It is simply that the Lord was separating  
those that were to be saved. The English version gives it on  
the whole very justly. Carefully remember that the meaning  
is not that they were saved then. The phrase in Luke has  
nothing to do with that question; it refers simply to persons  
destined to salvation without saying anything farther.  

In the next chapter (Acts 3) a miracle is related in detail,  
which brought out the feelings of the people, especially as  
represented by their leaders (Acts 4). In going up to the  
temple, (for the apostles themselves went there,) Peter and  
John met with a man that was lame; and as he asked for alms  
Peter gave him something better (as grace, poor in this  
world’s resources and estimate, always loves to do so). He  
tells the expecting man,  
Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give  
I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise  
up and walk {Acts 3:6}.  
The man instantly rises, according to the power of God, and  
is found with them,  
walking, and leaping, and praising God; and all the  
people saw him {Acts 3:8, 9}.  
This arrests universal attention, and Peter preaches a new  
discourse -- that which has been justly enough called a Jewish  
sermon. It is thus evident that his indication of the Christian  
place of blessing in the chapter before (Acts 2) does not  
hinder him from setting before the men of Israel (for so he  
addressed them here), first, their awful position by the  
rejection of Jesus, and, next, the terms that God in His grace  
sets before them in answer to the intercession of Christ.  
The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the  
God of our fathers, hath glorified his  
-- not “son,” but --  
servant Jesus {Acts 3:13}.  
We know Him (and the Spirit of God, who wrote this book,  
infinity better knew Him) to be the Son of God. But we  
must always hold to what God says; and the testimony of God  
did not yet -- and especially in dealing with the Jews -- set  
forth all the glory of Christ. It was gradually brought out; and  
the more that man’s unbelief grew, so much the more God’s  
maintenance of the Lord’s glory was manifested. And so, if  
they had with scorn refused Him in the presence of Pilate,  
when he was determined to let him go, -- if they had denied  
the Holy One and Just, and desired a murderer to be granted,  
-- if they had killed the Prince [leader, originator] of life,  
whom God raised from the dead, they had simply shown out  
what they were. On the other land, His name, through faith  
in His name, (and they were witnesses of its power,) had  
made this man strong, whom they saw and knew:  
Yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this  
perfect soundness in the presence of you all. And  
now, brethren, I wit that through ignorance ye did  
it, as did also your rulers. But those things, which  
God before had shewed by the mouth of all his  
prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so  
fulfilled {Acts 3:16-18}.  
And then he calls upon them to repent, and be converted,  
that their sins might be blotted out, so that times of refreshing  
might come from the presence of the Lord.  
And he shall send Jesus Christ, who was fore-  
appointed for you: whom the heaven must receive  
until the times of restitution of all things, which God  
hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets  
since the world began {Acts 3:20, 21}.  

God has accomplished His word by Moses the prophet; for  
Moses in no way took the place of being the deliverer  
of Israel, but only a witness of it, a partial exemplification  
of God’s power then, but looking onward to the great Prophet  
and Deliverer that was coming. Now He was come; and so  
Peter sets before them, not only the coming, the Blessér’s  
arrival and rejection in their midst, but the awfulness of  
trifling with it. Whoe’er would not bow to Him was to be cut  
off by their own Moses’s declaration:  
Every soul who will not hear that prophet shall be  
destroyed from among the people {Acts 3:22}.  
And so it was that all the prophets had testified of those days:  
and they were the children of the prophets, and of the  
covenant which God made with their fathers, saying unto  
Abraham,  
And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be  
blessed {Acts 3:25}.  
The Seed was now come. It was for them, therefore, to  
declare themselves. Alas! they had already set up their will  
against Him; but at His intercession (what grace!) God was  
will full to pardon it all, did they but repent and be converted  
for the blotting out of their sins.  
Thus we have here an appeal to the nation as such; for in  
all this it will be observed he does not speak a word to them  
of the Lord Jesus as Head of the church. We have no hint of  
this truth yet to anybody. Nay, we have not Jesus spoken of  
even in the same height as in the preceding chapter Acts 2.  
We have Him in heaven, it is true, but about to return and  
bring in earthly power, blessing, and glory, if Israel only  
turned with repentance to Him. Such was the testimony of  
Peter. It was a true word; and it remains true. When Israel  
shall turn in heart to the Lord, He who secretly works this in  
grace will return publicly to them. When they shall say  
Blessed is he that cometh in the name of Jehovah  

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{see Matt. 23:39; Luke 13:35; Psalms 118:26},
the Messiah will come in fulness of blessing. The heavens will retain Him no more, but give Him up who will fill earth as well as heaven with glory. No word of God perishes: all abides perfectly true.

Meanwhile other and deeper counsels have been brought to light by the unbelief of Israel. This unbelief comes out in no small measure in the next chapter, which follows but might properly have formed a part of Acts 3; for in sense it is a continuous subject.

And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide. Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed, and the number of the men was about five thousand {Acts 4:1-4}.

Then, on the morrow, we have the council; and Peter, being by the chiefs demanded by what power or name they had wrought the deed, filled with the Holy Ghost, answers,

Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; be it known unto you all,

(he is throughout bold and uncompromising)

and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him dost this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner {Acts 4:8-11}.

Thus again reference is made to their own testimonies.

Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved {Acts 4:12}.

Unscrupulous as they were, they were thus confounded by the calm confidence with which the truth armed the apostles; and the more so, because their tone and language gave evidence that, whatever the power of the Holy Ghost wrought, it did not set aside their condition as illiterate men. Their words, &c., bore no polish of the schools; and truth spurns, as it needs not, dialectic subtlety. This magnified, therefore, the power of God so much the more, as man’s skill was null. But at the same time there was the witness of the miracle that had been done. In presence, then, of the apostles clothed with the irresistible might of the Lord, and of the man whose healing silently attested it even as to the body, they could only command them to go aside, while they conferred together. A guilty conscience betrays its conscious weakness, however wilful. God invariably gives sufficient testimony to condemn man. He will prove this in the day of judgment; but it is certain to our faith now. He is God, and cannot act below Himself when it is a question of His own revelation.

On such occasions even those who profess most are apt to speak together, as if there were no God, or as if He did not hear them saying,

What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it {Acts 4:16}.

They would, if they could. Their will was engaged (sad to say!) against God, against the truth, against Jehovah and His anointed.

But that it spread no further among the people, let us straightly threaten them, that they may speak henceforth to no man in this name {Acts 4:17}.

Thus their lack of conscience could not be hid: witness their opposition to facts that they knew, and to truth that they could not deny. The apostles cannot but take the real seat of judgment, searching the hearts of their judges:

Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done. And being let go, they went to their own [company] {Acts 4:19-23}.

It is seen in this passage how truly it has been said that we have a new family.

They went to their own [company], and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them {Acts 4:23}.

Accordingly we find them speaking to God in a new manner, and suitably to the occasion:

Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together in this city [these last words being wrongly omitted in the received text] against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy servant [again it is servant] Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatening: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy servant Jesus {Acts 4:24-30}.

And God answered.

When they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together: and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost {Acts 4:31}.

They had received the Holy Ghost before; but to be filled

with Him goes farther, and supposes that no room was left for the action of nature, that the power of the Holy Ghost absorbed all for the time being.

They were filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness {Acts 4:31}.  

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Such was the effect. They were to be witnesses of Him.

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things in common [Acts 4:32].

The Spirit of God repeated this, I suppose, as having a further proof of His action on their souls at this time, because many more had been brought in.

And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet [Acts 4:33-35].

-- a slightly different development from the second chapter.

There we find that there was what might seem a greater freeness, and perhaps to some eyes a more striking simplicity. But all is in season, and it seems to me that, while the devotedness was the same (and the Spirit of God takes pains to show that it was the same, spite of largely increased numbers, by the continued mighty action of the Holy Ghost), still with this advance of numbers simplicity could not be kept up in the same apparent manner. The distribution made to each before was more direct and immediate; now it takes effect through the apostles. The possessions were laid at the apostles' feet, and distribution was made to every one according as he had need. Among the rest one man was conspicuous for the heartiness of his love. It was Barnabas, of whom we are afterwards to hear much in other ways of still more lasting moment.

But there is rarely a manifestation of God in the church without a dark shadow that accompanies it from the evil one. And further we find this immediately. We are not to be alarmed by the presence of evil, but rather to be sure that where God works Satan will follow, seeking to turn the very good in which the Spirit acts into a means for introducing his own counterfeit to the dishonour of the Lord. Thus in the present instance Ananias and Sapphira sell some of their property, but keep back part of the price; and this was done deliberately by concert for the purpose of gaining the character of devotedness without its cost. In principle they made the church their world, in which they sought to give the impression of a faith that confided in the Lord absolutely, while at the same time there was a secret reserve for themselves. Now the manifest point of that which was then wrought by the Spirit of God was grace in faith: there was in no way a demand. Nothing could more falsify the fruit of the Spirit of God here than converting it into a tacit rule: there was no compulsion whatever in the case. Nobody was asked to give anything. What was gold or silver, what houses or lands, to the Lord? The worth of it all depended on its being the power of the Spirit of God -- the fruit of divine grace in the heart. But Satan tempted them in the manner here described; and Peter, by whatever means he arrived at the conviction of it, arraigns the husband alone first.

It is a solemn thing to remember, that all sin now is against the Spirit. There may be, no doubt, the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against Him; but in truth all sin is sin against the Holy Ghost; and for this simple reason, that He has taken His place here. In Israel the sin was against the law, because the law was the testimony that God set in His sanctuary. By the law sin was measured in Israel; but it is not so for the Christian. There is now a far more serious and searching and thorough standard. Those that use the law now as a measure among Christians lower the test of judgment incomparably. Such a misuse of the law for righteous men does not at all prove that they are anxious about holiness or righteousness; it is a proof of their ignorance of the presence of the Holy Ghost, and the just and necessary effects of His presence. One has no thought, I repeat, of implying that it is not well meant. To be sure it is. It is simply that they do not understand the distinctive character of Christianity.

But this is a most serious error; and I doubt much whether all who in appearance and by profession take the place of owning the presence of the Spirit of God have by any means an adequate sense either of the privileges which are theirs or of the gravity of their responsibility. Now, Peter had. The days were early. There was much truth that had yet to be communicated and learnt; but the power of the presence of the Holy Ghost made itself felt. He at least seems to have realised the bearing of all, and so he deals with the sin of Ananias as one who had lied to the Holy Ghost. He had kept back part of the price of the land.

Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?

It was still his own.

Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God {Acts 5:4}.

Forthwith Ananias comes under the judgment of the Lord. He fell asleep, and great fear came upon all them that heard these words.

And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter said to her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? {Acts 5:6-8}.

Thus there was an appeal to her conscience, without an atom of harshness in it. She had longer time to weigh what they were about; but in truth it was a conspiracy; not so much to injure others as to exalt themselves; but the end was as bad as the means were evil and odious in the sight of God. Christ entered into none of their thoughts or desires. Many a thing has been said untruly since, which was not so judged of God. But there was an especial offence at this time, in that, He having wrought so wondrously in blessing man with the best blessings through Christ our Lord, the practical denial of the presence of the Spirit should have so deliberately and quickly manifested itself for the express purpose of exalting the flesh which Christianity has set aside for ever. Hence Peter says,

How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold the feet of them which

Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost? {Acts 5:3}
have buried thy husband are at the door, and they shall carry thee out. . . . And great fear came upon all the church (Acts 5:9-11).

Then we find the Lord accomplishing His word: greater works were to be done by them than even He Himself had wrought: never do we hear of the Lord's shadow curing the sick. And believers were the more added to the Lord. The unbelievers were warned,

and of the rest durst no man join himself unto them (Acts 5:13).

Souls that bowed to the word were attracted, multitudes both of men and women; and the enemy was awed, in some quarters alarmed, and irritated in others.

The high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, and were filled with indignation. They laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison (Acts 5:17, 18).

But the angel of the Lord shows his power; for this chapter is remarkable in giving us a picture not merely of the sweet activity of grace, but of divine power in presence of evil. We have seen the positive interference of the Spirit of God. At the end of the chapter before we had the second witness of it, after the foundation laid, and first witness given, in Acts 2. But here we have the proofs of His presence in other ways -- power in dealing with the evil, and judging it within the church of God; next, power by angelic deliverance; thirdly, power by men in providence. Gamaliel in council is just as truly the effect of God's power working by man, as the angel in opening the doors of the prison and bringing the apostles out, -- not, of course, so wonderful, but as real a part of God's working in behalf of His assembly and servants.

But there is another case. The very same men who were delivered by divine power are allowed to be beaten by man. Nay, not only do they take it quietly -- these men about whom all the power of God was thus seen in action in one form or another; but they rejoice that they were counted worthy to suffer. Are we prepared for the same thing? Be assured, brethren, if we have any tie with Christ by grace, we belong to the same company: it is our own company; it is a part of our own heritage of blessing. It is not, I admit, according to the spirit of the age to deal with us after the same sort; but there is no real change for the better in the world to hinder the outbreak of its violence at any time. Is it not well therefore for us to realize to what we belong, and what the Lord looks for from us, and what it is He has recorded for our instruction as well as comfort?

After all this then we find that they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ (Acts 5:41, 42).

It is impossible that a human authority could be entitled to set aside the direct command of the Lord Jesus. The Lord had commanded them to go and preach the gospel to every creature. Men had forbidden this. It is very clear that the apostle Peter gives the prohibition only a human place now (Acts 5:29). If men had told them to be silent, and the Lord bid them preach, the highest authority must be paramount.

* * *

Another form of evil betrays itself in the next chapter (Acts 6); and here again we find in the very good that God had wrought evil murmuring is found. It is not merely individuals as before; in some respects it is a more serious case: there are complaints heard in the church -- the murmuring of Grecians against the Hebrews (that is, of the foreign speaking Jews against the Jews proper of the Holy Land), because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. This forms the occasion for the provisional wisdom of the Spirit of God.

We have already seen with abundant evidence how truly the church is a divine institution, founded upon a divine person (even the Holy Ghost) coming down and making it, since redemption, His dwelling-place here below. Besides, we may now learn the working of this living power that is drawn out by the circumstances which call it forth. It is not a system of rules; nothing is more destructive of the very nature of the church of God. It is not a human society, with either the leaders of it or the mass choosing for themselves what or whom they think best, but the Spirit of God who is there meets in His wisdom whatever may be necessary for the glory of Christ. All this is preserved in the written word for our instruction and guidance now.

Here we have the institution of seven men to look after the poor who were in danger of being forgotten, or in some way neglected -- at any rate, so they had complained. To cut off the appearance of it, and at the same time to leave the apostles free for their own proper work of a more spiritual kind,

the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business (Acts 6:2, 3).

Thus we find two things: not only the apostles formally appointing, but the multitude of the believers left to choose, where it was a question that concerned the distribution of their gifts. On the part of those that governed the church of God, there ought not to be the appearance of coveting the property of God's people, or the disposal of it. At the same time the apostles do appoint those who were thus chosen over this matter. They were called of God to act, and so they do.

But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4).

The principle of the choice too is striking; for all these names, it would appear, were Grecian. What gracious wisdom! This was clearly to stop the mouths of the complainers. The Hellenists, or Grecians, were jealous of the Palestinian Jews. The persons appointed were, judging from their names, every one of them Hellenists, or foreign-speaking Jews. The troublers ought to have been not only satisfied but somewhat ashamed. Thus it is that grace, while it discerns, knows how to rise above evil; for murmuring
against others is not the way to correct anything that is wrong, even if it be real. But the grace of the Lord always meets circumstances, and turns them to a profitable account, by a manifestation of wisdom from above. The field was about to be enlarged; and although it was but a poor root of man’s complaints which led to this fresh line of action, God was moving over all, could use these seven, and would give some of them a good degree, as we find in Stephen soon and in Philip later. But He marked it in another way too, which showed His approbation.

The word of God increased,
spite of murmuring;
and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly;
and a new feature appears --
a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith [Acts 6:7].

Stephen then, full of grace and power (but One could be said to be full of grace and truth), is found doing great wonders. This draws out the opposition of the leaders of the Jews, who

were not able to resist the spirit and the wisdom with which he spake. Then they suborned men, who said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, and set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us [Acts 6:10-14].

Accordingly, thus accused, Stephen answers the appeal of the high priest,

Are these things so? {Acts 7:1}

And in his wonderful discourse (Acts 7), on which I can but touch, he sets before them the prominent facts of their history, which bear on God’s question with the Jews at this moment. God had brought out their forefather Abraham, but He never gave him actually to possess this land. Why, then, boast of it so much? Those who, according to nature, vaunted loudly of Abraham and of God’s dealings, were clearly not in communion with God, or even with Abraham. Spite of the love and honour that God had for their forefathers, he never possessed the land. Why, then, set such stress on that land?

But more than this. There was one of the descendants of the fathers who stands out most especially, and above all of the family of Abraham, in the book of Genesis -- one man who, more than any other, was the type of the Messiah. Need I say it was Joseph? And how did he fare? Sold by his brethren to the Gentiles. The application was not difficult. They knew how they had treated Jesus of Nazareth. Their consciences could not fail to remind them how the Gentiles would have willingly let Him go, and how their voices and will had prevailed against even that hardened governor of Judæa, Pontius Pilate. Thus it was manifest that the leading points of Joseph’s tale, as far as the wickedness of the Jews and the selling to the Gentiles, were rehearsed again in Jesus of Nazareth.

But, coming down later still, another man fills the history of the second book of the Bible, and indeed has to do with all the remaining books of the Pentateuch. It was Moses. What about him? Substantially the same story again: the rejected of Israel, whose pride would not hear when he sought to bring about peace between a contending Israelite and his oppressor, Moses was compelled to fly from Israel, and then found his hiding place among the Gentiles. How far Stephen entered intelligently into the bearing of these types it is not for one to say; but we can easily see the wisdom of God; we can see the power of the Holy Ghost with which he spake.

But there was another element also. He comes down next to their temple; for this was an important point. It was not only that he had spoken of Jesus of Nazareth, but they had also charged him with saying that He would destroy this place, and change their customs. What did their own prophets say?

But Solomon built him a house. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in [places] made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things? {Acts 7:47-50}.

In short, he shows that Israel had sinned against God in every ground of relationship. They had broken the law; they had slain the prophets; they had killed the Messiah; and they had always resisted the Holy Ghost. What an awful position! and the more awful, because it was the simple truth.

This brought out the frenzied rage of Israel, and they grashed on him with their teeth; and he that charged them with always resisting the Holy Ghost, as their fathers did, full of the Holy Ghost looks up into heaven, and sees the Son of man, and bears witness that he sees Him standing at the right hand of God. And thus we have what I began with: we have the manifestation of the character of Christianity, and the perception of its power, and the effect produced upon him that appreciated it. We have not merely the Lord going up to heaven, but His servant, who saw heaven open, and Jesus, the Son of man, standing at the right hand of God.

But there is more: for while they rushed now to silence the mouth which so completely proved their nation’s habitual sin against the Spirit, they stoned him indeed, but they stoned him praying, and saying,

Lord Jesus, receive my spirit {Acts 7:59}.

They could not silence the words that told how deeply he had drunk into the grace of the Lord Jesus. They could not silence his confidence, his peaceful entrance into his place with Christ, associated consciously with Him as he was. And then we learn (it may be without a thought on his part) how grace conforms to the words of Jesus on the cross, and certainly without the smallest imitation of it, but so much the more evincing the power of God. For Jesus could say, and He alone could say rightly,

Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit {Luke 23:46}.

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Jesus alone fittingly could say,

I commend my spirit.

He who could lay down His life, and could take it again, could so speak to the Father. But the servant of the Lord could say, and rightly and blessedly,

Lord Jesus, receive my spirit {Acts 7:59}.

Nor was this all; the same heart that thus confided absolutely in the Lord, and knew his own heavenly portion with Jesus, kneels down and cries with a loud voice. This was not directed to Jesus only: no loud voice was needed there: a whisper would be enough for Him. The loud voice was for man, for his dull ears and unfeeling heart. With a loud voice he cries,

Lord, lay not this sin to their charge {Acts 7:60}.

What simplicity, but what fulness of communion with Jesus! The same who had prayed for them reproduced His own feelings in the heart of His servant.

I shall not now develop this subject more than other scenes of the deepest interest, but just simply and shortly commend to all that are here the beautiful witness that it affords us of the true place, power, and grace of a Christian.
Lectures Introductory
to the Study of
The Acts, the Catholic Epistles,
and
the Revelation

Lecture 2
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We are now arrived at a turning-point in the history, not merely of the church, but of the unfolding of the truth of God, and the manifestation of His ways. The death of Stephen, therefore, has in various points of view a great significance. And no wonder. His was the first spirit that departed to be with Christ after the Holy Ghost was given. But it was not merely one who departed to be with the Lord, which was far better; it was by the act of the Jews in the infuriate spirit of persecution. The very same people had done it who had so lately received with the utmost favour (not the truth, nor the grace of God, which is inseparable from His truth, but), at any rate, the mighty impress of the grace as well as of the truth which had produced unwonted largeness of heart, unselfishness of spirit, and joy and liberty, that struck the minds of the Jews accustomed to the coldness of death in their own system.

But now all was changed. What was most sweet soon became bitter, as it often is in the things of God. And when they understood the bearing of that which God had wrought here below -- that it judged man; that it gave no countenance to the religiousness in which they boasted; that it showed most convincingly, and so much the more bitterly because convincingly, what God all through His testimony with them had expressly intimated, by the prophets as well as in the types of the law itself, that He had deeper purposes; that nothing on earth could satisfy Him; that it was in His mind, on the proved ruin of Israel, to bring in heaven and its things for a heavenly people even while here below: -- now that this was made manifest, above all, in the testimony that Stephen had rendered to the very man that they had rejected and crucified, seen in glory at the right hand of God, it was unbearable. Could it be otherwise, when, spite of proud unbelief and conceit of distinctive privilege, they were forced to feel that they were none the less the constant resisters of the Holy Ghost like their fathers, who had been guilty themselves, and suffered the consequence of their guilt in their prostration to the Gentiles; to feel now that they themselves were no better, but rather worse; that there was the same unbelief bringing out its effects even more tremendously; that they were guilty of the blood of their own Messiah, who was now risen and exalted in the highest seat of heaven? All these things were pressed home by Stephen; indeed, I have simply touched on a very small part of his most telling address.

But the close lets us see more than this. There was the revelation now of Christ as an object for the Christian in heaven, and the revelation of Him too in a way entirely outside the narrow boundaries of Judaism. Stephen speaks of Him as Son of man. This is an essential feature of Christianity. Unlike the law, it addresses all; there is no narrowness in a rejected heavenly Christ. By the Holy Ghost there is imparted all the firmness of a divine bond, and all the intimacy of a real living relationship of the nearest kind. At the same time, along with this is seen universality in the going out of both the truth and grace of God, which could not but be foreign to the law. And although its character had to be yet more brought out by another and far greater witness of divine things who was still in the blindness of Jewish unbelief -- at this very moment himself taking his own miserable part, though with a good natural conscience, in the death of Stephen, -- all told powerfully upon the Jews, but lacerated their feelings to the utmost.

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I have already touched upon the practical effects, and therefore will not enlarge on these now. My object, of course, is simply to give a sketch of the important book now before us, endeavouring to connect (as, indeed, evidently the chapter does connect) what was coming with what was past. Saul was consenting unto Stephen’s death, and Saul was the expression of Jewish feeling in its best aspect. It was now guilty of resisting unto blood, not merely as their fathers had done, but the heavenly testimony of Jesus. Nevertheless the God that vindicated the honour of the crucified Jesus did not forget the martyred Stephen; and though there was an outburst of persecution, which scattered abroad throughout the region of Judaea and Samaria all the believers that were in Jerusalem except the apostles, devout men were not wanting who carried Stephen to his burial. Clearly they were not Christians; but God has all hearts in His keeping, And they made great lamentation over him (Acts 8:2).

This was suitable to them. Theirs was not the joy that saw
into the presence of God. They felt in a measure, and, justly, the tremendous deed that had been done. And as there was reality at least in their feeling, they made suitable lamentation. But

as for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and dragging off men and women, committed them to prison {Acts 8:3}.

Religious persecution is invariably ruthless and blind even to the commonest feelings of humanity.

Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word {Acts 8:4};

for the God who not only has hearts at His command, but controls all circumstances, was now about to accomplish that which He had always at heart, making the disciples to be witnesses of Jesus to the very ends of the earth, though first of all to Judæa and Samaria. Accordingly we find, as the testimony had gone forth throughout Jerusalem at least, so now the old rival of Jerusalem comes within the dealings of God. Philip, who had been appointed by the apostles at the choice of the multitude of the disciples to care for the distribution to the poor, goes down to the cities of Samaria preaching Christ. This did not at all flow from his ordination. His appointment was to take care of the tables. His preaching Christ was the fruit of the Lord's call. Where man chooses for human things, we have the Lord recognising it. He would have His people, where they give, to have a voice. He would meet them in grace, stopping complaints, and showing that He honours and confides in their suitable choice. But not so in the ministry of the word or testimony of the Lord. Here the Lord alone gives, alone calls, alone sends forth Philip, besides being one of the seven, was an evangelist,

as we are told expressly in another part of this very book (Acts 21:8). It is important to distinguish between the two things -- one, the charge to which man appointed him; the other, the gift which the Lord conferred (Eph. 4). I merely make the remark in passing; though it will not be needed for most here, it may be for some.

Philip goes down, then, preaching Christ;

and the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did {Acts 8:6}.

But the testimony of miracles is apt to act upon the flesh. They are, indeed, a sign to unbelievers, and that such is the result we find shown us by the Spirit of God in the chapter before us. However graciously given of the Lord as a token to attract the careless minds of men, they are dangerous when they are made the resting-place and the object of the mind; and this was the fatal mistake made then, and not merely there but by many millions of souls from that day to this. Faith never rests on any other ground than God's word. All else is vain, and apt to accredit as well as entice man. There was indeed the unmistakable action of the Spirit of God on this occasion -- the power that cast out unclean spirits and healed the sick, as well as the means of spreading joy throughout that city for the souls of men. Evidently it was power in external display, then so richly manifested, which acted on the fleshly mind of Simon, himself having the reputation of a great one, and before this the vessel of some kind of demoniacal power -- the miserable power of Satan, with which he dazzled the eyes of men. But now finding himself eclipsed, like a wily man, his object was to avail himself of this superior energy if it were possible. His aim was not Christ; it was all for himself. He wished to gain fresh influence, not to lose his old: why not, by this new method, if possible, turn things to his own account?

Accordingly, among the train of those that received the gospel and were baptized, Simon is found. Philip had not the discernment to see through him: evangelists are apt to be sanguine. It may be that the Lord had not allowed the true character of Simon to be manifested to every eye at that moment. It did not escape the discerning eyes of Peter a little afterward. But as we are told here,

When they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized both men and women; and Simon himself believed also {Acts 8:12, 13}.

Scripture does show, though it does not sanction as divine, a faith that is founded on evidence. And it continues still. So John often speaks of it; and the very one that tells us most of the divinely given character of true faith -- who most of all lets us into its secret power and blessedness, even eternal life as bound up with it, -- that same John is the one who more than any other furnishes instances of a mere humanly produced faith. Such was the faith of Simon. The gospel of Luke also describes what is similar; that is to say, a faith not insincere but human, not wrought of the Spirit but founded on the mind yielding to reasons, proofs, evidences, which are to it overpowering; but there is nothing of God in it: there is no meeting between the soul and God. Without this, faith is good for nothing, nor is God Himself honoured in His own word. Power was what struck Simon's mind -- himself a devotee of power, who in times past had sunk indeed low, even to the enemy of God and man in order from any source to be the vessel of a power beyond man. He could not deny the might that proved itself without effort superior to anything he had ever wielded. This was what attracted him; and, as it is said here,

he continued with Philip (there was no other bond of connexion),

and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done {Acts 8:13}.

A believer would have wondered more at the grace of God, and bowed in adoration before Him. Conscience would have been searched by the truth of God; and the heart would have been filled with praise at the grace of God. Neither one nor other ever entered into the thoughts or feelings of Simon.

And

when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John {Acts 8:14}.
It was of the greatest importance that unity should be kept up practically, -- not merely that there should be proclaimed the truth that there is unity, but that there should be the maintenance of it in practice. Accordingly Peter and John, two of the chiefs among the apostles, come down from Jerusalem. But there was another reason too. It was so ordered of God that the Holy Ghost should not at first be conferred on the disciples at Samaria: I do not mean merely on such as Simon or false brethren, but even on those that were true. Undoubtedly they could not have believed the gospel, had there not been the quickening operation of the Holy Ghost; but we must distinguish between the Holy Ghost giving life and the Holy Ghost Himself given.

Another thing too let me again and again remark: the gift of the Holy Ghost never means those mighty wonders of power which had acted on the greedy and ambitious mind of Simon Magus. The gift of the Spirit is not at all the same thing as the gifts. These gifts, at least such as were of an extraordinary sort, were the outward signs of that gift in early days; and it was of great importance that there should be a decisive palpable testimony to it. The presence of the Holy Ghost was a new and quite unexampled thing even among believers. Hence it is there were mighty powers that wrought by those who were employed by the Holy Ghost; as, for instance, by Philip himself; afterwards also by the disciples, when Peter and John came down and laid their hands upon them with prayer. The Holy Ghost came upon them, not merely, it will be observed, certain spiritual powers, but the Holy Ghost Himself. They had not those powers only, but this divine person given to them. Scripture is clear and unequivocal as to the truth of the case. I can understand difficulties in the minds of believers; and no one would wish to force or hurry the convictions of any; nor would it be of the slightest value to receive even a truth without the faith that is produced, and exercised, and cleared by the word of God. But at the same time to my own mind it seems to be only homage to God's word to affirm positively that of which I am sure.

I therefore must say that the gift of the Holy Ghost here is, in my judgment, clearly distinct from anything in the way of either a spiritual gift for souls or a miraculous power, as it is called. There followed also such signs, or outward powers; but the Holy Ghost was given Himself, according to the Lord's word -- the promise of the Father, a promise which, as all know, was in the first instance assured to those who were already believers, and which was made good to them because they were believers, not to make them so. When redemption was accomplished, it was the seal of the faith and the life which they already had. There can be no doubt that the facts at Samaria were analogous; but this remarkable feature is to be noticed, that the Holy Ghost was here conferred by (not, as at Jerusalem, apart from) the laying on of the hands of the apostles. Of this we heard nothing in the divine history of the day of Pentecost; and I think that scripture is abundantly plain that there could have been nothing of the kind then and there. First of all, the apostles and the disciples themselves received it as they were waiting. The Holy Ghost came down upon them suddenly, with no previous sign whatever, except that which was suitable to the Holy Ghost when sent down from heaven -- the mighty rushing wind, and then the tokens of His presence upon each were manifested. Yet there was no such requirement as imposition of hands in order to be the medium of it. But it would seem that special reasons operated at Samaria to make it necessary there. It was of all moment to keep up the links practically between a work which might have looked to many there, as now, not a little irregular. It was wrought not by those that had previously been always the great spiritual witnesses; for we hear of none ministering but the apostles, and indeed not even of all the apostles speaking, though it may be that they did. But here we have clearly a man who had been chosen for another and an external purpose by the church, but whom the Lord uses elsewhere for a new and higher purpose, for which He had qualified him by the Holy Ghost.

Nevertheless, care was taken to hinder all appearance of independence or indifference to unity. There was the freest action of the Holy Ghost, -- sovereignly free, -- and it is impossible to maintain this too stringently; and there was the utmost care that all should be left open for the Holy Ghost to act according to His own will, not only within the church, but also by evangelizing outside. For all that God took precaution to bind up together the work at Samaria with that which He had wrought at Jerusalem. Hence, though Philip might preach and they receive the gospel, the apostles come down, and with prayer lay their hands upon them, and then they receive the Holy Ghost. To a reflecting believer it will be plain that the reasons for this do not hold at the present time. I merely make this remark lest any should draw from this the inference that there is a necessity for men commissioned from God to lay on hands now in order to confer such a spiritual blessing.

The fact is, that the notion of imposition of hands being a universal medium of conveying the Holy Ghost is certainly a mistake. On the greatest occasions, when the Holy Ghost was given, we have no ground to believe that hands were laid on any. There were two exceptional occasions on which one or more of the apostles so acted, but at times of more general interest and importance nothing of the sort was heard of. Take, as the most solemn moment of all, the day of Pentecost. Who that honours scripture can pretend that hands were laid on any then? Yet the Holy Ghost was given in especial power on that day. But what is more to the purpose for us Gentiles, when Cornelius and his household were brought in, not only no appearance of it is visible, but positive proof to the contrary. Peter was present, but he certainly laid no hand of his on a single soul that day before the Holy Ghost was given. So far from it, as we shall find by and by in Acts 10, the Holy Ghost was given while he was yet speaking, before they were so much as baptized. On the day of Pentecost they were baptized first, and then they received the gift of the Holy Ghost. At Samaria they had been baptized for some time, as we know. On believing they were baptized, as we are told in Acts 8; but they received the Holy Ghost after an interval, through the action of the apostles.

I refer to this just to show how far scripture is from
countenancing the cramped ideas of men, and that the only way of truth is to believe all the word of God, searching out the special principle of God by which He instructs us in the different characters of His action. Surely He is always wise and consistent with Himself. It is we who by confounding matters lose consequently the blessedness and beauty of the truth of God.

Now the reason, as it appears to me, why divine wisdom led to this striking difference at Samaria, was the necessity of hindering that independence to which even Christians are so liable. There was special exposure to this evil which called for so much the greater guard against it at Samaria. How painful must it be to the Spirit of God if the old pride of Samaria were to rise up against Jerusalem! God would cut off the very appearance of this. There was the free action of His Spirit towards Samaria without the apostles, but the Holy Ghost was given by the laying on of their hands. This solemn act was not merely an ancient sign of divine blessing, but of identification also. Such, I suppose, therefore, was the principle that lay at the bottom of the difference of the divine action on these two occasions.

Then we find Simon struck not so much by an individual's endowment with miraculous power, as by the fact that others received it by the apostles' laying on of hands. At once, with the instinct of flesh, he sees a good opportunity for himself, and, judging of others' hearts by his own, presents money as the means of acquiring the coveted power. But this detects the man. How often our words show where we are! How continually too where we least think they do! It is not only in cases of our judgment (for there is nothing that so often judges a man as his own judgment of another); but also where the desire goes out after that which we have not got. How all-important for our souls that we should have Christ before us, and that we should have no desire but for His glory! Not a ray of the light of Christ had entered the heart of Simon, and so Peter at once detects the false heart. With that energy which characterized him he says,

Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God {Acts 8:20, 21}.

At the same time there is the pity that belongs to one who knew the grace of God, and saw the end of all in His judgment.

Repent, therefore, of this thy wickedness, and pray God if, perhaps, the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee; for I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity {Acts 8:22, 23}.

God has no pleasure in the death of a sinner. Simon can only answer,

Pray ye to the Lord for me.

He had no confidence in the Lord for himself -- not a particle; for just as those who have confidence in the Lord have not an atom in man, his sole hope of blessing for his soul lay in the influence of another man, not in Christ’s grace.

Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of those things which ye have spoken come upon me {Acts 8:24}.

The apostles then, after preaching in the various villages of the Samaritans, return to Jerusalem. But not so the word of God. The gospel goes forth elsewhere; it is in no way bound to Jerusalem. On the contrary, the grand bearing of this chapter is that now the tide of blessing is flowing away from Jerusalem. The holy city had rejected the gospel. It was not enough that they had rejected the Messiah, nor even that He was made Lord and Christ on high. They refused utterly the Holy Ghost’s testimony to the Son of man glorified in heaven, and slew or scattered the witnesses. Who then was specially used as the instrument of the free action of the Holy Ghost elsewhere, without plan, without thought of man, and apparently the simple result of circumstances, but in truth God’s hand directing all? Philip is told by the angel of the Lord to arise and go towards the south -- towards

Gaza, which is desert {Acts 8:26}.

And he arose and went {Acts 8:27}.

Strikingly beautiful it is to see the devoted simplicity with which he answers to the call of his Master. I will not pretend to say that it cost him little, but am sure it would have been a heavy trial to many a man of God to leave that which was so bright, where He had wrought powerfully in using himself for His own glory. But he is truly a bondman, and at once is ready to go at the bidding of the Lord, who had given him to reap in joy where He had Himself tasted the firstfruits in the days of His own ministry here below. Samaria, which had held out against the truth, was now yielding the harvest that a greater than Philip had sown; and there was joy in that very Samaria where greater works were now done according to His own word.

But this was not enough for God. A man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under the queen of the Ethiopians, was returning after having gone up to Jerusalem to worship. He was going back without the blessing that his earnest heart yearned after. He had gone up to the great city of solemnities, but the blessing was no longer to be found there. Jehovah’s house had been left doubly desolate; Jerusalem had this added to her other sins that, when the blessing had come down from heaven, she would not have it. She despised the Holy Ghost as she had despised the Messiah; and no wonder therefore that he who had gone up to Jerusalem to worship was returning with the yearnings of his heart still unsatisfied. And not the angel but the Spirit guides now. The angel had to do with providential circumstances, but the Spirit with that which directly deals with spiritual need and blessing. So says the Spirit to Philip,

Go near and join thyself to this chariot {Acts 8:29}.

Philip acts at once, with alacrity hears the eunuch read the prophet Isaiah, and puts the question whether he understood what was read. The answer is,

How can I, except some man should guide me? {Acts 8:31}.

Thereon Philip is invited to come up and sit with him, Isa. 53
being, as we know, the portion in question; and the eunuch asks of whom the prophet spoke these words --
of himself or some other man? {Acts 8:34}
so gross was his darkness even as to the general point of the chapter.
Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the very same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus {Acts 8:35}.
It was enough. That one name, through faith in it, what could it not accomplish? The facts were notorious; but of this we may be sure, that never had they been put together before the mind of the Ethiopian as then, never connected with the living Word and His grace. They were now put in contact with his wants, and all was instantly light in his soul. Oh, what a blessing it is to have and know such a Saviour! What a joy to be warranted to proclaim Him to others without stint, even to a soul as dark as the Ethiopian, who was then and there baptized!

Remember that Acts 8:37 is only an imaginary conversation between him and Philip. The man just now so ignorant is not the channel that God was about to use for bringing out the remarkable confession that is introduced prematurely here. It was reserved for another of whom we shall read in the next chapter. This scene does show the stranger discovering the predicted Messiah in Jesus of Nazareth -- the Messiah suffering, no doubt, but accomplishing atonement. Certainly the Ethiopian received the truth; but Acts 8:37 had better be passed by in your minds, at least in this connexion. All who are informed in these matters are aware that the best authorities reject the entire verse.

He went on his way rejoicing {Acts 8:39}.

Though the Spirit of the Lord catches away Philip, so full is his heart of the truth that we may be sure all that occurred confirmed it in his eyes. How could anything seem too great and good to him whose heart had just made the acquaintance of Jesus? Did he not feel so much the more settled in Jesus as there was no other object now before his soul? It was the Lord that had brought Philip, and it was His Spirit that had taken him away; but it was He too who had given him and left him Jesus for ever. Philip is found at Azotus, and passing through he preaches elsewhere.

At this point we come to the history of the call of another and yet more honoured witness of divine grace and Christ's glory. Saul of Tarsus was yet breathing out his threats and slaughter when the Lord was pursuing His onward gracious work among the Samaritans and strangers. The returning treasurer of Queen Candace, was a proselyte, I suppose, from the Gentiles, living among them, not as a Gentile himself, but practically a Jew, whatever the place of his birth and residence. The time for the call of the Gentiles strictly was not yet come, though the way is being prepared. The Samaritans, as you know, were a mongrel race; the stranger may have been possibly a proselyte from among the Gentiles; but the apostle of the Gentiles is now to be called. Such is the unfolding of the ways of God at this point.

Saul in his zeal had desired letters giving him authority to punish the Christian Jews, and was found on his way journeying near the Gentile city that he sought.

Suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? {Acts 9:3-5}
All depended upon this.

And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest {Acts 9:5}.

What a revolution this word caused in that mighty heart! Confidence in man, in, self, was overthrown to its foundations -- all that his life had been zealously building up.

I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.

It was the Lord undoubtedly, and the Lord declared He was Jesus, and Jesus was Jehovah. He dared not doubt longer: to him it was self-evident. If Jesus was Jehovah, what then had his religion been? what had high priest or Sanhedrim done for him? Was it not then God's high priest, God's law? Unquestionably it was. How then could so fatal an error have been committed? It was the fact. Man, Israel, not merely Saul, was altogether blinded: the flesh never knows God. The despised and hated name of Jesus is the only hope for man, Jesus is the only Saviour and Lord. His glory burst on the astonished eyes of Saul, who surrenders immediately. It was not without the deepest searching of heart, though smitten down at once; for how could there be a question as to the divine power? How could its reality be doubted? As little could there be a question as to the grace exercised toward him, though the manner was not after that of man. The light that shone suddenly on him was from heaven. But it was God's way. The voice that said,

Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? {Acts 9:4} was from Jesus.
Who art thou, Lord? he cried, and hears,
I am Jesus whom thou persecutest {Acts 9:5}.
How could he resist the heavenly vision?

Observe that, although the next words are beyond a question scriptural, and so far the case differs from verse 37 referred to in the last chapter {Acts 8:37}, the last clause of Acts 9:5 and the first of Acts 9:6 belong properly speaking to two other chapters (Acts 22, 26) rather than to this. I do not therefore comment upon these additions here: they will remain for their own real and suitable places. But Saul does arise from the earth.

And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man {Acts 9:7}.

But he had heard the voice of His mouth, and His words were spirit and life, eternal life, to his soul. Three days and nights he neither eats nor drinks. The profound moral work of God proceeded in that converted heart. Nevertheless even he, apostle though he were, must enter by the same lowly gate as
another. And so we have the story of Ananias, and the ways of the Lord, -- not of some great apostle, nor even of Philip, but a disciple at Damascus named Ananias, to whom the Lord spoke in a vision. And he goes, the Lord communicating another vision to the apostle himself, in which he sees Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him that he might receive his sight.

The Spirit puts us in presence of the freedom of the servant, as he pleads with the Lord, for neither man nor even the child of God ever reaches up to the height of His grace. Ananias, wholly unprepared for the call of such an enemy of the gospel, slow of heart to believe all, expostulates, as it were, with the Saviour.

Lord,
says he,

I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name {Acts 9:13, 14}.

But the Lord said unto him,

Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel {Acts 9:15}.

Even here the intimation is sufficiently plain that the Gentiles were in the foreground of the work designed for Saul of Tarsus. But this was not all. It was to be emphatically a witness of grace in suffering for Christ's name:

For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake {Acts 9:16}.

And so it was. Ananias goes, puts his hand on him, addresses him by the sweet title of relationship Christ began, consecrated, and has given, telling him how the Lord, even Jesus, had appeared unto him. How confinatory it must have been to the apostle's heart to learn that Ananias was now sent by the same Lord Jesus, without the slightest intimation from without, whether of Saul himself or any other man!

The Lord hath sent me that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost {Acts 9:17}.

And every word was made good.

Saul arose and was baptized, and when he had received meat he was strengthened, and remained with the disciples for some time {Acts 9:18, 19}.

In due time follows the further development of the truth as to Christ in testimony.

He preached in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God {Acts 9:20}.

Such was the emphatic and characteristic presentation of His person assigned to the apostle, and this at once. It was not that Peter did not know the same, we are all aware how blessedly he confessed Him to be (not Messiah only, but) the Son of the living God while Jesus was here below. Nor is it that the other disciples had not the same faith. Surely it was true of all who really believed and knew His glory. Nevertheless

out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh {Matt. 12:34};

and he who loves to present the Lord in the depth of His personal grace, and the height of His glory, has surely a spiritual fitness for the expression of the heart's joy in that which faith has created within. Thus, although the others no doubt had the same Saviour taught them by the Holy Ghost, still there was not in every case the same measure of entrance or appreciation. Paul had it not more suddenly than with a heavenly splendour which was peculiar to himself; and thus there was a vast work soon wrought. There was a bringing out of that which belonged to Christ, not merely the place which Christ took, but that which He is from all eternity, -- consequently that which is most of all intrinsically precious. He preached Him, and this boldly in the synagogue too,

that he is the Son of God.

All that heard were amazed.

But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews that dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ {Acts 9:22}.

The doctrine of His Sonship did not in the smallest degree, of course, set aside the Messiahship. This remained; but he preached Him rather in His own personal glory, -- not as the Son of David, the servant, which was the great burden of Peter's preaching, made Lord and Christ; -- not that He was the Son of man in heaven, as Stephen witnessed; but that this Jesus, the Christ, is the Son of God; -- clearly therefore more particularly bound up with the divine nature, or godhead glory of Himself.

After this comes no slight discipline for Saul. As the Jews watched the gates to kill him, the disciples took him by night and let him down the wall in a basket. Thus we find the utmost simplicity and quietness. There is no show of doing great things; nor do we read of daring in any way: what is there of Christ in the one or the other? Contrariwise, we see that which outwardly looks exceedingly weak: but this was the man that was in another day to say that he gloried in his infirmities. He acts on that of which he afterwards wrote. He was led of God.

Then we learn another important lesson.

When Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple {Acts 9:26}.

God did not clothe him with such overwhelming influence that doors were thrown open to him though the greatest of the apostles. Oh why should any confessor of Christ -- why should any child of God -- shrink from rendering godly satisfaction to those that seek it? Why so much haste and impatience? Why should there be unwillingness to meet and submit to others when it is a question of reception? What earnest desire should there not be to bow to all that which is due to the church of God? Here we find not even the apostle Paul was above it.

Not on the other hand that there ought to be a spirit of suspicion or distrust in the church or any Christian. I am far from saying that it was comely on their part to indulge in hesitation touching this wondrous display of divine grace. But what I want to press for our profit, beloved brethren, is that
at any rate he who is the object of grace can afford to be gracious. Nor is there a more painful want of it than that kind of restiveness which is so ready to take offence at the smallest fear or anxiety on the part of others. Surely to shrink from their enquiries is nothing but self on our part. If Christ were the object of our souls, we should bow as one did called of God with incomparably better tokens of the Lord’s favour than any other, -- this blessed man, Saul of Tarsus. But if the church were distrustful, the Lord was not unmindful, and knew how to give courage to the heart of His servant. There was among them a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost, of whom we have had a happy report before, as we shall hear many (though not altogether unmingled) good tidings to the end. For indeed he was but man. Nevertheless, being a good man and full of the Holy Ghost, he seeks out and takes Saul to the apostles when others stood aloof, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus; and he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem {Acts 9:27, 28}.

Grace can credit grace easily, understands the ways of the Lord, and disarms suspicion. It is beautiful to see how the Lord thus, even in the history of that which was unprecedented and might seem to lie outside Christian wants, provides in His blessed word for the every day difficulties we have to prove in such a day of weakness as ours.

After this wonderful working of God the church had rest. I say, 

the church {Acts 9:31};

for there need be no doubt, I think, that such is the true form 24 of what is given us in Acts 9:31. The common text and translations have “the churches”; but I believe that this faulty form crept in here, because the sense of the oneness of the church so speedily passed away. Hence people could not understand that it was one and the same church throughout all Judaea, and Galilee, and Samaria. It was plain enough to see the Christian assembly in a city, even if it were as numerous as in Jerusalem, where it must have met in not a few different localities and chambers. The church, not merely in a city but in a province or country, is intelligible enough to man; but it soon became more difficult to see its unity in various and differing provinces. The change of reading here seems to prove it was too much for the copyists of this book. The reading sanctioned by the best and most ancient authorities is the singular -- not the churches, but the church.

Then had the church rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria {Acts 9:31}. 

Undoubtedly throughout these districts churches existed; but it was all one and the same church too, and not different bodies.

The end of the chapter shows us the progress of Peter. He visits round about. It was no longer a question of Jerusalem only even for Peter; but without being called to the same largeness of work practically as the apostle Paul, he nevertheless passes throughout all quarters {Acts 9:32}

of Palestine, and comes down to the saints at Lydda, and is seen by those of Saron. At Joppa too was wrought a still more striking miracle of the Lord in Tabitha’s case, already dead, in that of Eneas, who had been paralysed for years. On these I need only remark how grace used them for the spread of the testimony.

All that dwelt in Lydda and Saron. saw him, and turned to the Lord {Acts 9:35}.

It was known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord {Acts 9:42}.

But at this point a still more important step was about to be taken; and the Lord enters on it with due solemnity, as we shall see in the following chapter (Acts 10).

Little did the great apostle of the circumcision anticipate what was before him as he tarried many days in Jopha with one Simon a tanner. For hence the Lord called him to a new sphere -- a task which, to a Jewish mind, was beyond measure strange. It would be a mistake, to suppose that God had not wrought on the heart of Gentiles. We see such in the

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24. The external authority is very decidedly for the singular against the plural. Thus all the first-rate Uncials, the Sinaitic, Vatican, Alexandrian, and Palimpsest of Paris, supported by some of the best cursive and all the best ancient versions, oppose the vulgar reading.

The following extract from the late Dr. Carson’s Letters in reply to Dr. John Brown’s Vindication of Presbyterianism will show how far an able and excellent man went astray in defending Congregationalism through not knowing that his argument was based, not on God’s word, but on man’s corruption of it. I quote from the original edition (Edinburgh, 1807):

"Acts 11:31. "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea, and Galilee, and Samaria, &c. Here I would be glad to know how this can be interpreted upon any other principle than that church in the single number was solely appropriated to a single congregation, when applied to an assembly of Christ’s disciples. It is not the church of Judea, the church of Galilee, and the church of Samaria, but the churches of Judea, &c. Nay, more, had these been Presbyterians, all under the same government, the phraseology would not have been the church of Judea, and the church of Galilee, and the church of Samaria, but all these would have been in one church, and even then a small part of a church. This phraseology would have been somewhat like this, "The church had rest throughout all Judaea, Galilee, and Samaria," -- i.e., the part of the church that lies in these countries." (p. 378.) How startled this good man but excessively keen controversialist must have been, had he learnt that, beyond all just question, the only tenable text here is destructive of the notion of independent churches, and in reality gives the appellation to the entire body of the disciples throughout these regions, as standing on one common ground, and enjoying full intercommunication, though in these different districts. But that (continued...)
gospels. Cornelius was one of those who, among the Gentiles, had abandoned idolatry; but more than this was sometimes found. There were Gentiles who truly looked to the Lord, and not to self or man; who had been taught of Him to look for a coming Saviour, though they quite rightly connected that Saviour with Israel; for such was the burden of the promise. As there was a Job in the Old Testament, independent of the law and perhaps before it, so we find a Cornelius before the glad tidings in the New Testament had been formally sent to the nations. All know that there were Jews waiting for the Saviour. It is of interest to see, and should be better known, that among the Gentiles were not wanting such as worshipped no idols but served the true and living God. No doubt their spiritual condition was defective, and their outward position must have seemed anomalous; but Scripture is decisive that such godly Gentiles there were.

It is a fallacy then to suppose that Cornelius had no better than merely natural religion. He was assuredly, before Peter went, a converted man. To regard him as unawakened at that time is to mistake a great deal of the teaching of the chapter. Not that one would deny that a mighty work was then wrought in Cornelius. We must not limit, as ignorant people do, the operation of the Holy Spirit to the new birth. No man in his natural state could pray, nor serve God acceptably, as Cornelius did. One must be born again; but, like many others who had really been quickened in those days (and it may be even now, I presume), a soul might be born again, and yet far from resting in peace on redemption, far indeed from a sense of deliverance from all questions as to his soul. There is this difference, no doubt, between such cases now and that of Cornelius then -- that, before the mission of Peter, it would have been presumptuous for a Gentile to have pretended to salvation; now it is the fruit of unbelief for a believer to question it. A soul that now looks to Jesus ought to rest without question on redemption; but we must remember that at this time Jesus was not yet publicly preached to the Gentiles -- not yet freely and fully proclaimed according to the riches of grace. Therefore, the more godly Cornelius was, the less would he dare to put forth his hand for the blessing before the Lord told him to stretch it out. He did what, I have no doubt, was the right thing. He was truly in earnest before God. As we are told here -- and the Spirit delights to give such an account --

he was a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway {Acts 10:2}.

Such was the man to whom God was about to send the gospel by Peter. Thus we must carefully remember that the gospel brings more than conversion to God. It is the message of life, but it is also the means of peace. Before the gospel was preached to every creature, a new nature was communicated to many a soul; but till then there was not and could not be peace. The two things are both brought us in the gospel -- life brought to light, and the peace preached that was made by the blood of the cross. At the same time scripture shows there might be and often was an interval after the gospel did go forth. So from experience we know there is many a man that you cannot doubt to be truly looking to the Lord, yet far from resting in the peace of God. Cornelius, I apprehend, was just in this case. He would no more have perished, had it pleased God to have taken him away in this state, than any Old Testament saint, whether Jew or Gentile. No believer could be so ignorant of God and His ways of old as to imagine there ought to be any doubt about those who nevertheless were full of anxieties and troubles, and through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

Even now, although it is the gospel that God sends out, we know well how many, through a misuse of Old Testament teaching, plunge themselves into distress and doubt. God does not suggest a doubt of His own grace to them, or of the efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice for them: unbelief does. It was not so with Cornelius. He was not entitled to take the peace of the gospel till God warranted Peter to bring it to him. This was precisely what God was now doing; and the remarkable fact appears, that God did not wait for the apostle of the Gentiles to bring the good news to Cornelius. Is not this interlacing after a divine sort? It was not to be done by mere systematic rule of a human pattern. But just as the great apostle of the Gentiles was the one that wrote the final word of testimony to the Christian Jews in the epistle to the Hebrews, so the great apostle of the Jews was the one sent to fling open the door to the Gentile. It was Peter, not Paul, who was sent to Cornelius. The chapter itself proves that he had to be forced to go. He seems to have lost sight of the words of the Lord Jesus -- that he was told by Jesus risen from the dead to preach the gospel to every creature. There was to be a testimony to all the nations. The promise was not merely to them and to their children, but to all

afar off, as many as the Lord their God should call {Acts 2:39}.

At any rate, the Lord now graciously interferes, and as he gives Cornelius to see a vision most instructive to him, so next day also there is to Peter another vision from the Lord.

Answering to the vision, messengers bring the apostle to the household of Cornelius, and Peter opens his mouth to the following effect: --

Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) that word, I say, ye know {Acts 10:34-37}.

I call your attention to this. Cornelius was not in ignorance of the gospel going out to the children of Israel, but it was precisely be cause he was a lowly-minded believer that he did not therefore arrogate the blessing to himself. The very essence of faith is, that you do not run before God, but receive what and as He sends to you. God had published it already to the sons of Israel, and the good man rejoiced in it. But for himself and his household, what could he do but pray till the rich blessing came? He valued the ancient people of God; nor is he indeed the only centurion that loved their nation. We are told of another who also built for the Jews their synagogue. Thus Cornelius was aware that God had sent the gospel to the
Jews; but there was precisely where he necessarily stopped short. Was that word for him?
That word ye know,
says Peter,
which was published throughout all Judæa, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him . . . whom they slew and hanged on a tree: him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly
(not to all the people, but)
unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people {Acts 10:37-42}.

Clearly the Jew is meant.
He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever,
&c. {Acts 10:42, 43}.

Here comes the telling word for him that feared the Lord and bowed to His word, though he was a Gentile.

Whosoever believeth on him shall receive remission of sins {Acts 10:43}.

Peter had not long learnt it himself. Had he not read or heard those words in the prophets? No doubt he had read them many a time, but no better than we have read them, and many other words likewise; and how little we understood any of them to profit until the mighty power of God gave it efficacy in our souls! In this case Peter had God’s own direct warrant in the vision, not of the church (for this was not the meaning of the sheet let down from heaven), but decidedly of the call of the Gentiles. It was the obliterating of mere fleshly distinction between Jew and Gentile. God was meeting sinners as such, whatever they might be, giving no doubt a heavenly character to what had a heavenly source with a heavenly result. But there is not yet the revealed truth of the body, though involved in the word of the Lord to Saul of Tarsus when he said,

Why persecutest thou me? {Acts 9:4}.

Here it is not this, but simply the indiscriminate grace of God to sinners of the Gentiles as certainly as to the Jews -- to those who, in the judgment of the Jews, were nothing but refuse, vile, and unclean.

Peter then, with this new-born conviction in his soul, reads the prophets with entirely fresh light and other eyes. Full of the truth himself, he speaks with the utmost simplicity to Cornelius, who with his household hears the blessed word.

To him give all the prophets witness.
It was one concurrent evidence.
To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him.
There is no question of a Jew, but

Whosoever believeth in him.
Alas! the Jews did not believe in Him; but whosoever did, let him be Jew or Gentile,
shall receive remission of sins {Acts 10:43}.

This precisely Cornelius had not known, nor could any one have known it till the work of redemption was done. The Old Testament saints were just as safe before the work of Christ as they were afterwards, but this work put them on a ground of conscious salvation before God. It was not a question of being saved in the day of judgment; nor is this the meaning of the term “salvation” in the New Testament. Salvation means that the heart enters into deliverance by grace as a present known public standing in the world. Nobody could have this till the gospel, and even after its publication God Himself sent specifically to the Gentiles; for He has His ways, as well as His times and seasons. God will always be Himself, and cannot be other than Sovereign.

Thus we see God had allowed things apparently to take their course. Israel had the truth presented to them as it was afterwards to all. It was their responsibility now as ever to accept the gracious offer of God. If Israel would have received, the Lord would have given. It was even, and urgently, pressed on them, but they refused with disdain the message, and rejected the messengers to blood. Accordingly the rejection of the very witness of Christ, speaking by the Holy Ghost -- the rejection of Him to heaven -- becomes the turning-point; and then by the Lord from heaven is now called forth the witness of grace as well as of the glory of Christ. Finally, after the call of Saul of Tarsus, Peter himself (as well for other reasons as in order to cut off the semblance of discord in the various instruments of His grace) is brought in to show the perfect balance of divine truth and the wonderful harmony of His ways. Thus the church would still retain its substantial character, and the testimony of God still bear the same common likeness, while room was left for whatever speciality of form God might be pleased to give the truth, and the unfolding of the ways in which God might employ one or another. Peter was the one then, not Paul, that announced the gospel to Cornelius, who by the Holy Ghost received it, and was not merely safe but saved. It was no longer simply a cleaving to a God of goodness who could not deceive and would not disappoint the soul that hoped in His mercy, but the conscious joy of knowing his sins all gone, and himself distinctly put on the ground of accomplished redemption as a known present thing for his own soul in this world. Such is salvation.

While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost {Acts 10:44, 45}.

Thus on the great Gentile occasion, as before on the Jewish at Pentecost, the medium of man completely disappears. It was as thoroughly according to God that the apostle should not lay his hands on any this day, as it was according to His wisdom that they should lay their hands on the Samaritans. It
is granted that man sees difficulty in this: there is what he cannot reconcile; but be assured that the great point is, first, to believe. Settle it invariably that God is wiser than we. Is this too much to ask? After all, though it seems so simple as to be a truism, though nothing can well be conceived more certain; nevertheless, practically it is not always the plainest and surest truth that carries all before it in our souls. But to believe is the secret of real growth in the revealed wisdom of God.

On this occasion they of the circumcision see that the Gentiles receive the gift of the Holy Ghost; for they hear them speak with tongues and magnify God, and they were astonished. Then Peter says to them,

Can any man forbid water? {Acts 10:47}

It was a public privilege he was warranted to confer on the Gentiles thus baptized of the Spirit. Water baptism is neither slighted nor is it put forward as a command or condition. The previous gift of the Spirit without the intervention of any human hand was the most effectual stopper on the mouths of the brethren of the circumcision who were ever prone to object, and would surely have forbidden water, if God had not undeniably given them the unspeakable gift of the Spirit. But this manifestation and fruit of gracious power silenced even the unruly and hard spirits of the circumcision.

And he commanded them to be baptized
{Acts 10:48}.

It may be observed passingly, that thus plainly baptizing is in no way a necessarily ministerial act. It may be all right and in perfect keeping that one preaching the gospel should baptize; but occasion might well arise where he who preached would avoid it him self. We know that Paul thanked God that so it was with himself at Corinth; and we see that Peter here did not baptize, but simply commanded them to be baptized.

God is always wise. It is too familiar how soon human superstition perverted this blessed institution of the Lord into a sacramental means of grace, duly administered by one in the line of succession.

The next chapter (Acts 11) shows us Peter having to give an account of himself before those who had not witnessed the effects of the mighty power of God in the house of Cornelius. When the matter is rehearsed, the great argument is this, --

Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?
{Acts 11:17}.

This brought the question to a simple issue; but here again, let it be noticed that the gift of the Holy Ghost belongs to those that believe. It is not His operation in enabling souls to believe, but a precious boon given to such as believed.

When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life {Acts 11:18}.

The Spirit of God alone quickens a person by faith in Christ. Without the action of the Holy Ghost faith is impossible; but this capacitating power and the gift of the Holy Ghost are two very different things, and the latter consequent on the former. If God had given them the Holy Ghost, as was manifest in sensible results, it was very evident that they must have by God's grace had repentance unto life. The Spirit given to the believer was a privilege over and above faith, and supposed, therefore, their repentance unto life.

Then follows another grave fact. It appears that the scattered men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who had gone in consequence of the persecution everywhere, and among other places to Antioch, preaching the word to none but the Jews, took courage now and spoke (not to the Grecians -- for this had been done long ago, but)

unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus
{Acts 11:20}.

Those to whom they addressed themselves were really Gentiles. The word “Grecians” does not mean “Greeks,” but rather Greek-speaking Jews; to whom the gospel had been preached long before, as the cases of Stephen, for instance, and Philip clearly testify. Acts 6 shows us the party in question murmuring. They were in the church already. But the point here is lost in our English version. There is a mistake, not only in our vernacular Bible, but also in the common Greek text which is equally faulty as the authorized version. The true text, 25 which has sufficient if not the most

25. The copyists of old seem to have confounded in writing, as the Latin and most other ancient translators did in rendering, Ἑλληνας (Greeks) and Ἑλληνοντες (Hellenism), here and elsewhere. Thus it seems incredible, if it were not the notorious fact, that the only two known manuscripts in favour of that which is here most certainly requisite are the Alexandrian and the Cambridge Graeco-Latin of Beza. The Vatican and all others, uncial and cursive (as far as collated and known), support the error. Of the fathers, Eusebius among the Greek, and Cassiodorus among the Latin, are in favour of the true; others are in strange conflict, their text having the wrong reading (perhaps through mistaken scribes), and their comment correcting it. The reading of the Sinai MS. (ἐλληνοντες) is a mere blunder, not uncommon in that most ancient but not very accurate document, arising from confusion through a contigous word; it would give the sense of ἐντὸς into the preachers, preaching the Lord Jesus. But the correction confirms the true reading.

The importance of closer attention to the text is well shown by Calvin's remarks on this verse. He was led into no small perplexity by the reading current in his day, and, to the shame of Christendom, still tolerated as the received reading. Yet his masculine good sense held to the truth, though he did not know the solid basis on which it here stands. I cite from the Calvin Tr. Society's edition of his Comm. on the Acts, i. pp. 460, 467. "Luke doth at length declare that certain of them brought this treasure even unto the Gentiles. And Luke calleth these Grecians not Ἑλληνοι but Ἑλληνοντες [?]. Therefore some say that those came of the Jews, yet did they inhabit Greece and these would be right if the reading had been really Ἑλληνοντες and not Ἑλληνοι; which I do not allow. For seeing the Jews, whom he mentioned a little before, were partly of Cyprus, they must needs be reckoned in that number, because the Jews count Cyprus a part of Greece. But Luke distinguishes them from those, whom he calleth afterward Ἑλληνοι [this is precisely where he is mistaken; his reasoning is sound, but his knowledge defective]. Furthermore, forasmuch as he had said that the word was preached at the beginning only by the Jews, and he meant those who, being banished out of their own country, did live in Cyprus and Phenice, correcting this exception, he saith that some of that some of them did teach the Grecians. This contrariety doth cause me to expound it of the Gentiles." Quite right: only the true text delivers from the need of wresting the force of a word, and is as simply as possible Greeks, not Grecians, and means Gentiles without the smallest difficulty or discussion.

(continued...)
ancient authority, tells us that they spoke to Greeks or Gentiles. Thus we see that the Lord was working, and, as so constantly happens, it was not only that He called out Paul for the Gentiles; it was not only that He sent Peter to a Gentile; but now these men, who might have been despised as irregular labourers, were in the current of the same work of God, even if they knew nothing of it, save by divine instinct.

How blessed it is to see the free activity of the Holy Ghost without any kind of communication of man! It is always thus in the ways of God. It is not only that God uses one and another: this He does and we may bless Him that so He does; but the God who employs means is also above them, and He needs now only to draw out by circumstances the souls of some simple Christian men who had faith and love to seek the Gentiles without requiring the same vigorous and extraordinary means, under His mighty hand, as even the apostle did. Great workman as Peter was, he required the intervention of God in a vision to send him to do a work that these unnamed brethren undertook in their confidence of His grace, without any vision or sign whatsoever. It seems to have been the working of divine grace in their souls, and nothing else. At first they were more timid; they spoke only to Jews. By and by the power of the gospel and the action of the Holy Ghost fill their souls with desires as to the need of others. The Gentiles were sinners: why should they not dare to speak to the Gentiles?

And the hand of the Lord was with them, as we are told,

and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord {Acts 11:21}.

But, what a rebuke is this to those that would make the church to be merely a creature of government, or in any wise to be of man’s will, which is still worse. How blessed to see that it is a real organic whole, not only a living thing, but that He who is the spring of its life is the Holy Ghost Himself -- a divine person, who cannot but answer to the grace of the Lord Jesus whom He is come down to glorify.

Next we find Barnabas stirred up to another and a characteristic enterprise. He had before this delivered Saul from the effects of undue anxiety and distrust in the minds of the disciples. He would have Saul to return good for what I may venture to call a measure of evil towards him. As there was need in the church at Antioch, he goes and finds him. He had a conviction that this was the instrument the Lord would use for good. Thus we see that, while we have the angel of the Lord in certain cases, the Spirit of the Lord expressly in others, we have also simply the holy judgment of the gracious heart. This is all quite right. It is not to be treated as mere human arrangement. It was not only right, but recorded of God that we might see and profit by it. Barnabas was quite justified in seeking Saul.

And it came to pass that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church and taught much people.

And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch {Acts 11:26}.

The place once so famous for its nicknames was now to give a name that will never perish -- a name of incalculable sweetness and blessing, connecting Christ as it does with those that are His. It was, no doubt, a Gentile title. There would be no particular force in giving it to Jews, for all Jews professed to be looking for Christ. What a wonderful change for these poor Gentiles to know Christ for themselves, and to be called after Christ! All was ordered of God.

Then we find that if the church at Jerusalem had become impoverished, the Gentiles minister of their carnal things to them. Saul (as he is still called) and Barnabas are made the channels of bringing the contributions to the elders not named before. How these elders were appointed, if indeed they were so formally, does not appear. Among the Gentiles we know that they were installed, as we shall see a little later, by apostolic choice. Whether this was the case among the Jews scripture does not say; but that there were persons who had this responsible place among them, as among the Gentile churches afterwards, we see clearly.

* * *

Finally and in few words (for I do not intend to say more on Acts 12 to-night), we have the completing of this second part of our narrative in this chapter. We are given a striking prefiguration of the evil king that will be found in the latter day; he that will reign over the Jews under the shadow and support of the Gentiles as Herod was, and not less but more than his prototype bent on the murder of the innocents, and with his heart full of evil for others who will be rescued by the goodness of the Lord.

James sheds his blood, as Stephen had before; for this Peter was destined by man, but the Lord disappointed him. The disciples gave themselves to prayer, yet they little believed their own prayers. Nevertheless we learn hence that they had prayer-meetings in those days; and so they gave themselves up to this special prayer for the servant of the Lord, who did not fail to appear by an agent of His providential power. All this confirms its having a Jewish aspect, regarded as a type, and was very natural in James and Peter, who had to do specially with the circumcision.

It is needless now to dwell on the scene, more than just to point out that which is familiar, no doubt, to many that are here -- the manner in which the Lord judged the apostate; for Herod -- owned shortly after by the people whom he had sought to please, disappointed in one place, but exalted in another -- was hailed as a god; and at that moment the angel of the Lord deals with his pride, and he is devoured of worms -- a sad image of the awful judgment of God that will fall upon one who will sit

in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God {2 Thess. 2:4}.

25. (…continued)

But it is still more strange as evidence of the slipshod criticism of the Reformers that Beza, who was more of a scholar than his predecessors, uniformly edits ἕλληνικῶς, and writes a blundering note to the effect that it is here used in the sense of ἔλληνικῶς. And yet he had in his possession that famous Græco-Latin Uncial (D) which he presented to the University of Cambridge in 1581, which MS. supports the Alexandrian.
In the portion which follows we shall see the manner of the Spirit of God’s working by the great apostle of the Gentiles.

Appendix

It may be interesting to many readers to read as follows from Mr. Edward A. Litton’s work on “The Church of Christ in its Idea, Attributes, and Ministry: with a particular reference to the Controversy between Romanists and Protestants.” There are, of course, imperfect expressions, inasmuch as the truth itself is but partially apprehended; but one is glad to see views so decidedly in advance of ordinary evangelicalism, with equal decision against mere churchism.

“In the opening chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, the Christian dispensation is seen in actual operation; for that with the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost that dispensation properly commences will probably be admitted by all parties. Moreover, in these chapters the Church of Christ is first spoken of as in actual existence. What in our Lord’s discourses is a matter of anticipation or prophecy, here appears as a matter of fact. Though not at first fully aware of the great change which had taken place in their religious standing, still less of its ultimate consequences, the first believers at once formed a separate community in the bosom of the Jewish theocracy; a community having, for its distinctive marks, adherence to the twelve Apostles, baptism in the name of Christ, and the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Thenceforth the Church becomes a matter of history; and its history is nothing less than that of the vicissitudes, prosperous and adverse, which the kingdom of God upon earth has in the lapse of ages passed through.

“It has already been remarked that, far from intending to establish a mere invisible fellowship of the Spirit, our Lord contemplated His Church as having a visible existence, His followers as collected into societies [that society called the Church or assembly of God]. With this view He Himself instituted certain external badges of Christian profession, to come into use when they should be needed, and took measures to qualify a small and select company of believers, by attaching them constantly to His person while His earthly ministry lasted, and giving them a formal commission with extraordinary powers, when He left the world, to preside over the affairs and direct the organisation of Christian societies. These essential conditions of the existence of any regular society we find from the very first in being in the Church: the Apostles were the officers, and, collectively, the organ of the community; members were admitted into it by baptism; and they testified their continuance therein by participating in the sacrament of Christ’s body and blood. As we advance further in the inspired history, we find additions made to these simple elements of social fellowship; the organisation of the Christian society becomes more complex and systematic; questions of polity and order occupy no small portion of the apostolic epistles; and we have every reason to believe, if not from Scripture alone, yet from the unanimous voice of authentic history, that towards the close of the apostolic age Christianity had almost everywhere crystallised itself into a certain, definite, and well known form of ecclesiastical polity” (pp. 192, 193).

“St. Paul, in chap. 14, of the first epistle to the Corinthians, presents us with a graphic picture of the mode in which Christians in the first age of the Church celebrated public worship. The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper constituted the visible symbol of their profession, and the pledge of their union with Christ and with each other; but the governing function in the assembly was the ministry of the Word, whether it assumed the extraordinary forms of ‘tongues’ or a ‘revelation,’ or ‘prophecy,’ or ‘the interpretation of tongues,’ or consisted of the stated instruction of regular pastors and teachers. Among the various spiritual gifts then common in the Church, the chief place was to be assigned to prophecy; for “he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.” Of any typical or sacrificial element, St. Paul makes no mention: the whole service, with the exception of the Lord’s Supper, was manifestly homiletic or verbal. That the gifts mentioned in the chapter were, for the most part, extraordinary, and in process of time were to cease, makes no difference as regards the argument; for it is the essential character of Christian worship, not the particular vehicle of its expression, that is the point now under consideration” (pp. 256, 257).

The Church of Christ was not properly in existence before the day of Pentecost; much less did she, before that era, go forth on her mission to evangelize the world. A body of believers indeed had been by Christ gathered out of the Jewish people to be the first recipients of the Pentecostal effusion; but before that event, this body could not be called distinctively His Church. It is, then, nothing but the fact, that the invisible Church, or rather that which in the Church is invisible, preceded that which is visible. The spiritual power which wrought so wonderful a change in the Apostles must first descend from heaven, and give to the Church its inner form as its spiritual characteristic! afterwards the Apostles preach and organize. First, there are saints, or men in whom Christ is formed by an invisible operation of His Spirit, whose origin, however, is not unknown; then these saints proceed to execute their appointed mission” (p. 272).

“Were the question put to a person of plain understanding, unacquainted with the controversies which

26. Is it not distressing to find, in this thoughtful production of one in much above the traditions of men and the bias of party, the palpable omission of the grandest and most momentous distinction of the church, namely, the presence of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven? Unbelief here is alias characteristic of Christendom.

27. It is well to avoid a figure which churchism has ever turned to its own aggravation and the Lord’s dishonour. The Church neither preaches nor teaches, but Christ sends those who evangelize the world and teach the Church.
have arisen on the subject, What, according to the Apostolic Epistles, is a Christian Church, or, how is it to be defined? he would probably, without hesitation or difficulty, reply, that a Christian Church -- as it appears, for example, in St. Paul's epistles -- is a congregation or society of faithful men or believers, whose unsee faith in Christ is visibly manifested by their profession of certain fundamental doctrines, by the administration and reception of the two sacraments, and by the exercise of discipline. He would direct attention to the fact, that the ordinary greeting of St. Paul, at the beginning of each epistle, is to the 'saints and faithful brethren' constituting the Church of such a place, fellow-heirs with himself of eternal life; and that throughout these compositions, the members of the Church are presumed to be in living union with Christ, reasonings and exhortations being addressed to them, the force of which cannot be supposed to be admitted, except by those who are led by the Spirit of God; in short, that the members of the Corinthian or the Ephesian Church are addressed as Christians; and a Christian is one who is in saving union with Christ."

"In proportion to the apparent simplicity of the question, would be his surprise to hear it affirmed that he is mistaken, and that, in addressing a Christian society as a congregation of Christians, St. Paul merely regards it as a society of men professing the same faith, and participating outwardly in the same sacraments (it being immaterial to the idea whether they possess saving faith or not); a society invested with spiritual privileges, but not necessarily realizing those privileges, and that, consequently, we must lower the import of the terms, 'saints' and 'faithful in Christ Jesus,' to signify outwardly dedicated to God, and professing with the lips the doctrines of Christianity. . . . That the mode of interpretation alluded to involves a deviation from the obvious meaning of the New Testament phraseology is not, indeed, sufficient reason for at once rejecting it; but it does warrant us in requiring that the necessity for such deviation shall be clearly made out. And in the present case this requirement is the more reasonable from the circumstance that the Apostles uniformly identify themselves, as regards their Christian standing and hopes, with those to whom they write. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ;" "that I may be comforted by the mutual faith both of you and me"; -- did St. Paul, when he thus wrote, regard himself as but nominally interested in the blessings of redemption? Was his faith nothing more than a profession of Christian doctrine? If he must have meant something more than this; if his own faith and his own sanctity were living and real, the effect of the Holy Spirit's operation; then, inasmuch as he makes no distinction as regards this point between himself and those whom he addresses, we must suppose that he looked upon them also as real saints and believers. The language of the inspired writers of the New Testament is the expression of that Christian experience, or conscious participation in the blessings vouchsafed through Christ, which the Holy Ghost had shed abroad in their hearts: their idea therefore of a saint, or a believer, being derived from their own spiritual consciousness, must have been the highest of which the words will admit. But in the sense in which they supposed themselves to be Christians, do they, to all appearance, apply that title to those to whom they write" (pp. 280-283).

To the argument drawn from the use of similar terms under the Mosaic covenant in a merely national and external sense to prove that they mean the same, and nothing more, under the gospel, our author answers, "Here, in fact, is the real source of the error. While the typical character of the Mosaic institution in general is recognised, it has not been sufficiently borne in mind that the Jewish nation itself in its external or political aspect, was a type, and nothing more, of the Christian Israel. . . . We have only to extend this undoubted principle of interpretation to the Jewish people itself in its national -- that is, its legal -- character, to perceive that the terms by which, in the Old Testament, its privileges are expressed, assume, when applied to Christians, a different meaning, or rather betoken the spiritual realities of which the former were but the types" (pp. 286, 287).

"To all this, however, it will be replied, that the nature of a visible church, which we know must in all cases be a body of mixed character, as well as the actual state of several of the churches to whom St. Paul addressed his epistles, forbid the supposition that, in terming them communities of saints and believers, he could have used these words in their highest significations. This is the second difficulty which it is conceived lies in the way of our interpreting the apostle's language literally. But a moment's reflection will show that the difficulty is only imaginary. We must recollect that in the Apostolic Church an effective discipline -- the very idea of which seems to be lost amongst us -- existed. By means of this discipline, they having been separated from the society whose overt acts were contrary to their Christian profession, the apostle, not being endowed with the divine prerogative of inspecting the heart, was compelled to take the rest at their profession, and to deal with them as real Christians so long as there was no visible, tangible proof to the contrary. . . . Without pronouncing upon the state of individuals in the sight of God, he assumed the whole body to be what they professed to be -- a body of real Christians. For it must be remembered that, however far his profession may be from being a true one, every professor of Christianity professes to be a true, not a mere nominal, Christian. Except on this assumption the apostle could not have proceeded to enforce Christian duties by Christian motives" (pp. 298, 299).

"Nor is there any weight in the objection that many of these primitive Churches were very defective in doctrine or in practice, or in both; that St. Paul speaks of the Corinthians as being, on account of their divisions, 'carnal,' and not "spiritual," as 'babes in Christ,' and sharply reproves them for their laxity of discipline in the case of the incestuous person, and their want of discipline in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. For it is not maintained that the first Christians, any more than those of our own day, were or could be perfect; and all that can be fairly gathered from what St. Paul says of the Corinthians is, that they were imperfect and inconsistent. In the remarks sometimes made upon this
subject it seems to be assumed that there is no medium between our affirming of persons that they are not perfect Christians, and that they are not Christians at all; whereas in fact there is no Christian, however holy, who comes up to the ideal of Christian practice. . . . To return to the case of the Corinthians: -- on what principle, let us ask, did St. Paul reprove them for their inconsistencies? Did he address them as absolutely destitute of the vital principle of grace, or as possessing it, but needing exhortation to walk conformably thereto? The latter is, unquestionably, the ground which he takes” (pp. 302, 303).

“Christianity, as it appears in the New Testament, knows nothing of the atomistic theory of modern independentism. There can be little doubt that, even in the apostolic age, the church of each considerable city -- such as Rome or Ephesus -- consisted, not of one congregation, but of several, who were collectively styled the church of that place; certain it is that such was the case towards the close of the first century. It could not be otherwise. The expansive power of Christianity called it to break forth on all sides; and speedily the original congregation, or in modern language the mother church, of each city gave birth to other societies of Christians in the surrounding neighbourhood. . . . No notion is more at variance with the spirit of apostolic Christianity than that of societies of Christians existing in the same neighbourhood, but not in communion with each other, and not under ‘common government’” (pp. 449, 450).

“It is a perilous mode of reasoning, and likely to lead to universal scepticism, to maintain, for the sake of theoretical consistency, that the visible fruits of the Spirit do not possess a sufficiently distinctive character to enable us to pronounce where they are and where they are not: not to mention that the sin of denying the evident operation of the Holy Spirit is spoken of by our Lord in terms far too awful not to make us tremble at the thought of verging towards it. The fruits of the Spirit, whether they be produced within our own inclosure or beyond it, are always the same, and always to be recognized; otherwise our Lord would never have given us the simple test whereby we are to distinguish false from true prophets -- ‘by their fruits ye shall know them.’ If men profess themselves not to be able to do so, they simply profess that they have neither consciences nor moral sense.” [Alas! the power of the Spirit to this end is lost sight of.] . . .

“One visible manifestation, then, of the sanctity of the Church is the holy walk: and conversation of individual Christians; but there is another, and more formal, mode in which she professes herself to be holy, and that is, by the exercise of discipline. The personal holiness of the Christian is a property of the individual, not of the society as such; hence a professing Christian society, however large a proportion of holy men it may contain, does not predicate of itself that it is a part of Christ’s holy Church as long as it exercises no formal official act implying that assumption. The exercise of discipline is the true and legitimate expression of the sanctity of a visible Church considered as a society. Hence the great importance of discipline. It is not merely that the absence of it operates injuriously upon the tone and standard of piety within the Church; it affects the claims of the society as such to be a legitimate member of the visible Church Catholic. A Christian society which should openly profess to dispense with discipline, and tolerate on principle open and notorious evil doers [or still worse heretics, Antichrists, or their abettors] within its pale, would thereby renounce its title to one of the essential attributes of the Church; it would sever all ostensible connexion between itself and the true Church [or rather Christ and His sacrifice: see 1 Cor. 5], of which sanctity is an inseparable property; in short, it would unchurch itself. For every particular church is so called on the supposition of its being a manifestation, more or less true, of the one holy Church -- the body of Christ. . . . How essential to the idea of a Church the exercise of discipline is, may be seen from the embarrassing contrarieties between theory and practice which the virtual suspension of it in the Church of England is constantly occasioning” (pp. 515-517).

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Lectures Introductory

to the Study of

The Acts, the Catholic Epistles,

and

the Revelation

Lecture 3

The Acts of the Apostles 13 - 20

We now enter on the missionary journeys, as they are called, of the apostle Paul. The work, under the Spirit, opens to the glory of the Lord. Not merely are Gentiles met in grace and brought into the house of God: He had already wrought in their souls individually -- this we have seen before, in Peter's mission to Cornelius and his household; but grace goes out henceforth in quest not of Jews only but of Gentiles, as the special sphere which was assigned to Paul by God, and this also in co-operation with the other apostles; for thus they had agreed.

But there are preliminary circumstances of no little interest and moment, which the Spirit of God has been pleased to give us before the record of these journeys. I have read at the beginning of Acts 13 the principal scene of this kind. Saul of Tarsus had already been called, but here we have a formal act of separation. This is the true description of it in scripture. It was in no way what men call "ordination." This he takes particular pains to deny in explicit terms. It was not only that man was in no sense the source of ministry; for this would be, no doubt, disavowed by the godly everywhere; but he employs the strongest words in showing that it was not by men as the channel. As there are cases where man is the channel of conveying both a gift and authority, we can see how artfulness or ignorance can readily enough embroil the entire subject, and thus prepare the way for the building up of the clerical system. There is no ground for it in scripture. Ministry there is, and as a distinct though connected thing, an official charge: both are beyond question. These two things are clearly recognized by the Holy Ghost. Here we have nothing of official charge. So far as the apostle Paul had both a gift and a charge, and he had both (and the apostleship differs from the gift of a prophet as well as the rest in this, that it is not a gift only but a charge), all had been settled between the Lord and His servant. But now it pleased God at this particular epoch to call forth Barnabas, who was a kind of transition link between the twelve, with Jerusalem for their centre and the circumcision for their sphere, and the free and unfettered service of Paul among the Gentiles. It pleased Him to separate these two chosen vessels of His grace for the work to which He was calling them.

Let us look for a moment at the state of things at Antioch before we pass on.

And there were in the church (or assembly)

that was at Antioch [certain] 28 prophets and teachers {Acts 13:1}.

What is commonly called a stated ministry was there. All should give full weight to facts which if denied or overlooked would only weaken the testimony which God has given.

It is the continual effort of those who oppose the truth of the church, and who deny the present ruined condition of it, to insinuate against such as have learnt from God to act on His own word, that they set aside ministry, and more particularly what they call "stated ministry." They do nothing of the kind. They deny an exclusive or one-man ministry. They deny that abuse of ministry which would shut out of its own circle the operation of all gifts but one, which is jealous of every other save by its own will or leave, which has no sufficient confidence in the Lord's call or in the power of the Holy Ghost given for profit, which consequently makes a duty of both narrowness and self-importance through a total misunderstanding of scripture and the power and grace of God. Not for a moment do I deny that all who are in any definite measure taught of God as to His will in the service of Christ must disavow clericalism in every shape and degree as a principle essentially and irreconcilably opposed to the action of the Holy Ghost in the church.

But it is important to affirm that none understand the action of the Spirit who expose themselves and the truth (which is still more serious) to the deserved stigma of denying the real abiding-place of ministry. This is not in anywise the question. All Christians who have light from God on these matters acknowledge ministry to be a divine and permanent institution. It is therefore of very great importance to have

28. The best uncials, cursive, and ancient versions, omit τινὲς, "certain."

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scriptural views of its source, functions, and limits. The truth of scripture, if summed up as to its character, amounts to this -- that ministry is the exercise of a spiritual gift. This I believe to be a true definition of it. The minds of most Christians are encumbered with the notion of a particular local charge. Such a charge is altogether distinct from ministry: it is only confusion to suppose that they are the same thing, or inseparable. Ministry in itself has nothing to do with a local charge. The same person, of course, may have both: this might or might not be.

A man, for instance, as we find in the case of Philip and others, might have a local charge at Jerusalem; and there we saw the church choosing, because it was that kind of office which had to do with the distribution of the church’s bounty. This is the principle of it. What the church gives the church has a voice in. But the Lord gave Philip a spiritual gift, and there the church bows and accepts, instead of choosing. In point of fact the particular gift that Philip received from the Lord was not one that properly finds its exercise within the assembly, but rather without: he was an evangelist. But this establishes what I have been asserting; that is, that you may have a person without a charge who has a very special gift, and this for public ministry.

The elders or bishops, of whom we shall hear more by-and-by, had a still more important charge. It was the office of oversight, or of a bishop, that was found in every fully-constituted assembly where there could be time for the development of that which was requisite in order to it. But whether there were charges or none, whether the due appointment was or was not, the Lord did not fail to give gifts for the carrying on of His own work. Now those persons who possessed gifts exercised them, as they were bound to do; for here was no question of appointment, and indeed their exercise had nothing whatever to do with the leave, permission, or authority of any, but solely flowed from the Lord's own gift. This was properly ministry in the word. But there never was such an idea broached, still less acted on, as the exclusive ministry which in modern times has been set up, as if it were the only right thing in theory or practice. In point of fact it is thoroughly wrong, not only not defensible by the word of God, but flagrantly opposed to it.

Here, for example, we have the picture of an assembly drawn by the Spirit. It is the more instructive, because it cannot be pretended that here, as in the church at Jerusalem, there were elements which savoured of the anterior or Jewish state of things. It was among the Gentiles. It was where Saul himself laboured; but then there were other servants of the Lord beside Saul, -- as Barnahas, and Simeon, and Lucius, and Manaen. Nor are these mentioned as if they were the only persons who there exercised the gifts of prophecy and teaching: no doubt they were the more important men.

As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul
(for he is still called Saul, which was his Hebrew name)
for the work whereunto I have called them
{Acts 13:2}.
It was the Lord that called them.

But there is more than this: the Holy Ghost can also set apart among the servants to a peculiar service. This is emphatically brought in when it was a question of Barnbas and Saul. Not, of course, but that the Holy Ghost had to do with the action of a Peter, or a John, or of any others that have come before us in the previous accounts of this book; but it is expressly said here -- and not without an admirable reason, and of the deepest interest to us, because God is here preparing the road and instructing His servants as to His ways, more particularly in the church among the Gentiles. Hence, the Holy Ghost comes into a very decided and defined prominence here:

Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

The Holy Ghost is in the church; He is personally acting, and not merely as giving power, but in distinct and special call. It is, no doubt, subordinate to the glory of the Lord Jesus, but, nevertheless, as a divine person must who does not abnegate His own sovereignty, so it is said

as he will {1 Cor. 12:11}.

And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away {Acts 13:3}.

This was not to confer authority, which would set one scripture against another. Gal. 1:1 denies such an inference. We shall find, before we have done with the history, what the character of this action was, and wherefore hands were laid upon them: the end of Acts 14 explains it to us. It is said there (Acts 14:26) that they sailed to Antioch (which was the starting-point), from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled.

Such, then, was the object and meaning of the hands laid on Barnabas and Saul. It was not the presumptuous thought that men, who were really inferior to themselves spiritually, could confer upon the apostles what they did not themselves possess to the same extent; it was but a fraternal recommendation to the grace of God, which is always sweet and desirable in the practical service of the Lord.

So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost {Acts 13:4}:
nothing can be more distinct than the place that the Spirit of God has assigned Him, nothing more emphatic than the manner in which the inspired writer draws attention to the fact in these commencing verses. All now depends upon His power: He is on earth, the directing power of all that is carried on. That power does not belong to the church, which has indeed responsibility in the last resort in the judgment of evil, but otherwise never can meddle with ministry except to the dishonour of the Lord, its own hurt, and the hindrance of ministry. On the other hand, ministry never can meddle with what properly belongs to the church. They are two distinct spheres. The same person, of course, may be a minister while he has his place as a member in the body of Christ. But as he is not permitted to use his ministry to override the church in any respect, but rather to subserve its right action, helping it on as far as may be in his power by the Holy Ghost, so on the other hand the church can in nowise rightly control that
ministry which flows not from the church, but directly from the Lord.

The present state in nowise alters or modifies the principle: on the contrary, it is an immense comfort that as ministry never did flow from the church, so the present broken state of the church cannot overthrow the place and responsibility of those who minister in the word. The fact is they are quite distinct, although coordinate, spheres of blessing.

Barnabas and Saul go forth, then, to Cyprus, the native place of Barnabas; and coming there they preach the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. There is great care, and so much the more because Saul was apostle of the Gentiles, to go to the Jews; and it is lovely to see the ways of God in this respect. Above all others Luke, as we know, brings out the Lord Jesus Christ Himself in His grace towards the Gentiles. Nevertheless there is no gospel so eminently Jewish as Luke’s in its commencement, -- not even Matthew’s. We have no such scene in the gospel of Matthew, and still less in Mark’s or John’s, -- no such scene of the temple both of the exterior and interior. We have no such account of the godly Jewish remnant. We have no such care in showing the obedience of Joseph and Mary to the requisitions of the law as in the first two chapters of the gospel of Luke. The fact is, that what is shown first in the gospel, then in the Acts, is to the Jew first and also to the Gentile {Rom. 2:10}.

And so we find in the service of these blessed men who now go forth.

They had, by the way, also, we are told, John to their minister. We must not make an ecclesiastical institution out of this. No doubt the expression might to ignorant minds convey some such notion. Nor do I pretend to say what might have been the motives of those who translated it so as to give such a colour to the passage. Manifestly, however, the thing were absurd; because it would be, not a ministry to others, but to Paul and Barnabas. Clearly therefore Mark’s service lay here, I suppose, in searching out proper lodgings, and getting people to hear the apostles preach, and that kind of care which a young man would be expected to bestow on those whom he was privileged to accompany and attend in the work of the Lord.

On this occasion they met with the deputy of the island, Sergius Paulus, who was besieged by the efforts of a certain sorcerer that sought to exercise and retain influence over the mind of the great man. But the time was come for falsehood to fall before the truth. When he therefore attempted to turn his old arts against the gospel, and those that were the instruments of bringing it to the island, God asserted His own mighty power. For when Elymas withstood Barnabas and Saul, Saul,

who also is called Paul {Acts 13:9} (the Spirit of God taking this opportunity of bringing forward his Gentile name in a mission that was to be pre-eminently among the Gentiles, although beginning with the Jew according to the ways of God), being then filled with the Holy Ghost, sets his eyes on the evil worker, gives him his true character, searches him through and through, and, more than this, pronounced a sentence, a judicial sentence, from the Lord, which was at once accomplished. As we are told,

Immediately there fell upon him a mist and a darkness, and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand {Acts 13:11}.

It was the sad sign of his guilty race, the Jews, who, by their opposition to the gospel of the grace of God, and more particularly among the Gentiles, are now doomed to the same blindness after a spiritual sort.

Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord {Acts 13:12}.

Beautiful contrast with Simon Magus! What astonished Simon Magus was the power displayed; what astonished the deputy was the truth. The admiration of power is natural to man, and particularly to fallen man. He, conscious of his weakness, covets the power that he would like to wield, having still the consciousness of the place to which he was called, but from which he has fallen; for God put every creature under him, and although through sin he is fallen from his estate, he has in nowise abandoned his pretensions, and he would fain have the power that would enable him not to hold up only, but to reverse if possible the sad consequences of the fall. Delight in the truth, a heart for that which God reveals, flows only from the Holy Ghost; and this was the happy portion of the deputy. He believed, and believed after a very different sort, with a divinely exercised conscience by the power of the Spirit, instead of a merely intellectual credit receiving upon evidence that which approved itself to the judgment of his mind.

Next we read of Paul and his company, for from this moment he takes the chief place, and others are designated because of their companionship with him. Was this place in anywise contrary to the will of the Lord? Was it not thoroughly according to it? We all know that there is sometimes a little jealousy of any such spiritual influence. I cannot but think, however, that the feeling is owing more to the natural independence of the mind, than the simplicity that delights in the working of the Holy Ghost and the sanctioned expression of God’s holy word. I say, then, that Paul and his company

loosed from Paphos, and came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John, departing from them (for he was not at all in faith up to the level of the work -- at any rate of Paul), returned to Jerusalem {Acts 13:13},

his natural home.

The others proceed on their way to Antioch in Pisidia, and there they are found on the sabbath-day in the synagogue.

And after the reading of the law and the prophets, the ruler of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on {Acts 13:15}.

What a painful contrast with that which is found in Christendom! Even among the poor Jews, spite of all the coldness and narrowness of their system, there was then a
greater openness of heart, and a simplicity to receive whatever could be communicated, than one sees where there ought to be the rivers of living water, -- where there should reign the cherished desire among all that belong to the Lord, that the best help at all cost be rendered to every saint of God, as well as to every poor perishing sinner. However, here among these Jews, the rulers were anxious to get all the help possible from others for the understanding of the word of God, and for its just application. Although they knew nothing whatever of Paul and Barnabas (except, of course, that they were Jews, or looked like them), they called on them forthwith to address all.

And Paul beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God {Acts 13:16}.

There were proselytes as well as children of Jacob. Many Gentiles had renounced idolatry in all the great cities where Jews were found at this time. Undoubtedly, so far, Judaism had prepared the way for the Lord among the nations of the earth, in whose midst Jews were scattered. Disgust had grown up in the Gentile mind. The abominations of Paganism had risen up to a fearful height. At this very time there were not a few who though Gentiles were not idolaters (and you must bear this in mind), and really did fear God.

To all these Paul addresses himself:

The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it {Acts 13:17}.

The history is pursued until he comes to David, as the object, of course, was to bring in the Son of David: for the apostle, led of the Lord, speaks with that considerate skill which love does not fail to use, formed under the Spirit of God. Thus having brought in the Messiah, we are shown how He had been announced by the Baptist. There was no collision about it. John had first preached, before His coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. As he fulfilled his course, he acknowledged that he was not the Messiah. Thus God gave an admirable witness of the Messiah that was just at hand. It was no question of a great man, or great deeds, but of God’s accomplishing His purpose. Had a particle of ambition influenced John, he, with an immense following among the people, might readily have set up to be the Messiah himself. The truth was, that he was not the Bridegroom but His friend, and the fear of God shut out these base desires, and he felt it his joy and his duty to do the will of God, and be the witness of Him that was coming.

Thus Paul announces the Messiah himself.

Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent {Acts 13:26}.

Next he brings boldly forward the awful position in which the Jews had put themselves.

They that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him {Acts 13:27}.

Along with spiritual blindness there was as usual the grossest want of common righteousness.

And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre {Acts 13:28, 29}.

God was against them, and as for the man whom they had crucified, He

raised him from the dead: and he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people. And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus {Acts 13:30-33}.

It is not warrantable to say “raised up Jesus again.” You may read it either “raised up Jesus,” or “raised Jesus again;” but you cannot give both. The word cannot at the same time include both, though it may in certain cases, according to the context, mean either. The proper rendering here is raised up Jesus.

This is the meaning required by the facts. It refers to Jesus given to the Jews as the Messiah according to the prophets. It is also the commonest thing possible for the word to apply to resurrection. But then in itself it takes in a much wider range than simply resurrection. The word “raised up” requires “from the dead” to make it definitely mean resurrection. But this is not the case here, till we come to Acts 13:34. I therefore believe that resurrection is not meant in the earlier text at all, but raising up Jesus as the Messiah, as it is also written in the second Psalm:

Thou art my Son: this day have I begotten thee {Psa. 2:7}.

This is confirmed, and I think proved by the next verse, where we have the additional statement:

And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead {Acts 13:34}.

Thus we have two distinct steps: -- Acts 13:33 affirms that God had fulfilled the promise in raising up the Messiah in the earth for His people; Acts 13:34 adds that, besides this, He raised Him up from the dead. This is important, because it serves as a key to the true application of the second Psalm, which is often, and I believe mistakenly, applied to the resurrection. The reference is to the Messiah, without raising the question of actual bodily resurrection, which is first introduced distinctly in Psa. 16, though implied in Psa. 8. So, in the Apostle’s discourse, the resurrection from the dead is founded not upon the second Psalm, but on a well known passage in the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 55:3), and also in Psa. 16 already referred to.

But here the apostle (instead of pointing out that God had made the rejected Jesus to be Lord and Christ, which was Peter’s doctrine, and, of course, perfectly true) uses it according to his own blessed line of truth, and urges on their souls, that

through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him

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(not the Jew alone, but)

all that believe are justified from all things from
which they could not be justified by the law of Moses
{Acts 13:38, 39}.

Thus early, vigorously, and plainly did the apostle proclaim
this great truth -- no doubt for all among the Jews who bowed
to it, but stated also in terms that should embrace a Gentile
believer even as an Israelite. The law of Moses could justify
from nothing.

All that believe are justified from all things.

The whole is wound up by a solemn warning to such as
despise the word of the Lord, and this founded on or rather
cited from more than one of their own prophets. (Compare
Isa. 29 and Hab. 1.)

And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue,
the Gentiles besought that these words might be
preached to them the next sabbath. Now when the
congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and
religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas:
who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue
in the grace of God. And the next sabbath day came
almost the whole city together to hear the word of
God {Acts 13:42-44}.

This stirred up the Jews: it was a new element, and kindled
their jealousy at once. We have had the irritation and the
murderous opposition of the Jews in Jerusalem. We can
understand that they disliked what they considered a new
religion, which claimed to come with the highest sanction of
the God of Israel, more particularly as it made them feel to
the very quick their own sins, their present and past
resistance of the Holy Ghost, as well as their recent slaughter
of their Messiah. But a new feature comes out here which the
Spirit of God lets us see henceforth in all the journeys and
labours of the apostle Paul; that is, the hatred which the
unbelieving Jews felt at the preaching of the truth to the
Gentiles.

When the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled
with envy.

The scene now lay outside among the nations whom they
despised. If the gospel were a lie, why feel so acutely? It was
not love or respect for Gentiles. But Satan stirred up, not now
simply their religious pride but their envy, and, filled with it, they

spake against those things which were spoken by
Paul, contradicting and blaspheming {Acts 13:45}.

The law had never wrought such a change among men.
It might correct the grossness of idolatry and condemn its
folly, thereby some here and there might fear God; but it
never did win hearts after such a sort. Thus the evil of their
own hearts was brought out among the Jews, and the more in
proportion as the might of the grace of God proved itself in
attracting souls to the Lord.

Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was
necessary that the word of God should first have
been spoken to you {Acts 13:46}.

How wondrous and how beautiful the ways of divine love!

But seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves
unworthy of everlasting life
-- how solemn to judge oneself unworthy of everlasting life,
as every unbeliever does! --

lo, we turn to the Gentiles {Acts 13:46}.

This was spiritual wisdom; but was it simply instinct? It
was not. There may have been those that turned to the
Gentiles from no deeper or more defined reason, as we saw
last night. There were those who perceived that the gospel
was too great a boon to be confined to the ancient people of
God, that it was adapted to the universal need of men, and
that it became God's grace to let it forth to the Gentiles; and
they acted on their conviction, and the Lord was with them,
and many believed. But it was not spiritual instinct here: it
was a still holier and lowlier thing, yet higher and more
blessed. It was intelligent obedience, where it might not be
supposed that one could find a sufficiently clear direction. But
the eye of love can discern; it is ever on the alert to obey
from the heart.

For so,
says he,

hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee
to be a light of the Gentiles {Acts 13:47; see
Isa. 42:6}.

What had this to do with Paul and Barnabas? Everything.
Beyond controversy Christ is directly in view of the prophet,
and perhaps some would be disposed to shut up the words
only to Christ; but not so the Holy Spirit, who therefore
extends its bearing to Paul and Barnabas. Did not Paul
afterwards write
to me to live is Christ {Phil. 1:21}?

Christ was all to them. Christian faith appropriates to itself
what was said to Him. What a place is this! what a power in
His name! No doubt it was heretofore a hidden mystery that
man should be so associated with a Christ rejected by (and so
separated from) the ancient people of God. But what said He
to the man despised and set at naught by them? This was the
very time when the Messiah, lost to Israel, becomes, in a new
and intimate way, the centre for God to associate fully in
grace with Him. Thus what belongs to Him belongs to them,
and what God says about Him is direction for them.

I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou
shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth
{Acts 13:47}.

There was no rashness or presumption, but the soundest
wisdom in this. Was it only for the Apostles? Is there no
principle in this of all importance for us, my brethren? Does
it not prove distinctly that it is not merely where we get a
literal command that we may and ought to discern a call to
obedience? The apostles, as men of faith, were bold about it:

For so hath the Lord commanded us {Acts 13:47}.

Yet, I suppose, not two souls besides in the whole earth
would have seen a command to them. Unbelief would have
asked proof, and have been ill-satisfied; but faith, as
evermore, is happy and makes happy.
And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the name of the Lord was published throughout all the region {Acts 13:48, 49}.

But the Jews were not to give up their envy. The greater the blessing, the more their hearts were vexed with it. The Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women. They were more open, doubtless, to their efforts; and so were the chief men of the city {Acts 13:50}.

As faith looks to God and the truth, unbelief flies to influence of one kind or another, -- of females on the one side, and of great men on the other. Thus they raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost {Acts 13:51, 52}.

As the enemy makes good the occasion of evil, so God turns the wickedness of the adversary to the blessing of His own. The apostles pass thence into another place; they are, as ever, unwearied in their love. There is, perhaps, no feature more noticeable and instructive than the fact, that nothing turns away the heart of Paul from the poor Jews. He loved them with an unrequited affection; he loved them spite of all their hatred and their envy. Into the synagogue he went again here (as in each new place that he visits), and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews (they were generally just the same to Paul in one place as in another)

stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren. Long time therefore abide they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles. And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them spitefully, and to stone them, they were ware of it, and fled {Acts 14:1-6}.

They thus bowed to the storm. Nothing at all of what men call heroism marked the apostles; there was what is very much better -- the simplicity of grace: patience is the true wisdom, but God only can give it.

They go accordingly elsewhere, and there preach the gospel. At Lystra, which they visited, the case came before them of a man crippled in his feet,

impotent in his feet {Acts 14:8},

who had never walked. Paul, perceiving that he had faith to be healed, beholds him steadfastly, and bids him stand upright on his feet. The Lord at once answering to the call, the man leaped and walked.

And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men {Acts 14:11}.

Accordingly they called Barnabas (who, it is evident, had the more imposing presence) Jupiter; and Paul, because he was the more eloquent of the two, they designated Mercury. Then the priest of Jupiter -- for the city was famous for its devotedness to the so-called father of gods and men, -- brought oxen and garlands into the gates, and would have done sacrifice {Acts 14:13}.

Which when the apostles, 29 Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, and saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? we also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein {Acts 14:14, 15}.

What is notable, I think, especially for all those engaged in the work of the Lord, is the variety in the character of the apostolic addresses. There was no such stiffness as we are apt to find in our day in the preaching of the gospel. Oh, what monotomy! what sameness of routine, no matter who may be addressed! We find in scripture people dealt with as they were, and there is that kind of appeal to the conscience which was adapted to their peculiar state. The discourse in the synagogue was founded on the Jewish scriptures; here to these men of Lycaonia there is no allusion to the Old Testament whatever, but a plain reference to what all see and know -- the heavens above them, and the seasons that God was pleased from of old to assign round about them, and that continual supply of the fruits of His natural bounty of which the most callous can scarce be insensible. Thus we see there was the ministration of suited truth, as far as it went, of what God is, and what is worthy of Him, opening the way for the glad tidings of His grace. How different from the vileness of a Jupiter or of a Mercury, a god devoted to corruption and selfwill, and another god devoted to stealing! Was this the best religion and morality of the heathen, making gods just like themselves? Such certainly is not the true God. Who can deny all to be vanity even in the minds of the most civilized and refined of the Gentiles? The true God, although He had suffered all nations to walk in their own ways in times past, nevertheless did not

leave himself without witness in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness {Acts 14:17}.

This was no more than an introduction for that which the apostle had to say; it was the truth so far rebuking the folly of idolatry. It was in no way the good news of eternal life and

29. So the Spirit of God calls them both; and it is an important point to observe; it is not restricted to the twelve. Here we find the Holy Ghost acted in this manner. We have apostleship entirely apart from the twelve tribes of Israel. And not merely is Paul apostle, but Barnabas was recognized also.
remission of sins in Christ; but it was that which either vindicated God, or at least set aside what was undeniable and before all eyes the debasing depravity of their false gods and pagan religion.

And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead {Acts 14:19}.

And having stoned Paul
-- how like his Master! How sudden the change! About to be worshipped as a god, and the next thing after it to be stoned and left for dead! Alas! here also the Jews instigated the Gentiles.

Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe {Acts 14:20}.

Such is the victory that overcomes the world; such the power and perseverance of faith. They go on undaunted, yea, confirming the souls of the disciples in various places, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God {Acts 14:22}.

Impossible for the world to overthrow those who bear the worst it can do, give God thanks, and wait for His kingdom.

But here take note of another part of their service -- the confirmation of the souls of those who had already believed. It is not simply bringing souls in, and then leaving them to other people; the apostles would establish them in the faith as they were taught. But this was not all.

When they had ordained them {Acts 14:23}.

Let me take the liberty of saying that “ordained” is a very misleading term, which conveys an ecclesiastical idea without any warrant whatever. Not that “ordained” is an interpolation here as in the first chapter of Acts, but certainly the meaning given is fictitious. The true force of the phrase is simply this, they chose them elders.

In more ways than one it is important; because, as a simple choice takes away “ordination,” and with it that mysterious ritual which the greater bodies like, so on the other hand the apostles choosing for them elders takes away all that gives self-importance to the little churches. For it is neither the smaller bodies choosing for themselves, nor an imposing authority vested in their great rivals, but a choice exercised by apostles; that is, they chose for the disciples elders in every church.

I am well aware that persons of respectability have not been wanting who have tried to make out that the Greek word means that the apostles chose them by taking the sense of the assembly. But this is mere etymological trifling. There is not the slightest warrant for it in the usage of scripture. It is not requisite for a man to be a scholar in order to reject the thought as false. Thus the word them refutes it for any intelligent reader of the English Bible. It is not merely that apostles chose. If it be said that the people must have chosen for them to ordain, the answer is, that the people did not choose at all. This is proved by the simple declaration that the apostles chose for the disciples. Such is the way to fill up the sentence --

They chose them elders. 30

To make out the meaning of what Presbyterians or Congregationalists have contended for, it should have been said that they chose by them, or some phrase meaning that they chose by the votes of the assembly. Here there is no ground whatever for such a sense, but on the contrary that the apostles chose elders for the rest.

They chose them elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, commending them to the Lord, on whom they believed {Acts 14:23}.

It is vain to deny or parry the importance of this decision of scripture on the subject of presbyters. Not unfrequently there is an attack made on those who really desire to follow the word of God, by men who ask, “Where are your elders? You profess to follow scripture faithfully: how is it that you have not elders?” To such I would answer, “When you provide apostles to choose elders for us, we shall be exceedingly obliged for both.” How can we have elders appointed according to scripture unless we have apostles or their delegates? Where are the men now who stand in the same position before God and the assembly as Paul and Barnabas? You must either have elders, or at the very least apostolic men such as Timothy and Titus; for it is quite evident that merely to call people elders does not make them such. Nothing would be easier than to bestow the title of elders within a sect, or for the law of the land to sanction it. Any of us could set ourselves up, and do the work in name, no doubt; but whether there would be any value in the assumption, or whether it would not be really great sin, presumption, and folly, I must leave to the consciences of all.

30. It is scarcely necessary to refute at length the notion of the fathers, and of some moderns like Bishop Bishop (Perpetual Government of Christ’s Church, p. 13, Eden edition, Oxford, 1842), that χριστονισται here means ordaining by imposition of hands. That the word was so used in later times by ecclesiastical writers is true; that this is its meaning in scripture is palpable error. It is to confound χριστονισται with χριστιανισται (or its equivalent, ἡ ἑπισκοπὴ τῶν χειριστῶν). On the other hand the idea that χριστονισται means that the apostles concurred to the disciples the power of selecting by vote, whilst they reserved to themselves the right of approval and institution, is still harsher and in short unexecuted in all Greek writings profane or sacred, ancient or medieval. In the earlier Greek authors who write of their public affairs, the word often occurs in the sense of choosing by suffrage (as opposed to lots); later on it meant appointment irrespective of votes. But it is never used, so far as I know, to express that some appointed on the ground of election by others. And I am glad to say not merely that a candid Presbyterian like Prof. G. Campbell treats Beza’s version (per suffragium creassent) with the utmost severity as “a mere interpolation for the sake of answering a particular purpose,” but that the Presbyterian divines of 1645 in the “Jus Divinum” point out the flagrant inconsistency of such an interpretation with the express language of the text. None but Paul and Barnabas chose (whatever the manner); and they chose for the disciples, not by their votes, which would be incompatible with their own choice. Compare Acts 10:41, 2 Cor. 8:19. In the former case God chose beforehand the witnesses, but others gave no votes; in the latter the churches chose brethren to be their confidential messengers, but they never thought of collecting the suffrages of other people. Scriptural usage in every instance is simply choice.
to judge.

Thus we know with divine certainty that the elders were chosen for the disciples by the apostles in every church. Such is the doctrine of scripture, and the fact as here described. It is evident therefore, that unless there be duly qualified persons whom the Lord has authorised for the purpose, and in virtue of their most singular relation to the assembly, -- unless there be such persons as apostles, or persons representing apostles in this particular, there is no authority for such appointment: it is mere imitation. And in questions of authority it must be evident that imitation is just as foolish as where it is a question of power. You cannot imitate the energy of the Spirit except by sin, neither can you arrogate the authority of the Lord without rebellion against Him. Notwithstanding, I do not doubt that this is often done with comparatively good -- let us conceive the best -- intentions on the part of many, but with very great rashness and inattention to the word of God. Hence those are really wrong, not to say inexcusable, who assume to do the work that apostles or their delegates alone could do, not such as content themselves with doing their own duty, and refuse a delicate and authoritative task to which they are not called of the Lord.

What, then, is the right thing? All that we can say is, that God has not been pleased, in the present broken state of the church, to provide all that is desirable and requisite for perpetuating everything in due order. Is this ever His way when things are morally ruined? Does He make provision to continue what dishonoured Him? So far from contrariety in this to the analogy of His dealings, it seems to me quite according to them. There was no such state of things in Israel in the days of the returned captives, as in the days of the Exodus, but Nehemiah was just as truly raised up of God for the return from Babylon, as Moses was for the march out of Egypt. Still the two conditions were quite different, and the mere doing by Nehemiah what Moses did would have been ignorance of his own proper place. Such imitation would have possessed no power, and would have secured no blessing.

It is a precisely similar course that becomes us now. Our wisdom is to use what God has given us, not to pretend to the same authority as Barnabas and Paul had. Let us follow their faith. God has continued everything, not that is needful only, but far over and above it for the blessing, if not for the pristine power and order, of the church of God. There is not the slightest cause but want of faith, and consequent failure in obedience, that hinders the children of God from being blessed overflowingly even in this evil day. At the same time God has so ordered it, that no boast is more vain than that of possessing all the outward apparatus of the church of God. In fact, the louder the vaunt, the less real is the claim to ornaments of which God stripped His guilty people. None can show a display of order and charge so settled and regular, as to bear a comparison with the state of the church as it was founded and governed by the apostles.

Far from thinking that it is not good and wise, I admire the ways of the Lord even in this deprivation of ground for boasting. I believe that all on His part is thoroughly as it should be, and really best for us as we are. Nor is it that we should not feel the want of the godly order as of old; but I need not say that if we feel the want of elders, the value of apostles was incomparably greater. Apostles were far more important than elders, and very much more the means of blessing to the church of God. But the right appointment of elders necessarily lapses with the departure of the apostles from the earth. It is not so with gifts, nor therefore with ministry; for all this is essentially independent of the presence of the apostles, and bound up with the living action of Christ the head of the church, who carries out His will by the Holy Ghost here below.

Now we enter upon another and an important chapter in its way, that is to say, the efforts of the Judaisers, who were now beginning (not to hinder the apostle's work merely, but) to spoil the doctrine which he preached. This is the particular point we may see in Acts 15. Accordingly the source of this trouble lay not among unbelieving Jews, but among such as professed the name of the Lord Jesus.

Certain men which came down from Judea, saying, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When, therefore, Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem {Acts 15:1, 2}.

Jerusalem, alas! was now the fountain of the evil: it was from the assembly in Jerusalem that this pest emanated. Satan's effort was to pollute the doctrine of the grace of God, who allowed that the authority and the power too of Paul and Barnabas should be entirely ineffectual to stop the evil. This was turned to good account, because it was far more important to stem the tidal in Jerusalem, and to have the sentence of the apostles, elders, and all thoroughly against these evil doers, than simply the censure of Paul and Barnabas. It could not but be that Paul and Barnabas should oppose those that set aside their doctrines; but the question for the Judaisers was, What about the twelve? Thus, the carrying of the question to Jerusalem was a most suitable and wise act. It may not be that Paul and Barnabas at all designed it as such -- I do not suppose they did: no doubt they endeavoured to put it down among the Gentiles, but they could not do so. The consequence was that perform the question was reserved for Jerusalem, where Paul and Barnabas go up for what Paul knew involved the truth of the gospel.

And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phinece and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy unto all the brethren {Acts 15:3}.

31. (continued)

31. “But it is a characteristic of the Church system” (says Mr. Litton in his “Church of Christ,” p. 636, speaking of sacramentalists) “to be most peremptory and exclusive in its decisions where Scripture supplies the slendest foundation for them.”
Thus, you see, going upon this painful controversy, their hearts were filled with the grace of God. It was not the question they were full of, but His grace.

And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things which God had done with them {Acts 15:4}.

There again is uttered what filled their hearts with joy, -- an important thing. For I am sure that often, where there is any duty of a painful kind, and where the heart of any servant of the Lord, no matter how rightly, gets filled with it, this very earnest pressure becomes really a hindrance. Because such is man, that, if you become thus over-occupied with it, others will infallibly put it down to some wrong object on your part; whereas on the contrary, others do not so oppose where you trust the Lord simply, only dealing with the matter when it is your duty to deal with it and passing on. Meanwhile, your heart goes out to that which is according to His own grace; and there is so much the more power, when you must speak on that which is a matter of pain.

It was thus according to the grace and wisdom given to these beloved servants of the Lord. When the question came before them,

there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed {Acts 15:5}.

This is a new feature, it will be observed; that is, it is not merely the envious unbelieving Jews, but the working of legalism in the believing Jews. This is the serious evil that now begins to show itself. They insist

that it was needful to be circumcised, and to command them to keep the law of Moses {Acts 15:5}.

In fact they thought that Christians would be all the better for being good Jews. This was their object and their doctrine, if such it can be called.

And the apostles and elders came together to consider of this matter. And when there had been much disputing, &c. {Acts 15:6, 7}.

All this leads us into the interior of those days, and proves that the idea of everything being settled just by a word is only imagination; it never was so, not even when the whole apostolic college were there. We find the liveliest discussions among them.

And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men [and] brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith {Acts 15:7-9}.

Peter we hear on this occasion preaching Paul’s doctrine, just as we saw that Paul might among the Jews preach somewhat like Peter: -- God

put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye

God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ

-- not “they shall be saved,” nor “they shall be saved even as we.” This is probably what we might have said, but it is not what Peter said.

We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, -- we Jews shall be saved -- even as they [the uncircumcised Gentiles] {Acts 15:9-11}.

How sweet is the grace of God, and what an unexpected blow to the pretensions of the Pharisees that believed! And this too from Peter! If Paul had said it, there would have been less to wonder at. The apostle of the Gentiles (so they were prone to think) would naturally speak up for the Gentiles, but how about Peter? what induced the great apostle of the circumcision so to speak? and this in the presence of the twelve in Jerusalem itself? How was it that without the plan of man, and contrary no doubt to the desires of the wisest, the failure of Paul and Barnabas to settle the matter, conciliatory and gracious as they were, only turned to the glory of the Lord? It was the evident hand of God to the more magnificent vindication of His grace.

Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying

(for he now takes the place of proposing or giving a judgment),

Men [and] brethren, hearken unto me: Simeou hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: so that the residue of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord who doeth these things known from eternity {Acts 15:12-18}.

Thus we see that in James’s mind what Peter and Paul and Barnabas had pressed was according to the declarations of the prophets, not in conflict but agreement with them. He does not say more than this; he does not mean that such was their fulfilment; nor is any special application set before us. They teach that the Lord’s name should be called on the Gentiles, not when they become Jews. That they should be blessed and recognized, therefore, was in accordance with prophecy. There were Gentiles as such owned of God, without becoming practical Jews by being circumcised, -- Gentiles upon whom the name of the Lord was called.

This was the argument or proof from Amos; and it was conclusive.

Wherefore my sentence is (or, I judge), that we trouble not them which from among the Gentiles are turning to God: but that we write to them, that they
abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from the thing strangled, and from blood {Acts 15:19, 20}.

This, in the latter part of it, is simply the precepts of Noah, the injunctions that were laid down before the call of Abram, and, again, that which was evidently due to God Himself in regard to the human corruption that accompanies idolatry; so that things were then left in a manner alike simple and wise. There could be no right-minded Gentiles who would not acknowledge the propriety and necessity of that which the decree insists on.

Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, having chosen to send men from among them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren {Acts 15:22}.

It will be observed, by the way, that there were leading men among the brethren. Some seem jealous of this; others of hostile mind talk as if it contradicts brotherhood; but according to scripture, as in the nature of things, it is manifestly right. It is only crotchety people who have made a mistake. There must not be any allowance of jealousy where God speaks so plainly. This would be indeed to quarrel with the mercies of God among us. The letter was written, if I may so say, under the seal of the Spirit of God, from the apostles, and elders, and brethren {Acts 15:23},
to the brethren of the Gentiles in Antioch, and Syria, and Cilicia. On its contents I need not enlarge: they are familiar to all.

Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren (i.e., at Antioch) with many words, and confirmed (i.e., strengthened) them. And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto those that sent them {Acts 15:32, 33}.

(I give more exactly than in the common text.)

It was important to have the presence of men who were themselves competent witnesses of what had been debated and decided at Jerusalem. This was far more than being the mere and cold bearers of a letter. They knew the motives of the adversaries; they were familiar with the spiritual interests at stake, beside knowing the feeling of the apostles, and of the church at large. These men accordingly accompanied Paul and Barnabas. But this led also, in the wisdom of God, to an important point in the journeyings of the great apostle; for Paul and Barnabas, it is said,

continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also {Acts 15:35}.

(What largeness and love! How different from the days when an exclusive title protects unfit or haughty men, and money difficulties hamper both teachers and taught!)

And some days after Paul said to Barnabas (the younger takes the lead),

Let us go again and visit the brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do {Acts 15:36}.

Paul loved the church; he was not only a great preacher of the gospel, but he was deeply interested in the state of the brethren, and he valued their edification. Barnabas proposed to take with them John, who was also called Mark; Paul, however, would not agree to it.

But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other {Acts 15:39}.

The Spirit of God takes good care to record this; it was needful that it should be noted. It should act as a warning; and, on the other hand, it would also prepare the minds of the children of God for the fact, that even the most blessed men may have their difficulties and differences. We must not be too much cast down if we meet with anything of the kind. I do not make this remark in any wise to make light of such disagreements, but alas! we know that these things do arise.

But there is more for our instruction:

Paul chose Silas {Acts 15:40}.

This is a weighty practical consideration. There are persons, I am aware, who think that in the work of the Lord all must be left absolutely without thought of one's own or concert to the Lord Himself. Now I do not find this in the word of God. I do believe in simple-hearted subjection to the Lord. Assuredly faith in the action of the Holy Ghost is of all importance, -- both in the church, and also in the service of Christ. Yet there is not liberty alone but a duty of conferring together on the part of those who labour. There may be spiritual wisdom in what is often called "arrangement." So far from regarding it as an infringement of scripture, or of what is due to the Holy Ghost, I believe there are cases in which not to do so would be independence, and a total mistake as to the ways of the Lord. It is quite true that Paul would not have an improper person forced on him in the work. He had come to the conclusion that, though Mark might be a servant of the Lord and of course have his own right sphere, he was not exactly the labourer that was suited for the mission to which the Lord was calling himself. Consequently his mind was made up not to take Mark with him. Barnabas, on the contrary, would have Mark with them, and at length so strongly urged this as to make it the necessary condition of his own association with the apostle. The consequence was that the apostle preferred even to forego the presence of his beloved friend and brother and fellow-servant, Barnabas, rather than have an unsuitable person forced upon him.

I have little doubt that the brethren in general judged, and this spiritually, that Paul was in the right and Barnabas therefore wrong. For the apostle chose Silas and departed, as we are told,
recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God
{Acts 15:40},
without a word about the brethren recommending Barnabas
and John. Not that one would in the least doubt that Barnabas
continued to be blessed of God. And as for John (Mark), we
are expressly informed of his ability in the ministry at a later
day. The apostle takes particular pains to show his respect
and love for Barnabas after this in an inspired epistle
(1 Cor. 9); and what is yet more to the purpose, he makes
the most honourable mention of Mark in more than one of his
later epistles. (Col. 4 and 2 Tim. 4.) How good of the Lord
thus to let us see the triumph of His grace in the end! And
what a joy to the loving heart of the apostle to record it!

At the same time the entire history furnishes a most
important principle in the practical service of the Lord. We
ought not to be in anywise bound by an esprit de corps;
where His testimony is concerned, we must be prepared to
break with flesh and blood -- to say to a father and mother, I
have not seen them, neither to acknowledge one’s brethren,
nor to know one’s own children. Nor must we think
omnirich about the trial; for beyond a doubt many will be
angered by that measure of faithfulness to the Lord which
denominates themselves. This we must bear as a part of
the burden of His work. On the other hand, need it be said
that nothing is more uncomely than a rudely personal and slashing
habit with others in carrying out the will of the Lord? There
is in it neither grace, nor righteousness, nor wisdom, but self
and self-deception; for it looks like zeal -- this fire of Jehu.
At the same time there is such a thing as looking to God to
have an exercised judgment, as to your associates no less than
your work. The Lord alone can give the single eye with self-
judgment which enables us in the Spirit to discern aright
whom we ought to decline, and whom to choose, if
companions offer or should be sought in the work.

In Acts 16 we enter on some fresh points of interest. We
have before us the first appearance of Timothy, who was
afterwards to figure so much in the history of Paul and the
service of the Lord. Here too we find a principle of no small
moment for our guidance, and the more so as Paul did that
for which, one can conceive, a great many might judge him.
It is wonderful how apt people are, and especially those who
do not know much, to judge such as know far better than
themselves. There is nothing so easy as to form a judgment,
but whether there be adequate grounds and a sound
conclusion are other questions. Here the apostle is said to
have taken Timothy (whose mother was a Jewess and his
father a Greek, himself a disciple of good report among the
brethren) to go forth with him. But, singular to say, Paul
circumcises him. What consternation this must have made
amongst the brethren, especially the Gentiles! It was just after
the battle of Gentile independence of circumcision had been
fought and won. They surely must have thought that Paul was
losing his wits himself to circumcise Timothy! Not even a
Jew would have gone so far. Could it be that the apostle of
the uncircumcision had at length succumbed to the adversary?
or that he was swayed by his early prejudices so as to forget
all his own past testimony to the cross and death and
resurrection of Christ?

Now I do not hesitate to say, that so far from Paul being
under legal prepossession in this act, on the contrary he never
did anything in his course that showed him to be more
completely above it. To circumcise Timothy was precisely
what the law would not have done. It is well known that, if
there was a mingled marriage (i.e., between a Jew and a
Gentile), the law would have nothing to say to the offspring.
Legally the Jewish father could not own his own children
born of a Gentile mother, or vice versa. (See Ezra 10.) Now
Timothy being the fruit of such a marriage, there could be no
claim, even if there was license, to circumcise him; and (just
because there was no such claim, he being on the one side
sprung of a Greek, though his mother was a Jewess, because
it could not be commanded) Paul condescends out of grace to
those who were on a lower ground, and stops their mouths
most effectually. Grace knows how and when to bend, no less
than to be as unflinching as a rock; but this is precisely what
even believers in general are least able to understand.
Righteousness (that is, consistency with our relationship) is
not at all. God is gracious, and so may we be by His grace, and
thus feel how such as are really on a true and real ground
of grace, and in a position according to the word of God, can
have the true sympathy with those who, though of God, are
on a totally different ground, doing and saying what must
astonish others possessed of little grace. Is not this a thing to
be weighed? We may find, there is little doubt, the
importance of it before we have got through our little career.
It is a question that often comes up in various forms; but I
believe there is only one means of solving it. While the heart
thoroughly holds fast the truth of God, let us seek at the same
time to understand the workings of that truth according to the
grace of God.

This was the secret of the apostle’s action here, but it did
not hinder in the least his use of the decision arrived at in the
recent council at Jerusalem. For

as they went through the cities, they delivered to
them to keep the decrees that were ordained of the
apostles and elders that were at Jerusalem. And so
were the churches established in the faith, and
increased in number daily {Acts 16:4, 5}.

Then we find another important fact. Paul was stopped
in his Asiatic journeyings, as we are told here, and
forbidden by the Holy Ghost to preach the word in
Asia {Acts 16:6}.

So completely is the Spirit of God regarded as the directing
person in the church.

After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go
into Bithynia: but the Spirit of Jesus (for such should
be the text) suffered them not. And they passing by
Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared
to Paul in the night; there stood a man of Macedonia,
and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia,
and help us {Acts 16:7-9}.

In various ways, therefore, divine guidance was never
wanting.

♦ ♦ ♦
Accordingly they come to the first spot in Europe that was blessed with the preaching of the great apostle of the Gentiles. They came to Philippi,

which is the first\(^33\) city of that part of Macedonia, a colony: and we were abiding in the city itself certain days.

Here we read of Lydia’s heart opened, and of her household. The action of the Spirit as to the family seems to have obtained remarkably among Gentiles; among the Jews, as far as I know, we do not hear of it. We have found already districts among the Jews, as also among the Samaritans, which were powerfully impressed (to say the least) by the gospel; but among the Gentiles families seem particularly visited by divine grace as recorded by the Spirit. Take for example Cornelius the jailor, Stephanas; indeed you find it over and over gain. This is exceedingly encouraging -- especially to us.

But grace never acts in power without stirring up the enemy, and in ways calculated most to oppose and undermine. His tactics in Europe differed from those in Asia -- at least in this the first place where the gospel was preached. The earliest case of any one or thing which the word of God names is, as a rule, remarkably characteristic. Applying this to what is in hand, we find that Satan’s peculiar method in Europe was not so much by overt opposition but rather by affecting patronage. The maiden with the spirit of divination did not take the method of decrying the servants of the Lord but of applauding them. As it is said here,

she followed Paul and us

(for Luke was now with the apostle) with the cry,

These men are the servants of the Most High God, which show unto us the way of salvation {Acts 16:17}.

This she did many days, for at first the apostle avoided action to give no importance by any assaults of an open kind on the evil spirit. But after no notice was taken for some days, he being grieved at her boldness turns and says to the spirit,

I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her {Acts 16:18}.

This roused the whole city.

The masters were troubled because the source of their gains was gone; and the magistrates disliked anything that produced an uproar. The result was that the multitude rose up together, the praetors rent off their clothes, and the apostle and his companion were beaten and cast into prison, with a charge to the jailor to keep them safely. There the Lord wrought marvellously. At midnight, while others slept, Paul and Silas in praying were singing the praises of God, who soon answered them.

Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened {Acts 16:26}.

The consequence of the truth afterwards presented was in God’s grace the conversion of the jailor. It is not now the time to dwell on the details, beautiful as the scene is, and attractive to the heart as it may well be. The praetors were soon forced to acknowledge the wrong they had done in beating Romans uncondemned, contrary to the law of which they were the administrators. Thus the world was rebuked, the brethren comforted, and Paul and his companions departed to other fields of suffering and service.

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The next chapter (Acts 17) sketches for us the first entrance of the gospel into Thessalonica. It may be noted how remarkably the kingdom was preached there. But those of Berea earned for themselves a still more honourable character, being distinguished not so much by the prophetic style of teaching addressed to them, as by their own earnest and simple-hearted research into the word of God.

Finally, the apostle is at Athens, and there he makes one of the most characteristic appeals preserved to us in this striking book, but an appeal by no means to the credit of human refinement and intellect. For there is no place where the apostle condescends more to the elementary forms of truth, than in that city of art, poetry, and high mental activity. His text is taken, we may say, from the well-known inscription on the altar,

To the unknown God {Acts 17:23}.

He would let them know what, in the midst of their boasted knowledge, they themselves confessed they knew not. His discourse was pregnant with suited truth, for he points out the one true God, who made the world and all things therein -- a truth that philosophy never acknowledged, and now denies, and would disprove if it were possible.

God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth {Acts 17:24} -- another truth that unbelief disowns -- that God is not only the maker but the Lord, the master and disposer, of all --

He dwelleth not in temples made with hands {Acts 17:24}.

Thus the apostle finds himself at issue with both the Gentiles and the Jews.

Neither is worshipped (served) with men’s hands, as though he needed anything,

-- contrary to all religion of nature, wherever and whatever it may be.

Seeing he giveth (such is His character)

to all men life and breath and all things; and hath made of one blood {Acts 17:25, 26}:

here again he is at issue with man’s ideas, especially with those of Hellenic polytheism, for the unity of the human race

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33. Philippi was not the “chief” city of Macedonia, but Thessalonica and as Wieseler has shown, even if the subdivisions had been known then of Macedonia Prima, Sec. &c., Amphipolis (not Philippi) was the chief city of that part or district. The literal and correct translation therefore is “first,” geographically speaking. Eckhel (iv. p. 477, ss.) copies the coin, COL. AVG. IVL. PHILIP. It was therefore probably a colony founded by C. J. Cesar, and afterwards increased by Augustus.
is a truth that goes with that of the true God. It was seen among men that various races had each their own national god, and thus naturally the falsehood of many gods was bound up with and fostered the kindred pretension of many independent races of men. This was a darling idea of the pagan world. They held themselves to have sprung from the earth in some singularly foolish manner, at the same time maintaining that each was independent of the other. On the other hand, the truth which divine revelation discloses is that which man’s mind never did discover, but, when propounded, at once brings conviction along with it. Is it not humbling that the most simple truth about the simplest fact should be entirely beyond the ken of the proudest intellects unaided by the Bible? One would think that man ought to know his own origin. It is just what he does not know. He must know God first, and when he does all else becomes plain.

He hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth {Acts 17:26}.

Again,

He hath determined the times before-appointed (everything is under His guidance and government);
and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek God, if haply they might feel after him, and find him {Acts 17:26, 27}

(“God,” it should be here, according to the best authorities: “The Lord” is not in keeping with the teaching in this place. He shows them that God is the Lord, but this is another matter),

though he be not far from every one of us: for in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets, &c. {Acts 17:27, 28}.

Thus he turns the acknowledgment of their own poets against themselves, or rather against their idolatry. Strange to say that the poets, however fanciful, are wiser than the philosophers. How often they stumble in their dreams on things beyond that which they themselves would have otherwise imagined! Thus some of the poets among them (Cleitaneus and Aratus) had said,

For we are also His offspring {Acts 17:28}.

Forasmuch, then, as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead (the Divine) is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device {Acts 17:29}.

How clearly was shown the folly of their boasted reason! What can be simpler or more conclusive? Since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that God can be made by our hands. This is in effect what their practice amounted to. Gods of silver and gold were the offspring of men’s art and imagination.

And the times of this ignorance

(what a way to treat the boasting men of Athens!)

God winks at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent {Acts 17:30}.

Manifestly there is a thrust at conscience. This is the reason why he insists here on God’s call to repent. It is no use to talk of science, literature, politics, religion. Old or new speculations in philosophy are alike vain. God is now enjoining on all everywhere to repent. Thus he puts the sage down with the savage, because God is brought in as the judge of all. It is evident that divine truth must be aggressive; it cannot but deal with every conscience that hears it throughout the world. The law might thunder its claims on a particular people; but the truth deals with everybody as he is before God. The ground of the appeal too is most serious:

Because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world {Acts 17:31}.

Solemn prospect! This he urges home on them, and in a manner peculiar but suitable to the moral condition of Athens.

God is about to judge the habitable earth (οἰκουμένη) in righteousness. He does not here speak of judging the dead. It is the sudden intervention of the man who, raised from the dead, is going to deal with this habitable earth. Such is the unquestionable meaning of the text. The world here means the scene dwelt in by man. It is in no way a question of the great-white-throne judgment. Certainly all that he put before them was admirably calculated to arouse them from their mythic dreams to the light of truth, without gratifying their love of the speculative.

He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance to all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead {Acts 17:31}.

The allusion to the resurrection became at once the signal for unseemly jest.

And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. So Paul departed from among them {Acts 17:32, 33}.

There was but little fruit even for the apostle and from this wonderful discourse. Some, however, did cleave to him, and believed:

among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and, a woman named Damaris, and others with them {Acts 17:34}.

* * *

But in the grossly voluptuous state of Corinth the gospel, strange to say; was to take a great and effectual hold on a certain part of the population. Not so at Athens: few were the souls, and comparatively feeble the work there. But in Corinth, proverbially the most corrupt of Grecian cities, how unexpected yet how good the ways of the Lord? He had must people in that city. It was an immense comfort, both in his labours there and afterwards, when the work seemed spoiled. He could still believe, and spite of all look for the recovery of those that had been turned aside. The Lord is ever kind and true; and so Paul went on with good courage, however tried and humbled on their account.

Here take note of another remarkable fact. The apostle does what is proscribed by all ecclesiastical canons, as far as I know, everywhere: that is to say, he works with his hands at the simple occupation of tent-making.
And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. And when Silas and Timotheus were come
-- he takes this as the occasion for testifying to the Jews fully
-- being
pressed
(not exactly in the spirit, as it is said in the common text, but)
in regard of the word,
he testifies that Jesus was the Christ.
And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment,
with the warning,
Your blood be upon your own head; I am clean:
from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles
{Acts 18:4-6}.
Accordingly the work goes on among the Gentiles, though the Lord was not without witness among the Jews.
And this leads to a vast deal of feeling and clamour:
and all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of
the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment
seat
{Acts 18:17}.
Here the ruler was not only unwilling to entertain the question, but supercilious, and indifferent to the general disorder.

Just at the same time another remarkable feature appears here. In Caesarea Paul shaves his head according to a vow. It is plain that, whatever might be the strength of divine grace, there was a certain concession to his old religious habits, even in the greatest of apostles, and the most blessed instrument of New Testament inspiration.

However this may be, the end of the chapter gives another remarkable witness of grace. Apollos is brought 
before us, taught by Aquila and Priscilla, who
took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly
{Acts 18:26}.
I doubt whether it would have been according to the will of
God for a woman to have done so alone; but she, along with her husband, instructed him as they could. Now Priscilla, as I cannot doubt, knew more than her husband; it was therefore desirable that she should contribute her help. Still the Lord's ways are invariably wise; and it is very evident that it was in conjunction with her husband, not independently of him, that this grave task was carried on.

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Another important fact opens Acts 19. Paul found at
Ephesus a dozen disciples, who were in a very ambiguous position; for they were not exactly Jews, and they were 
certainly not in the true sense Christians: they were in a transition state between the two. Does this appear to you at 
all startling? It is likely that it may disturb those who are in the habit of thinking, or at least saying, that all persons must be in one of the two states -- that it is impossible to be in a middle position between them. But this is not the fact. It is always well to face the word of God; and God has written nothing in vain.

I say, then, that these men were recognized at Ephesus as believers, but it is very evident that they were not resting on the work of the Lord Jesus. They had faith, they looked to His person; but they had not intelligently laid hold of His work for the peace of their souls. So when Paul comes there and finds these disciples, he says,

Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?
{Acts 19:2}.

Not the slightest doubt is started about their believing, but he does raise a very serious question about another thing: --

Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?

Why he asked this it is not for us to say for certain. It is likely that he saw something that indicated to his penetrating eye souls not at rest and in the liberty of grace. In spirit they were still under the law. It is the state described in the latter part of Rom. 7. Of course I use this description with reference to Rom. 7 by anticipation, because that Epistle was not yet written. But people were in that state before it was written as well as since; and the object of the epistle was to deliver them out of it.

Paul then enquired,

Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?
And they said unto him, We have not so much as
heard whether there be any Holy Ghost
{Acts 19:2}.

It is not that they did not know the existence of the Spirit of God. Such is not at all the meaning of the text. All Jews had heard in the scripture of the Holy Ghost; and more particularly John's disciples were well instructed in the fact, not only of His existence, but that the Holy Ghost was about to be sent down on believers, or rather that they were going to be baptized with the Holy Ghost. This is what is referred to. Had that baptism taken place? They were not aware of it; they had not yet received the great blessing. Thus it is seen, they were believers, though they had not received the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Such is the account that scripture gives of their state.

It is well to note this, because we may find persons now in a state somewhat analogous. There are many souls who are not at all in liberty, not having yet received the Spirit of adoption. Yet are they persons that we can truly accept as born of God; they detest sin; they love holiness; they really adore the Lord Jesus, having no doubt at all as to His glory, and that He is the Saviour. For all this they are not able to, -- what they call -- “apply” the truth to their own case and settled relationship. They cannot always appropriate the blessing. They are not at ease and at liberty in their souls. We must not put such people down as unbelievers, on the one hand; neither must we rest, on the other hand, as though they had received everything. Those are two errors to which many are prone. Scripture allows neither, perfectly providing for every case. What the apostle did was this: he was far from questioning the reality of their faith, but he showed that it was not yet exercised on the full object of faith. They had not yet entered into the just results of redemption. Accordingly he enquires how this came to pass -- to what they had been baptized. They say, To John’s baptism. This explains all.
John’s baptism was only transitional. It was of God, but it was simply in prospect of the blessing, not in possession of it. Such too was the state of these men. The apostle then puts before them the truth.

They were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came upon them; and they spake with tongues (Acts 19:5, 6).

This is highly important to be understood, though (I need not say) still more to be believed. We have the apostle in an exceptional way laying his hands on disciples in this condition, just as Peter and John laid their hands on the Samaritan believers who thereby received the Holy Ghost. Thus God takes particular pains to show that the apostle Paul had the same sign and voucher of his apostleship as attached to Peter and John before. We are not, however, to suppose that a man cannot receive the Holy Ghost except by such an act: this would be a false impression and a misuse of scripture. As I have said elsewhere, and sought to explain long ago, the two general cases of the gift of the Holy Ghost are entirely irrespective of any such act; the special cases, where hands were imposed, owed their existence to peculiar circumstances that do not call for detailed remarks at this late hour.

Then we hear of the mighty spread of the work, -- not only the power with which God clothed the apostle, but also that which rebuked the superstitious use of the name of Jesus by those who without faith pretended to it. The chapter ends with the tumult at Ephesus.

In Acts 20, we learn the definitive usage, which the Spirit sanctions and records for us, of the Lord’s day, or the first day of the week, as the fitting time for the breaking of bread. So we find it among the Gentiles in Acts 20:7. I am aware that there are those who seem to think there is no liberty to break bread on any other day. I cannot but differ from such a conclusion. There appears to me full liberty to break bread any day provided that some adequate or just reason call for it: Acts 2 is, to my mind, conclusive authority for this. At the same time, while there is liberty to break bread, wherever there arises a sufficient ground for it in the judgment of the spiritual on any day of the week, it is obligatory, if we may use such a term on such a theme, on all saints walking with the Lord to break bread on the Lord’s day, remembering always that the obligation flows from the grace of Christ, and is perfectly consistent with the most thorough sense of liberty before the Lord. In short, then, the regularly sanctioned day for breaking bread among the Gentiles is the first day of the week (not of the month, or quarter, or year); but under special circumstances the early disciples used to break bread every day. This appears to be the true answer to questions raised on this point.

Finally, in the same chapter (without entering into particulars at present), we may note the meeting of the elders 34 with Paul, and the important truth that they are not thrown upon any successors to the apostle, nor does he speak of any successors in their own office, but commends them to God and to the word of his grace (Acts 20:32).

This is the more worthy of attention because he warns them of grievous wolves without, and perverse men from within. Thus there was every reason for speaking of succession, if it really possessed the place which tradition gives it, both to apostles on the one hand, and to elders on the other; but there is a marked absence of any such provision. Not only is it not pointed to, but a wholly different comfort is administered.

34. It may be observed here that those whom the inspired historian calls “the elders of the church” (i.e., in Ephesus) the apostle designates overseers, or bishops (ἐπίσκοποις). They are not in scripture two orders of spiritual rulers but one office. It is not merely that the bishops were styled presbyters (the higher dignity including the lower), but the presbyters Paul calls bishops, which could only be because they are both descriptive of the same men and office. This is supposed also in Phil. 1:1, 1 Tim. 3, Tit. 1:5, 7, 1 Pet. 5:1, 2. On the other hand presbyters never appointed to that office, though an apostle associated them with himself in laying hands on Timothy when he conferred on him a χρίσματι. But scripture never calls Timothy a presbyter or bishop, but an evangelist, though he was also employed of the Lord in a highly responsible place at Ephesus, and seems to have exercised a quasi-apostolic charge over the presbyters as well as the saints in general there.

I am sorry to add an instructive sample of the blinding influence of ecclesiastical tradition over a pious mind at an early day. It is a citation from Irenæus’ famous work against heresy (iii. xiv. 2), or rather the Latin version which alone represents him here: -- “In Mileto enim convocatis episcopis et presbyteris, qui erant ab Epheso et a religuis proximis civitatibus, quoniam ipse festinaret,” &c. Undeniably there is a double misstatement here: (1) the bishops and presbyters must be regarded as at least contrary to fact; (2) they were expressly of the church in Ephesus, not from other neighbouring cities. We cannot wonder that later writers of less integrity and singleness of eye than the martyr bishop of Lyons went farther and without scruple in the effort to justify the growing departure from the normal state of the church, its doctrines, ministry, and discipline, as laid down in God’s word. I could not but consider the note of Massuet, the Benedictine editor, a disgrace to a Christian scholar, or even to an honest man, if one did not bear in mind that the eyes of such persons are useless spiritually when they read the Fathers.
The closing chapters from 21 to the end of the book are devoted to an episode full of interest and profit -- Paul's course from Jerusalem to Rome. And here we find ourselves in an atmosphere considerably different from what we have had before. It is no longer the mighty power of the Holy Ghost, either inaugurating the great work of God on the earth at Jerusalem, nor His equally wonderful energy in breaking through the old bottles of Judaism, when grace flowed freely, first to Samaria, then to the Gentiles, and in principle, as we know, in due time to the ends of the earth. Neither have we the apostle separated, as it is said, unto the gospel of God. These were the three great divisions and the main contents of the book up to the point we are arrived at. But now the apostle is about to become a prisoner, nor this without warning. The Holy Ghost, as we may see on the surface of the verses I have read, admonished the apostle time after time; but the apostle shows us the most striking combination of what was truly heavenly in faith and life with the strongest clunging of heart to his brethren after the flesh. This is what makes the difficulty of appreciating his history by no means small. But one may say that what was infirmity must be allowed to be infirmity on the noblest side (if any thing be so, which I do not deny.) of the human heart. Nevertheless we have the immediate effect in the lesson that even this does force us into altogether new circumstances wherein God never fails to magnify Himself. He knows how to turn even that which may have been in itself mistaken to His own glory, and then He in grace forms new channels and suited ways, not without a righteous judgment of the error even if it were in the best, and so much the more remarkably because it was in the best. And this I believe to be the prominent lesson of these later chapters of the Acts.

Let us, however, pursue the course of the divine instruction.

The apostle goes on his way and finds disciples, and tarries among them, as we are told, at Tyre for seven days {Acts 21:4}. This seems to have been a common term of stay -- we can readily conceive why. One great reason, I do not doubt, was to enjoy the fellowship of the saints together, to spend with the Christians in a new place that day which has the strongest possible claim on the heart that is true to Jesus -- the first day of the week. This was expressly shown in Acts 20. The Spirit of God does not repeat the same express statement here. Nevertheless I do not think we are far astray if we connect the seven days of the apostolic visit with that which was stated plainly in Acts 20:6, 7. At Troas it was said that we abode seven days; and upon the first day of the week, when the disciples (or rather, we) came together to break bread, Paul preached {Acts 20:6, 7}.

Here there is no such positive affirmation, but still the mention in a similar way of seven days with the disciples may well open a question for spiritual judgment what the motive was for such a term. I do not doubt myself that it was to have the joy of meeting all saints in each locality as opportunity served, and of cheering and strengthening them on their course.

No doubt the spiritual instincts of the children of God would lead them always to desire to be together. For my own part I cannot understand a child of God who on principle could abstain from any occasion that summoned round the name of the Lord the members of the household of faith. It appears to me that, far from being a waste of time or from any other object being of the same moment, it is simply a question whether we value Christ, whether we truly are walking in the Spirit, if we live in the Spirit, whether the objects of the constant active love of God are also in measure the objects of our love in Christ's name.

I think therefore that it is according to the Lord that the children of God should if practicable be together every day. To this the power of the Spirit would lead: only the circumstances in which we are placed in this world necessarily hinder it. Therefore the true principle according
to the word of God is a coming together whenever it is practicable; and we do well to cherish a real exercise of heart and conscience in judging what the practicability is, or rather whether the impracticability be real or imaginary. Very often it will turn out to be in our will, an excuse for spiritual idleness, a want of affection to the children of God, and a want of sense of our own need. Accordingly obstacles are allowed in own minds, such as the claims of business, or the family, or even the work of the Lord. Now all these have their place. Surely God would have all His children to seek to glorify Him, whatever may be their duty. They have natural duties in this world; and the wonderful power of Christianity is seen in filling with what is divine that which without Christ would be merely of nature; and this should rammify the whole course of a man’s life after he belongs to Christ. And so again the claims of children for instance, or parents, or the like, cannot be disputed; but then if they are really taken up for Christ, I do not think it will be found that it is to the loss of either parents or children, or that the little time is missed in the long run that is spent in seeking the strength of the Lord, and in communion according to our measure. We ought to be open for both; and we shall ourselves never have any power to help unless we have the sense of the need of help from others; but both will be found together.

It appears to me that through the blessed apostle the Spirit of God gives us in these passing touches, and in recounting them, valuable hints as to the spirit that animated him in his course. We may know in some slight degree what it is to be long on a journey without due rest, food, or shelter; and passing from one country and continent to another was by no means then the easy thing that it is in modern times. We have all the habit of being rapidly enough in motion, and anxious to get to the end. We can understand how the apostle, with so many hindrances in the way, might feel the comfort of these repeated stays, seven days in one place, seven days in another, as we have seen, expressly showing the desire of his heart after communion as well as confirming their souls. Such is what we find in this blessed man’s course: in our little measure surely it ought to be so with us.

On this occasion, however, the disciples told Paul through the Spirit that he should not go up to Jerusalem. This was serious. There is no other comment upon it. We know not what the apostle said or did, further than this, that the apostle certainly went up to Jerusalem all the same.

When we had accomplished these days, we departed and went our way {Acts 21:5}.

Then we have the beautiful scene of the wives and the children. This has its value. There is a marked absence of allusion to children in the Acts of the Apostles, where much is said among men and saints and servants of God. But we do hear of them in that which is confessedly suitable. Here they are brought forward, but not as a superstitious church ere long did, among other things, to receive a portion from the table of the Lord: things were soon to change if not to arrive at that pass yet; but we do see them in the expression of the love that filled all, and the desire to reap to the very last moment the blessing of having an apostle in their midst. In short, the children were there no less in token of respectful love to him who was going, but also set in the attitude to receive whatever blessing the Lord might be pleased to bestow upon them.

And they all brought us on our way with wives and children,

it is said,

till we were out of the city, and we kneeled down and prayed, and, when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship, and they returned home again {Acts 21:5, 6}.

Another means of letting us into the ways of God among His people is found at Cæsarea.

We entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven {Acts 21:8}.

We cannot well have forgotten his labours in earlier days at Samaria, and round about. But we are told here what we had not learnt then, that

the same man had four daughters {Acts 21:9}.

As unmarried, they were remaining in their father’s house; and they prophesied. There is no reason why a woman should not have this or most other gifts as much as a man. I do not say the same kind of gift always. Surely God is wise and gives suited gifts whether to men or women, or, it may be, I was going to say, to children. The Lord is sovereign and knows how, as putting all who now believe in the body of Christ, so also to give them a work suitable to the purposes of His own grace. Certainly He did clothe these four daughters of Philip with a very special spiritual power. They had one of the highest characters of spiritual gift -- they prophesied. And if they were invested with this power, certainly it was not to be put under a bushel but to be exercised: the only question is how.

Now scripture, if we be but subject, is quite explicit as to this. In the first place, prophecy stands confessedly in the highest rank of teaching, but it is teaching. Next, the apostle is himself the person who tells us that he does not suffer a woman to teach. This is clearly decisive; if we bow to the apostle as inspired to give us God’s mind, we ought to know that it is not the place of a Christian woman to teach. He is speaking on this topic, not in 1 Cor. 11, but in 1 Cor. 14. He is drawing the line between men and women in 1 Tim. 2. The latter epistle forbids the women as a class to teach. The other and still closer word in the former epistle, commands them to be silent in the assembly. At Corinth, apparently, there was some difficulty as to godly order and the right relations of men and women, because the Corinthians, being a people of speculative habits, instead of believing, reasoned about things. It was the tendency of the Greek mind to question everything. They could not understand that, if God had given a woman as good a gift as a man, she was not equally to use it. We can all feel their difficulty. Such reasoners are not wanting now. The fault of it all was, and is, that God is left out. His will was not in the thought of the Corinthians. There was no waiting on the Lord to ascertain what was His mind.
Clearly, if He has called the church into being, it can not but be made for His own glory. He has His own mind and will about the church, and He has therefore spread out in His word how all the gifts of His grace are to be exercised.

Now the passages in 1 Cor. 14 and in 1 Tim. 2 appear to me to be perfectly plain as to the relative place of the woman, whatever may be her gift. This may be said to decide only as to one sphere -- the assembly -- where the woman, according to scripture, is precluded from the exercise of her gift. I may say further, that in those days it did not occur to them that women would go forth publicly to preach the word. Bad as the state of things was in early days, they seem to me to have looked for a greater sense of modesty on the part of women. There is not the slightest doubt that many females with the best intentions have thus preached, as they do still. They, or their friends, defend their course by appeals to the blessing of God on the one hand, and on the other to the crying need of perishing sinners everywhere. But nothing can be more certain than that scripture (and this is the standard) leaves them without the slightest warrant from the Lord for their line of conduct. Public preaching of the gospel on the part of women is never contemplated in scripture. It was bad enough for the Corinthians to think that they might speak among the faithful. It might have seemed that there women had the shelter of godly men; that there they were not offensively putting themselves forward before all sorts of people in the world, as must be the case in evangelising. Among the godly they may have imagined a veil, so to speak, drawn over them more or less. But in modern times the end is supposed to justify the means. Gross as the Corinthians were, I must confess that to my mind the plans of our own day seem even more grievous, and with less excuse for them.

However this may be, we see here that the daughters of Philip did prophesy. No doubt it was in their father’s house, as already intimated; otherwise the word of God would thus be set one part against another.

While they tarried there, a certain prophet came down from Judaea, who repeats the warning to the apostle. Binding his own hands and feet with Paul’s girdle he declares,

So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles {Acts 21:11}.

And thus it was accomplished to the letter. Nevertheless, spite of the tears of the saints, spite of the warning of this prophet, as of others before, Paul, with mind made up, answers,

What mean ye to weep and to break my heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus {Acts 21:13}.

After all the apostle goes accordingly, and in Jerusalem the brethren receive him gladly.

And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present {Acts 21:18}.

It is evident from this picture that all ecclesiastically was in due order at Jerusalem. An apostle was there who had an apparently high place of local dignity. Besides there were the ordinary overseers whom the Holy Ghost had set as guides and leaders in the assembly (that is, the local charge of elders).

And when Paul had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry {Acts 21:19}.

They owned the way in which the Lord had been glorified. At the same time their word to him is,

Thou seest, brother, how many thousands (the true meaning is tens of thousands, myriads, which may probably give some a larger thought than is familiar of the vast and rapid spread of the gospel at that time among that nation)

of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law: and they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying, that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs {Acts 21:20, 21}.

This was a mistake. Such was not the course of the apostle.

What Paul really taught was the impropriety of putting Gentiles under the law: he did not interfere with the Jews at this time. Later a distinct and peremptory message came from the Holy Ghost; but the process of the Lord with them was gradual -- His method with His ancient people I deem of importance for us to learn and imitate. It is perfectly true that it was in the mind of God in due time to bring out fully the deliverance of both Jew and Gentile from the law; but this was not done all at once, at least as regards the Jew. What the apostle set himself decidedly against was the effort to bring the Gentiles under law; and this was precisely what Pharisaic brethren were zealous for. Whether Judaizing Christians or the Gentiles themselves took up the law, the apostle did most resolutely reject and condemn the fatal error. But as regarded the Jews themselves there was the truest forbearance, flowing from, not characteristic largeness of heart only, but tender consideration for scrupulous consciences. If God had not yet sent out the final word that told them the old covenant was ready to vanish away, how could he who so closely followed His ways be hasty? The early days were really a time of transition, where Christ was ministered first to Jew and then to Gentile. The Gentile, never having been under law, was far more simple than the Jew in appreciating the liberty of the gospel. The Jew was tolerated in his prejudices until the closing message came from God, warning them of the danger of apostasy from the gospel through their adhesion to the law.

Having dwelt on this in sketching the epistle to the Hebrews, there is the less reason to say more about it now. But that epistle was to the Hebrew believers the last trumpet which summoned them to renounce all connection with the old system. Up to that time there had been a gradual transition; the gap widening, the difference more pronounced, but still every tie was not broken till this the final call. Such a way strikes me as worthy of our God -- a way which to our precipitate minds might seem somewhat difficult, because we have been mostly trained as Gentiles. Since we have entered
into the truth of God more perfectly, we have seen the enormous mischief of bringing in the law and mixing it up with the gospel.

Let us remember then that, whilst the Holy Ghost always maintained liberty for the Gentile, there was unquestionably a time of waiting on the Jew. Even the apostle Paul was no exception to patience with their prejudices. As to the twelve, they seem to have feebly enough entered into this liberty from the law. Doubtless Paul, as being apostle of the Gentiles, called from heaven by the risen Jesus, and witness of sovereign grace, apprehended it after a different sort and richer measure; but we shall find that even he could warmly sympathise to a great extent with the feelings of a Jew. He is the one to whom, under God, we are indebted for knowing anything about Christianity in its full form and real strength; yet, for all that, it is quite evident that he had, if not Jewish prejudice, certainly the warmest Jewish attachments; and, in point of fact, it was the strength of his affection to the ancient people of God that brought him into the trouble recorded in these concluding chapters of this book, the Acts of the Apostles.

This, we must remember, to a certain extent, may be viewed as an answer to the love found in our blessed Lord Himself; but then there were striking differences. In our Lord, love for Israel was, as all else, perfect: there was not, nor could be, the faintest admixture of a blemish. We know well the bare hint of such a thought would be repulsive to our faith and our love for His person. To the Christian it is impossible to conceive it for an instant. At the same time, we know His love for that people was felt and expressed up to the last. It was His persistent love which brought Him into the circumstances of utter rejection when God's time was come, and He suffered all the consequence of their hatred (though infinitely more also for sin in, atonement, which was His alone). Now the apostle knew what it was to love Israel and suffer for that love. Not only among the Gentiles, but among the saints, the more he loved the less he was loved. This was true; but, if in general true there, emphatically was it to be verified among the Jews. Thus stands the wonderful fact in the history of the apostle Paul: the very man who brought out the church distinctly, and showed its heavenly character as none other approached; the very man that proved the absolute abolition of the old ties and relations, swallowing up all in Christ exalted to the right hand of God: -- he is the man whose heart retained the strongest attachment of love to the ancient people of God. And I have not the smallest doubt that God gives us in this case a grave but gracious warning of its danger. Were it an apostle, were it the greatest of the apostles, still Paul was not Christ, and what in Christ could be and was absolute perfection, in Paul was not. Yet Paul was a man who puts all that have been since that day into the shade.

If I may express my feelings here, let me say that I felt nothing a greater trial to my own spirit than touching on this very theme. I could not point out any one thing I shrink from more than having the appearance of reflecting on such a servant of Christ. Yet God has written the history of all this, and He has written it surely not for sentiment and silence, but for utterance and common profit. He has written it, no doubt, that we should feel our own great shortcomings, and that we should beware of our spirit in setting up to condemn such an one as the great apostle of the Gentiles.

Still, I repeat, the Holy Ghost has recorded here His own warnings on the one side, and on the other the refusal of the apostle to act on them, if I may venture so to say, though it were through fulness of tender love, and an ever-burning affection for his brethren after the flesh. Alas! when we think of our faults; when we reflect how little they spring from anything that is lovely; when we recollect how much they are mixed with worldliness, and impatience, and pride, and vanity, and self; when we observe that he was so deeply chastened, and met with such a distressing stop to the worldwide work which God had given him, in what a light do our faults appear! He had a pressure of trial such as few men ever knew beside himself; and, what might embitter it to him, all this the natural effect of slighting the admonitions of the Spirit of God by yielding to his undying love for a people out of whom, after all, he had been divinely separated to the work the Lord had given him to do. God having given us the account, whatever may be one's own feelings, can it be doubted that we are bound to read, and by grace to seek to understand? Yea, not this only, but may we apply it for the present blessing of our souls, and for our progress in the path of Christ here below, whatever it may be. We may have the smallest possible sphere; but, after all, a saint is a saint, and very dear to God, who magnifies Himself in the least of those that are His.

It is assuredly for our profit and to God's own glory that the Holy Ghost has written this remarkable appendix to the history -- the onward history -- of the Acts of the Apostles. Here we have a check which brings in new things, the fruit of persisting in going up to Jerusalem spite of the Spirit's testimony against it. The more blessed the man, the more serious the miss of firm footing. There is one step outside what the Spirit enjoined, whatever may be the mingling of that which is beautiful and lovely; at the same time, it was not the full height, so to speak, of the guidance of the Spirit of God. This exposed the apostle to something more, as it always does; and, indeed, so much the more, because it was such an one as Paul. The same principle is plain in David's life. The lack of energy, which might have been comparatively a little hurt to another, became the gravest snare to David; and, found out of the path of the Lord, he soon slips into the meshes of the devil. Not that I mean anything in the least degree tantamount in the apostle Paul; far from it; for, indeed, in this case the apostle was mercifully preserved from anything that gave the smallest activity to the corruption of nature. It was simply a defect, as it appears to me, of watching against his own love for Israel, and thus setting aside, consequently, the warnings that the Spirit gave. The tears and appeals seem to have rather stimulated and strengthened his desire, and accordingly this exposed him to what was a snare, not immoral but religious, through listening to others below his own measure. He took the advice of James.
What is it, therefore? The multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come. Do therefore this that we say to thee. We have four men which have a vow on them; them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads

-- what a position for the apostle to find himself in!- and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing {Acts 21:22-24}.

Without pretending that there was nothing in the previous line of Paul tending to this (compare Acts 18:18), it is evident that the object was to give the appearance that he was a very good Jew indeed. Was this warrantable, or the whole truth? Was he not a somewhat ambiguous Jew? I believe that, as we have seen, there was an undisguised respect for what once had the sanction of God. And here was just the difference in his case from our blessed Lord’s perfect ways. Up to the cross, we all know, the legal economy or first covenant had the sanction of God; after the cross, in principle it was judged. The apostle surely had weighed and appraised it all; he did not require any man to show him the truth. At the same time there was no small mingling of love for the people; and we know well how it may intercept that singleness of eye which is the safeguard of every Christian man.

The apostle then listens to his brethren about a matter in which he was incomparably more competent to form a sound judgment than any of them. Accordingly he suffers the consequence. He is found purifying himself along with the men who had a vow. He enters the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them. And when the seven days were almost ended

-- which it is well known had to do with the Nazarite vow -- the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people and laid hands on him, crying out, Men of Israel, help! This is the man that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place; and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place {Acts 21:26-28}.

The next verse shows us why. It was a mistake; nevertheless it was enough to rouse the feelings of all Israel.

All the city was moved, and the people ran together {Acts 21:30}, and the issue was a frightful tumult, and the apostle was in danger of being killed by their violent hands, when the chief captain comes and rescues him. This paves the way for the remarkable address which the apostle delivers in the Hebrew tongue, given in the next chapter.

The mention of the Hebrew tongue appears to confirm the true key to the difference between this account of the apostle’s conversion and others. It is not precisely in this book as in the gospels, where a different way of presenting the same fact or discourse of our Lord Jesus obtains, according to the character of the design in hand; yet is it the same principle at bottom. Even in the same book a difference of design may be traced. There may be observed this in the three accounts in which Paul’s conversion is given: first, the historical account; secondly, Paul’s own statement to the Jews; and, thirdly, Paul’s to the Jews and Gentiles as to the Roman governor and king Agrippa. This is the true reason of the difference there is in the manner in which facts are presented. We need not enter minutely into detail.

On examination you will find what is said to be correct, that here as is evident he adopts a language which was for the very purpose of arresting the attention in appealing to the affections of the Jew; he speaks in their familiar tongue, and accordingly gives an account of his conversion in such a way as he considered conciliatory to the feelings of the Jews. To these there was one thing which was unpardonable; but this was the very glory of his apostleship, the direct object for which God raised him up. Thus, with the most gracious of intentions, and with the warmest love towards his countrymen after the flesh, the apostle gives an account of his conversion and the miraculous circumstances that attended it, of his meeting with Ananias, a devout man according to the law, which he takes particular pains to state there, and of the trance into which he afterwards fell at Jerusalem in the temple whilst praying. But he tells them out that which he must easily have known (and so much the more because of his accurate understanding of the feelings of the Jews) would rouse them to the uttermost: in short, he lets them know that the Lord called him and sent him to the Gentiles.

It was quite enough. The moment the sound of Gentiles {Acts 22:21} reached their ears, all their feelings of Jewish pride took fire, and at once they cried out,

Away with such a fellow from the earth! It is not fit that he should live {Acts 21:22}.

As they cried and cast off their clothes to throw dust into the air, the chiliarch commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging. There he put himself in the wrong; for Paul was not only a Jew but a citizen of Rome; and he was so by a better title than the commandant who thus ordered him to be bound. The apostle quietly states the fact. I dare not judge him, though there may be some Christians who would: he was clearly entitled to remind those that were the guardians of the law of their own transgression. He uses no means further, but merely tells them how things stood.

It appears to me that it is a morbid squeamishness rather than true spiritual wisdom that would cavil at such an act on the part of the apostle. Every one knows that it is easy to be a martyr in theory, and that those who are martyrs in theory are seldom so in practice. Here was one destined to torture, and really one of the most blessed witnesses of the Lord all through. Faith enables one to see things clearly. Should the guardians of law break the law? Faith never teaches one to court danger and difficulty, but to walk the path of Christ in peace and thankfulness. The Lord has not called His servants to desert it. I dare say some of us may have been struck with
the fact that the Lord told them when they were persecuted in one city to flee to another. Assuredly this is not courting martyrdom, but the very reverse; and if the Lord Himself gave such a word to His servants in Judæa and to His disciples (as is well known), it appears to me that it is at least hazardous without grave spiritual ground to face a danger so decided of condemning the guiltless who are entitled to our reverence. Here we have no sign of anything said by the Holy Ghost in the form of warning; and therefore, observe, it is not in the least degree a setting aside what is clearly laid down elsewhere. We have seen the Holy Ghost admonishing the apostle, when carried far in ardent love, and we can easily see that He had a sovereign title, both to guide and to correct -- even if it were an apostle.

Nothing of the kind appears here. It was a fact which the Roman officer had overlooked illegally, and the apostle was entitled to state the fact. It was in no way a going to law. Need it be said that such a recourse to the powers that he would have little become a follower and servant of Jesus? It was in no way using such means as man would have employed; it was the simplest possible statement of a circumstance serious in the eye of the law, and it had its effect.

And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned? When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chiliarch, saying, Take heed what thou doest; for this man is a Roman [Acts 22:25, 26].

The chiliarch enquires accordingly. You must remember that to say you were a Roman, if you were not, was a capital offence against the government, which of course they never failed to visit with the severest punishment. To claim it untruly was too dangerous to be often attempted, as it exposed a man to the imminent risk of death. The officials of the Roman empire were rarely disposed therefore to question such a claim, especially where it was made by a man who, on the face of it, was such a character as the apostle, little as he might be known to any of them.

So straightway,
it is said,
they departed from him which should have examined him, and the chiliarch also was afraid after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him [Acts 22:29].

However, man strives to preserve his dignity after his own fashion.

On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands,
(that is to say, he leaves him still a prisoner which he had no right to do,)
and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them [Acts 22:30].

The apostle seeks no further redress, and was as far as possible from the desire or thought of punishing the man for the mistake he had made. For this evidently would have been a departure from grace: but the occasion helps to give a little insight into this wonderful man of God. For when the high priest Ananias commanded those that stood by to smile him that said he had lived in all good conscience, Paul turns quickly upon him with the words

God shall smite thee, thou whited wall
(and so He did);
for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?
And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest? Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people [Acts 23:3-5].

This is a fine instance of the most simple, and at the same time admirable, way in which grace recovers, even if there be a momentary slip of haste mingling with it. There can be no doubt at all that the high priest had acted in a way entirely contrary to the law. There was therefore an indisputable right to rebuke him. At the same time I suppose that his decided character, and his keen sense of the glaring injustice, did betray itself in his utterance. Further, it is an instance of what is found often elsewhere in Scripture. God may be with a deed which on one side of it may have haste mingling with it, but on the other real truth and righteousness. What was done here by the high priest was glaringly contrary to the law of which he was the professsed administrator. Nor certainly did God permit these solemn words to fall to the ground without bearing fruit. Paul at once, however, corrects himself, and owns that had he known him to be the high priest, he would not have spoken so; that is to say, whatever might be the character of the man, Paul was not one to lower the office. He would leave it to God to judge that which was unworthy of it.

There is another thing that claims our notice. Is there not a certain peculiarity discernible in a measure in the apostle now? First of all there was haste of spirit. Is there as firm treading as before in the path where the power of the Spirit of God rested on him? Do we not find an adroitness, may I venture to say, though wishing in no way to utter a word too much, as is easily done? But still is there not a cleverness in the way in which the apostle, when he perceived that one part of the council were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, cried out,

Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of
Pharisees; of the hope and resurrection of the dead
I am called in question [Acts 23:6]?

This does not seem according to the simple and full activity of the Spirit of God that we have seen in the apostle

35. The plural form is recommended to us by the most ancient uncials, some good cursive, the Vulgate and the Syriac; the singular prevail in the great majority of copies and versions. Being more natural or customary, though far less energetic, we can understand copyists falling into it.
when he was away from Jerusalem. He had gone where he had been divinely warned not to go; and it matters not who it is, if it were even the greatest of the apostles, is there not a sensible difference when there is the smallest divergence from the peaceful guidance of the Holy Ghost? And if this is true of him, what shall we say of ourselves? Do not allow your lips to utter strong things about the apostle Paul; but let your own consciences, and let me, take heed to our own ways, and above all beware of this -- that we be not found slighting one word that comes to us from the Holy Ghost. Let us weigh and cherish every expression of God’s mind. In this case the apostle Paul could not doubt it. It was not doubt; but he strengthened himself now that the time was come to suffer. He had made up his mind for the worst that man might or could do. Was it all that was there? In truth there was more than this; but I think the comparative lack of calm, the exposure to haste, and the other features that appear in this remarkable history, are meant to be signs to our souls of the real truth of the case as it now stood.

The consequence was soon apparent on this occasion. The diversion produced was no doubt what men would call politic; that is, the apostle designed to divide and conquer. He made good use of the one party that had whatever there was of zeal and orthodoxy. There is not the smallest pandering to the Sadducees, which would have been far from the Spirit of God. Now I am very far from saying or implying any unworthy ways; but I do mean that there was a kind of availing himself of the difference that reigned between these that held to the word of God with, at any rate, an outward religious respect, and those that despised it; and this is a danger that no man is free from, particularly in circumstances of danger. The apostle yielded to it then. He stated the fact that the hope and resurrection of the dead were in question; but still the question arises, What was his motive for putting it so? What does the Spirit of God bring out before us here? Was it simply the truth? Was it only Christ? I doubt so.

It seems clear that the discerning eye of the apostle saw the horrible state of the high priest and his party, -- that whatever might be the honour of the office, yet, in the defiled and defiling hands that now held it, it was only used for their own worst purposes against the truth and grace of God. Accordingly he availed himself of the strong feeling of the sounder part of the nation, and thus gained what might have seemed unexpected adherents among the Pharisees. It did not give him after all the advantage. To the believer is not this always the result? I doubt very much the weight of such a gain. Have we not learnt that the true gain is Christ? and that to take our side unqualifiedly with the Lord, by God’s grace to shut our eyes to all consequences, and our ears to all censure, and just go on holding to that which we know is acceptable in His eyes and for His own glory, -- is not this the only true path of service, as it certainly is the precursor of victory? In this case it would be a victory unmixed for the Master. Such an idea as one’s own victory ought not to be in a Christian man’s mind. Let our desires be simply for the Lord -- for His grace and truth, for His own work and glory in the church. His name is ill-served by making use even of the most reputable of His adversaries. Those zealous for the law, one cannot but know, are opposed to the gospel, -- the Pharisee no less than the Sadducee. The apostle presents to the multitude the hope and resurrection of the dead {Acts 23:6}.

He does not commit himself to speaking about Jesus; he does not say a word of the gospel. Had he brought in either, all would have come to nothing: the Pharisee would have resented the word just as much as the Sadducee. Leaving out what was adverse to his purpose; he puts forward that which he knew would set one part of his enemies against the other.

Yet here was vouchsafed no small comfort from the Lord to His servant.

And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle. And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome {Acts 23:10, 11}.

What a proof of what the Lord is, even in (yea, because of) those very circumstances when the apostle’s heart might have been exceedingly cast down! He had persisted in going up to Jerusalem, and brought himself into what certainly looks like a false position, and as a fact exposed him to a number of disasters and painful oppositions. The Lord at this very time, when things looked gloomiest, appeared to His servant, and comforted him. Instead of a word of reproach, on the contrary it is all that could bid him good cheer.

How good the Lord is! How perfect in His ways! He knows how to deal with a mistake whenever there is one, while He righteously deals with it so much the more in one who ought not to have made it, a mistake in his case being a thousand times more serious than in another. Nevertheless, the Lord has nothing but comfort to administer at such a time, Be of good cheer, for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness of me in Rome.

He was not going to be killed. This was just before the conspiracy appeared. What could man do? Why should he be afraid then? The Lord meant him to go to Rome: his heart’s desire was to go there. That is what his heart was set upon next to Jerusalem; and he had his way in going to Jerusalem; and now the Lord was about to take him to Rome. To Rome he was going, but he was to visit it bearing the marks of having been up to Jerusalem. He was going to Rome a prisoner; bringing the message surely of the grace of God, but not without the experience of what it cost to have yielded to his love for the ancient people of God. He was going to Rome with a deeper sense of what his true calling was. His allotted work lay among the Gentiles -- pre-eminently and especially among the uncircumcision. Why did he not cleave simply and solely to his calling?

Nor were the foes of the gospel scrupulous, spite of their boasted attachment to the law of God. A conspiracy was forming among the unhappy Jews, and the Lord in His providence brings it to light by one that was kinsman of the apostle, to whose heart the ties of flesh and blood appealed
with some strength, if there were no higher motive. No doubt he must have been a Jew to have been in the secrets of that portion of the nation which was bent upon the destruction of the apostle. He divulges the secret, first to Paul, subsequently to the chiliarch. Accordingly Lysias (for this was his name) gets ready a detachment of soldiers, and horsemen, and spearmen, during the night, and sends Paul to Felix the governor with a letter. Little did the Roman think that his letter was to be read by you and me; little did he know that there was an eye that looked him through and through as he wrote. That the false and the true should be proclaimed on the housetops he never counted on.

Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix, sendeth greeting. This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them; then came I with the troop and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman {Acts 23:26, 27}.

He understood nothing of the sort; he was merely deceiving his superior, seeking in fact to make capital out of that which was error and fault; for, as we have seen, he began with a positive infraction of Roman law. He had bound, and this for the purpose of scourging, one no less a citizen than himself. He was guilty of claiming credit and zeal, where he had been both remiss and hasty. Oh, how little does the world think that the secrets of the most private letter, -- the counsels of the cabinet, -- the movements of kings, of governors, and ministers of state, of military chiefs and their men, no matter who or what, are all before One who sees all and forgets nothing.

Paul, however, is rescued; and now comes another scene. Ananias, the high priest, descends with the leaders to try their fortune before the governor with the captive. On this occasion they hire an orator to plead for them. If he begins with the grossest flattery and pomposity of speech, the apostle answers with as strikingly admirable and quiet dignity, exactly suited to the circumstances.

Here the apostle, then, when the governor beckoned him to speak, explains how utterly false were all the charges of this hired rhetorician. He loved his nation too well instead of being in anywise their trouble, as he had been represented.

As thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogue, nor in the city {Acts 24:11, 12}.

There was therefore no such case as Tertullus had set forth:

We have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes; who also hath gone about to profane the temple {Acts 24:5, 6}.

He had only been a few days in Jerusalem, and was there worshipping, not seeking to trouble anybody.

Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: and have hope towards

God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust {Acts 24:15}.

Then he frankly states what had brought him up on this occasion.

I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings.

He really did love them.

Whereupon, he says,

certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult; who ought to have been here before thee, and object what wrong they had against me {Acts 24:17-19}.

But the witnesses were not found. In point of fact, there was nothing tangible to allege against him. It was merely the outburst of priestly hatred and popular fury, followed by a conspiracy formed to murder; and when this failed, the effort was to bring about a judicial condemnation. Who could fail to see the mere will and malice of man? It had no other origin or character.

When Felix heard these things, he adjourned them, saying, When Lysias the chiliarch shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter. And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty {Acts 24:22, 23}.

His wise experienced eye at once saw how things were: there was not the slightest ground for the charges against the apostle. Hence the unusual order not of liberty only, but that none of his acquaintance were to be forbidden to come or to minister to him. Nay, more than this:

When Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith of Christ {Acts 24:24}.

But there was no compromise: he heard what he did not expect. It was not the resurrection now; it was an appeal to conscience morally, or, as it is said here,

He reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come {Acts 24:25}.

All has its season, and this was a word exactly suited to the man and the woman to whom Paul preached. It was well timed. Any one who is at all acquainted with the history of this personage -- for he is an historical character -- knows that he was peculiarly guilty, and that these words of the apostle were directly levelled at, and a condemnation therefore of, his moral delinquency.

Felix trembles, accordingly, and talks about hearing him at another time; but that convenient time never came.

He hoped also that money should have been given him {Acts 24:26}.

How truly, therefore, and how seasonably, had Paul reasoned to him of righteousness {Acts 24:25}!

He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him {Acts 24:26}.

Besides, you see the character of the man in what follows.
After two years Porcius Festus came in Felix’s room: and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound [Acts 24:27].

There was no justice to be got out of this unjust judge. It was not that he wanted sense, or wisdom, or judgment. He had all these, and so much the worse for him; but he was willing to sacrifice everything for his own ends. He had been foiled in his desire for money; and now to please those Jews whom he heartily despised -- willing to do something that would ingratiategive them with him without costing him anything -- he leaves Paul bound.

Festus in due time appears to our view in the next chapter (Acts 25). He had the same desire. He was no better than his predecessor. Festus proposes in a singular way that Paul should go up to Jerusalem. This was an unheard of thing for a Roman governor -- the chief representative of the empire -- to send one who had been brought before him back to Jerusalem to be judged by the Jews. Paul at once takes his stand on the well-known principle of the Roman empire that ought to have guided Festus. He says,

I stand at Caesar’s judgment-seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews I have done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. But if I be an offender, and have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die; but if there be none of these things whereof they accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar [Acts 25:10, 11].

This is clearly a matter of spiritual judgment. Paul had now committed himself to this course, as later he actually went before Caesar. It was irrevocable. There was no human possibility of change now. He had uttered the word; before Caesar he must go. Nevertheless, a short time after this we find Agrippa comes down, and the Roman governor, knowing well the active mind of the king, tells him the story of Paul. He felt his own weakness in having to do with such a case, and he knew the interest of Agrippa. Agrippa accordingly tells the governor that he would like to hear the man himself.

On the next day,

when Agrippa therefore came, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chiliarchs and principal men of the city, at Festus’ commandment Paul was brought forth [Acts 25:23].

And here we find a remarkably fine contrast with all the glitter and pomp of the court. The king himself was a most capable man, but destitute of moral purpose. His wife, however she might be favoured naturally, was alas! a woman of no character whatever. Both of them were under the most painful cloud of suspicion even in the minds of the heathen themselves, not to speak of the Jews. These are the persons who, with the Roman governor, sit in judgment upon the apostle. And then comes forth the prisoner bound with chains. But oh what a chasm separated them from him! What a difference in the eyes of God! What a sight it was to Him to behold these judges dealing with such a man without one shred to cover them of what was of Himself -- nay, with that which was most shameful and debasing. In all the splendour of earth’s rank and dignity they sat to hear the poor but rich prisoner of the Lord. And Agrippa (Acts 26) said to him,

Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself:

I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee {Acts 26:1, 2}.

If we find the full peace and blessedness of this honoured man of God, what the Lord wrought, and the mighty power of His grace, we see the most dignified yet lowly courtesy towards those who listened, Agrippa especially.

Because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently {Acts 26:3}.

He expounds therefore all his history, how he had been trained from his youth in the strictest sect among the Jews, and again mentions how he was judged for the hope of the promise made of God to “our” fathers. Thus he reasons on the resurrection:

Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you if God raises the dead? {Acts 26:8}.

He at once brings in this which every Pharisee acknowledged, and which was the main test of orthodoxy among the Jews. This is applied to the history of Jesus of Nazareth. In fact, all turned on it. If it was true that God had raised Him from the dead, what was the position of the Jews, and what the glory of Jesus? All turned therefore on the resurrection.

Then he points out the facts of his own conversion. It was not favourable circumstances that had thrown him in the way of the gospel; it was the very reverse of attachment to the Christians or of any lukewarmness toward the law. All his prepossessions were for Israel, all his prejudices against the gospel. Nevertheless while he had carried this to the uttermost, while with the authority of the chief priests he had sought to persecute them to death, the grace of God surmounted all either of religious ties or religious hatred in the heart of Paul.

When I went to Damascus,

he says,

with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun {Acts 26:12, 13}.

And not more surely was the heavenly light whichstreamed upon the apostle above all nature’s light, than the grace which God showed that day completely eclipsed all that was of man in his heart and previous history. All disappeared before the all-overcoming strength of the goodness of God in Christ.

And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against goads. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest {Acts 26:14, 15}.

The work was done. I say not that there was all the peace and blessedness he was afterwards to enjoy, but there was
effected then the entrance of that spiritual light of Christ that
dealt with his conscience in all its depths. At once, down to
the very roots of his moral being, all was stirred up, and the
good seed, the seed of everlasting life, was sown underneath.
He is hidden to rise and stand upon his feet.

For I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to
make thee a minister and a witness both of these
things which thou hast seen, and of those things in
the which I will appear unto thee [Acts 26:16].

The word is not exactly as we have it -- “delivering thee
from the people and from the Gentiles.” It is hard here to see
the propriety of that term “delivering” in our common Bibles.
In this connexion it was not a question so much of a rescue as
of taking him out from the people and from the Gentiles. The
Lord was severing him from the Jew no less than the Gentile.
It is also more than Peter speaks of in Acts 15 (taking out
from the Gentiles a people for His name); which we have
seen already, as it was of prime importance to insist on it at
the great council of Jerusalem. It was of course still true that
God is taking out a people for His name; but in the case of
Saul of Tarsus the Lord speaks of taking him out from the
Jew no less than the heathen. It is a separation therefore unto
the new work of God from both Jew and Gentile.

Unto whom,
speaking of the Gentiles,

now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them
from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan
unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins,
and inheritance among them that are sanctified
through faith that is in me [Acts 26:17, 18].

Nor was Paul disobedient to the heavenly vision. He
bowed to the Lord. He was right, as became a man taught of
God. And he

showed first unto them of Damascus, and at
Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judaea,
and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and
turn to God, and do works worthy of repentance
[Acts 26:20].

For these were the true causes of Jewish hostility.

There was no setting himself up against the law. God
forbid that this should ever be an object for a Christian man!
He does not call us to a negative testimony, even if
legitimate; He calls us to a task far more truly of Himself.
It is not against evil so much as for good that God gives us a
mission. We must hold this fact always as a fixed principle.
I grant you that he who is called out to a purpose that is
worthy of God does judge what is evil; nay, not merely this,
but judges especially what looks ever so good. Correcting evil
by power is not the present purpose of God for the Christian
or the church; and be assured His will is the only true
directory and the only safe ground for us in everything.

Let us then always enquire, what according to scripture
does God design and desire for His people now? What is His
real revealed work now? To what therefore is He calling you
and me? To what did He set apart the apostle then? It was
certainly not the pulling down of the Jews or their legal
economy. Judgment was coming on that nation soon, but as
long as God forbore Paul lingered over them in patient love;
and was he not quite right? But God was calling out a people
from the Gentiles as well as from the Jews, and separating
him from all his antecedents, from everything that his heart
was so fondly bound up in: for never was mortal man that
loved Israel more than the apostle Paul did. But God took him
out of all his old Jewish associations as well as the Gentiles,
to whom now He sent him.

It is evident that we must be separated from human
influences even of the best kind, in order to be a fit vessel for
God’s purposes where the need is greatest. If you would
effectually help others, you must always be above the motives
and ways that sway them. Impossible to deal rightly with a
person if you are merely on the same level with him. This is
the reason why, if a brother be overtaken in a fault, what is
wanted is a truly spiritual soul to seek his restoration. A
careless Christian would spoil the case; because, if he who is
in fault can put his finger on something like his own
shortcoming in the one who deals with him, it gives him an
excuse for his own sin, and a ground for censoring his
censor. Whereas, if there had been the true effect of the grace
of God in him who appeals to his soul; if grace has both
brought out from all that is evil and sustained in good, so that
he can be accused of nothing against the Lord, I need not say
how God honours it as His will and special provision for
dealing with those who are involved in any fault. Here, in the
apostle Paul, is the same principle, though in a far deeper and
larger way. Indeed, it is but the assertion of grace -- that
mighty principle of God’s goodness in power, working spite
of evil according to all that is in His heart.

Paul, then, was taken clean out of everything, both Jew
and Gentile, but sent to the Gentile especially. And the bare
sound of this it was that horrified the Jews; nor could they
reconcile how one who had burning love to the Jew could at
the same time be the prominent, untiring witness of grace to
the Gentiles. In their legal pride they could not forgive it. The
most hostile feelings broke out against Paul, coupled with the
madness of envy and jealousy against the Gentiles. So he tells
them,

For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple,
and went about to kill me. Having, therefore,
obtained help of God, I continue unto this day,
witnessing both to small and great, saying nothing
else than those things which Moses and the prophets
did say should come; whether Christ should suffer;
whether he should be the first through resurrection of
the dead to announce light, &c. {Acts 26:21-23}.

As he thus explains, the Roman governor interrupts him
in the exclamation, that much learning had made him mad.
Paul replies,

I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the
words of truth and soberness {Acts 26:25}.

There is all possible respect, it will be observed; at the same
time, he could not without protest allow the ignorance of a
blind heathen to put such a stigma on the truth. He appeals to
one beside Festus -- certainly an impartial witness as far as
Christianity was concerned.
For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely; for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner [Acts 26:26].

The alleged facts of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus were not unknown to Herod Agrippa. They were universally talked of by all who concerned themselves with Israel.

Suddenly he turns with a direct question:
King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest them. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian {Acts 26:27, 28}.

Though I do not agree with some modern efforts as to this clause, I admit that the word “almost” hardly gives the true force.

In a little degree you are persuading me.

In what spirit was this said? It seems to be a sentiment into which he was surprised, and in this sense wrung out from him. He could not deny the truth of what the apostle asserted. He would not disclaim his own prophets. He was, in point of fact, shut up in a corner as far as regarded the facts and the prophecies that spoke of them beforehand. Thus, cool a man of the world as he was, the surprise of the pointed enquiry of the apostle obliged him to acknowledge that in a little degree Paul was persuading him to be a Christian. This does not intimate, of course, that he really believed in the Lord Jesus; but the premisses of the apostle did involve the conclusion that Jewish prophecy pointed to Jesus Christ, so that Agrippa could not but own a certain impression made on his mind.

But Paul answers in a spirit truly admirable, and this not alone with wisdom, nor with loving desire only. There is another element, too, exceedingly sweet, as showing the state of the apostle at this time, and his own soul’s deep present enjoyment of the Lord and of His grace.

I would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both in a little and in a great degree such as I am, except these bonds {Acts 26:29}.

I hardly know such an answer from man’s lips. We have wonderful words of others as well as of Paul elsewhere; but to my mind, throughout the compass even of this blessed book, it would be hard to find an expression of grace and truth, with the condition of happiness which the Spirit vouchsafes, more admirably suited to the circumstances of all concerned — more perfectly reflecting what God gives by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul could not wish his bonds for any, however he might glory in them for himself. He boasted to be a prisoner of Jesus Christ; but he could not desire such fare then at least for such as he desired to be brought to the Lord. The time might come, no doubt, when those who proved good soldiers in that warfare might rejoice, even as he rejoiced, in his sufferings for Christ’s sake and for his body’s sake, as well as for the gospel. But this he could with all his heart wish, — that they might be, not only in some measure (even if it were only a little), but in a great degree such as he was. It is not merely that they might be Christians; still less that they might be converted; but such as I am.

The wish embraces both the reality or standing and the state of the Christian; yea, such enjoyment as filled Paul’s own heart at the very moment when he stood in bonds before this splendid court. Did not Paul know the dark cloud that hung over Agrippa and Bernice, not to speak of others? Grace surmounts all evil, as it overcomes and forgives the worst enemies. There is not one bitter reflection, nor a denunciatory word. Grace wishes its best even for those who are bent on the pleasures of sin for a season. We know that judgment is sure and just; but grace can rise to a higher kind of justice — not that of earth or of man, but of God, who can be just, and justify him that believes —

the righteousness of God by faith of Jesus Christ {Rom. 3:22}.

This was what filled his heart, and it was the full unhindered strength of God’s own grace made good and seen in Christ that was now working in his own soul. It was drawn out by his delight and enjoyment of the Christ to whom he had been bearing witness; whose glory made pale all that a Roman governor or a Jewish king could boast. It was not the surprise, but the overflowing heart of one who looked right into eternity — who recalled once more the brightness of the glory of heaven, wherein he had seen Christ Himself brighter than all that glory — the source, power, and fulness of it all, and the giver of it also to those who believe. It was this that filled him then, and strengthened him to utter such an expression of divine love.

The court breaks up, Agrippa acknowledging himself that Paul might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed to Caesar. This is to be noted.

The next chapter {Acts 27} details the singularly instructive voyage of the apostle: where, instead of being a prisoner, he looks as if he was really the master of the ship; and, indeed, had his word been duly heeded in time, they would have been preserved in safety. How wonderful a thing faith is! How blessed the faithfulness that flows from faith; how completely it is the power of God in whatever position a man may be!

Here you find the apostle on his way to the Gentiles. All was clear now. He is away from that which was a charmed circle to him, where his bow did not abide in strength, but now, as before Festus and Agrippa, has returned to his old vigour. All is found in its place: no proofs are wanted where every fact proves it.

The last chapter shows us not only the journey to Rome, but the apostle reaching it. There, too, we find how truly the power of God is with him. He is received and no small kindness shown by the inhabitants in the island of Malta. And Paul illustrates how far any word of the Lord is in vain by accomplishing one of the peculiar promises in the disputed verses at the end of Mark. This strikes the minds of these
heathen, so that afterwards we find the father of the great man in the island with Paul, who prays and lays his hands upon him and heals him.

When this was done, others also which had diseases in the island came, and were healed: who also honoured us with many honours; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary {Acts 28:9, 10}.

Arrived in Italy, they taste the comfort of brotherly love.

We found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days; and so we went toward Rome. And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum, and Tres Taberne; whom, when Paul saw, he thanked God and took courage {Acts 28:14, 15}.

What a joy it is for a humble brother to be the means of inspiring the apostle Paul with fresh cheer along the road of Christ; and how we defraud ourselves as well as our brethren of so much blessing by our little faith and scanty love in identifying ourselves with the most despised and suffering for the name of the Lord! To what a work are we not called! What a wonderful mission is that which the Lord confers upon the simplest soul that names the name of Jesus! May He wake us up to feel how blessed we are, and what a spring of blessing He is! Out of them, it is said,

shall flow rivers of living water {John 7:38}.

Here, observe, it was the apostle himself; and, though it may seem strange to some, even he could find the sweetness and the power of the ministry of love.

To Rome Paul goes, and there he dwells with a soldier that keeps him; and in due time he sees the Jews, and lays before them the gospel at full length. Alas! it was the same tale; for man is everywhere the same, but God is too.

Some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by, Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive {Acts 28:24-26}.

The sentence, the long-suspended sentence, of judicial hardening was now about to fall in all its withering strength. It had been hanging over the nation ever since the days of Isaiah the prophet; for not without ground was it uttered then. Still the patience of God pursued its way, till Jesus came and was rejected, when the clouds gathered more thickly. Now not only the Holy Ghost was come, but He had testified of the risen glorified man from Jerusalem to Rome. But if He had testified, the Jews, instead of being, as they ought to have been, the first to receive God’s testimony, were in point of fact the first to refuse -- the most active and obstinate emissaries of unbelief and of Satan’s power, -- not only not entering in themselves, but forbidding those who would. Accordingly, then and most justly fell that pull of judgment because of unbelief under which they lie to this day. But the gospel goes to the Gentiles; and spite of all that had wrought
Lectures Introductory

to the Study of

The Acts, the Catholic Epistles,
and

the Revelation

Lecture 5

The Epistle of James

To the reader who enters on the consideration of the epistle of James from the epistles of Paul, the change is great and sudden, and by no means least of all from the epistle to the Hebrews, which, in the arrangement of the English Bible, immediately precedes James. The main object of that epistle was to consummate the breach of the old relationships of such Christians as were Jews in times past, and to lead them out definitively from all earthly connexion into their heavenly association with Christ.

It is not so when we enter from the Acts of the Apostles; as in truth it is so arranged in the great mass of ancient authorities, and some versions which follow them. These “general epistles,” as they are called, are placed not after the Pauline but before them. Thus the break is by no means so marked, but on the contrary natural and easily understood; for, in point of fact, James coalesces with the state of things that we find in the churches of Judea, and notably in the church at Jerusalem. They were jealous of the law; they went up to the temple at the hour of prayer; -- not only Israelites, but even priests, a great company, we hear at one time were obedient to the faith. We have no ground whatever to suppose that these left off either sacrifices or the functions properly sacerdotal. This sounds strange now as men constantly look and judge out of their own present state; but it is impossible to understand the scriptures thus. You must take what the Bible gives, and thus seek to form a just judgment according to God.

It is perfectly plain from the early portion of the Acts of the Apostles, and confirmed too by the latest glimpses which the Holy Ghost gives us of the church in Jerusalem, that there was still a great and decided cleaving to that which was properly Jewish on the part of the early Christians there. They used the faith of Christ rather for conscientious, godly, thorough carrying out of their Jewish thoughts. Whatever people may say or think about it, there is no denying this. Whatever they may know to be their own proper place as Christians who never were in such a position, and, so far from being led into it, guarded from it strenuously by the Holy Ghost, there is no question that the facts which scripture presents to us regarding the church in Jerusalem are as I have endeavoured to state them.

Again, the epistle of James was written not merely to the church in Jerusalem, but to the twelve tribes that were scattered abroad. This prepares us for something even larger, not merely for Christian Jews, but for Israelites, for such wherever they may be -- not merely in the land but out of it -- scattered abroad;

as it is said,

the twelve tribes that were scattered abroad

{James 1:1}.

In short it is evident that, among inspired epistles, James’s address has a special and an exceptional place. Where this has not been taken into account, there need be no surprise that men have misunderstood the epistle of James. We all know that the great Reformer, Luther, treated this portion of the word of God with the most undeserved distrust and even contempt. But I am persuaded that no man, I will not say despises, but even attempts to dispense with, the epistle of James except to his own exceeding loss. Luther would have been none the worse, but all the stronger, for a real understanding of this writing of James. He needed it in many ways; and so do we. It is, therefore, a miserable cheat where any souls allow their own subjective thoughts to govern them in giving up this or any portion of the word of God; for all have an important place, each for its own object. Is it too much to ask that a document be judged by its express and manifest design? Surely we are not to take Paul’s object in order to interpret James by. What can be conceived more contrary, I will not say to reverence for what claims to be inspired, but even to all sense and discrimination, than such a thought? And it is thus that men have stumbled and fallen over this -- it is little to say -- precious and profitable, and above all, practically profitable portion of the word of God.

At the same time we must read it as it is, or rather as God wrote it; and God has addressed it, beyond controversy, not merely to Christian Jews, nor even to Jews, but to the twelve tribes that were scattered abroad. Thus it embraces such of them as were Christians; and it gives a very true and just place to those who had the faith of the Lord Jesus. Only it is a mistake to suppose that it contemplates nobody else. People may come to it with the thought that all the epistles
were addressed to Christians, but this is simply wrong. If you
bring this or any other preconception to the word of God, no
wonder His word leaves you outside its divine and holy
scope. For He is ever above us and infinitely wise. Our
business is to gather what He has to teach us. There is no
more fruitful source of error than such a course. No wonder,
therefore, when persons approach scripture with
preconceived thoughts, hoping to find confirmation there
instead of gathering God’s mind from what He has revealed,
-- no wonder that they find disappointment. The mischief
evidently is in themselves and not in the divine word. Let us
prayfully seek to avoid the snare.

James writes then after this double manner. He says
a servant of God.

Clearly there we have a broad ground which even a Jew
would respect. On the other hand, to

a servant of God

he adds,

and of the Lord Jesus Christ {James 1:1}.

Here at once would spring up a divergence of feeling among
them. The mass of Israelites would of course altogether
repudiate such a service; but James writes of both. Observe
he does not speak of himself as the brother of the Lord,
although he was, and is so styled

the Lord’s brother {Gal. 1:19}
in the epistle to the Galatians. It seems needless to explain
that the James who wrote this epistle was not the son of
Zebedee; for he had fallen under the violence of Herod
Agrippa long before this epistle was written -- at a
comparatively early date. I do not doubt that the writer is the
one called “James the just,” and

the Lord’s brother;

but with all propriety, and with a beauty that we should do
well to ponder and learn from, he here avoids calling himself
the Lord’s brother. It was quite right that others should so
designate him; but he calls himself

the servant;

not merely “of God,” but

of the Lord Jesus Christ {James 1:1}.

He writes, as seen, to the twelve tribes scattered abroad,
and sends them greeting. It is not the salutation that the
Epistles of Paul and the other apostles have made so familiar
to us, but exactly the form of salutation that was used in the
famous epistle of Acts 15 from the apostles and elders in
Jerusalem who wrote to the Gentile assemblies to guard them
from yielding to legalism. And as he was the person who
gave the sentence, it is not without interest to see the link
between what was written on that day, and what James writes
here.

The object of the Spirit of God was to give a final
summons by him who held a pre-eminent place in Jerusalem
to the entire body of Israelites, wherever they might be. This
is evident on the face of it. Nor is this an opinion, but what
God says. We are so told expressly. Controversy here is, or
ought to be, entirely out of the question. The apostle James it
is who lets us know that such was his object in writing.
Accordingly the epistle savours of this. No doubt it is
peculiar, but not more so in the New Testament than Jonah is
in the Old. As a whole, you are aware that the prophets
addressed themselves to the people of Israel. Jonah’s special
mission was to Nineveh, to the most famous Gentile city of
that day. Just as the Hebrew scriptures are not without this
exception, so in the New Testament you have another
exception. What could better convict the narrowness of man’s
mind, who would like to have it all thoroughly square
according to his notions. As a whole, the New Testament
addresses itself to the Christian body; but James does not.
That is to say, in the Old Testament we have an exceptional
address to the Gentiles; in the New Testament we have an
exceptional address to the Jews. Is not all this quite right?
One sees thoroughly, in the midst of the utmost difference
otherwise, how it is the same divine mind -- a mind above the
contractedness of man. Let us hold this fast! We shall find it
profitable in everything, as well as in the word that we are
now reading.

My brethren,
says he,

count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;
knowing this, that the trial of your faith worketh
patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that
ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing
{James 1:2-4}.

Thus it is at once apparent that we are on practical ground --
the manifestation of godliness toward both man and God, --
that here the Holy Ghost is pressing this as the very first
injunction of the epistle.

Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.

Temptations, trials (for clearly he refers to outward trials),
are in no way the dreadful ogres that unbelief makes them to
be.

We are appointed thereunto {1 Thess. 3:3},
says the apostle Paul. The Israelites no doubt found it hard,
but the Spirit of God deigns here to instruct them. They were
not to reckon trial a grievance.

Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.
The reason is that God uses it for moral purposes; He deals
with the nature which opposes itself to His will.

Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh
patience (or endurance). But let patience have its
perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire,
wanting nothing {James 1:3, 4}.

And how is this then to be effected? Here is brought in
another essential point of the epistle. It is not only a question
of trials that come upon the believer when he is here below.
Clearly he is in this place addressing his brethren in Christ.
He does not simply look at the whole twelve tribes, but at the
faithful; as we find in the beginning of the next chapter,

My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus
Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons
{James 2:1}.
So I think it is clearly here men capable of understanding what was spiritual.

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God
{James 1:5}.

These are the two most important points pressed practically throughout the epistle. One is the profit of not enjoying the pleasant only, but the rough and hard that God sends for our good. Blessing now is not in ease and honour, but, contrariwise, counting joy in trial, accepting what is painful from God, certain that He never mistakes, and that all is ordered of Him for the perfect blessing of His own people. But then this leads the way, and makes one feel the need of wisdom from God in order intelligently and happily to profit by the trial; for, as we know, the blessing of all trial is to them that are exercised thereby {Heb. 12:11}.

In order to discern we need wisdom. This he brings in:

If any of you lack wisdom.

There is thus the need of dependence on God, the spirit of habitual waiting on Him -- of bowing to Him, and, in short, of obedience.

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not
{James 1:5}.

We shall see by and by whence this flows, but we have merely now a general exhortation.

Let him ask in faith,
says he,

nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways {James 1:6-8}.

Thus he shows that faith supposes confidence in God, and that this doubtful mind, this hesitancy about God, is in point of fact nothing but unbelief. Accordingly it is a practical denial of the very attitude you take in asking God. It is blowing hot and blowing cold; it is appearing to ask God, when in point of fact you have no confidence in Him. Let not such a one, therefore, expect anything of the Lord.

In the next place he proceeds to show too how this works practically:

Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: but the rich, in that he is made low:

-- such are the ways of God --
because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away
{James 1:9, 10}.

All that is founded on a mere temporary set of circumstances is doomed, and in no way belongs to the nature of God as revealed in truth and grace by the Son of God. Hence, therefore, God reverses the judgment of the world in all these matters,

Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: but the rich, in that he is made low.

The reason also is given:

For as the flower of the grass (which is mere nature) he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways {James 1:9-11}.

On the other hand, one may and should be blessed.

Here we have the full contrast, and the reason why all this is brought in; for there is a perfect chain of connection between these verses, little as it may appear at first sight.

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation;

instead of being exposed either to the instability of unbelief which we saw, or to the mere dependence on natural resources which was next proved. The man that endures temptation, that accepts it and counts it joy, blessed is he;

for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him {James 1:12}.

This leads to another character of trial in inward evil, not in outward. There is a temptation which comes from the devil as truly as there is a temptation that comes from God, and is good for man. That is, there is a trial of faith, and there is a temptation of flesh.

Now it is clear that the trial of faith is as precious as it is profitable; and of this exclusively he has been speaking up to this point. Now he just turns aside to notice the other; and it is the more important to weigh it well because, as far as I know, it is the only place in scripture where it is definitely presented. Temptations elsewhere mean trials, not inward solicitations of evil; they have no bearing upon, nor connection with, the evil nature, but on the contrary are the ways in which the Lord out of His love tries those in whom He has confidence, and works for the greater blessing of those whom He has already blessed. Here, on the other hand, we find the common sense of temptation. Alas! the very fact of its being common proves where people are, -- how little they have to do with God, how much in common with the world.

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.

Now he is touching upon another character;

for God cannot be tempted by evils {James 1:13},

-- you must read it as it is in the margin, --

neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed {James 1:13, 14}.

Thus it is not only that God is inaccessible to evil Himself, but He also never tempts to evil at any one time whatsoever. There is no such thought that enters the mind of God. He moves supremely above evil: this is the ground of the blessing of every child of God, which he will show presently, when he has finished the subject of evil that comes through man's nature. Evil is from himself; for, as he says,

Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath
conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death [James 1:14, 15].

This is not the way in which the apostle Paul handles the matter. It is not that there is the very smallest contradiction between the two. They are perfectly harmonious; but then it is a different way of looking at the matter; and the reason is obvious, because what Paul treats of in Rom. 7, which is the scripture I refer to, is not the conduct but the nature. Now, if you look at nature, it is plain that sin is there first, and in consequence of the sin that dwells in the nature, there are lusts as the effects of it. Here he looks at sin in the conduct, and accordingly there are evil workings within, and then the outward act of sin. Thus we see it is only, to say the least of it, a very great want of perception, and a dulness that certainly is unworthy -- nay, worthy -- of any person that sets up to judge the word of God -- a shameful position for a creature -- for a man -- above all for a Christian to take. But it is here, as is the case everywhere, blindness and ignorance in those that set one part of scripture against another.

To this, perhaps, it may be said, “Do you never find a difficulty?” To be sure, but what is the place of any one who finds a difficulty in the word of God? Wait upon God. Do not you try to settle difficulties, but put yourself in the attitude of dependence. Ask wisdom, and ask it all of God, who gives liberally and upbraids not. He will surely clear up whatever is for His own glory. There is not a man of exercised soul in this building, or any other, who has not proved the truth of what I am now saying. There is not a man who has been led in any measure to the understanding of the ways of God that has not proved the very passages, which he once found so difficult when they were not understood, to be the means of exceeding light to his soul when they were. And therefore, haste to solve difficulties is really and practically a finding fault either with God or with His word; -- with His word, because it is deeper than we are; with Himself, because He does not give the babe the knowledge that would be proper to the grown man. Now it is evident that this is only foolishness. It is just the haste that hinders blessing and progress. However, nothing can be simpler than that which the apostle here describes and recommends to us, and nothing more certain.

Now we come to the other side.

Do not err, beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above [James 1:16, 17].

We have had the evil traced to its source, which is the fallen nature of man, no doubt wrought on by Satan, but without here bringing the enemy before us. We shall find this by and by, in James 4; but here he simply looks on man’s nature; and then he raises his eyes to God.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning [James 1:17].

The first point therefore in the mind of the Holy Ghost here is to vindicate God at all cost, and this entirely apart from us. As evil comes from us, so all that is good comes from God; and not only is God the spring of every good -- every good giving and every perfect gift being all from God -- (the manner of it as well as the thing itself that is given); but, besides, there is no change in God, the creature in its best estate is nothing but change.

Thus there is a most complete vindication of God’s moral glory in this verse, contrasted with man in his weakness, and ruin, and evil. But he goes farther, and asserts -- and asserting, too, in the most admirable manner -- the truth of the sovereign action of grace. He has claimed this for God already; but now we come to see the application to us. It is not only, therefore, that God is good, but that He is a giver, and this of nothing that is not good, and of all that is good. Stainless in His holiness, and invariable in His light, God is active in His love; and as the fruit of this energetic sovereign love He does not bless merely, sweet as it is from Him. Blessing is altogether short of that which we know now in Christianity -- of that which even James treats of, according to his very broad and comprehensive epistle. In the bright day that is coming God will bless the creature. In the dark day that man calls “now,” God more than blesses -- far more than blesses -- those who believe. We are ourselves born of Him: He communicates His nature to the believer. He does so unsought, and surely undeserved. Undeserved! Why there was nothing but evil: he had shown this immediately before. There was nothing good from man’s nature as a fallen creature, -- nothing but good from God.

Then, let it be repeated, it is not merely good we see here, but a communication of His own spiritual nature; and this He is doing by the word of truth. Scripture is the medium. The revelation of Himself by which He acts on souls is accordingly here brought before us, no less than His own sovereign will as the source of it.

Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures [James 1:18].

He means to bring in fulness of blessing by and by. This will be, as far as government is concerned, in the millennium; but, being only government, evil will remain to be controlled and kept down to His own glory. This could in no wise satisfy God’s nature, and so scripture reveals a time coming when all will be according to God. Then will be in the fullest sense His rest, -- when all question of His working and of man’s responsibility will be over, -- when He, entering into the result, will grant us to enter into His rest. Then shall we be not merely first-fruits of His creatures, but all in rest and glory according to the new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Meanwhile we who are thus begotten, the first-fruits, have the wondrous blessing here set forth. It is not merely that we are objects of this blessing. Alas! how often a blessing has been given, and as often lost, being turned to His shame and men’s corruption. God blessed, as we know, at the very beginning -- blessed everything that He had made; but there was no stability in a blessing itself. To ensure stability, all must rest on one who is God as well as man, giving us a nature according to God. In those that are fallen there must be the communication of the divine nature; and this there is
in Christ, and so there always has been. It may not be always consciously known; and it was not in Old Testament times; but in order that there should be a basis of immutable blessing, and of communion in any measure between God and the creature, there must be the communication of the divine nature. Of this, accordingly, James here speaks. How it links itself with Peter, and John, and Paul, we need not stop now to enquire. We see at once that he who could despise such an epistle as this is a man -- not to be despised indeed, for God would not have us despise any as He despises none Himself; but certainly -- to call forth pain and sorrow that such thoughts should ever have been allowed in a soul born of God and withal a servant of Jesus Christ.

Founded, then, on this, the communication of His own nature, with its moral judgment, we have the practical exhortation: --

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear.

Hearing is exactly the attitude of dependence. Now one who is the servant of God looks up to God, confides in God, and expects from God. This is the place which becomes him that is born of God.

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak [James 1:19].

Speech is apt to be the expression of our nature -- of ourselves. Be slow then to speak, swift to hear. Clearly he has God in view, and has His word before him, and that which would make His word understood. Let us, too, be swift to hear, slow to speak.

But another thing is to be heeded. It is not only that the nature of man expresses itself in the tongue, but in the feelings of the heart; and alas! in the wrath of a fallen creature. Let us be, then, not only slow to speak, but slow to wrath [James 1:19].

You see at once that we have an exhortation founded on, first, the spiritual anatomy, if I may so say, of our nature, and then we are given to know the wondrous character of the new life that we have received by faith of Jesus Christ, and know to be ours, because we are begotten by the word of truth [James 1:18].

Next, he gives the reason; for,
says he,

the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God [James 1:20].

It need scarcely be remarked that it is no question here of the righteousness of God in a doctrinal sense. James does not deal with such matters; he never takes up the question how a sinner is to be justified. Therefore, certainly, he in no way contradicts Paul, any more than in what is said of faith, or justification; indeed he does not at all treat of the same question that Paul has before him. Where two persons really take up the same matter, and then give us contrary expressions, they of course contradict each other; but if they deal with two totally different points, although they may be ever so closely connected, contradiction there is none: and such precisely is the fact as to Paul and James in the matter before us, without saying a word of the inspiration which makes it impossible. They both employ the words, “faith,” “works,” and “justify,” but they are not settling the same question, but two different ones. We shall find the reason of this by and by, but I the more willingly make this remark in passing, in order to help any souls who find a difficulty; because it often proves a snare, particularly to those who rest over-much on verbal analogies.

Let us look to the grace of the Lord to understand the scripture. It is the habit of many, if they find the same expression, to give it always the same meaning. This is true neither in every-day language nor in God’s word. Here, for instance, we have the righteousness of God clearly in a different sense from that so familiar to us in the Pauline epistles. He is speaking of what is not pleasing to, because inconsistent with, His nature; and clearly the wrath of man is offensive to Him. It works nothing suitable to His moral nature. The passage speaks of practice, not of doctrine.

Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls {James 1:21}.

It will be observed how far it is from being an imposed law. Particular pains are taken to guard from this prevalent idea. A Jew would have been likely to have thought of it thus; for he naturally turned to the law as the one and only standard. But, on the other hand, James is far from leaving out the use of the law: we shall find it in this very epistle. Still he is careful in this place to show that the word deals inwardly with the man, -- that it is this implanted word, as he calls it, and not an external law, that is able to save the soul. The word enters by faith, or, as the apostle has it in Hebrews, is mixed with faith in them that hear it [Heb. 4:2].

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves [James 1:22].

It is plain that we find ourselves throughout on the practical side of the manifestation by life. This is the governing thought and aim of the epistle.

For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass.

He may have ever so clear a view of himself; he sees clearly what he is like for a moment; but he as soon forgets all.

He beholdeth himself, and goeth his way.

The image is faded and gone. He

straightway forgettest what manner of man he was {James 1:23, 24}.

Oh, how true is this, and how admirably drawn to the life! It is that glimpse of conviction by the truth that comes before souls when they are forced to discern what the spring of their thoughts is, what their feelings are: when the light of God flashes over and through a man; but how soon it passes away, instead of entering in and abiding within the soul! It is the power of the Spirit of God alone that can grave these things

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on the heart. But here the apostle is exposing the absence of an internal work where intelligence is severed from conscience, and this he illustrates, as we have seen, by the man that gets a glance in a glass, and then all is gone directly his back is turned. Whereas there is power and permanence with him who fixes his view on

the perfect law of liberty (James 1:25).

And here it seems seasonable to say that, so far from James being legal in the evil sense of the word, he is the inspired man who, at least as much as any other, slays legality by this very expression. For this end there is not a more precious thought nor a mightier word in all the New Testament. In its own province there is nothing better, plainer, or more striking. The reason why people often find legality in James is because they themselves bring it. They are under that influence in their souls, and accordingly they cloud the light of James with that which was meant to veil the guilty in darkness.

What then is the law of liberty? It is the word of God which directs a man begotten by the word of truth, urging and cheering and strengthening him in the very things that the new life delights in. Consequently it has an action exactly the opposite of that exercised by the law of Moses on the Israelite. This is evident from the bare terms: “Thou shalt not do” this, “thou shalt not do” that. 36 Why? Because they wanted to do what God prohibited. The desire of man as he is being after evil, the law put a veto on the indulgence of the will. It was necessarily negative, not positive, in character. The law forbade the very things to which man’s own impulses and desires would have prompted him, and is the solemn means of detecting rebellious fallen nature. But this is not the law of liberty in any wise, but the law of bondage, condemnation, and death.

The law of liberty brings in the positive for those who love it -- not the negation of what the will and lust of man desires, so much as the exercise of the new life -- in what is according to its own nature. Thus it has been often and very aptly described as a loving parent who tells his child that he must go here or there; that is, the very places which he knows perfectly the child would be most gratified to visit. Such is the law of liberty: as if one said to the child, “Now, my child, you must go and do such or such a thing,” all the while knowing that you can confer no greater favour on the child. It has not at all the character of resisting the will of the child, but rather of directing his affections in the will of the object dearest to him. The child is regarded and led according to the love of the parent, who knows what the desire of the child is -- a desire that has been in virtue of a new nature implanted by God Himself in the child. He has given him a life that loves His ways and word, that hates and revolts from evil, and is pained most of all by falling through unwatchfulness under sin, if it seemed ever so little. The law of liberty therefore consists not so much in a restraint on gratifying the old man, as in guiding and guarding the new; for the heart’s delight is in what is good and holy and true; and the word of our God on the one hand exercises us in clearing to that which is the joy of the Christian’s heart, and strengthens us in our detestation of all that we know to be offensive to the Lord.

Such is the law of liberty. Accordingly

who so looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed (or rather “doing”) (James 1:25).

There is, however, the need of attending to the other side of the picture:

If any man seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain (James 1:26).

Then the chapter closes with giving us a sample of what pure and undefiled religion is, but chiefly as we observe in a practical way -- the main object and never lost sight of. There is, first, the

visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction (James 1:27),

-- persons from whom one could gather nothing flattering to the flesh, or in any way calculated to minister to self; there is, on the other hand, the keeping one’s self unsytted from the world. How often one hears people in the habit of quoting from this verse for what they call practice, who dwell on the first part to the exclusion of the last. How comes it that the last clause is forgotten? Is it not precisely what those who quote would find the greatest difficulty in honestly proving that they value? Let us then endeavour to profit by the warning, and above all by the precious lesson in the word of our God.

In all that we have had the question naturally arises, wherein lies the special propriety of such exhortations, or why are they addressed to the twelve tribes? Surely we may ask this; for those who value the word of God are not precluded from enquiring what the object is. Rather are we encouraged to ask why it was according to the wisdom of God that such words as these should be presented to Israel, and especially to such of the twelve tribes as had the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ. James enters upon this expressly in the next chapter.

My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor,
Stand thou here, or sit here under my footstool; are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised them [James 2:1-6].

Here, it would seem, we begin to learn more definitely the reason. We can see the need, value, and wisdom of what has been said, but we may find here the occasion of it: with Israel there was peculiar danger of taking up the doctrines of Christianity as a system. As a people who had an exceptionally religious standing, they were yet more exposed to this than the Gentiles. The Jewish mind on its own side was just as prone to make a code of Christianity as the Gentiles were to couple it with philosophy. The Greek mind might speculate and theorize about it, but the Jew would make a quasi-Talmud of it in its way. His tendency would be to reduce it merely to a number of thoughts, and thus an outward system.

At this precisely is the epistle levelled, namely, the severing faith from practice. Against this the Holy Ghost launches His solemn and searching words in the rest of the chapter. This brings in the allusion to the law:

If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: but if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors [James 2:8, 9].

Then follows a grave and searching consideration for those who talk about the law, --

for whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law [James 2:10, 11].

From this use of these two things, that is, the royal law which thus goes forth towards one's neighbour, and again the law in general, he turns to take up the law of liberty which has been explained before.

For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment [James 2:13].

This introduces then the famous passage which has been the perplexity of so many minds:

What should it profit, my brethren, though a man may say that he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save? [James 2:14].

It is evident that it cannot. A faith that is unproductive has no living link with God. What is the good of a faith that consists in mere assent to so many dogmas, and thus proves its human source? The faith that is given us of God saves, not that which is the fruit of man's nature. We have seen this already, and so therefore the grand principle of the first chapter leads as simply as possible into the application of it in the second. Here all is exemplified in a plain but striking way.

If a brother or a sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? [James 2:15, 16].

Evidently nothing.

Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe and tremble [James 2:17-19].

If there is any difference, the advantage is really on the side of those misleaders of poor ruined men. At least they do feel; and so far there is a greater effect produced than on these reasoning Jews.

But wilt thou know, O vain man? says he. It is not all that the Corinthian was vain in his speculations, but the Jew not less, who thus spoke and acted.

Wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead [James 2:20].

Yet the remarkable feature we have also to weigh here is that when works are thus introduced, attention is directed to what would be perfectly valueless if they were not the result of faith, -- nay, worse than valueless, positively evil, and entailing the severest punishment. For if we merely look at Abraham, or at Rahab, apart from God, apart from faith, -- if we regard their ways here cited as a question of human good works -- who in the world would ever so style that which Abraham or Rahab did? It is perfectly plain that according to man Abraham would have been in danger of losing his liberty, if not his head, for intent to kill Isaac; and unquestionably, judged by her country's law, the conduct of Rahab must have exposed her to the worst punishment of the worst political crime. But this would be judging their actions apart from God, because of whose will they were done, and apart from faith, which alone gave these works their life and character. Otherwise Abraham in man's eye was a father ready to murder his own son: what could be worse than this? In short, if we regard his work apart from faith, it is perhaps the darkest evil conceivable. And what was Rahab's act but treason against her country and her king? Was she not willing, so to speak, to hand over the possession of the city in which she had been born and bred to those who were going to raze it to the foundations?

The moment we bring into view God and His will and His purposes, it is needless to say that these two memorable acts stand out clothed with the light of heaven. The one was the most admirable submission to God -- with unqualified confidence in Himself, even when one could not see how His sure promise could stand, but sure it would. A man that did look straight up to God, swift to hear and slow to speak, was Abraham; -- a man in whom the loud voice of nature was utterly silenced, that God's will and word might alone govern his soul. So, if it were his only son that came of Sarah, so much the more bound to his heart because so singularly given in the pure favour of God, yet he would give him up, and be
prepared with his own hand to do the dreadful deed. Oh, if ever there was a work of faith since the world began, it was that work for which Abraham was ready -- yea, did put his hand to. So on Rahab's story I need not dwell, except just to show how remarkably guided of divine wisdom was James's allusion. How truly it bears the very stamp of inspiration, and the more so because we know the apostle Paul refers to Abraham at least for a totally different purpose! But not more certainly was Paul inspired to present Abraham's faith and Abraham's act too in this closing circumstance of his life (we may say, the great and final test of his faith), not more was Paul guided in his application, than James was in that which has been just now before us.

The great point of all seems this: that there were works, but the works that James insists on are works where faith constitutes their special excellence, and indeed alone could be their justification. Is this then in any way allowing the value of works without faith? The very reverse is true. He does call for works, and is not content simply with faith, but the works he produces are works that owe all their value to faith.

Thus, therefore, the indissoluble union between faith and works never was more blessedly maintained than in the very circumstances that James thus brings before us. So far is he from shaking faith that he supposes it, and the works which he commends are stamped with it in the most definite and striking manner.

Then we come to some fresh practical exhortations. As we have found, he particularly warns against the tongue as the expression of the heart's excitement if not of malice.

Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh
{Matt. 12:34}.

Here we open with its application in another and, if possible, still more important province; that is, in the matter of speaking to public edification. We have to remember that the danger is not only in what may be breathed in private; but, adds he,

Be not many masters,
-- that is, in the sense of teachers --
knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation {James 3:1}.

For surely that which a man says publicly will be used to measure himself; and it is well to be prepared for it. If we ought as a rule to be slow to speak, there is no exception in setting up to teach others; for thus we certainly incur severer judgment. It is an exhortation that shows on the one hand the danger and wrong of being over ready to seize an open door through anxiety to display one's self; on the other hand, it supposes the perfect liberty that reigned among believers. Impossible that such an exhortation could apply where there exists the régime of an exclusive ministry.

Thus evidently not only does James's doctrine set forth clearly the blessed truth of a new nature, as already shown, but his exhortation supposes just the same openness among Christians in the exercise of ministerial gift as was found, e.g. in 1 Cor. 14, and in practice throughout the church of God. So far from there being any contradiction of others in

the epistle of James, although there is not a little which in form is new (for the twelve tribes) both in its breadth and in its speciality, the mind of God is one. The inspiring Spirit, even in the most peculiar production of the New Testament epistles, gives us what harmonizes with every other part, and cements the whole fabric of divine truth.

There is a moral reason added:

For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body {James 3:2}.

He does not, I apprehend, restrict himself to public speaking, though opening with it, as we have seen.

Behold we put bits into horses' mouths {James 3:3}.

He shows that it may seem a little thing to man, but we must not excuse what is wrong because it may appear to have a little source. He proves that the least things are often those which govern other bodies incomparably larger.

Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm {James 3:4}.

This is applied to the subject in hand.

The tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter

(or wood, as it is given in the margin)

a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell {James 3:5, 6}.

In all the Bible we meet no more energetic and truthful picture of the desperate evil to which men are exposed by that little active member.

For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: but the tongue can no man tame {James 3:7, 8}.

The comfort is that God can deal with it -- God who gives the believer His own nature, and knows how to bring down the old nature so that there may be scope for the manifestation of what is of Himself.

Nor does James spare the gross inconsistency too often experienced.

Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be {James 3:9, 10}.

This is fortified by various illustrations, and followed up by the picture of the wise man, who is proved to be such, not by famous knowledge, but practically. It is always the every-day application that is in the mind of James. It is ever the right thing, as it was exactly what was most called for then and there. Had he in this epistle launched out into the vast expanse of the truth, he would only have given an impulse to the heaping up of more dogmas. Such a course would only have aggravated the evil instead of uprooting it. Himself a
wise man in his ordinary ways, there was divine wisdom
given him by the Holy Ghost in thus dealing so directly with
the snares of the twelve tribes, and even of that portion which
professed the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Hence, if a man be wise, the question arises, how is it to
be proved? Assuredly not in talking much, which usually
tends to talking ill.

Let him show out of a good conversation his works
with meekness of wisdom {James 3:13}.

If on the contrary there were bitter envy and strife in their
hearts, how could they boast against the truth, or lie against
it? How cuttlingly severe, and this simply from laying bare
things as they were! Yet, what an exposure! Think of people
glorying in their shame!

And lie not against the truth {James 3:14}.

It was a practical incongruity and contradiction of the mind
of God.

Then we are shown two kinds of wisdom, -- just as with
regard to temptations there were two sorts of them -- one
blessed from God, and a real glory to the man that endures;
and the other a shame, because it springs from his own fallen
nature. No otherwise is it with wisdom.

This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is
earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and
strife is, there is confusion and every evil work
{James 3:15, 16}.

Its works prove its nature and its source. There is confusion
in every evil way,

but the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then
peaceable {James 3:17}.

Never reverse this order; it is not only that this wisdom is
pure and peaceable, but it is first pure, then peaceable. It first
maintains the character and glory of God, and then seeks the
fruits of peace among men. But this is not all. It is gentle, and
easy to be entreated, or yielding. Instead of ever giving battle
for its rights supposed or real, there is clearly the yieldingness of grace about it. It is not the stubbornness of
self-assertion or opinionativeness. This, on the contrary,
stamps the sensual aspiring wisdom of man; but what comes
down from above is gentle, yielding, full of mercy and good
fruits, uncontentious, and unfeigned. When a man is
conscious that his wisdom is of a suspicious kind, one can
understand him unwilling to have his mind or will disputed;
but the truth is, that there is nothing which so much marks the
superiority of grace and truth and wisdom that God gives as
patience, and the absence of anxiety to push what one knows
is right and true. It is an inherent and sure sign of weakness
somewhere, when a man is ever urgent in pressing the value
of his own words and way, or cavilling habitually at others.

The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then
peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated:
it is also

full of mercy and good fruits, without contention,
and without hypocrisy {James 3:17}.

It is characterised by the self-judgment which delights in and
displays the ways of God.

And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of
them that make peace {James 3:18}.

Thus if there is peace in the way, righteousness is alike the
seed and the fruit. The seed, as ever, must produce its own
proper fruit.

The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them
that make peace.

What an honour to be sons of peace in a world ever at war
with God and those who are His!

Alas! we find in James 4, the contrary of this -- wars and
fightings,

whence come they?

Not from the new nature of which God is the blessed source,
but from the old.

Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in
your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and
desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war,
yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and
receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may
consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and
adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the
world is enmity with God? {James 4:1-4}.

I hope it will not be contended that these were persons born
of God. It seems to me that what was stated at the beginning
of the present discourse is an important key for interpreting
expressions. On the other hand, the effect of forgetting to
whom the words are addressed, and of assuming that the
epistle contemplates none but such as are born of God, is that
you are obliged to explain away the strength of the divine
word. Receive its address in simplicity of faith, and every
word of God is intelligently found to tell. You do not require
to enfeeble a single phrase. James does contemplate
Christians, but not Christians only. He is writing, as he says
himself, to the Israelitish stock, and not merely to those of
Israel that believe. Expressly he addresses the whole twelve
tribes of Israel. Whether they believe or not, they are all
addressed in this epistle. Consequently there is a word for
those of them that were clearly not born of God, as well as
for those who were.

Under this impression I read,

Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is
the enemy of God. Do ye think that the scripture
saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to
envy? {James 4:4, 5}.

Need it be told you that this verse has been a matter of much
difficulty to many minds? Although I am not at all prepared
to dogmatize about its force, it appears to me a harsh
expression to suppose that the spirit here described means no
more than man's spirit. I do not know how a man's spirit can
with propriety be said to dwell in a man. One can understand
the spirit of a man that is in him;
as the apostle Paul, when describing the human spirit, does
put it in 1 Cor. 2:11, but hardly the spirit that dwelleth in a
man. But if here it be not the spirit of man, the only spirit
elsewhere said to dwell in man (i.e., the believer) is the Spirit

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of God. But herein is just what causes the difficulty. How, if it be the Spirit of God, can He be put in such a connexion here? Must we translate and punctuate as in the common Greek Testament and English Bible?

Hence many are of opinion (and to this I am rather disposed, though I would not venture to say more) that the verse ought to be thus divided: --

Do ye think that the scripture speaketh in vain? Does the Spirit that dwelleth in us lust unto envy?

{James 4:5}.

Clearly both the word condemns and the Holy Spirit leads in a wholly different direction. (Compare Gal. 5.) The natural spirit of man does lust to envy, no doubt; but the Spirit that dwells in us opposes the flesh at all points, as we know scripture does.

And this connects itself, as it seems to me, with what follows:

But he giveth more grace,

That is, so far from lusting to envy, God is acting in goodness. It is grace alone that has communicated the nature of God; it is grace alone that strengthens the new nature by the gift of the Holy Ghost who dwells in us; and yet more than this,

He giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble

{James 4:6}.

He who realises with God what this world is, and what man's nature is, is humble before Him; as also more grace is given to such. The sense of all around and within leads him out in self-judgment before God.

This, then, I suppose -- though not venturing to speak with more decision -- is the practical result.

Submit yourselves therefore to God. But resist the devil, and he will flee from you {James 4:7}.

How much is covered by these two exhortations! One is the source of all that is good, and the other the guard against all that is evil.

Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.

Cleanse your hands, ye sinners {James 4:8}.

Will it be contended that sinners means saints? They are utterly different. There prevails among too many evangelical persons a mischievous habit of talking about “saved sinners.” To my mind it is not only inexact but misleading and dangerous. Scripture knows no such being as a “saved sinner.” We may well rejoice over a “sinner saved” if we know the mercy of it in our souls; but if we license the phrase -- a “saved sinner,” the moral effect is, that, when and though saved, he is still free to sin. Not that any one acquainted with the truth denies that a saved soul has still the flesh in him, and is liable to sin if unwatful. Still he who is saved has a new life and the Holy Ghost, and to sin is not natural for him: he is bound to walk in the Spirit as he lives in it. Evidently, if he sin, he must go athwart his new nature and position, and the blessed deliverance which God has given him in Christ.

Thus there is often a great deal of importance even in the way in which a truth is stated. The manner of stating a truth, however well-meant, may sometimes stumble souls, through our own want of subjection to the precious truth and the wonderful wisdom of God in His word. Instead of helping on holiness, one may on the contrary, by an unguarded word, give somewhat of a loose rein to the old nature. This no part of scripture does. It is perfectly true that, when God begins to deal with a soul, He certainly begins with him as a sinner; but He never ends there. I am not aware of any part of the word of God in which a believer, save perhaps in a transitional state, is ever referred to as a sinner. No doubt that he who was in the front rank of all the saints and servants of God, when he looked at what he was in himself glorying in the law and nature, could and did characterize himself as a chief of sinners, especially when he thought of the immeasurable riches of God’s grace of which he was so favoured a communicator to souls. In this we do and must all join in our measure. At the same time it is evident that to be a saint and a sinner at the same time is simply a flat contradiction.

In short, holy scripture does not sanction such a combination, and the sooner we get rid of phrases, which deserve no better name than religious cant, the better for all parties. It would be waste of time to speak of such a thing now, if it were not of practical moment; but I am convinced that it is, and that this and other stereotyped phrases of the religious world gravely need and will not bear an examination in the light of scripture. The traditions of Protestants and Evangelicals are no better than those of Roman Catholics, any more than of Jews who were before them all. Our wisest course is to discard every unscriptural phrase which we find current and influential.

I press, then, that the word sinners {James 4:8} here clearly to my mind shows that the Spirit of God in this epistle takes in a larger range than most allow. Also it is no mean confirmation of what has been already advanced as to James.

Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother {James 4:8-11} is really speaking evil of God’s own law and judging it.

But he presses also the necessity of dependence on God in another form in the end of our chapter. That is, we are warned against forming resolutions, plans of our future doings and the like. This too is a practical subject. We ought all to know how much we need to watch against such an ignoring of God above us, and the coming of the Lord. As he says here,

Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not
what shall be on the morrow
-- not even on the morrow.

For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away, instead of your saying, If the Lord will, and we live, we will also do this, or that. But now ye glory in your boastings: all such glorying is evil {James 4:13-16}.

He does not conclude, however, without another appeal to conscience.

Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin {James 4:17}.

It is the law of liberty, and of infinite purity and power. It is not only that sin consists in doing evil, but in not doing the good that we know. May we never forget what the new nature loves and feels to be true and holy according to Christ.

Then in James 5 we have a solemn word for rich men, to weep and howl for their miseries that shall come upon them. Will any man argue still that this means the saints of God? Are they the persons called to weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon them? Are they told to weep and howl?

Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together

-- not exactly “for the last days.” This would be hardly intelligible. What there can be little doubt the Holy Ghost meant us to gather is,

Ye have heaped together riches in the last days
{James 5:2, 3}.

This aggravated the selfishness of their ways and their indifference to others. It is bad enough to heap treasure at any time; but to heap it up in the last days was to add not a little to the evil in the Lord’s eyes.

Is it a time,
said the indignant prophet, to his covetous and deceitful attendant,
to receive money, and to receive garments, and olive-yards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and men-servants, and maid-servants? {2 Kings 5:26}.

Was it a time, when God was dealing with unwonted power and grace even for Gentiles? Was this the time for an Israelite to lie for profit and get gain by it? And so here; when the last days were proclaimed by God’s word in solemn warning, the heaping up of treasure in such days as these was indeed most offensive to Him.

Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cry of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just {James 5:4-6}.

What an unexpected moral link! The apostle shows that the spirit of heaping up riches in the last days is the same that in other circumstances slew Jesus Christ the righteous. It is not a connection that we could have anticipated, but it is just such an one as would be discerned by the Holy Ghost ever sensitive to the Lord’s glory; and so in fact it is as we may feel on reflection. It was this selfishness that came into direct personal collision with the Lord of glory,

who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich
{2 Cor. 8:9}.

We can understand that those whose one object was their own importance, glory, and ease in this world, necessarily felt that such an one was a living witness against them, and convicted them of flagrant opposition to the grace of God, who taught by Jesus in word and deed that it is more blessed to give than to receive. For this doctrine and practice the Pharisees were quite unprepared. (See Luke 16.) Accordingly their hatred grew until it resulted in the cross of the Lord; and hence this is one of the elements, though of course not the only one, which calls down the judgment of God; and the Spirit of God so treats it here:

Ye have killed the just.

The allusion is to the Lord, not the just in general, but the Just One, even Christ,

and he doth not resist you {James 5:6}.

Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord.

Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh {James 5:7, 8}.

Then he calls them again so much the more to avoid a murmuring spirit against one and another, because the judge stood at the door. He exhorts them to endurance and to patience. This reappears as a final appeal. We had it at the commencement of the chapter; we have it again here that it should by all means be remembered.

Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy
{James 5:10, 11}.

Then another snare is connected with this for avoidance:
Above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation {James 5:12}.

What has the apostle in view here? The oath before a magistrate? In no wise does scripture slight that solemn obligation. The Lord Himself respected the adjuration of the high-priest; and in no passage whatever do we see a depreciatory allusion to a judicial oath in the sermon on the mount, or, in what James says here, or in any other part of the Bible, but the contrary. The Lord was addressing Jewish
disciples, James writes to the twelve tribes of Israel who are in the dispersion; but what they both set their faces against was the habit of bringing in religious asseverations for the purpose of confirming their word every day, besides the profaning of the Lord’s name in matters of this life. This in point of fact weakens instead of establishing what is said; for it is evident that whatever is uncalled for gives no strength to an assertion, but is just a fruit and proof of weakness. Where there is simple truth, nothing is needed but the quiet statement of the fact.

There were no people so prone to ordinary swearing as the Jews. Accordingly, I have not the slightest doubt that what our Lord and His servants reprobated was the introduction of an oath in common conversation; and this, it is plain, does not apply to an oath administered by a magistrate. Indeed, it seems to me in itself sinful for a man to refuse an oath (supposing its form otherwise unobjectionable) if required to do so by proper authority. It would be to me a virtual denial of God’s authority in civil government here below. I believe, therefore, that it is the bounden duty of every man to whom an oath is put, to take it in the fear of the Lord. I admit it must be put by competent authority. Therefore we are not to assume that the passage in Matt. 5, or this portion of James, has the smallest reference to judicial swearing. How could one think that those who indulge in such thoughts show any real intelligence as to the word of God? They certainly exhibit a certain care for conscientiousness. This is not in the least denied. But we have to take care that we are guided of God in this, which is important in the present day when we know that the spirit of the age is endeavouring to blot out God in all that touches man here below. The Lord was silent till adjudged by the high-priest: was not His conduct thus perfectly consistent with His own teaching? An oath, therefore, should not be refused when put by a magistrate. I am supposing, of course, that there is nothing in the terms of the oath that would involve false doctrine or countenance a superstition. For instance, in a Roman Catholic country there might be reference to the virgin, or angels, or saints. Such an oath I do not think that a Christian man would be at liberty to take. But I am supposing now that a person is required in the name of God to declare what he believes to be the truth in a matter of which he is a witness, the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. It appears to me that so far from his being at liberty to refuse this, he is on the contrary guilty, through ignorance, of no small sin in cavilling about the matter.

The rest of the chapter takes up another subject -- the case of God’s discipline. It is governmental.


This does not mean expressly the inspired psalms. Persons are apt to think of the psalms of David whenever there is the introduction of the word. Doubtless old habits and associations lead to this; but there is no ground for it in the Bible. No more is meant here than that, being happy, he is to give vent to his joy in the praise of the Lord. It is nothing more.

Is any among you sick? let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord {James 5:14}.

This we know was an old custom. It was used even by those who were clothed with miraculous power. When the apostles were sent forth of our Lord, they were directed by Him to anoint the sick with oil (Mark 6). And so here the elders were to act in the same remarkable style. Nor do I deny that there are answers to prayer of a very striking kind. I do not call these answers miraculous powers, because the true power of this kind is that exercised by a person raised up of the Lord for the purpose, and who knows that he can count upon it in the case where He pleases to show it; whereas in an answer to prayer there is a trial and exercise of faith about it, just as with those who were praying for Peter when he was in prison. There was no miracle in their part of the business, as far as they were concerned. There was a remarkably direct intervention of God, but it was in no way connected with any gift of miracles committed to the people who were praying.

And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up {James 5:15}.

Here it is a question of God’s judgment. The person is chastened in sickness for some evil; it is now judged; grace intervenes, and God heals.

Then comes the general spirit of confession.

Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed {James 5:16}.

It is the true love that interests itself, not only in that which is good, but even in what is, alas! the fruit of unjudged evil. But there is a careful abstinence from urging confession to the elders, I cannot doubt, in the far-seeing wisdom of God, who loves souls and hates superstition.

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much {James 5:16}.

Elias is cited in support of this. Finally we have,

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins {James 5:19, 20}.

It is doubtless put in a general form. At the same time it only confirms, as it appears to me, what has already been shown to be the comprehensive character of the epistle.

In the next lecture we shall enter, if the Lord will, on what belongs more to the ordinary train of our Christian associations.
Lectures Introductory
to the Study of
The Acts, the Catholic Epistles,
and
the Revelation

Lecture 6
The Epistles of Peter

The epistles of Peter are addressed to the elect Jews of his day, believing of course on the Lord Jesus, and scattered throughout a considerable portion of Asia Minor. The apostle takes particular care to instruct them in the bearing of many of the types that were contained in the Levitical ritual with which they were familiar. But while he contrasts the Christian position with their former Jewish one, in order to strengthen them as to their place and calling now in and by Christ, he takes care also to maintain fully whatever common truth there is between the Christian and the saints of the Old Testament. For it is hardly necessary to say to any intelligent believer, that whatever may be the new privileges, and consequently fresh duties which flow from them, there are certain unchangeable moral principles to which God holds throughout all time. These were insisted on in the Old Testament, particularly in the psalms and the prophets. And the apostle guards against the wrong conclusion, that, because in certain things we stand contrasted with the Old Testament saints, there are no grounds in common.

Let it then be well borne in mind, that God holds fast that which He has laid down for all that are His as to the moral government of God. That government may differ in character and depth; there may be at a fitting moment a far closer dealing with souls (as undoubtedly this is the case since redemption). At the same time the general principles of God are in nowise enfeebled by Christianity, but rather strengthened and cleared immensely. Take, for instance, the duty of obedience; the value of a gracious, peaceful walk here below; the degree of confidence in God. It was ever right that love should go out towards others, whether in general kindness towards all mankind, or in special affections towards the family of God. These things were always true in principle, and never can be touched while man lives on earth.

It is equally true, however, that from the beginning of his first epistle, Peter draws out the contrast of the Christian place with their old Jewish one. It is not that the Jews were not elect as a nation, but therein precisely it is where they stand in contrast with the Christian. Whatever may be found in hymns, or sermons, or theology, scripture knows no such thing as an elect church. There is the appearance of it in the last chapter of this very epistle, but this is due solely to the meddling hand of man. In 1 Pet. 5 we read, “The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you;” but all concede that the terms “the church that is” have been put in by the translators: they have no authority whatever. It was an individual and not a church that was referred to. It was probably a well known sister there; and therefore it was enough simply to allude to her.

She that was at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you {1 Pet. 5:13}.

The very point of Christianity is this, that as to election it is personal -- strictly individual. This is precisely what those who contend against the truth of election always feel most: they will allow a sort of body in a general way to be elect, and then that the individuals who compose that body must be brought in, as it were, conditionally, according to their good conduct. No such idea is traceable in the word of God. God has chosen individuals. As it is said in Ephesians: He has chosen us, not the church, but ourselves individually.

The church {Eph. 1:22},
as such, does not come in till the end of the first chapter. We have first individuals chosen of God before the foundation of the world.

Here too the apostle does not merely speak, nor is it ever the habit of scripture to speak, in an abstract way of election. The saints were chosen

according to the foreknowledge of God the Father {1 Pet. 1:2};

for it was no question now of a Governor having a nation in whom He might display His wisdom, power, and righteous ways. They had been used to this and more in Judaism, but it had all passed away. The Jews had brought His government into contempt by their own rebellion against His name; and Jehovah Himself had found it morally needful to hand over His own nation into the power of their enemies. Consequently that nation as a display of His government was a thing of the past. A remnant, it is true, had been brought up from Babylon for the purpose of being tested by a new trial by the presentation of the Messiah to them; but alas! only to their
responsibility, not to their faith; and if it be responsibility, whether to do the law or to believe the Messiah, it is all one as far as the result in man is concerned. The creature is utterly ruined in every way, and with so much the speedier manifestation the more spiritual the trial.

Thus, as is known, the rejection of the Messiah was incommensurably more fruitful of disastrous consequences to the Jew than even had been of old their breach of the divine law. This accordingly gave occasion for God to exercise a new kind of choice. Undoubtedly there was always a secret election of saints after the fall and long before the call of Abraham and his seed; but now the choice of saints was to be made a manifest thing, a testimony before men, though of course not till glory come absolutely perfect. Accordingly God chooses now not merely out of men but out of the Jews. And this is a point that Peter presses on them, -- a startling thought for a Jew, yet they had only to reflect in order to know how true it is:

Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father {1 Pet. 1:2}.

He is forming a family, and no longer governing one chosen nation. Those addressed from among the Jews were among the chosen ones,

 elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.

But there is more than this: it was no longer a question of ordinances visibly separating those subject to them from the rest of the world. It was a real inward and not merely external setting apart; it was through

sanctification of the Spirit.

God set them apart unto Himself by the effectual working of the Holy Ghost. We do not hear now of the gift of the Spirit. Sanctification of the Spirit is altogether distinct from that gift. His sanctification is the effectual work of divine grace, which first separates from the world a person, whether Jew or Gentile, unto God. When a man for instance turns to God, when he has faith in Jesus, when he repents towards God, even though it may be faith but little developed or exercised, and although the repentance may be comparatively superficial (yet I am supposing now real faith and repentance through the action of the Holy Ghost), these are the tokens of the Spirit’s sanctification.

There are those who constantly think and speak of sanctification as practical holiness, and exclusively so. It is granted that there is a sanctification in scripture which bears on practice. This is not the point here, but if possible a deeper thing; and for the simple reason, that practical holiness must be relative or a question of degree. The

sanctification of the Spirit

here spoken of is absolute. The question is not how far it is made good in the heart of the believer; for it really and equally embraces all believers. It is an effectual work of God’s Spirit from the very starting-point of the career of faith. Elect of course they were in God’s mind from all eternity, but they are sanctified from the first moment that the Holy Ghost opens their eyes to the light of the truth in Christ.

There is an awakening of conscience by the Spirit through the word (for I am not speaking now of anything natural, of moral desires or emotions of the heart). Wherever there is a real work of God’s Spirit -- not merely a testimony to the conscience but an arousing of it effectually before God -- the sanctification of the Spirit is made good.

If asked why this should be accepted as the meaning of the expression, I acknowledge that one is bound to give a reason for that which no doubt differs from the view of many, and I answer, that in my judgment the just and only meaning of the word is proved from the fact that the saints are said to be

elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ {1 Pet. 1:2}.

The order here is precise and instructive. Now practical holiness follows our being sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ, whereas the sanctification of the Spirit of which Peter here treats precedes it. The saints are chosen through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience. This is somewhat difficult for theology, because in general even intelligent and godly souls are much shut up in the prevalent commonplaces of men. Never should I for one blame their tenacity in adhering to the truth and duty of advancing in practical holiness, or what they call sanctification. This is both true and important in its place. The fault is in denying the other and yet more fundamental sense of sanctification here shown by Peter in its right relation to obedience. A truth is not the truth. True growth in practice confessedly is after justification; sanctification in 1 Pet. 1:2 is before justification. It is very evident when a man is justified, he is under the efficacy of the blood of Christ. He is no longer waiting for the sprinkling of that precious blood, he is already sprinkled with it before God. But the sanctification of the Spirit laid down here is in order to the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus; and therefore unless you would destroy the grace of God, and reverse a multitude of scriptures as to justification by faith, this sanctification cannot be one’s practice of day by day.

Confound the one with the other and you upset the gospel: distinguish sanctification in principle from the beginning for all from sanctification in practice in the various measures of believers, and you learn the truth of what Peter here teaches, which is forgotten for the most part in Christendom. If you say that practical holiness precedes the being brought under the blood of Jesus, I ask, How is one to become holy? Whence is the power or the growth in holiness? Certainly such is not the teaching of God’s word anywhere, still less is it what the apostle Peter insists on here. There is a wider and, if possible, a deeper thought than the measure of our walk, which, after all, differs in all the children of God, -- no two being exactly the same, -- and all of us depending on self-judgment as well as growth in the knowledge of the Lord and of His grace. The word of God, prayer, the use that we make of the opportunities that His goodness affords us, both public and private, -- all the means that teach and exercise us in the will of God no doubt contribute to this
practical holiness.

But here the apostle speaks of none of these things, but only of the Spirit separating the saints to obey as Jesus obeyed, and to be sprinkled with His blood. And so we find it in fact and in Scripture. Thus, for instance, Saul of Tarsus had this sanctification of the Spirit the moment that, struck down to the earth, he received the testimony of the Lord speaking from heaven. He went through a profound work in his conscience after that. For three days and nights, as we all know, he neither ate nor drank. All this was thoroughly in season; and after it, as we are told, the blindness was taken away, and he was filled with the Holy Ghost. This is not the sanctification of the Spirit. It was clearly the consequence of the Holy Ghost being given to him, but the gift of the Spirit is not the sanctification of the Spirit. Sanctification of the Spirit is that primary action that was experienced before Saul entered into peace with God. When a man is roused to hate his sins through God's testimony reaching him, and convicting him before God, and not in his own eyes, -- when a man is ashamed of all that he has been in presence of God's grace, ever so little known and understood, -- still where a real work goes on in the soul, sanctification of the Spirit is true there. Now this ought to be a great comfort even to the feeblest of God's children, not an alarm. There is not one of them who has not really sanctification of the Spirit. They may be troubled as to the question of practical holiness, but the fundamental and essential sanctification of the Spirit is that which is already true of all the children of God. I am not speaking of a particular doctrine. It is not a question of that; but of a soul quickened by the Spirit through the truth received in ever so simple and limited a manner. But it is a reality, and from that time this sanctification of the Spirit becomes a fact.

But then, to what are they sanctified of the Holy Ghost thus? Unto Christ's obedience and the sprinkling of His blood; for

Jesus Christ [1 Pet. 1:2]

belongs to both these clauses. This again is a difficulty to some minds. They would rather have placed the sprinkling of the blood first, and obedience next. I can understand them, but do not in the least agree with them. Indeed such difficulties serve to show where people are. The root of all is that people are occupied about themselves first, instead of leaning on the Lord. No doubt if a person were at once to be brought into the comfort of full peace with God through the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus, this would suit the heart's sense of its own need. But it is not what the word of God gives us by that converted soul, to whose case I have adverted. What is it that Saul of Tarsus says as the effect of the light of God shining on his soul?

Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? [Acts 9:6].

And was not this before he knew all the comfort and blessing of the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus?

The first impulse of a converted man is to do the will of God. There may be no sense of liberty yet, nor even joy in the Lord; there can be no solid peace whatever. All this will come in due time, and it may be very rapidly, even the self-same hour; but the very first thing that a soul born of God feels is the desire at all cost to do the will of God. It is exactly what filled Jesus perfectly. It was not a question of what He was to gain or what He was to avoid; but as it is written,

Lo, I come, to do thy will, O God {Heb. 10:9}.

To my mind, nothing is more wonderful in our blessed Lord here below than this devotedness to His Father, not merely now and again, but as the one motive that animated Him from the beginning to the end of His course here below. He came to do the will of God, and this not as the law proposed, in order that it might be well with Him, and He might live long in the earth; He never had such a motive though He fulfilled the law perfectly. On the contrary, He knew quite well before coming that He was not here for a long life, but to die on the cross. He was about to be a sacrifice for sin, giving Himself up despite of suffering, not only from man, but from God. But at all cost God's will must be done;

by the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all {Heb. 10:10}.

The self-same principle is true in the believer, although of course it is pure grace toward him, whereas it was moral perfectness in Jesus. In our case it is all through Jesus. It is the Holy Ghost no doubt producing it. It is the instinct of that new nature, -- of life in the believer, who, being born of God, has this necessary feeling of the new nature, the desire to do the will of God. In point of fact Christ is the life of the believer; and we can well understand, therefore, that the life of Christ, whether viewed in all its perfection in Him, or whether it is seen modified in ourselves, is nevertheless just the same life, -- in our case hindered alas! by all sorts of circumstances, and above all by the evil of our old nature that surrounds it, -- in Him, as we know, absolutely perfect and without mixture.

In this case, then, it seems to me that the order is divinely perfect, and manifestly so. Being sanctified of the Spirit, we are called to obey as Christ obeyed. It is another character and measure of responsibility. The Jew, as such, was bound to obey the law. To him it was a question of not doing what his nature prompted him to do. But this was never the case with Jesus. He in no case desired to do a single thing that was not the will of God. Now the new nature in the believer never has any other thought or feeling; only in our case there is also the old nature which may, and which alas! does struggle to have its own way. Therefore God has His own wise, holy, and gracious mode of dealing with it. We shall see that this comes later on in our epistle, and therefore I need say no more upon it now.

Here we have the first great primary fact, that the Christian Jew does not belong any more to the elect nation; but is taken out of this his former position, and is elect after a wholly new sort. In this case, those actually addressed had belonged to that elect people, but now they were chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. It was no after-thought, but His settled plan. It was the foreknowledge
of God the Father in virtue of (ἐν) sanctification of the Spirit, and this unto the obedience of Jesus Christ (that kind of obedience), and the sprinkling of His blood. These two points are carefully to be weighed -- Christian obedience, and the sprinkling of His blood. I consider them both to stand in manifest contrast with the same two elements under the law in Ex. 24, which appears to be in view. In that chapter we have Israel agreeing to do whatever the law demanded, and thereupon the blood of certain victims is taken and sprinkled on the people, as well as on the book that bound them.

It is a great mistake to suppose that the blood there is used as a sign of the putting away of sin. This is not by any means the only meaning of blood, even where it was sacrificially employed. The meaning in that sense I take to be this: that the people formally pledged themselves to legal obedience, and bound themselves in this solemn manner to obey. Just as the blood sprinkled was from the animals killed in view of the old covenant, so they shrank not from that dread and extreme exaction if they failed to obey the will of God. It was an imprecation of death on themselves from God if they violated His commandments. Therefore it is observable there was the sprinkling of the book along with it. This had nothing at all to do with atonement -- a supposition which only arises from people closing their eyes to other truths in the Bible, to their own great loss even in the truth they hold. We must leave room for all truth. Atonement has its own incomparable place. But certainly when the Israelites were binding themselves to obey the law, it was as far as possible from a confession of atonement. It is a total fallacy, injurious to God's glory and to our own souls, to interpret the Bible after this fashion. It only makes confusion in jumbling up law and gospel, to the detriment of both, and indeed to the destruction of all the beauty and force of truth.

In the case of the Christian all is changed. For Christ communicated a new nature which loves to obey God's will, which accordingly is given us from conversion, before (and it may be long before) a person enjoys peace. From the time that this new nature is given, the purpose of the heart is to obey. Such was, unhindered by imperfection, the obedience of Jesus.

But besides this, the gospel, instead of putting a man under blood as a threat or imprecation of death in case of failure, the awful sign of his doom before his eyes if he disobeyed, puts him under the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus, which assures him of plenary forgiveness. With this he is intended to start as a Christian; he begins his career with that blessed shelter which tells him that, although he has entered on the path of Christian obedience, he is a forgiven and justified man in the sight of God. Such is the suited and striking preface with which our apostle commences, contrasting the portion of the believer in Christ with that of the Jew, as it stands in their own sacred books, which we as well as they acknowledge to have divine authority.

Next follows the salutation,

Grace unto you, and peace,

the usual Christian or apostolic style of address.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time 

{1 Pet. 1:2-5}.

Thus he loves to bring out again confirmatorily the new relationship in which they stood to God.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is not here blessing them in heavenly places in Christ. Such is not the topic of Peter; it had been given to another instrument more fitted for revealing the heavenly position of the believer. But if it is not union with Christ, if not our full place in Him before God, there is a clear statement of our hope of heaven. And this is what Peter immediately enlarges on. Speaking of God he says,

Who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven.

It is not the universal inheritance of which the apostle Paul treats; so that clearly we have the distinction between his testimony and Paul's very definitely.

Bear in mind that the one is just as truly Christian as the other. There is no difference in their authority, but each has its own importance. The man that would make all his scripture to be the epistle to the Ephesians would soon find himself in want of Peter. And I am persuaded that a hardness of character, quite intolerable to men of spiritual minds, would inevitably be generated by making all our food to consist in what could be extracted from Ephesians and Colossians, the effect of which would soon become painfully sensible to others. The consequence would be that much of the exercise of spiritual affection which humbles the soul, a vast deal which renders needful the gracious present care of the Lord Jesus as advocate and priest on high, would be of necessity left out. In other words, if we think of firmness, as well as the sense of belonging to heaven, -- a bright triumphant consciousness of glory, surely we must enter into and enjoy the precious truth of our union with Christ. But this is not all; we need Christ interceding for us, as well as the privilege of being in Christ; we need to have Him active in His love before our God, and not merely a condition in which we stand. Peter treats chiefly of the former, Paul of both, but chiefly of the latter. Such was the ordering of matters under God's hand for both. The epistle to the Hebrews of all the Pauline epistles is that which most approaches the testimony of Peter, and coalescing in it to a large extent. There we have not union with the Head, but

the heavenly calling {Heb. 3:1};

and substantially the latter line of truth is that which we have in 1 Peter.
Nor is it only that we find here the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus, but the life that grace has given us is characterized by resurrection power.

We are begotten again, says he,
to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead {1 Pet. 1:3}.

The blood of Jesus Christ, however precious and indispensable, does not of itself constitute a man a Christian either in intelligence or in fact of standing. It is the foundation for it; and every one who rests on the blood of Christ is surely a Christian; but I repeat that, both for position before God and intelligent perception and power of soul, we need and have much more. Supposing God only gave the believer according to his own thoughts (often meagre); supposing one believed in the power of the precious blood of Jesus ever so truly, and had nothing more than this our real portion by the Spirit, such an one, I maintain, would be a sorry Christian indeed. No doubt as far as it goes it is all-important, nor could any one be a Christian without it. Still the Christian does need the effect of the resurrection of Jesus following up the sprinkling of His blood -- I do not say the resurrection without His blood, still less the glory without either. A whole Christ is given and needed. I do not believe in these glory-men, or resurrection-men either, without the blood of Jesus; but, on the other hand, as little are we in scripture limited to that most wonderful of all foundations -- redemption through Christ Jesus our Lord. To restrict yourself to it would be a wrong, not so much to your own soul as to God's grace; and if there be any difference, especially to Him who suffered all things for God's glory and for our own infinite blessing.

In this case then we have the Christian by divine grace possessed of a new nature which loves to obey. He is sprinkled with Christ's blood, which gives him confidence and boldness in faith before God, because he knows the certainty of the love that has put away his sins by blood. But, besides this, what a spring is conveyed to the soul by the sense that his life is the life of Jesus in resurrection. So, he adds, there is a similar inheritance for the saints with Christ Himself --

an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven {1 Pet. 1:4},
where He has already gone. More than this, there is full security, spite of our passing through a world filled with hatred and peril, for the Christian above all.

For you, says he,
who are kept {1 Pet. 1:4, 5};
for Christian doctrine is not, as men so often say, that of saints persevering. In this I, for one, do not believe. One sees alas! too often saints going astray, comparatively seldom persevering as the rule, if we speak of their consistent fidelity and devotedness. But there is that which never fails, --
the power of God through faith {1 Pet. 1:5}, -- by which the believer is kept to the end. This alone restores the balance; and thus we are taken out of all conceit of our own stability. We are thrown on mercy, as we ought to be; we look up in dependence on One who is incontestably above us, and withal infinitely near to us. This ought to be the spring of all our confidence, -- even in God Himself, with His own power preserving us. There is given to the soul of him who thus rests on God's power keeping him a wholly different tone from that of the man who thinks of his own perseverance as a saint. Far better is it, then, to be kept by the power of God through faith {1 Pet. 1:5}.

In this way it is not independent of our looking to Him.

But there is discipline also, God puts us to the proof; and, undoubtedly, if there be unbelief working, we must eat the bitter fruit of our own ways. It is good that we should feel that it is unbelief, and that unbelief can produce nothing but death. This may be in various measures, and therefore no more is meant than so far as want of faith is allowed to work. In the unbeliever, where it does work unhinderedly, the consequences are fatal and everlasting. In the believer the evil heart of unbelief is modified necessarily by the fact that, believing on Christ, he has everlasting life. But still, as far as unbelief does work, it is just so far death in effect. The saints, then, are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation {1 Pet. 1:5}.

And here it is well to observe, as an important fact to be recognised, that salvation in Peter's epistle looks onward to the future, where it is not otherwise qualified. Salvation is here viewed as not yet come. In the general sense of the word, salvation awaits the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ. It supposes that the believer is brought out of all that is natural even as to the body -- that he is already changed into the likeness of Christ.

Salvation, says Peter,
ready to be revealed in the last time {1 Pet. 1:5}.

This is the reason why he connects it with the appearing of Jesus Christ. It is not merely the work effected, but salvation revealed; and hence it necessarily awaits the revelation of Jesus Christ.

There is another sense of salvation, and our apostle, as we shall shortly find, does not in anywise ignore it; but then he qualifies the term. When he refers it to the present, it is the salvation of souls, not of bodies. This also is a very important point of difference for the Christian, on which it will be desirable to speak presently. On the other hand, as here, when salvation simply and fully is meant, we are thrown on the revelation of the last time.

Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations {1 Pet. 1:6}.

Such is the path of trial through which the believer goes forward, putting to the proof the faith which God has given him: --
That the trial of your faith
(not of flesh as under the law)
being much more precious than of gold that
perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be
found unto praise and honour and glory at the
appearing of Jesus Christ {1 Pet. 1:7}.

It is not said to be at Christ’s coming. The trial of our
faith will not be revealed then, but
at the appearing of Jesus.

This is the reason why the appearing of Jesus is brought in
here. The coming of Jesus might be misunderstood, as being
a much more comprehensive term than His appearing or
revelation. His coming (παρουσία) is that which effects the
rapture and reception of the saints to Himself; and His
appearing is that which subsequently displays them with
Himself before the world, and therefore expresses but a part
of His presence, being the special (not the generic) term. The
appearing of Jesus is exclusively when the Lord will make
Himself visible, and be seen by every eye. It is evident that
the Lord might come and make Himself visible only to those
in whom He is distinctly interested, and who are themselves
personally associated with Him; and such, I have no doubt,
is the truth of scripture. But then He may do more and
display Himself to the world. Such is the
appearing {1 Pet. 1:7}
of Jesus, and of this the apostle Peter speaks when the
revelation of the sons of God in glory will take place. Then
it is that the trial of the faith of the Christian will be made
manifest in glory. Wherever the saints have shown faith or
unbelief, whether hindered by the world, the flesh, or the
devil, whatever the particular snare that has drawn them
aside, all will be made plain then. There will be no possibility
of self-love keeping up appearances longer: unbelief will cost
as dear in that day as it is worthless now; but the trial of
faith, where it has been genuine, will be

found unto praise and honour

then. Proved unbelief will be certainly to the praise of none,
but where feeble faltering faith has been put in evidence by
the trial, while surely forgiven in the grace of God,
nevertheless the failure cannot but be judged as such. The
flesh never counts on God for good. All unbelief therefore
will be shown plainly to be of the flesh, not of the Spirit, and
never excusable.

But this gives the apostle an occasion to speak of Jesus,
especially as he had spoken of His appearing, and this in a
way that remarkably brings out the character of Christianity.

Whom,
says he,

having not seen, ye love {1 Pet. 1:8}.

It is a strange sound and fact at first, but in the end precious.
Who ever loved a person that he never saw? We know that in
human relations it is not so. In divine things it is precisely
what shows the power and special character of a Christian’s
faith.

Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though

now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with
joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end
of your faith,

-- not yet the body saved, but soul-salvation --

the salvation of souls {1 Pet. 1:8, 9}.

This at once gives us a true and vivid picture of what
Christianity is, of signal importance for the Jews to weigh,
because they always looked forward for a visible Messiah, --
the royal Son of David -- the object, no doubt, of all
reverence, homage, and loyalty for all Israel. But here it is
altogether another order of ideas. It is a rejected Messiah who
is the proper object of the Christian’s love, though he never
beheld Him; and who while unseen becomes so much the
more simply and unmixedly the object of his faith, and withal
the spring of

joy unspeakable and full of glory.

While this is in full and evident contrast with Judaism, it
needs little proof that it is precisely what gives scope for the
proper display of Christianity, which could not be seen in its
true light if at all till Jesus left the world. Whilst the Lord
was here, it is ignorance and error to call such a state of
things, however blessed and needed, Christianity. Of course
it was Christ, which, after all, was far more important in one
sense than the work He wrought for bringing us to God. All
on which one could look with delight and praise was
concentrated in His own person. What were the disciples
then? Members of His body? Who told you this? None can
find it in Scripture. Up to that time membership of Christ, or
to be in Christ, was not a fact, and consequently could not be
testified to any soul, nor known to the most advanced
believer. What Christ was to them then was all: not in the
least did any suspect (for indeed it was not yet true) that any
were in Him. The Lord spoke of a day when they should
know it; but as yet the foundation was not even laid for it.
This was done in the mighty work of the Saviour on the
cross; and not the fact only but its results were made good
when Christ, after having breathed His own risen life into
them, went up to heaven and sent down the Holy Ghost that
they might taste the joy and have the power of it. This gives
room for all the practical working of Christianity. It was
necessary to its existence that Jesus should go. There could
have been no Christianity if Jesus had not come; yet as long
as He was visibly present on earth, Christianity proper could
not even begin.

It was when He who died went to heaven that
Christianity appeared in its full force; and accordingly then
came out faith in its finest and truest character. While He was
here, there was a kind of mingled experience. It was partly
sight and partly faith; but when He went away, it was
altogether faith, and nothing but faith. Such is Christianity.
But then, again, as long as Christ was here, it could not be
exactly hope. How could one hope for One who was here,
having different His estate from what was longed for and
expected? Thus neither faith had its adequate and suited
sphere, nor had hope its proper character till Jesus went
away. When He left the earth, especially as the Crucified,
then indeed there was room for faith; and nothing but faith
received, appreciated, and enjoyed all. And before He went away, He had left the promise of His return for them. Thus hope also could spring forth as it were to meet Him; as, indeed, it is the work of the Holy Ghost to exercise the faith and hope He has given.

This, then, may serve to show the true nature of Christianity, which, coming in after redemption, is founded on it, and forms in us heavenly associations and hopes while Jesus is away, and we are waiting for Him to return. Perhaps it is needless to say how the heart is tried. There is everything, as we have seen, to give not only faith and hope their full place, but also love. As we are told here,

Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing,

-- no wonder he adds, --
ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory {1 Pet. 1:8}.

But none of these wonders of grace could have been, unless by redemption we receive the end of our faith meanwhile, namely, soul-salvation.

A very important development follows in the next verses.

Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you {1 Pet. 1:10}.

How little, it seems, the Old Testament prophets understood their own prophecies! How much we are indebted to the Spirit who now reveals a Christ already come! The prophets were constantly saying that the righteousness of God was near at hand, and His salvation to be revealed. Thence, we see, they did speak of these very things. They prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories after these {1 Pet. 1:10, 11}.

Take Psa. 22, or Isa. 53, where we have the sufferings which belonged to Christ, and the glories after these. But mark,

To whom it was revealed, that not to themselves, but to us they did minister the things which are now reported to you in virtue of the Holy Ghost sent from heaven {1 Pet. 1:12}.

This is Christianity. It is very far from identifying the state and testimony of the prophets with ours now under grace and a present Spirit. He shows that first of all there was this testimony of that which was not for themselves but for us, beginning of course with the converted Jewish remnant. -- these Christian Jews who believed the gospel which in principle belongs to us of the Gentiles just as much as to them.

Christianity is come to us now; but when really known, it is not at all a mere question of prophetic testimony, even though this be of God, but there is the preaching of the gospel by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. The gospel sets forth present accomplishment -- redemption now a finished work as far as the soul is concerned. At the same time, the day is not yet come for the fulfilment of the prophecies as a whole. This is the important difference here revealed. There are three distinct truths in these verses, as has been often remarked, and most clearly, as we have seen.

Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the appearing of Jesus Christ {1 Pet. 1:13}.

Then the prophecies will be fulfilled. Thus the Lord Jesus, being already come and about to come again, brings before us two of these stages, while the mission of the Holy Ghost for the gospel fills up the interval between them. Had there been only one coming of Christ, then the accomplishment that we have now, and the fulfilment of the prophecies that is future, would have coalesced, so far as this could have been; but two distinct comings of the Lord (one past, and the other future) have broken up the matter into these separate parts. That is, we have had accomplishment in the past; and we look for future fulfilment of all the bright anticipations of the coming kingdom. After the one, and before the other, the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven is the power of Christian blessedness, and as we know also of the church, no less than of preaching the gospel everywhere.

And when the Lord Jesus appears by and by, there will be not the gospel as it is now preached, nor the Holy Ghost as He is now sent down from heaven, but the word going forth and the Spirit poured out suitably to that day. There may be a still more diffusive action of the Holy Ghost when He is shed upon all flesh, not merely as a sample, but to an extent (I do not say depth) beyond what was accomplished on the day of Pentecost. In due time there will be the fulfilment of the prophecies to the letter. Christianity accordingly, it will be observed, comes in between these two extremes -- after the first, and before the second, coming of Christ; and this is exactly what Peter shows us in this epistle.

Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope perfectly, &c. {1 Pet. 1:13}.

Again in 1 Pet. 1:14:

As children of obedience, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as he which hath called you is holy, be ye also holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy {1 Pet. 1:14-16}.

There is an instance of what I referred to -- that the essential moral principles of the Old Testament are in no wise disturbed by Christianity. And, indeed, you find this not merely in Peter but in Paul. Paul will tell you so, even after he shows that the Christian is dead to the law; and then a term is used to show that he does not at all mean that the righteousness of the law is not fulfilled in us, but that it is. In fact, the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in no one but the Christian. A man under the law never fulfils the law: the man who is under grace is the one that does, and the only one; for the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in those who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit {Rom. 8:4}.

So Peter takes up a passage of Leviticus, and shows that it is strictly true -- yea, if one can employ such an expression,
more true (of course meaning by this more manifestly true) under the Christian than under the Jewish system. As all know, many things were allowed then for the hardness of the heart, which are thoroughly condemned now. That is, the holiness of the Christian is fuller and deeper than that of the Jew. Hence he can fairly take up the quotation from the law, not at all conveying that we were under law, but with an a fortiori force. As Christians, we are under a far more searching principle, namely, the grace of God (Rom. 6), which assuredly ought to produce far better and more fruitful results.

It is clearly seen how he treats these Jews, and what they used to boast of.

But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. And if ye call on the Father

-- that is, if ye call on Him as Father --

who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning in fear: forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God {1 Pet. 1:15-21}.

What can be more magnificent than this setting of the Christian on his own proper basis?

It will be observed here that there are two motives to holiness: the first is that He has called us; the next, that we call Him, and this by the sweet and near title of Father. It is no longer relationship with and recognition of a God that rules and governs. This was known in Israel, but it could in no wise draw out the affections in the same way as calling Him Father. We are told and meant to know, that as He called us by His grace, so we should call on Him as Father. It is after the pattern, not of a subject with a sovereign, but of a child’s dependence on a parent. To this double motive there is added another consideration on which it all rests, and without which neither of these things could be. How is it that He has been pleased thus to call us? and how is it that we can call Him Father? The answer is this:

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ. The Jews were all familiar with a ransom price that used to be paid in silver. But it did not matter whether one gave silver or gold, it was all corruptible; and to what did it come at last? The precious blood of Christ is another thing altogether; and there alone is efficacy found before God; so also His incorruptible seed revealing Himself is planted in the heart of the saint.

They were redeemed then with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. It was no new thought. Though but newly brought out, it was in point of fact the oldest of all purposes. Did they boast about their law, the apostle can say that Christianity -- the present blessed revelation of grace in Christ -- was in God’s mind before the foundation of the world. Therefore there could be no comparison on that score, not even for a Jew. And this was an important point; for the Jews reasoned, that because God brings out one thing to-day, He could not bring out another tomorrow. They consider that, because God is unchangeable, He has not a will of His own. Why even your dog has a will; and I am sure you have a will yourselves. And here is the wonderful infatuation of unbelief. That very system of reason that makes so much of the will of man, and is not a little proud of it, would deprive God Himself of a will, and under penalty of man’s accusation of injustice forbids its exercise according to His own pleasure. But thus it is He brings out one part of His character at one time, and another part at another time. Therefore he would have them know that, as to the novelty with which they reproach Christianity, it was altogether a mistake; for the Lamb without blemish and without spot, though only lately slain, was foreordained before the foundation of the world. When he refers to Him as a

lamb without blemish and without spot {1 Pet. 1:19},

he evidently points to their types, yea, to Christ before the types, because we had that from the very beginning in the first recorded sacrifice, long before there was a Jew, and still more before the law. To what did it all point? To

the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

It is plain that, if God foreordained it, He at the same time took care to act on it, and this is long before either Judaism or the law.

Thus there was a most thorough conviction of the folly of the Jewish argument as to Christianity being a mere novelty; but it was

manifest in these last times for you who by him do believe in God {1 Pet. 1:20, 21}.

Here it is not merely believing in the Messiah, but believing in

God that raised him up from the dead {1 Pet. 1:21}.

Now I do not believe there ever can be settled peace in a man’s soul till he has confidence in God Himself, according to the truth of His raising up Christ from the dead. Simply to believe in Christ may make a man quite happy, but it never of itself gives solid unbreakable peace. What brings a man into that peace which resists all efforts from without to take it, all weakness within in giving it up, is the certainty that all is clear with God. It is He that raises the question of conscience in His sight, and this is so much the more dreadful, because when renewed we know better our own subtlety and His unstained essential holiness. It belongs to the condition in which man is that, being fallen, and yet having a conscience of the good that alas! he does not do, and of the
evil that he does, he has a dread of God, knowing that He
must bring into judgment the good that he knew but did not,
and the evil that he knew and did. So guilty man cannot but
quake, still by scepticism he may reason himself out of his
fears, or he can find a religion that soothes and destroys his
conscience. But that man has this conscience in his natural
state is most certain.

Christianity alone settles all questions. There we have not
merely the blessed Saviour who in unspeakable love comes
down and attracts the heart, and searches the conscience, but
He settles all for us with God by redemption. Nor is it only
that He comes down from God, but He goes up to God. That
we receive the peace we need as Christians is mainly
connected, not with His coming out from God, but with His
going back to God; as it is said here,

Who by him do believe in God that

-- what? Gave Him to shed His blood? There can be nothing
without this: impossible to have any holy and permanent
blessing for the soul without it; nevertheless this is not what
is said. We have the value of Christ’s blood already spoken
of, but now it is added of God that He

raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory.

Where? In His own presence. Even the kingdom on earth
does not suffice. According to Christian light nothing will do
but ability to stand before the glory of God. And this by
Christ’s work is made good for us, because the very one that
became responsible for our sins on the cross is in glory now.
God has raised Him from the dead and given Him glory. The
consequence is that all for ever is made clear and settled for
those who believe in God, that our

faith and hope might be

-- not “in Christ,” though it is so, assuredly, but more than
this --

in God {1 Pet. 1:21}. This is the more important, because of itself it completely
dissipates a thought as common as it is grievous to the Lord,
that Christ is the one in whom the love is, and that His task
for the most part is to turn away the totally opposite feeling
that is in God Himself. Not so; for as He came out in the love
of God, who none the less must by this very Christ judge
every soul that lives in sin and unbelief, He would not go
back to heaven until He had by His own sacrifice completely
put sin away. But this was the will of God (Psa. 40;
Heb. 10). Thus He goes in peaceful triumph into the presence
of God, establishing our faith and hope in God, and not
merely in Himself.

But there is another thing to be considered.

Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying
the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the
brethren,

-- for this is the sure effect --

see that ye love one another with a pure heart
fervently {1 Pet. 1:22}.

There was the best and weightiest reason for this, because the
nature thus produced in them is this holy nature that comes by

grace from God Himself.

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of
incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and
abideth; because all flesh is as grass, and all its glory
as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the
flower thereof falleth away; but the word of the Lord
endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the
gospel is preached unto you {1 Pet. 1:23-25}.

Next he shows some of the privileges as well as wants of
the Christian. First he is surrounded by an evil world, but,
besides, he has not lost in fact something nearer that is quite
as bad as what is in the world.

Laying aside,

he says,

all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies,
and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the
sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby
to salvation {1 Pet. 2:1, 2}.

To salvation

you will not find in your common Bibles, but it is none the
less true for all that. The apostle represents us as growing by
the word to salvation (i.e., the end in glory). It is not often
that words are thus left out. The more usual fault of those
who copied the scriptures was that they added words. They
assimilated passages one to another; they thought that what
was right in one case must be right in another; and thus the
tendency was to blunt the fine edge of the sword of the Spirit
which is the word of God. But in this case they omitted. At
first sight, perhaps, these words may be startling to some,
that is, to such as think that the sense of

salvation

is weakened thereby. But you need never be afraid of trusting
God or His word. Never fear for the honour of the scripture,
never shrink from committing yourself to what God says. I
have no hesitation in saying that this is in my judgment what
God said, if we are to be guided by the most ancient and best
authorities. 37

If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious; to
whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed
indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious, ye
also as lively stones are built up a spiritual house, a
holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices,
acceptable to God by Jesus Christ {1 Pet. 2:3-5}.

Two characters of priesthood are here shewn us. We have
first seen one of them, --

a holy priesthood;

there is another lower down, in 1 Pet. 2:9, where he says,

Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood.

Both flow from Christ and are in communion with Him who
is now carrying on a priesthood according to the pattern of

37. In fact but one uncial (Cod. Angelicus Romanus) of the ninth century
with many cursives warrants the omission; but N, A, B, C, K, more than
fifty cursives, and all the versions but the Ambic of the Parisian Polyglott
support the words. The early quotations, Greek and Latin, save of
Occumenius, point to the same reading.
Aaron; but in His own person is a priest after the order of Melchisedec. That is, He is a royal priest just as truly as His functions are now exercised on the ground of sacrifice, interceding after the Aaronic pattern within the veil but a veil that is rent. He is now fulfilling the Levitical types in the holiest of all. On this is founded the spiritual priesthood, and in consequence we who are His draw near and offer up spiritual sacrifices. Besides that, not only is there holiness in drawing near to God, but royal dignity stamped upon the believer. This too is of the greatest importance for us all to remember and seek to realize by faith. Where is each to be proved? Before God we bow down in praise and adoration; before the world we are conscious of the glory grace has given us. We do honour to the world and shame to this our place by seeking its favours. Alas! how often and readily the Christian forgets his proper dignity. Let us then bear in mind that we are a royal priesthood

to show forth,
as it is said here,

the virtues of him who hath called us out of darkness
into his marvellous light [1 Pet. 2:9].

But when it is a question of drawing near, let us not forget that we are a holy priesthood. We can all understand this: holiness, when one has to do with God; royalty, before the world when the temptation is to forget our heavenly honour.

Which in time past were not a people, but are now
the people of God: which had not obtained mercy,
but now have obtained mercy [1 Pet. 2:10].

Here again we have a scripture of the Old Testament applied; and this has often been, and still is to this day, exceedingly misunderstood; as if the persons here spoken of must be Gentiles because they are called the strangers of the dispersion. It means Jews, and none but Jews, who believe in the Lord Jesus. What he refers to is the loss of their title to be the people of God, which Israel sustained at the time of the Babylonish captivity. They then ceased to be manifestly God's people. Accordingly their land became the possession of the Gentiles; and so it has gone on to this day. As we know, from that day to this there has never been a real recovery, but only the return of a remnant for special purposes for a season. The times of the Gentiles are still in course of accomplishment. They are not yet finished; and they must be punctually fulfilled. Hence it is evident that, as long as the times of the Gentiles proceed, the Jews cannot regain their ancient title, nor become the real owners of Emmanuel's land. Indeed, it is too plain a fact for any one to dispute. All this time they are not a people; they are dependent on the will of their Gentile masters. But even now grace gives the believer (here believing Jews) to enter that place; we are now God's people. We do not wait for times and seasons. Israel must wait; but we do not.

This is just the difference between the Christian and the Jew. The Christian does not belong to the world, and consequently is not bound by accidents of time. He has everlasting life now, and is a heavenly person even while upon the earth. This is ChristianitY. Thus he says to the Jews addressed that they were not a people (that is, in the days of their unbelief), but are now. So far was their believing in Christ from taking them out of the people, it is then alone that they became a people. They

were not a people, but now are the people of God;
they

had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy [1 Pet. 2:10].

It is a quotation from Hos. 2.

And this is exceedingly interesting, because if the prophet be compared, it will be seen to illustrate what has been remarked before -- the difference between the present accomplishment made good in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, and the future fulfillment of the prophecies. If persons take the actual application as the fulfillment of the prophecies, it in fact not only nullifies the future of scripture, but destroys the beauty and point of the present; for what the apostle intimates is, that they had obtained mercy now, though none were yet sown in the earth. These Christian Jews were not sown in the earth. The earth will be sown with the seed of God when the Jewish nation, as such, obtains mercy. They will be the greatest people on the face of the earth, and all the Gentiles shall own it. They will have everything at their command, and worthily use all for God. Not only are they to be set publicly at the head of the nations, but God himself will link His own glory from above with them as His earthly people here below, and nothing but peace, righteousness, and plenty will be found all over the earth in that day of glory. Such will be

that day [Hos. 2:16-23],
and of that day Hosea prophesies. You can easily judge whether that day is come now. It is only a theologian who finds a difficulty, His traditions wrap him up in fog.

I do not think it requires much argument to show whether under the gospel the Jews or the world are in such a condition as the prophet describes, or whether there is anything in progress that is intended or calculated to bring about such a result. But what will not men believe, provided it be not in the Bible? I admit that what is in the Bible requires faith; and this is as it should be. It is, however, too evident that there is nothing like incredulity for swallowing anything that panders to the first man, and leaving out the glory of the Second. In the word of God, then, we find that the accomplishment of the prophecy supposes an earthly place, with visible power and glory given to the Jewish people. But the wonderful place given to the Christian is that, though we do become the people of God now, whether Jew or Gentile, and although the believing Jew does obtain mercy now, he is not sown on the earth, but called out for heaven, and, in consequence, becomes a pilgrim and stranger here below till Jesus appears. This will not be the case when the Jews shall be brought back to the land. In a certain sense they are strangers now; but it is an awful sense, because it is the fruit of judgment. They are scattered over the earth, and can find no rest for their souls, any more than their feet. This is notorious to every one -- even to themselves. Least of all can the Jews be said to be sown in the land of Palestine. I do not mean that they may not
acquire previously a delusive glory; nor that the antichrist by fraud will not palm himself off as the Messiah, and settle some of them in the land, according to Dan. 11. Nor do I believe that this day is far off. The hour of temptation is near.

But while fully looking for this, it is sweet to see the place of the believing Jew now as divine wisdom here applies Hosea, *mutatis mutandis*. Although he is of the people of God, instead of getting an earthly character by Christianity, on the contrary he becomes a pilgrim and stranger.

Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul [1 Pet. 2:11].

It is as if God had purposely put 1 Pet. 2:11 to negative the conclusions which men have drawn from a misunderstanding of 1 Pet. 2:10.

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Then he begins his exhortations, and first of all with the personal snares of every day, with what the Christian had to contend with in himself. Next he proceeds to bring in what had to do with others. There he says,

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether to the king, as supreme; or to governors, as to them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and praise to them that do well [1 Pet. 2:13, 14].

I suppose there was a danger of these Christian Jews being somewhat turbulent. Certainly the Jews of old were rarely good subjects. They were apt to rise against oppression and to fail in obedience to a superior, at least among the heathen. They were ever a rebellious people, as we know; and the Christian Jews were in danger of using their Christianity in order to justify insubjection. We can easily comprehend it. They could see how gross, dark, and dissolve these Pagan governors were; and in such circumstances one needs the distinct sense of God’s will to abide in the duty of obedience. “How can we obey men that worship stocks and stones, whose very religion makes them immoral and degraded?” However this may have been, it is of all importance for the Christian that he should be established in the place of patient submission; as we see Paul elsewhere taking especial pains to insist that the Christians in Rome should obey, even where they had to do with one of the most abandoned men that had ever governed the empire, persecuting themselves to death a short time after. Nevertheless the apostle there claims the most unqualified subjection to the powers that be. So here we find that the Christian Jews, who might have exonerated themselves from the burden laid on them by their heathen masters, are earnestly exhorted by the apostle Peter to do their bidding for the Lord’s sake. I do not say that there are no limits. Obedience is always right, but not to man when he would force the dishonour of God. Nevertheless obedience abides the principle of the Christian. But the lower obedience is absorbed by the higher one when they come into collision; and this is the only seeming exception.

After this Peter not only branches out into the outward life, but takes particular note of the family and its relationships. Some of those addressed were domestics, whether or not they were slaves. The apostle Paul pressed on the Christian slave the beauty and responsibility of obedience; but Peter insists on it whether a man be a slave or not. This is founded on the very principle of Christianity itself; that is, doing good, suffering for it, and taking it patiently. I admit it requires faith; but then the Lord cannot but look for faith in Christian people. Nay, we have Christ Himself brought in to enforce and illustrate it. It is not merely the Christian who is called to this, but this is what Christ was called to.

Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again [1 Pet. 2:21-23].

To be reviled was a pain to which as domestics they would be particularly exposed, as well as to suffer in all sorts of ways. What had Christ not gone through in the same path?

When he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree [1 Pet. 2:23, 24].

He suffered in other ways; in this He stands alone for us; that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls [1 Pet. 2:24, 25].

Since He came and showed the perfect pattern, it was less than ever the time to sanction disobedience; it was more than ever unbecoming to shirk the path of suffering.

The exhortation is not limited to slaves. Here we find the various relations of life practically met. At any rate the most important part is noticed; and in particular the great social bond, wives and husbands (1 Pet. 3). Then comes the general exhortation:

Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, pitiful, lowly-minded: not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing [1 Pet. 3:8, 9].

What a place for the Christian! -- called to blessing, and to be a blessing. And this is fortified, singular to say, (but confirming what has been already remarked) by the Psalms. He had quoted the law in 1 Pet. 1, the prophets in 1 Pet. 2, and now the psalms in 1 Pet. 3. Thus all the living oracles of God are turned into use for the Christian, only you must take care that you do not abuse them or any part of them.

For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil [1 Pet. 3:10-12].

And then he asks,
And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers
of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts {1 Pet. 3:13-15}.

This leads to another important point; that if we do suffer, it ought never to be for sin, and for the affecting reason that Christ has once for all suffered for sins. Let this be enough. Christ has suffered for sins; He has had there, if we may so say, a monopoly; and there let it end: why should we? He alone was competent to suffer for sin. We ought never to suffer but for His name, unless it be for righteousness, as is said here, --

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the Spirit: by which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison {1 Pet. 3:18, 19}.

Carefully observe that Peter does not say that Christ went to prison and preached to the spirits there. No such words are used, nor is this what he means. The spirits are characterised as in prison. They are waiting there for the day of judgment. God may have judged them in this world, but this is not all. He is going to judge them in the next world. There may have been a judgment, but this is not the judgment. So he says these very spirits which are spoken of were

once disobedient, when the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was preparing, wherein few, that is eight souls, were saved through water {1 Pet. 3:20}.

It is not a description of all that died in unbelief, but of a generation favoured with a special testimony and smitten by a particular stroke of judgment. The preaching was in the days of Noah. It was just before that judgment fell on them, and this because they despised the testimony of Christ through Noah. Just as the Spirit of Christ prophesied in the prophets, so the Spirit of Christ preached by Noah. There is no difficulty that I see about it. There is nothing at all in the verse that warrants a web of doctrine strange to the rest of the Bible. It is a mistake to construe it of one that knows not what took place in the lower parts of the earth. Nothing is said of preaching in prison, but to the imprisoned spirits -- not when they were there. He is speaking about the people that heard Noah, and despised the word of the Lord then. It was not Noah's own spirit that preached; it was the Spirit of Christ.

It may be well to point out that the Spirit is used particularly in connection with Noah, as we find in Gen. 6:

My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh.

There was a term of patience assigned:

Yet his days shall be a hundred and twenty years {Gen. 6:3}.

That is, the Spirit went on striving in testimony to men all that time. Then the flood came and took them all away; but their spirits are now kept in prison waiting for that judgment which has no end. And why does Peter notice them particularly? For this reason, -- that very few were saved then, whilst a great many perished. On reflection it will be evident that there is no instance so suitable as this for the argument in hand -- so few saved and so many perishing. The unbelieving might taunt the Christians with their scanty numbers, while the great mass still remained Jews, and with the absurdity of such a conclusion to the coming of Messiah. There is no force in that argument, the Christian can reply; for, when the flood came, only a few were saved after all, as is shown by the first book of Moses, their own indisputably inspired history. It is beyond cavil that the many perished then, and still fewer were saved than the Christian Jews at that time. Thus the passage is sufficiently plain. There is not the slightest excuse for misinterpreting the language, or for allowing anything unknown to the rest of scripture. It is a solemn warning to unbelief founded on plainly revealed facts before all eyes in this world, and not something to be understood as relating to another world.

The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the request of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ {1 Pet. 3:21}.

This, again, is somewhat peculiarly put in our version. It is not exactly “the answer of a good conscience.” The real meaning may make the difficulty appear to be greater for a moment (as, I suppose, the truth often, if not always, does); but when received and understood, what has such strength of appeal to the conscience? The word is a somewhat difficult one; but I believe the force is that it is what conscience wants and asks for from God. Now, when a conscience is touched by the Holy Spirit, what is it that satisfies such a conscience? Clearly nothing less than acceptance in righteousness before God; and this is precisely the position that baptism does set forth. That is to say, it is not simply the blood of Christ, which indeed is never the meaning of baptism; still less is it the life of Christ: baptism means nothing of the sort. It really is founded on the death of Christ; and therein further our due place is shown us by His resurrection. Thus he says,

The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us.

Never do we see salvation in its real force so affirmed apart from resurrection. You may find that which meets guilt in death, but never is salvation short of or separable from the power of resurrection. Hence, when he says it saves us, he necessarily brings in resurrection.

Baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh . . .)

He did not mean the mere outward act of baptism. This could save nobody; but what baptism represents does save. It declares that the Christian man has a new place and standing -- not in the first Adam at all, but in the Second in the presence of God -- man without sin, and accepted according to the acceptance of Christ before God. This it is that baptism sets forth; and what of course as a sign it brings one into.

Baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the request of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is gone into heaven, and is on the right
hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him [1 Pet. 3:21, 22].

Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind [1 Pet. 4:1].

In this chapter (1 Pet. 4) we come to the divine government in dealing with nature opposing itself to the will of God.

For he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin [1 Pet. 4:1].

If you yield to nature, you gratify it; but if you suffer in refusing its wishes, then he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin.

It is practical; and holiness costs suffering in this world. Suffering is the way in which power in practice is found against the flesh; so that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God [1 Pet. 4:2].

The time past might well suffice for the wretched gratification of self. Do men wonder at one’s abstaining? They are going to be judged.

For for this cause was the gospel preached to the dead also, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit [1 Pet. 4:6].

Thus he shows that even if you look at those that are dead, there was no difference. They too, those who had been before them, had been put to the proof in this way. He is keeping up the link with saints of old by a general principle. Whatever the form, God never gives up His righteous government, though there is His grace also. Hence, if any received the gospel, they were delivered from judgment, and lived according to God in the Spirit. If they despised it, they none the less suffered the consequences.

But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins [1 Pet. 4:7, 8].

After this episode which has to do with men here, not in the unseen world, he returns to the relative duties of Christians, and exhorts them to watchfulness with sobriety, to fervent love, and also to use hospitality one to another without grudging [1 Pet. 4:9].

And then he takes up what is distinctly spiritual power, which should be used not in charity only but with conscience before God, and for His glory through our Lord Jesus. We saw in a similarly characteristic way in the epistle of James the connection of his moral aim with teaching. But they both suppose an open door for ministry among Christians in the Christian assembly. Why was there the mighty action of the Spirit of God producing such various gifts for profit if they did not create the responsibility to exercise them?

No Christian should think or talk about a right of ministry; for although liberty of ministry may be legitimate enough in itself, still I think it is a phrase apt to be misunderstood. It might easily be interpreted as if it meant a right for any one to speak. This I deny altogether. God has a right to use whom He pleases, according to His own sovereign will and wisdom; but the truth is, that if you have received a gift, you are not only at liberty but rather bound to use it in Christ’s name. It is not a question of merely having license. Such a principle may be very well for man; but responsibility is the word for men of God,

as each man hath received the gift [1 Pet. 4:10].

It is not merely certain men, one or two, but as each man,

whatever the number, whether few or many.

As each man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, [let him speak] as [the] oracles of God [1 Pet. 4:10, 11].

According to this none ought ever to speak unless he has a thorough conviction that he is giving out God’s mind and message, as suited for that time and those souls. Were this felt adequately, would it not hinder a great many from speaking? Nor is there any reason to fear that silence in such a case would inflict a real loss on the church of God. It does not seem to be of such prime importance that much need be said. The great matter is, that what is spoken should be from God. Persons ought not to speak unless they have a certainty that what they wish to say is not only true (this is not what is said) but the actual will of God for the occasion. The speaker should be God’s mouthpiece for making His mind known there and then. This is to speak

as oracles of God [1 Pet. 4:11].

It is not merely speaking according to His oracles, which is the usual way in which men interpret the passage, and thence derive their license for speaking as they judge fitting without thinking of God’s will. They think they have an understanding of scripture, and that they may therefore speak to profit; but it is a totally different thing if one desire only to speak as God’s mouthpiece, though it is granted that one may here as elsewhere mistake and fail.

The principle, however, is sound; and may we heed it in conscience, looking to the Lord’s grace in our weakness.

If any man speak, [let it be] as oracles of God; if any man minister, [let it be] as of the ability which God giveth [1 Pet. 4:11].

Let it be observed here that ministry is distinguished from speaking. What a vast change must have passed over Christendom, seeing that now a man is chiefly thought a minister because he speaks! whereas real service of the saints is as precious in its place as any speaking can be.

If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth.

Ministry, then, is clearly in itself a distinct thing from speaking; it is another kind of service to which he is called of
God. It is granted that, even in connection with spiritual gift in the way of speaking, there is such a thing as the natural ability of the person taken into account; but this is not the gift, though it be the suited vehicle for it. We must always distinguish the ability of the man from the spiritual gift which the Lord gives; and, besides both, there is also the right use of the gift. One must exercise and give oneself up to the cultivation of that gift which God has given. There is nothing contrary to sound truth or principle in that, but indeed a very great defect in those who do not believe it; in fact, it is flying in the face of scripture. And scripture is clear and peremptory as to all these things.

He,
it is said of Christ,

gave them gifts {talents -- money}, to each man according to his several ability {Matt. 25:15}.

There we have the gift, and this given according to the man’s ability before he was converted. That is the outward framework of the gift, which latter is suited no doubt to that ability; but the gift itself is the power of the Spirit according to the grace of Christ. No ability constitutes a gift; but the spiritual gift does not supersede natural ability, which becomes the channel of the gift, as the gift is given and works in accordance with that ability. But there is need also of present strength from God to those who look to Him. Thus He is in all things glorified through Jesus Christ,

to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever {1 Pet. 4:11}.

Next we have the trial that the saints were passing through alluded to, and the call to suffer not for righteousness merely but for Christ’s sake. Finally a warning is given as to the importance of suffering according to God’s will, committing meanwhile their souls in well-doing to Him as a faithful Creator. He is righteous; He is jealous of His house; but if this be serious for His own, where shall the sinner appear?

* * *

Again we have an exhortation to the elders (1 Pet. 5). Here it is a pain to be obliged once more to make a depreciatory remark on our common English version. It is indeed a forcible and, in general, a faithful version, but it not seldom fails in accuracy. The elders are told to feed or shepherd the flock of God which was among them, exercising the oversight, not by necessity, but willingly; not for base gain, but readily, &c. They have to bear in mind first that the flock is God’s. If a man does not carry the sense in his soul that it is God’s flock, I do not think he is fit to be an elder or in any other office of spiritual trust: he is far from the right ground for being a blessing to what, after all, is God’s flock. In short, we find here too a guard which shows the meaning more clearly.

Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God’s heritage {1 Pet. 5:2, 3}.

It will be observed that “God’s” is inserted in italics.

Now there need be no hesitation in declaring that the phrase does not mean God’s heritage at, all, but another idea wholly different. The true drift is this --

Nor as lording it over your possessions.

The elders are not to treat the flock as if it belonged to them. This is exactly what modern presbyters think they may and ought to do every day of their lives. It is into this very snare that unbelief has brought men in Christendom. It is the constant and notorious source of the difficulties that one has continually to contend with, because feelings are roused by this -- all sorts of jealousies and wounded feelings are created by a position so false. In short, one may find here and there a truly excellent man, and, we will suppose, a number of godly people. But then they are “his congregation”; they think so, and the godly man really believes it. He thinks they are his congregation, and they think so too. The consequence is that when minds get disturbed, it may be, about their position, then all sorts of difficulties come in. He feels exceedingly wounded because, as he will tell you very often, “Why, it is one of the best of my people. I have lost the cream of my congregation.” Accordingly he is exceedingly annoyed because one of the most spiritual of his congregation goes away, though it may be to follow God’s word more faithfully; and no doubt there is a great deal of pain and feeling on the part of the member of the congregation who is leaving his minister.

Now all this is here judged and set aside as quite wrong. The elders are exhorted and warned. There are those who guide, and it is a most proper thing. At the time of this epistle, it was in due order. Now, I need not tell you, things are in a certain measure of confusion. You may have the real substance of the truth, but you cannot have it in all official propriety at the present time. However, apart from that, on which I do not mean to enter more to-night, one thing is remarkable, that even when all was in apostolic order, and where pastors and teachers and prophets and so on were, and besides, where the elders had been fitly appointed by the apostles themselves or by apostolic men, even there and at that very time they were exhorted against the notion of considering, “This is my congregation, and that is your leader.” Nothing of the sort is ever said in God’s word but what excludes it.

What they were here directed to was to

feed the flock of God {1 Pet. 5:2}.

I repeat, it is God’s flock, not yours; and you are not to lord over it as if it were your own belongings. If it were your heritage, you would have certain rights; but the truth is that he who stands in the position of an elder has no small responsibility. Assuredly he is to shepherd the flock, and this as God’s flock, not his own. Where this is duly weighed, it is wonderful what a change is produced in the mind, tone, and temper -- a change both in those who tend the flock, and in those who are cared for; because then God is looked to, and there is no petty feeling of infringing the rights of man in one form or another. It is not then a question of wounding; for why should it hurt you, if I see a particular truth and must act according to it? Why should this be a cause for vexation?
The truth is that the assumption of “my flock,” or “yours,” is the root of endless mischief. It is God’s flock; and if a person is charged of the Lord to shepherd His flock, how blessed the trust!

The rest of the chapter consists of exhortations to the younger ones, and finally to all, with a prayer that

the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, when ye have suffered a while, himself shall make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be the glory and the might for the ages of the ages. Amen. By Silvanus, the faithful brother, as I suppose, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand. She that is at Babylon, elected together with you, salute you; and Marcus my son. Greet ye one another with a kiss of love. Peace be with you all in Christ Jesus {1 Pet. 5:10-14}.

{- Second Peter -}

In the Second Epistle of Peter (and here I must be brief, because of the hour; and I may be brief because Jude will afford us a further consideration of it) we have the same substantial truth of God’s righteous government maintained. But the apostle here supplements his first letter by bringing in its effect on the world in that coming day, and especially in its judgment of Christendom or corrupted Christianity. Written of course for the guidance of the saints, it may well serve as a warning to sinners, whether in the profane world or as to those that abuse righteousness and truth.

There is an expression in 2 Pet. 1:3 to which I particularly call your attention.

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us by glory and by virtue.

It is really not to glory and virtue, but by His own glory and by virtue. This seems to me an important statement of the Holy Ghost’s to understand. What serves to make it plain is this: -- Adam was not “called” when in Paradise. When innocent, he was not called by God’s own glory and by virtue. What Adam was bound to do was just to stay where he was. That is, he was responsible to do the will of God, or, rather, not to do what God prohibited in his case. There was a simple test of obedience. It was not a thing that Adam really needed in the smallest degree. He had everything that he wanted and much more, for God showed Himself to be one that delights in abundantly blessing when He put man in Paradise. The business of man, then, was to keep his first estate; he should have simply abode in his position. When he listened to the devil, this was a call not by God’s own glory and virtue, but to do the devil’s will. It was a seeking of his own independence by disobeying God’s express word. Our calling is by God’s own glory.

The whole principle of Christianity is just this. It takes the believer out of the place in which he naturally is, and

...now in sin; and therefore it is spoken of as a calling. The Christian “calling” supposes that the gospel, where received, deals with the soul by the power of the Spirit of God; and that he who receives it is called out of the condition in which man is now plunged by sin, not put back again into the position of Adam, but taken into another position altogether. It is no longer a question of man on earth; he is called by God’s own glory and by virtue. It is by God’s own glory, because if God saves, He calls to stand in nothing less than that glory. The declared effect of sin is, as it is said in Rom. 3, that all

come short of the glory of God {Rom. 3:23}.

By this they are now measured. Are they fit to stand in presence of the glory of God? The glory of God is the standard of judgment now for a sinner; it is no question of regaining the lost paradise or of keeping the law, even if it were possible. The blessedness of the gospel is that it calls a man not to put him in the place of the unfallen man or of a Jew on the earth, but by God’s own glory; and along with this “by virtue.” There is a holy restraint put on the allowance of the flesh in any respect whatever. It brings in not “virtue” as the first great point, but God’s own glory, and then virtue along with this (that is, the moral courage which refuses the gratification of the old nature).

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature {2 Pet. 1:4}.

Such is the efficacy of the call of grace. A new nature is communicated which loves the will of God, and abhors the evil whereby Satan has inundated the world.

Having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust {2 Pet. 1:4}.

Then he shows there is no time for waiting or ease.

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue

(or the moral courage I have already described);

and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness love {2 Pet. 1:5-7}.

These last two qualities are not the same.

Love

is a great deal more and deeper than

brotherly kindness.

The latter makes one’s brother the prominent object; the former tests everything by God and His will and glory. Therefore you may find a Christian very full of brotherly love, but sadly at fault when the test of love comes, which feels and insists that the first of all duties is that God should have His way.

By this we know,

as John said, (and who knew love better?)

that we love the children of God, if we love God, and keep His commandments {1 John 5:2}. 

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In the next part of the chapter we have the kingdom introduced, which is really the main object of Peter’s testimony in the first epistle as well as in the second. Being about to depart himself, he as it were throws open the blessed prospect of the Lord’s interference to put aside evil in the world, and display His own power and goodness here below. Such is the kingdom that will be brought in at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. His coming, or presence, embraces the kingdom within its wide circumference.

But then in stating this, the utmost pains are taken to show that there is something better than the prospect of the kingdom, glorious as it is; and this is of capital importance to see clearly. Thus 2 Pet. 1:19 opens the matter, which I must give you rather more exactly than as it stands in our version:

We have also the word of prophecy more confirmed, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed.

They were quite right in holding fast the old prophetic scriptures. Even as Jews they had known those portions of the word of God, and the apostle in no way blames them for adhering to them tenaciously. So far, it was quite right.

Ye do well that ye take heed to them. It was needless to press attention with greater warmth; but still he commends the heed they paid to the prophetic word of the Old Testament. Yet study it either in the New Testament or in the Old Testament, one cannot but dread when prophecy becomes the all-absorbing object. It is not meant deeply to engage the affections. It may occupy the mind to the exclusion of what is better still. Its nature forbids it from adequately filling the heart that is purified by faith; nor does the apostle mean that it should ever have such a place. When he says,

Ye do well that ye take heed to it,

he adds the instructive comparison,

as unto a lamp that shineth in a dark place.

This is what prophecy resembles. He does not then stop; but points us to another and brighter light --

until the day dawn, and the morning-star arise in your hearts [2 Pet. 1:19].

He means that prophecy is a divinely given lamp for this dark scene. None can despise without loss the light it casts on this obscure place, the world which is going to be judged. It shows us the awful end and thereby guards us all the way through.

As a lamp for the dark, prophecy is therefore excellent; it is given of God for this purpose; and no Christian can afford to slight or overlook it as an unprofitable study, which does not claim and cannot reward his heed. They were quite right, then; but let them see to it that the heart possess a far better treasure. And what can this be? Not Christianity indeed as a whole, but the Christian hope. The Lord’s coming, and all that is bound up with Him on high as the hope of the Christian and of the church, must not be lowered to a mere prophetic event. Prophecy deals with the earth, with the Jew, with the nations, with evil here below; prophecy declares men to be so bad that the Lord must come and judge them, and then introduce His own kingdom, no longer morally and in testimony, but in power and glory. But is this all that Christ is for us? Do you confound the Christian hope with the judgment of Babylon, the overthrow of the Gentiles, the restoration of Israel? A Christian has the faith that in principle all evil has been judged long ago in the cross; that it has been absolutely and perfectly condemned, beyond whatever can be in the creature here below. His hope, therefore, rises far above the revelation of that display of power in righteousness as well as mercy which is to put aside evil, and then bless a long guilty and miserable world with peace and joy and every form of creature goodness. The Christian hope is the taking the Christian out of the world altogether to be in glory with Christ, the object of his heart. Therefore Peter says,

Until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts.

When does he mean by this expression? When the Christian lays hold of this hope; when he is not merely warned by prophecy, but has his heart reached and filled with the heavenly hope, the light of a better day, yea, Christ Himself the source and centre of it all.

Accordingly,

till the day dawn
does not mean till the day come -- till the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings, and the wicked are trodden down like ashes under the feet. This is not at all the meaning of the phrase. It is the dawn of day in the heart; it is a hope that should be realized now because we are children of the day. Consequently we ought to have, as a present thing, that daylight dawning, and the morning star arising in our hearts. A soul born of God might believe all that is in the prophecies -- and it is well to heed it all -- but this is not enough. Not the downfall of Nineveh, nor the judgment of the great whore, nor the destruction of the beast, is the Christian hope. Our hope is that we and all Christians are to be taken out of the world, and translated into heavenly glory. Consequently the light of the lamp does not suffice; we need also daylight. Good as the lamp is, its main value in an obscure place is

till daylight dawn
-- not till we acquire more of its own light, but till a brighter character of light, daylight, dawn. It is not the actual arrival of the day that he means, but the light of day before itself comes:

Till daylight dawn, and the morning-star arise in your hearts.

Christ is made known in this heavenly light for the Christian. It is not Christ dealing with the world and judging the nations. This is the way in which Christ is described in prophecy. But not thus is Christ set before the Christian.

In short, the apostle means that it is well to hold fast the prophetic lamp, which he did not want to disparage in any way, provided it were kept in its proper place. It foreshows the judgment of the world, and it separates the believer, if he believes it, from the world. But this is negative. Do we not
ourselves belong to another scene? It is all well then to turn our back on the world, which the prophetic lamp judged; but are we also turning our faces to the light that dawns from above? There are many Christians now that seem to be all occupied with the vast changes either in progress or in anticipation for the earth. About them they fritter away thought and time with no worthy, positive, sanctifying object for their affections. How can one have affection for the judgment of Babylon and the beast? I am not called to anything of the sort. The lamp shows it me, and I am glad to be warned and responsible to warn others. But am I not called to have the only worthy object filling my heart? It is Christ Himself; and this not in the execution of judgment, but in the fulness of grace about to take us out of the world to heaven, and not merely to be assessors with Himself in judging the world when He appears in glory.

Therefore I do most strenuously oppose the petty efforts that have been made to sever the expression

in our hearts
from this verse. It is a sorrow to see them, and to know that any Christians could be influenced by them. Only this morning I was looking at a book in which there was a most misleading parenthesis introduced, as if the meaning were, “Ye do well to take heed in your hearts;” thus severing the connexion of

in your hearts
from

the day dawn and the day-star arise.
What can one call this but abominable?

There is another way also in which I have seen the truth sought to be destroyed, by connecting

in your hearts
with

knowing this first,
contrary to all analogy of Peter or any one else, and in fact without the smallest reason, but with the evident object of obliterating for the heart the value of the heavenly hope. Such dealings with the text I cannot characterise as mistakes only, but as unwarrantable meddling with the word of God. There is not the slightest foundation for either the one punctuation or the other. The English version is perfectly correct in this at least.

And it may help some enquirers perhaps if I show them that Peter elsewhere thoroughly confirms this to a plain English reader. In the first epistle it is written,

Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts {1 Pet. 3:15}.
It is clear that the expression

in your hearts
is no unimportant phrase in Peter’s epistles. If we do not
sanctify the Lord God in our hearts,
we shall not gather much good either from prophecy or from the heavenly hope; but if we do, it is of the highest moment for us to have Christ as the morning-star arising in our hearts, and not such a knowledge of prophecy satisfying us as a godly Jew might once have possessed. Compare also

knowing this first (2 Pet. 3:3).
There is no connexion with

in your hearts
there any more than here.

It is difficult to speak with patience of these rash ways with the word of God. I hold it to be a grievous sin indeed to warp scripture from the purpose for which God has written it. If it be said that these innovations meant only what is good, the question is whether any are at liberty without the best reasons to change the form of the text, and particularly to do so without telling you. In this very place for instance, in a book which professes to be the authorised version of the Bible, you unsuspectingly take up the book without knowing any change has been made in the punctuation; and your hope is destroyed before you know why, -- that is, if you trust their form of the book, which the compilers meant you should.

There is another phrase that follows, on which it may be well to say a word:

No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation [2 Pet. 1:20].

Many a soul asks, What is meant by this? Of course, the error of Catholicism is not to be thought of: the remedy against making prophecy of private interpretation is in no way ecclesiastical tradition. I am speaking now to persons uninfluenced by such thoughts, and need not expose its irrelevant absurdity. But, again, there are many Protestants like Bishop Horsley who think it means that the way to hinder prophecy from being of private interpretation is to take history to interpret prophecy. In this I do confess I see little change for the better. Whether you take the church to interpret prophecy, or look into the world to read its interpretation, it is but a sorry choice, and as far as possible either way from the sense. The meaning is, that no prophecy of scripture is of its own insulated interpretation. Limit a prophecy to the particular event that is supposed to be intended by that scripture, and you make it of private interpretation. For instance, if you so regard the prophecy of Babylon’s fall in Isa. 13, 14, you make this prophecy of private interpretation. How? Because you make the event to cover the prophecy, you interpret the prophecy by the event. But this is precisely what scripture prophecy is made not to be; and it is to hinder the reader from this error that the apostle writes as he does here. The truth, on the contrary, is that all prophecy has for its object the establishment of the kingdom of Christ; and if you sever the lines of prophecy from this great central point on which they all converge, you destroy the intimate connection of these prophetic lines with the centre. It is like lopping off the branches from the tree to which they belong, or limbs from the body of which they are integral parts.

So it is with prophecy. All prophecy runs on to the kingdom of Christ, because it comes from the Holy Ghost. If it were the forecasting of men, a man might apply it to a particular event; and there it would end. It might be a
sagacious conjecture or not. But supposing it to be ever so correct, after all it is only within the limits of a man’s mind. But not so with prophecy of scripture. The Spirit of God is satisfied with no aims short of the kingdom of Christ, and hence therefore prophecy as a whole looks onward to that bright end. It may have had a partial accomplishment, a just application by the way, but it never stops short of His coming and that day.

For the very same reason, when Moses and Elias were put by Peter on the smallest approach to equality with the Lord Jesus on the mount, the Father set aside Moses and Elias with the words,

This is my beloved Son: hear ye him {Matt. 17:5}.

His object is not Moses, or Elias either: it is Christ, the beloved Son of God. So the Holy Ghost in prophecy does the selfsame thing. He had the same object as the Father -- the glory of the Lord Jesus. Only as the Father held to the glory of His Son as such, the Holy Ghost in prophecy looks to the kingdom to be put under the Lord Jesus: and so the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost {2 Pet. 1:21}.

They could not therefore have any object other than that of the Holy Ghost who inspired them; and so prophecy must be interpreted, not isolatedly, but as forming part of the Spirit’s testimony to the purpose of God in glorifying Christ.

The second chapter {2 Pet. 2} shows us the opposite side -- Satan’s instruments in defaming Christ and injuring souls -- the false teachers in Christendom, just as there had been false prophets among the people of old. What an awful character is given to them, justifying the judgment that is coming upon them!

In the last chapter {2 Pet. 3} we have not merely false teachers, corrupt in their ways as in their doctrines, but scoffers ridiculing the coming of the Lord Jesus. What is the answer of the Holy Ghost to this? Their ground was the assumed unchangeableness of the world. Oh the folly of man when he opposes God! What a confirmation it is that at this present time philosophy is precisely coming to this! Christendom is going back to heathen conclusions as fast as possible. It does not matter whether we look at the popular physiologists, geologists, naturalists, astronomers, economists, metaphysicians, historians, or any others you like, they are in general hastening to this humiliating end; that is to say, a denial of the distinct statements of scripture and an exclusion of God from His own world. Their idea is, that a sort of cycle governs nature, ever repeating itself through the same round. It is the same at bottom as Peter denounces here -- the notion that there is a perpetuity in the state of things around us.

Consequently such as believe in nature must scoff at the assertion of the Lord coming to change the face of all things. The apostle warns them to abandon that delusion; for after all God has intervened already. The God that caused the flood, and destroyed the world that once was, can destroy the world again. And this is precisely what the Lord is going to do. Therefore, if you tauntingly say,

Where is the promise of his coming? {2 Pet. 3:4}.

I answer you, not that He is coming for you, but that the day of the Lord is coming on the world. What can scoffers have to do with the coming of the Lord for His own people? You may ask with a scoff,

Where is the promise of his coming?

But we can answer with assurance that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night -- as sudden, unexpected, and unwelcome, for the judgment and destruction of the creation which is your rest and ruin. When everything has disappeared that can, and all that is to be shaken shall have been dissolved, the result will be the new heavens and new earth,

wherein dwelleth righteousness {2 Pet. 3:13},

without one scoffer more.

The believer then in the face of this is exhorted to holy conversation and godliness.

Ye therefore, beloved, seeing that ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away by the error of the wicked, should fall from your own stedfastness {2 Pet. 3:17};

for there is danger of the Christian’s contamination by the spirit of the world. What then is the preservative?

Grow in grace, and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen {2 Pet. 3:18}.
The Epistles of John have evidently a character altogether peculiar to themselves. Christ Himself personally is more before us than in any other of the inspired epistles. Nevertheless there is this difference between the Gospel and the Epistles of John: that his gospel necessarily treats of Christ in a direct and immediate way, and then the provision that He made, when He was about to leave the world and His disciples in it, by the Holy Ghost taking His place down here (these being the two chief subjects of the Gospel of John); in the Epistles, on the other hand, while Christ is still prominent, the main characteristic is to show Christ is in us, as well (so to speak) as Christ in Himself — that it is the selfsame life, Christ personally being its full perfect expression. In order to set out this astonishing truth with all clearness, the Epistle opens directly with the Lord, and this as He was manifested in this world. The Gospel begins with Christ before all worlds. Such is not the manner in which the Holy Ghost begins here.

I am aware that some have been disposed to take

That which was from the beginning (1 John 1:1),
as if it taught the same truth as

In the beginning was the Word (John 1:1).

No doubt there is an allusion, but there is also a marked difference. We gain nothing by forcing scripture: we always lose somewhat. In the Gospel, where Christ Himself directly and immediately is the object, the Holy Ghost starts with revealing His divine subsistence when there was none but God:

The Word was with God,
and lest there should be any question of His glory,
the Word was God (John 1:1)
-- not the creature.

The same was in the beginning with God (John 1:2).

Thus He had a distinct personal existence, which had been from everlasting. No matter how far one goes back, we may still find the Word, and the Word with God: it is not said exactly with the Father, but with God. We never in scripture find the Word

coupled with the

Father.

We do find it in what is not scripture, as I shall show before we have done with considering this Epistle. In unquestionable scripture,

the Word

and

God

are correlative, -- the

Son

and the

Father.

Man cannot even imitate the word of God without exposing his own weakness.

The Gospel therefore, in order to assert His glory, goes back before all time. And

in the beginning

-- no matter where you may ask to place the point within eternity -- the Word was there. But this is not at all the object of the Epistle. It is assumed no doubt, but it is to show how truly the life is the very same. It is not union. Life is never confounded with union, though in the Christian closely connected. Union is by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, but life was before this, whether in Christ personally, or even in us. Christ Himself is our life. Hence, when flesh had hindered and overlaid the power of the Spirit; when the world was gaining vast influence; when Satan was working with all subtlety to undermine the foundations, the Holy Ghost directs attention to Christ, in whom the life was manifested. In what the Son of God was before entering the world, there could be no instruction for us how the life is to be now displayed in us; and what God looks for, -- how by the Holy Ghost He nourishes and exercises us. The weightiest instruction turns on what Christ was here, having to do with man -- with Satan -- above all, with His God and Father. So
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have we. Hence, therefore, it is not here,

He was in the beginning with God [John 1:2],

but

That which was from the beginning {1 John 1:1}.

This is a phrase (ἀπὸ ἀρχῆς) constantly used as to the manifestation of the one or thing spoken of: it matters not whether it be good or evil. We find the formula used, for instance, of Satan. There is no reference to what he was before he became the devil; there is silence as to his subsistence as an unfallen angel, but when he departed from God, he sinned from the beginning. Such is his character as devil: he sinned. As for our Lord Jesus, He was manifested as man here below; but before we hear of what was manifested, John says,

That which was from the beginning.

He had a personal being as man here below -- a divine person no doubt, but He took a real place in this world. This seems to be referred to in the expression

which was from the beginning.

Next we have the fact that others are directed towards Him -- what we have

heard about Him -- what we have

seen with our eyes).

It was not a mere phantom, but a real person in this world -- hence

that which we have looked upon,

or contemplated. Even though from above, He was really an object seen; He was not a passing shadow, but a person, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled

(coming down as it were into the closest familiarity)

concerning the word of life {1 John 1:1}.

It will be understood that all these different clauses refer to the Word of life -- what was from the beginning about the Word of life: what we have heard about the Word of life: what we have seen, and so on.

And the life was manifested {1 John 1:2}.

The second verse yet makes the first plainer; for there we find His pre-existence with the Father, when the apostle has stated His manifestation (for that expression

the life was manifested

is a kind of summary of what had been laid down in the preceding verse):

The life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and announce to you that eternal life, which was with the Father.

Now here we have the Son’s eternal being, so that there is no holding it back in this verse. It is supposed and treated of as a known truth; but the present object is to put forward the Lord Jesus as He was displayed in this world; for

it was manifested to us: that which we have seen and heard

(taking up the two verses)

announce we to you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ {1 John 1:2, 3}.

Thus the evident aim here is to show that there has been a manifestation -- an adequate personal revelation of God the Father. The only such adequate manifestation was Christ Himself. But it was Christ Himself in this world, a man as truly as any other, though infinitely above man, but a man who displayed what divine life is in all imaginable circumstances. He became a babe, a child, a full-grown man. He grew up subject to His parents; He entered on public life, as before He was traced in the unobtrusive privacy of His home after the flesh. He is then found confronted with the enemy, going forth in the power of the Spirit, dealing with every kind of pain and sorrow that pressed down humanity, in everything showing out what God is, but in everything also displaying what man ought to have been, and was not -- Himself always absolute perfection, but perfection as man in dependence on God.

What, it may be asked, has this to do with us? Everything. It is not true that we only want propitiation, or as guilty sinners to be justified. We want life -- eternal life. But have not the children of God eternal life? Certainly, but where shall I look at it? I see a beautiful trait of the divine life in this saint; I see something else sweet, and at the same time humbling to my soul, in another -- perhaps where least expected. But in all there is weakness and even positive failure. Who would not confess it? who does not feel it? This, then, after all, is but an unworthy expression of what divine life is, because it is shaded too often and modified by the effect of the world, by the allowance of nature, by a thousand thoughts, feelings, ways, habits which do not savour of Christ. All these things break in upon and mar the perfect outshining of that new life that is communicated to all the children of God. And here is the blessedness of what the Holy Ghost at once ushers in without a single note of preface, -- without the smallest allusion to any other person or topic. With Christ before Him, could it be otherwise? There was but one adequate and worthy object of the Holy Ghost, and it was Christ. Neither was it at all requisite to say for whom John was inspired to write thus. Of necessity, Christ was for His own. For whom could Christ be portrayed, if not for the Christian? But then the suitable homage to Christ was to bring into prominence none but Christ Himself; and so we find the epistle of John opening in a way unlike any other. There may be some approach to analogy in the remarkable manner the apostle Paul writes to the Hebrews. He who writes and those who are written to are in the back ground, that God may unfold His ancient oracles about the Messiah His Son. But in Hebrews, the reason is rather the grace that descended to Jewish weakness. In John, the reason is the all-eclipsing glory of Him, the Eternal Life, who deigns in grace and by redemption to be our life. It was John’s allotted province thus to bring Christ before those that are His; and he has done so in the power of the Holy Ghost, and with a wisdom that proves itself altogether divine to him who has ears to hear.
Through such a revelation as this the great comfort is that God is showing His children, conscious of their own weakness, what in this respect grace has given them in Christ -- what the very life is that they have received. Often cast down and groaning in the feeling of how little they manifest the life of Christ, and needing to know what His life -- their life -- Christ -- is in its own excellency, they are directed to Himself. In its perfection it is seen in Christ alone.

This it is therefore that opens our epistle: and what is the effect?

These things which we have seen and heard we announce to you, that ye also may have fellowship with us {1 John 1:3}.

The apostles had fellowship with the Son of God, and they were particularly chosen out, as we find in the Lord's prayer (the proper prayer of the Lord, not that which is commonly so called in Matt. 6, Luke 11, blessed as it is, but in John 17). For it is evident that the apostles have a singularly distinguished place assigned them. But Christians also are immediately concerned; for there is no doubt that others were to be brought in and to believe through their word. And thus they are expressly the objects of their Lord's communications to the Father.

Here, too, the design was that others should have fellowship with the Son of God: the first favoured ones were not to keep it to themselves, but to spread abroad the riches of His grace. As we see in John 17 that others were to believe through the apostles' word, so here John acts on the intimation himself. The object is,

that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ {1 John 1:3}.

It is with

the Father,
because He communicates what He loves best. Never was anything or one in His sight, so precious as the manifestation of His own Son in manhood here below. It was what opened the heavens, so to speak; it was what caused the Father's voice to be heard; and this in various critical circumstances, where it might have seemed that a dishonouring shade hung over the Anointed of God. But not so; it was but an appearance in the eyes of dimly seeing man -- Christ was perfection always. Take, for instance, the scene of His baptism; or, again, the mount of transfiguration. Our fellowship then is with the Father. He shares with us the object of His own delight.

But our fellowship is no less with His Son Jesus Christ, who lets us into the secret of the Father's love, and gives a place with Himself to His own, as far as it could be communicated to the creature.

Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

And what is the designed effect? Fulness of joy.

These things write we unto you that your joy may be full {1 John 1:4}.

If any believer, then, looks at Jesus as He was here below, and if the effect on his heart is to take away from the spring of joy in his soul, or to fail in ministering divine joy, it is clear that he has misapprehended God's own object and love. He has not interpreted aright the revelation of the Son of God. Now there are many that do so read the gospels. They derive far more joy from that which Paul brings before them in Rom. 5 or 8. One can understand this at first. Ought it to be so always? There are states no doubt where the clearing and consolidating chapters in the epistle to the Romans supply the requisite food of the soul. Nor could one in the least desire to weaken this, still less to set one part of scripture against or above another. But while assuredly in the first learning of salvation it is of consequence that we should be built up in the good news of grace that God sends us through the work of the Lord Jesus, the object of God in settling us on redemption is to make us free to enjoy the Son and the Father. We are not to be arrested along the way however precious, but to enjoy Himself who has reconciled us by Jesus Christ, -- to appreciate and adore our God and Father who has manifested His glory in Christ His Son. Short of this we cannot rightly stop. We may pause midway, but we ought to be going on until we can rest perfectly in this blessed communion of love -- fellowship

with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

The effect then, I repeat, is fulness of joy. And mark, all this is simply from the manifestation of grace in Jesus Christ the Lord. There is not one question of ourselves, but the simplest receiving what God has brought and given us in His own Son; the intended issue is the overflowing of joy in the Holy Ghost.

+++ But if we had a manifestation, there is also a message. The manifestation, with its connexions and result, was given us in the first four verses. The message begins from the fifth verse. If you have this life of Christ, if I too have it, if we who believe are brought thus into fellowship, with the Father and with the Son Jesus Christ, -- if we possess the wondrous place of being (so to speak) in the family circle, and the most intimate affections of our God and Father through the Son of His love, I cannot be there, nor you, without the creating of a certain demand on our souls by virtue of the divine nature of which grace has made us alike partakers. No doubt love is the spring, but it is in truth; and the God who thus brings us by His own Son into the present enjoyment of life everlasting makes the soul sensible of the antagonism between the state of nature and of all around us with God Himself. But mark the grace of God: not a word of that whatever until fulness of joy is established, and this solely by the gift of Jesus the Son of God to us, and eternal life in Him. But having given us the joy, now He turns us back, as it were, and gives the eye inwardly to discern as those enabled to see according to God, -- to judge all that is of self, and consequently all false pretensions wherever they may be. It could not, ought not to be otherwise. We can afford to judge ourselves now that we have the fulness of the blessing, which is eternal life. Remember it, and Him in whom it is, and by whom only we could have it. God the Father has given in Christ that sure
blessing, and assured it for ever, in order that the soul may be free to look at anything, and to take up everything in the interests of His own holiness and glory, as having fellowship with the Father and the Son.

This is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light {1 John 1:5}.

It is not the Father now. In the early verses it was expressly and only as the Father, because there it was the outflow of grace through the Son. But now, this nature being communicated, we cannot if we would avoid having to do with God; and we feel for His will, holiness, and glory, just because we are so blest by His grace.

This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you.

It is not the law but a message. Grace does not put under law, but it does communicate the judgment of God Himself on all that is contrary to His nature.

The message is that God is light. Heathenism was founded on a quite contrary assumption. They supposed darkness to be the source of everything; but not such is God to the Christian.

God is light.

Consequently all is detected and judged.

God is light, and in him is no darkness at all {1 John 1:5}.

Even Moses, in view of the hardness of men’s hearts, allowed a little darkness; for the law made nothing perfect; it was not the perfect expression of God: Christ only is this. It is only divines, or those misled by their errors, who give His glory to the law as the image of God. But according to scripture (and it cannot be broken {John 10:35})

Christ is the image of God: never is the law so styled. The law had not to reveal God but to deal with man, -- it condemned the first Adam. God under law had fallen sinful presumptuous man before Him. Law was really the expression of the lowest claim that God could assert over the first man had he been able to meet it. He could not abate those terms. It was the very least measure -- the ten words -- that God could accept even from a sinful man.

But it was altogether different when the Son of God came. Undoubtedly He vindicated the law, which fell through all other hands. Perfectly and in all things He retrieved the honour of God, which might else have seemed only committed to man to be sullied. Alas! the first man had done nothing but sin or break the law of God. The last Adam not only rescued the jewel from the filth of the men who had brought it into obloquy and turned it if not to corruption to their own ruin, but set it off so as to shed its own lustre and glorify the God who gave it. The mischief lay in sin, never in the smallest degree in the law. There was everything wrong in the first man; and this was the true secret. But to lower the Son of God to a mere doer of the law is unconsciously to deny His divine glory; nay, it is unwittingly to deny even His human perfection. No doubt the Lord never failed to magnify the divine law; but I venture to say He never did one thing in which He did not go beyond the law. It must be maintained further that not to speak of Christ, the Christian, who does not go beyond the law does not understand, enjoy, or adorn Christianity. And so far is this rising above the character of law in our walk from being an extraordinary effort, it is what the Christian man is called to do every day in his life. I admit this, that you cannot even contemplate such a thing until you know your place in Christ, and that Christ risen is your life; but when this is a settled truth for your soul, you will soon understand its certainty and preciousness, as well as your own new responsibility, as living in the Spirit, to walk also by the Spirit.

Let me repeat once more the message --

God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

Nothing is now allowed in view of the hardness of their hearts. This was the license under law, as our Lord Jesus Himself tells us, but it will not stand the revealed light of the gospel. There is nothing tolerated except what suits the nature of God Himself. Christ, the reality of it in His own person and ways on earth, alone has brought us the revelation of this truth. Where was it ever seen or heard of before? It was seen and heard in every way, in every word, of Jesus. It was so because He was God, but it was never so till He became man. It is there we see adoringly the wondrous truth of the person of the Lord Jesus. As long as He remained simply God, no such manifestation was or could be. Had He been merely man, it would have been simply impossible; but being not only what He was, but who He is, in Him here below we have God as well as man perfectly displayed. This it is that judges -- judges everything in us.

Accordingly there follows the various testings of this divine nature in the believer.

If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth {1 John 1:6}.

It is no longer a question merely of an open falsehood. Of course this cannot but remain always immoral and inexusable; and its true gravity is brought out incomparably more under the gospel than ever it was under the law. But then what is spoken of here goes far deeper than a pronounced lie; it might be only such virtually and practically -- a lie that we live and do where we may not speak one.

If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.

The Christian walks in the light; and the reason why he walks there is this, because he sees Christ, who alone is the light of life. And if he sees and follows Christ, which all His sheep do, he cannot but walk in the light, because following Jesus, who is the light, he necessarily walks in the light.

I do not say that he necessarily walks according to the light. This is a very different matter, often confounded with it, but in fact wholly distinct, though it too ought to be. But every Christian walks in the light. If he is walking according to it, then glory is brought to the Lord; if, as is too often the case, he fails to walk according to the light, he dishonours the
Lord so much the more because he does walk in the light.

A Jew as such did not walk in the light. When God had His dealings with Israel, there was nothing of the kind. He, though always light Himself, dwelt in the thick darkness. Not that He was darkness: this never was nor could be: but He dwelt in the dark, veiled and shut up by curtains and clouds of incense, sacrifices and priests. Thus He dwelt because man was in the dark; and God, by the very fact that He dwelt surrounded by His people Israel, dwelt in dark seclusion in view of the condition of Israel -- the first man -- in whose midst He deigned to dwell.

But now that Christ the Son is come, the full unclouded light of God shines out in love. Accordingly, as we have seen, He reveals Himself as light, with whom is no darkness at all. More than this, if we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.

Further, if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin {1 John 1:6, 7}.

This total and evident contrast is what every Christian by his Christian profession assumes. If you are a Christian at all, you walk in the light; it is where you walk, and not here a question of how. The apostle John is not here at all discussing how far it may be made good, or how far you have realised it -- albeit an important question for conscience. Here he is showing what is true and real, and so absolutely necessary that it is involved in the very being of a Christian man.

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light (for Christ can be no less a standard than this)

we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

Manifestly he is describing, not some special class among the faithful, but all genuine Christians, whoever they may be. As having seen and followed the Lord Jesus, they walk in the light, and being in that light, where all sin is judged, there is fellowship mutually. For the fellowship here is not with the Father and the Son: this had been already settled in the early verses. But here John is speaking of the communion of Christians one with another; and he says that being in the light of God (because the light is no less than Christ), the hindrances to fellowship are judged: --

We have fellowship one with another.

You see it every day, and wherever you may be. If you pass through any circumstances where you look to find no Christian, a little word is dropped, -- Christ's own name, or that which betrays to your heart the sense of His grace, and at once you are knit to the man, no matter who, -- indeed, the more, so to speak, because of the sound falling on your heart in such unexpected circumstances: --

We have fellowship one with another.

Then there is another comfort not less needed --

that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin.

Such is the precious place grace has given us, the ever abiding power of the blood of Jesus Christ cleansing us from every sin.

This is not put here as a provision against our failure and for our restoration. The apostle treats of the place in which we are set by the grace of God from the beginning of our Christian career, and which remains unchanged right through. No doubt the apostle does not contemplate such a thing here as the departure of a real Christian from Christ. Still less, if possible, does he contemplate a Christian's trifling with sin: this could not be, for the Spirit of God never does. We shall find, however, in its own just place, that if he slip into evil of a practical kind, or sin, God does not leave him without a resource. The grace that never fails appears for the child, if he have been drawn aside. But this is not at all the object in the verse before us, which is simply the assertion of the Christian's place; and this, too, when it is a question of God's own nature, which might produce (not searching only, but) trial and anxiety in the spirit. But if there is, the very place where the power of the blood of Jesus Christ cannot fail to cleanse you from all sin is asserted.

But there might be another form of pretension. Instead of setting up to fellowship with God, while indifferent to His will, without sense of or care for standing in the light of God, the flesh might assume another character of delusion -- the denial of sin.

we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and
the truth is not in us {1 John 1:8}.

By a Christian is not meant one insensible to his own sinfulness. The truth is in him; and he confesses instead of hiding or ignoring his sins. He has fellowship with God; but, far from saying along with this

I have no sin,
he is the very man that hates and spreads out his sins before God. Accordingly 1 John 1:9 tells the tale of that which grace and truth effect in the Christian:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

So the Christian does from the very starting-point of his career.

Still less does the Christian refuse to own that he has sinned. This is a yet grosser form of contrariety to the truth of God. Therefore the condemnation is still more stern:

If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us {1 John 1:10}.

The word of God, not to speak of conscience, declares so plainly that all have sinned, that it proves the audacity of unbelief and rebelliousness in those that deny, and this denial is incomparably more guilty since Christ came, to whose name these deniers laid claim.

This then closes the second part of the chapter. The first was the manifestation of the fulness of grace in Christ; the
next, the detection of what is contrary to God in us. Hence we are now judged before God in His light. Having a nature which feels according to God, we at once discover what is inconsistent with Himself. For this very reason the Christian would be extremely cast down if, when drawn aside through the power of the enemy, there were not the provision of grace to meet and restore his soul. Hence two verses follow in the beginning of 1 John 2 as a sort of appendix to the doctrine and application of the first chapter:

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for . . . the whole world {1 John 2:1, 2}.

I leave out “the sins of.” It is clear enough that they ought never to have been inserted in the common English Bible. Not only are they not required for the sense, as words generally are, but they injure the sense, and really insinuate erroneous doctrine. If the sins of the whole world were met by the propitiation of Christ, the whole world would be saved. No such statement occurs anywhere in the word of God. There is a righteous ground in the sacrifice of Christ on which God can meet the whole world -- not only bear with it, but send the gospel to every creature. This, however, is a totally different statement from a “propitiation for the sins of the whole world.” In the real phrase it is clear that we have the beautiful wisdom of scripture, and at the same time an exact expression of the Lord’s rich grace without exaggeration:

My little children, I write unto you that ye sin not; but if any one should alas! sin, instead of cause for despair, we have an advocate with the Father.

Wondrous mercy! Jesus as much lives to take up the failure of His own, as He died to put away their sins by His blood. This too is founded on propitiation; but there is besides the blessed fact that He is the righteousness of the believer in the presence of God. His one expiatory sacrifice avails in abiding value; His place is before God as our righteousness; and there for the failing He carries on His living active advocacy with the Father.

Such is the doctrinal ground of this epistle, with the added special provision for those who may fail.

* * *

From 1 John 2:3 we begin the consideration of the characteristics of life in Christ which the believer possesses, and is bound to manifest. What is the leading trait? what the especial features of divine life in man? It is not power, nor love, nor even righteousness. What is it then? Obedience. This, it is clear, gives no importance to man. It necessitates the just subjection of the creature, and maintains also the majesty of God. How dreadful when grace, so-called, lowers His glory in the eyes of any soul! It is not denied that danger there is; but the danger is fully met by the precious word of God:

And hereby we do know that we know 38 him, if we keep his commandments {1 John 2:3}.

Do not call this legal: where is anything of the sort in John? Indeed there can be nothing legal in one who under the Holy Spirit unfolds Christ. And let me say further that, where love is, nothing is sweeter than the doing the will of the one that is loved, particularly where we know that He whose will we do is absolutely good and wise in all that He lays upon us. We know that this is the case with God.

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him {1 John 2:3, 4}.

He is no Christian at all, any more than those that pretended to have fellowship with Him and walked in darkness, or said they had no sin, or denied that they had sinned. The contrast is of real Christians with mere pretenders. It is not a comparison between faithful Christians and unfaithful ones. Banish all this kind of notion from your minds. It is delusion, and you lose thereby the profit for your soul. It is not what the Lord is treating of here. He is putting down a new class of evil that was beginning to spring up, of persons pretending to fresh light, but involving a departure from the only light of God, -- persons who indulged in fine-spun speculations and claimed undiscovered truth, but were in the awful predicament of contradicting the revealed mind of God. It was a different Christ, who was not another but antichrist, as we shall see, -- a different truth which was not really truth.

The characteristic object of the epistle is to maintain that none can ever rise above the Christ already manifested in this world. After all you may have learnt from Paul or any other, know as you may the Christian’s place in grace and all he hopes for in glory, if you want to behold perfection in man you must look back at what Christ was in this world -- the self-same Jesus who is now in the glory of God. Such is Christ everywhere. There is a season when one needs most of all to think of the cross. There is a season when one needs the comfort of having Him as the Priest in heaven. There is a season when one can appreciate Him as the glorious Head of the church. But it is false that any of these points of view is to make Christ less precious as manifested in this world. Nor is there one who treats it with such decision and solemnity as John. The time was come for this:

Even now are many antichrists {1 John 1:18}.

It is the very point and object of our apostle’s writing to maintain the indefeasible glory and the infinite excellence of the Lord Jesus in every respect, and this as displaying God the Father in this world. This Satan was seeking to annul through the false teachers now in view. Therefore are we shown from the first, as I have endeavoured to explain, the fulness of grace that came in His person, as well as the revelation of the moral nature of God. But now we have the first great test of the reality of divine life in man, namely,

38. The first “know” is in the present, this (the second) in the perfect, ἔγνωκαίμεν, which means (not “have known,” but) “have the knowledge of.”
obedience. In this the unbeliever, no matter what his profession may be, is sure to fail. His will is unjudged. He either seeks his own way in pleasure, or he bows to man in superstitious asceticism, without knowledge of the true God or confidence in His grace. His failure is not perhaps in notions, but in obedience. On the other hand the Christian keeps the commandments of God; but he goes farther. It is said,  

Whoso keepeth his word {1 John 2:5}.  

It is more than what is commanded.  

He loves to do whatever may be the will of God, no matter what the form. It may be simply seeing how He manifests His character in Christ: this is enough. The obedient heart enters into and ascertains the will of God where disobedience would find nothing but difficulties, obstacles, and uncertainties. There is always to such either a lion in the way or no light. We find it too often in our families. See a child whose heart is not in obedience: what readiness of excuse! “Indeed, I did not know. You never told me. Why did you not forbid me before?” On the other see the obedient child. She has watched her mother’s looks even when not the appearance of a command was heard. She knows right well what will please her parent. Just so should we cherish the will of our Father as obedient children. It is not in this case the keeping of the express commands, but of His word. Let me add, that this is the answer to all the pride of man’s heart. For take the most moral man you ever saw: on what does he rest? He does this and that because he judges them right. This is his boast: “I always do what I believe is right.” Such is the desire of the moral man. I answer, that even if always consistent, and you always did a thing because it is right, you must inevitably be always wrong.  

The true ground for a believer, and that which pleases God, is this, -- not to do a thing simply because it is right, but because it is His will. The life that is formed on obedience is of an altogether different texture and source. To do things because they are right is to do without God and His word. It is merely idolizing self. The man becomes judge of all: “I think this, I do that, because it is right in my judgment.” Obedience alone puts man down, and God in His place. This only is right. Hence therefore we find, as the first distinguishing trait of the divine life, the exercise of obedience: not only are His commandments to be kept, but also His word.  

But there is more than this.  

He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked {1 John 2:6}.  

I need not only commandment and word, but Himself as a living person before my eyes. It is always thus in John, who treats of Christ Himself. Thus while providing for the deepest, there is a grace which wins the simplest. It is clearly Christ Himself, as He walked day by day in this poor world.  

But there follows another and a remarkable word, which needs a little explanation.  

Beloved, says he (for this is the true word in 1 John 2:7),  

I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning.  

It means, as before, from the time that Christ was manifested in this world.  

The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you {1 John 2:7, 8}.  

The old commandment was manifested in Christ Himself. He alone was always the obedient one. It is now not merely an old commandment, but a new one, yet the very same. Why? Because it is the same life, whether viewed in the Christian or in Christ. If I look at Christ Himself, it is the old commandment seen in Him from the beginning; but now it is no longer this solely, but a new commandment, which thing is true in him and in you.  

It is the same life, seen in Christ in its perfection, in us often hindered and obscured by the activity of what is of the first man. Christ alone was its fulness; now we have it in Him. As John tells us, it is true in Him and in you because it is the very same life.  

He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now {1 John 2:9}.  

Love now comes in. It is not disobedience only which detects that a man is not really born of God, but also hatred. He that loves not is not born of God.  

But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes {1 John 2:11}.  

This was the more important to press, because these false teachers had not the smallest concern about their brethren. What they sought was self -- in one form or another; and consequently light, as they called it, was no more than the invention of novel notions. But the true way in which divine light (Christ) shows itself is in obedience as its effect, and so surely in love. You cannot obey God without loving your brethren also.  

This, however, leads into a remarkable parenthesis in the epistle, on which we need not dwell, because it is perhaps more than any other part of the epistle familiar to all. The great characteristic throughout, being life in the Son of God, forbids the apostle from entering into the different measures of attainment as a rule; yet as it is a fact that there are some more mature, some more vigorous, and some comparatively feeble in the expression of Christ here below, the Spirit of God in this parenthesis notices these differences briefly.  

Before this is done, He lays down what they had all in common. They were forgiven for Christ’s name. Then the fathers were known by their knowledge of Christ -- a beautiful and blessed distinction. They had known him that was from the beginning {1 John 2:13}.  

This we, have seen to be the great text of the whole epistle, and it is the more remarkable that he does not mention any
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Now he is going to enlarge on the subject of righteousness. However, before he enters into it fully, he gives us a prefatory note beginning with the last verse of 1 John 2, and then shows us the privileges into which grace brings those who are born of God.

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God {1 John 3:1}.

It may be mentioned here that “sons of God” is never the expression of the writings of John. We have sons of God as well as children in Paul’s epistles. But children of God

the Holy Ghost employs exclusively both in the gospel and in this epistle of John. Is it asked what is the difference? It lies in this, that son (viōc) is more the public title, whereas child (τέκνον) conveys rather the closeness of connexion by birth. It expresses community of nature as born of God. For it will be understood that a person who was not a child might be adopted as a son; but the Christian is not only a son adopted by our God -- he is really a child as being a partaker of the divine nature. This only it is John puts forward and prominently speaks of; and it is seen at once how it connects itself with his doctrine everywhere. We are born of God, -- born of water and of the Spirit, made partakers of the divine nature (in the sense, of course, of having the life that was in Christ).

Therefore the world knew us not, because it knew him not {1 John 3:1}.

So absolutely is the life of Christ found in us, that we have the same fare, so to speak, as Christ in this world. The world did not know Him; therefore it does not know us. It is simply because of Christ, unknown then personally, unknown now in us who live of His life. When He was here, it was no other life than that which we now have in Him. The world never knew, never appreciated, the life that was in Christ; neither does it recognise that which is in the children of God. But this can in no way hinder the blessedness of the result for the children of God.

This is no mere empty title.

Beloved, now are we the sons (children) of God; and it doth not yet appear (that is, it has not been manifested)

what we shall be {1 John 3:2}.

As far as the word of God could show, (and how well it does!) it is clearly revealed there. This remark is added to cut off misapprehension of the sense, as it may hinder the vagueness that prevails in many minds. Indeed, an hope has been revealed to us most distinctly: what we shall be is revealed not only elsewhere, but here also. The apostle does not at all overlook this. But it doth not yet appear, in the sense that it has not yet been manifested as a fact
before the world; but we know, says he, and we only know because it has been revealed by the Holy Ghost in the word.

We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is [1 John 3:2]. There is no haze over the future of the child of God. He has the certainty in his soul, because he has the revealed assurance in scripture that he shall be like Christ. Christ being his life now, no wonder that he must be like Christ then; and this too is founded on a ground blessedly sure and simple, and at the same time full of glory to Christ:

We shall see him.

This is enough. Such and so great is the gracious assimilating energy of the Second man, that for us to see Him is to be like Him. When we saw Him here on earth by faith, we were made spiritually like Him; when we shall see Him bodily by and by, we shall be like Him even in our bodies.

Thus then is the portion of the Christian by grace; and here is the moral consequence:

Every one that hath this hope on him -- founded on Him -- purifieth himself, even as he is pure [1 John 3:3]. Thus for the Christian it is not any longer a law that demands this thing or that. There is the full operation of the Spirit by the entire word of God, no part of scripture being excluded from the enjoyment, instruction, and admonition of the Christian. At the same time, what gives all scripture its fulness of application to the believer is the possession and knowledge of Christ Himself. Without Him you cannot understand any part of the Bible spiritually -- that is, neither certainly nor thoroughly. It is Christ, who not only gives us intelligence, but gives it power by the Spirit over and in us.

Then John proceeds naturally to trace the difference between the two families:

Every one that committeth sin committeth also lawlessness [1 John 3:4].

I give you the sense rather more exactly than it stands in our common version. There is no allusion to transgressing the law. Perhaps there is hardly a worse translation than this in the New Testament, nor one as to which even scholars seem duller. Sin is declared to be lawlessness. Beyond a shadow of doubt it may be asserted that the apostle does not define sin as “the transgression of the law.” It is a false version which nothing can justify, and I am perfectly persuaded the more any man understands either the word of God in general or the language in which John wrote, with the less hesitation he will confess this. That a person who is only spelling out his Greek, and learning to render by the help of the Authorized Version, may make difficulties about the matter is intelligible; but it is hard to see how an unbiased honest man who knows the language could have the slightest question about it. Do I insinuate that our translators were not men of integrity, able, erudite, and pious? They were under no small difficulties, but they tried to do their best. Possibly their attention was never drawn to the point. Even intelligent men were considerably muddled as yet from the past as well as the actual struggles of that day. But instead of either finding fault with them or endorsing all they said, what we have to do is to profit by whatever is good and true, and at the same time to be warned by whatever mistakes others have made.

Now I maintain, not only that the word (ἀνομία) will not bear such a meaning, but that it is altogether foreign to the scope of the passage and the drift of the apostle’s reasoning. He is not speaking of particular acts, but about nature manifesting itself in our ways.

Every one that committeth sin committeth also lawlessness [1 John 3:4].

A man who sins shows his will alienated from God -- an evil nature derived from him who fell through Satan. Here the apostle regards man as doing nothing else but his own will, which is exactly what the natural man does. He acts independently of God, and, as far as he is concerned, never does anything but his own will. John is not speaking of positive overt acts, but of the man’s habitual bent and character -- his life and nature. The sinner, then, sins, and in this merely shows out his state and the moral roots of his nature as a sinner (namely, lawlessness). He has neither heart nor conscience towards God: he does what he likes as far as he can. He practises lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.

What makes it of practical as well as dogmatic importance is, that the common view entails the accompanying error that the law is always in force for all the necessary expression of God’s mind and will. But this we know from many scriptures is not true. The Bible is thoroughly explicit, that one particular nation was said to be under law, and that the rest of mankind had no such position, though responsible on their own ground. (See Rom. 2:12-15; 3:19.) Here, therefore, the translation cannot be correct which contradicts other passages of undoubted holy writ; for if the common version of 1 John 3:4 held good, the rest of mankind outside the Jews could not have been sinners at all, because they were not under law. Thus, evidently, this error throws the whole doctrine of what sin is and of God’s dealings with men into hopeless confusion. It necessarily darkens some vitally momentous parts of God’s word as to past, present, and future. For instance, according to the scripture already referred to, in the day of judgment God will by Jesus Christ deal with the Jews according to the law, with the Gentiles that have it not according to conscience; and, by parity of principle, with professing Christians according to gospel light. There is no hint of judging all by the measure which was given to Israel. The idea springs from a source no better than traditional ignorance.

Again, taking Rom. 4:15, and 5:13, 14, it would perplex all to bring in the common version of 1 John 3:4; for it would follow thence that there was no sin, because it had not the form of a transgression of law between Adam, who had a law, and Moses, by whom the law was given. So fatal may be a mis-translation of scripture. In fact, practically, it lowers the sense of what sin is throughout the length and breadth of Christendom, others having fallen into an error similar to that...
of our own translators. It is therefore as certain as it is
important to see that sin embraces much more than a
transgression of the law. In this case there could be no such
thing as sin without the law, and all would be judged alike as
under the law and transgressors of it, contrary to the express
word of God. Our version is wrong. Sin is not the
transgression of the law, though every transgression of the
law is a sin. The true meaning, as I have said, is,

sin is lawlessness.

As for the Christian, then, to resume our sketch, all is
different (not conduct only but rather a new nature) from man
as such. We know that He (Christ) was manifested to take
away our sins, and in Him is no sin.

Whosoever abideth in him
-- and this is the consequence of really knowing Christ --
sinneth not [1 John 3:6].

Such is the life of the Christian that this is the consequence of
abiding in Him. If grace has turned my soul to Him, if I am
resting on Christ as my Saviour and Lord, my life and
righteousness, I shall also by grace abide in Him, and

Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not.

In fact, who ever sinned with Christ before his eyes? When
a Christian is drawn aside, another object usurps the place of
Christ, and his own will exposes him to the wiles of Satan
working on his fleshly nature through the world. And

Whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known
him [1 John 3:6].

He evidently speaks of one unconverted -- a man in his
natural state. If he had only seen and known Christ, how
changed all would be!

Little children, let no man deceive you.

This the false teachers and antichrists were doing. They had
invented the awful theory that the great blessing of Christ had
swung away all need of self-judgment and holiness -- that sin
was gone in every sense. Hence a believer might take his ease
in the world. If Christ had taken away all sin, why talk more
about it? What need of repentance or confession, as the
croakers talked who refused to go on to higher life and truth?

Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth
righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.
He that doeth sin is of the devil [1 John 3:7, 8].

Here we see the ground for saying that John traces all up
to two distinct families -- the family of God and that of the
devil.

The devil sinneth from the beginning:
such is his character, though he is not under law.

For this purpose the Son of God was manifested that
he might destroy the works of the devil [1 John 3:8].
That was His character, and the result of His appearing and
work in this world.

Every one that has been born of God doth not sin.

Such is the deduction:

for his seed remaineth in him;

-- the life that God has given through faith, Christ Himself
being the source and expression of it --
and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God
[1 John 3:9].

There is shown the new nature. It is a matter of course that
every one lives according to his nature: only the Christian,
having two, must mortify the evil and walk according to the
good. Take the simplest animal, -- the bird above, or the
reptile below, or any other around us, -- every creature lives
according to its nature. So does the sinner. He lives according
to that nature which is now under Satan’s power. The
believer lives in Christ. John is not here looking at
modifications through circumstances, it is to be observed. He
is not here looking at particular cases of unfaithfulness. John
as a rule does not occupy himself with the details of fact. He
looks at truth in its own proper abstract character apart from
passing circumstances; and if you do not read John’s writings
thus, especially the epistle before us, I am afraid that there is
little prospect that you will ever understand them.

Having shown this, he now brings in the other test, that
is, not simply righteousness but love.

This is the message that ye heard from the beginning,
that we should love one another. Not as Cain
-- no love was there.

Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew
his brother [1 John 3:11, 12].

There is the connexion. He has brought in the wicked one and
his family. Man now is not only a sinner, but especially
shows his character in this, that he exhibits no love. By love
he means what is of God, and this exclusively. He does not
of course deny natural affection, but insists on love as divine.
Cain had no love, and proved it by slaying his own brother.

And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works
were evil, and his brother’s righteous [1 John 3:12].

He here traces the link that binds righteousness with love. We
have had righteousness separately as well as love: now he
shows that the two things are intertwined, and are found only
in the same persons. But here too, as in Christ was no sin, so
in Him we behold perfect love, and in the world hatred.
Ought we then to be surprised at the world’s hatred? Hence,

We know that we have passed from death unto life,
because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his
brother abideth in death. Every one that hateth his
brother is a murderer [1 John 3:14, 15].

Thus things are followed to their full result, as we have seen
them traced to their hidden sources before God. How
different was all with Christ!

Hereby perceive we the love

. . . To add “of God” spoils the sentence. There is no ground
for interpolating any words. But One showed such love, and
He was man as surely as God.

Hereby perceive we the love, because he laid down
his life for us.

If you want to know what love is, look here. This was love
indeed.
And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren 
{1 John 3:16}.

The same life of which we live was in Him: ought it not to be exercised in similar love? We may not often be called to lay down our life for our brethren; but are there not plain, simple, common ways by which it may be tested every day? My brother may have need: it is no use talking about readiness to die for my brother, if I at once shrink back from meeting his ordinary and perhaps urgent necessity? There is nothing great here; it is homey, but how practical! How it puts the heart to the test, and one that might be presented any day of the week!

Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things 
{1 John 3:17-19}.

He here puts before them the great danger of trifling with the practical consequences of the truth. Suppose that a man knows what God says and wishes, and yet does not act upon it, what is the consequence? He must get into consciousness of distance from God.

To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin 
{James 4:17},
says James. So we have the same question here. The point is not a man's losing his place in Christ, but his ground of confidence with God. Communion is almost as strikingly a characteristic point of John, as life in Christ, and the love from which both flow. He is not satisfied that men should be simply Christians, but that they should enjoy Christ practically. An idle word, a passing thought unjudged, might disturb this.

Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.

Looking up, a simple soul goes on with the Lord.

Then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ 
{1 John 3:21-23}. 

It is the beginning of everything good, and goes right through to the end, as I need not say. There is the one and only starting-point in the mind of the Holy Ghost, who always gives Christ His own primary place. To be saved even is not put as the first duty, but to

believe on his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him 
{1 John 3:23, 24}.

Here we come to a very important expression, which we find more particularly in 1 John 4. It is not simply our dwelling in Him: this we had already in 1 John 1 (and abiding in Him is the same word); but He dwells in us. Wonderful truth! This is here applied to one of these two things.

Hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Holy Spirit which he hath given us 
{1 John 3:24}.

The Holy Ghost given to us is the primary proof that God abides in us. He dwells in us by His Spirit. This does not necessarily involve our abiding in God; but if God gives His Spirit to any believer, He abides in that man. We shall find more than this in what follows; but before these truths are explained more fully, John cautions the saints.

Hence 1 John 4 begins with this warning. He is going to tell us about the Spirit of God and His abiding in us, but he would have us on our guard because there are evil spirits, as certainly as the Holy Spirit, and this as proved by the false prophets that have gone out into the world.

Believe not every spirit 
{1 John 4:1}.

There is nothing that exposes the believer (and it has always been so) to greater danger, than severing the Holy Spirit from Christ. The apostle ever binds His power with Christ's name. We shall be kept in the truth if we remember that the one object of the Holy Ghost is to glorify Christ, and this therefore becomes the test in practice: the Spirit of God must ever operate to keep Christ before our eyes. If not, we are not far from a snare. Connect the Spirit with the church merely, and then you will have popery; connect Him simply with individuals, and you will have fanaticism. He is a free and evident witness to Christ. There is the truth. The Holy Ghost is sent down to take of the things of Christ, and to show them to as. He is come to glorify (not a priest nor even the church, but) Christ Himself. This, I admit, is the truest glory of the saint and the church -- their greatest blessedness and joy. In Christ's name the church is formed by the Holy Ghost; through Him also the Holy Ghost dwells in the believer. This is not doubted; but all this, and the testimony and ways of each and all are invariably for exalting our God by Christ Himself. If they fail here, the salt has lost its savour.

Take, I will not say the grossness of popery but, the Quaker system, as an instance which painfully reverses the truth. The reason is plain: the Spirit is practically severed from Christ, and the result is that, under colour of humility, their testimony constantly tends to exalt the first man. Every child of Adam is supposed to have the Spirit of God. The consequence is that the truth is darkened, impaired, and destroyed, and all due sense of the ruin of man destroyed by their extreme form of Pelagianism, deifying not ordinances indeed but conscience.

However this may be, here we find the apostle solemnly warning the saints against false prophets. Many such men were gone into the world. We want therefore some sure means of discerning them. It is not a question of deciding who are Christ's and who are not; but rather what sort of spirit it is that acts by this teacher or that. It is not at all the point to pronounce on man's state before God or his destiny. People have always been prone enough to form and give
opinions when the Lord forbids it. It is clear that we are called of the Lord frankly to accept persons as born of God when they render a true testimony to Christ; but, on the other hand, we ought to beware of endorsing those whose testimony in word or deed is against the name of Jesus.

This then is the test of what is or is not of the Holy Ghost.

Hereby ye know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth Jesus Christ come in the flesh is of God {1 John 4:2}.

Let me beg the reader here to leave out a word or two which are not printed in italics. “Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.” The difference is great. As it reads in the Authorised Version, it is altogether inadequate. It may be in the recollection of not a few here that a generation ago there were manifestations of spirits (evil, I doubt not), which did not deny that Jesus came in the flesh. On the contrary, they seemed to lay the greatest stress on the fact of His incarnation, and chid the orthodox for want of heed to this truth if not of faith in it. The point of their own false doctrine lay in maintaining that Jesus took the flesh in the same condition of corruption in which all others are born, and that Jesus showed His perfection in subduing and purifying the flesh. Of course you will understand that my reference is to the Irvingite movement. To confess therefore that Jesus is come in the flesh is not satisfactory.

What then does the apostle say and mean here? Every spirit that confesseth Jesus Christ come in the flesh is of God. This is to confess His person; not His deity alone, still less His humanity alone, but Him who thus came. The one is a bare acknowledgment of a fact; the other is the confession of a divine person, yet a man. Now there is no demon that ever acknowledges the person of Christ. There is no evil spirit but wincs at and refuses to endorse the glory of Christ; whereas the direct object of the Spirit of God is always to maintain His person in all the fulness of His glory, and in all His grace. Let none take it as a statement of His human nature. This is not the meaning. The real humanity of Jesus is contained in it, but it is by no means the whole or chief part of the confession. Take any man -- yourself, for instance; who would describe you as having come in the flesh? No man that had common sense; because one might well ask in what other way you could come. Here was the difference between the Son of God and any other that ever was born. All mankind must come in the flesh if they come at all. The wonderful thing was that this divine person should come in the flesh. For what claim had flesh on Him in the slightest degree? Nothing but His grace hindered His coming in His proper divine glory. Had He been thus manifested in this world, of course it must have involved the destruction of all the race. According to the will and counsels of the Godhead He was pleasing to come in the flesh. It was not the manifestation of glory save of His person morally and in love, but of that very grace which we have seen from the beginning of this epistle, and which runs through to the end.

The spirits, then, which are not of God refuse (save when divine power bent and broke them) to own the personal glory of Christ, while the Holy Spirit of God loves to own it. Such is the test. If therefore any doctrine undermine the glory of Christ, you have an unequivocal proof that it is of Satan as certainly: whatever exalts Christ, according to the word, is of God.

This leads him to speak of the difference of what is in the world from that which is of God. In the world there is ever at work a restless spirit of contrariety to Christ. It is the spirit of antichrist, which will be manifested fully in its own season. Hence it is said,

Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error {1 John 4:4-6}.

These false teachers being of the world, speak of what has their heart, and this attracts the world. There is sympathy between the world and them.

We are of God, says the apostle, speaking of himself and his fellows raised up to declare the word of God fully. He is peremptory; and this rouses the spirit of unbelief as it meets faith:

He that knoweth God heareth us; and he that is not of God heareth not us.

Here again is a serious test. It is not only the confession of Christ, but that man is proved to be of the world who refuses subjection to the apostolic word. Many a man might profess to acknowledge the literal words of Jesus; many another might own only those of the Old Testament. If you do no more than this now, you cannot be of God. He who is really of God, while thoroughly owning every word He wrote of old, feels especially the blessedness of that which He has now given by His holy apostles and prophets. (Compare Eph. 2, 3.) This was of the utmost moment to urge at the time the gospels and epistles appeared. At the same time, though not of course in exactly the same shape and manner, it always abides a grand test, next to the person of Christ. The time hastens which will prove how few among those that acknowledge the New Testament really hear and believe it. The saddest proof that they do not believe it to be God’s word will be their giving it up. Did they believe it, they would no more abandon it than the true mother would allow the child to be cut in twain.

But this brings us to another point -- not the truth, but loving one another. The truth comes first, and then love.

For love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God (whatever may be his pretensions and his talk);

for God is love {1 John 4:7, 8}.

This leads him to speak of the way in which God has shown His love. He brings it out in three forms. First, there is the wondrous manifestation of God in Christ which is the
foundation of the gospel; and in a twofold way also He was manifested in Christ -- as life, and as propitiation. If we had not Christ as life, we never could understand God. Could we have understood Him by having Christ as our life without propitiation, as His holiness and judgment would have been slighted, so we could only be intensely miserable. To have the knowledge of what God is and of what we are, and withal not to have our sins borne away, must be alike His dishonour and our everlasting shame and anguish; and so many a quickened soul who is ignorant of the efficacy of redemption proves in its measure. God in His great mercy does not permit any to know it to its depths. But how many of us have known what it is to be converted, and yet for a while ignorant of the judgment of sin, and its absolute removal for us by the cross of Christ! Consequently one had no taste for the world, a horror of sin, a real desire to do God's will, but not the least rest for heart and conscience in Christ before God. It is a mercy to be thus converted, a misery to abide in this state. What a joy that God does not divorce but unites for us life and propitiation in our Lord and His work! Let not man meddle here. What God has joined let no man put asunder. He has given the same Christ who is life to be also a propitiation for our sins. Such is the teaching of the 1 John 4:9, 10, both being the display of the love of God, and in contrast with law (the latter especially), which had no life to give, and could only judge, not put away, sin.

But this is not all.

If God so loved us
(and He has demonstrated it as nothing else could),
we also ought to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us
(1 John 4:11, 12).

It is a wonderful word, evidently connecting itself (whether written before or after is of no account) with what is said in John 1:18. There Christ stands the manifestation of God in love. Here the saints are called to be no less. Beloved brethren, how far do we manifest our God and Father by this divine love that never seeks its own, and is at all cost bent on the good of its objects, His children, yea all, even enemies?

Hereby we know that we dwell in him, and he in us,
because he hath given us of his Spirit.

This goes farther than the last verse of 1 John 3, which said that He dwells in us, not we in Him. But we shall see more of this, and therefore I do not pause on it now.

And we have seen and testify that the Father hath sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God

I hardly know anything that concerns us more profoundly affecting than these verses; for what can be conceived near to God, if it be not dwelling in God and God in us? There is no image that tells out intimacy and mutuality, so to speak, more than this. And when we think who and what God is, as well as what we are, it is indeed a great word to say. Of whom does the apostle say it? Of every Christian; and this too as the simple fruit of the gospel.

But let us look a little at the force of the passage more closely. In the one case we read,

Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us,
because he hath given us of his Spirit (1 John 4:13);
in the other it is,

Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God
(1 John 4:15).

It is not now said, “Hereby we know.” In this instance, perhaps, the person may be without objective knowledge of it: this does not hinder the truth of the blessing. If you confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in you, and you in God. He dwells in you, having given His Spirit to be in you.

This is the way in which His dwelling in man is effected; but the consequence of that gift to you is that you make God your refuge and delight. There is no such thing as the dwelling of the Spirit in a saint without bringing the soul to judge itself, as well as to peace with God. To this it seems to me that every Christian comes by grace sooner or later, though not always at first. He will be brought to it in God’s goodness, were it, as it is often, on a death-bed. We do not always judge aright. There may be not seldom hindrances to comfort through bad teaching, as well as through unjudged sin. Of these I do not speak now, nor of defect in intelligence. Still less do I speak of the effects of the Calvinistic system or of Arminianism, both of which are prejudicial to enjoying the grace of God. Calvinists are apt to think an Arminian cannot have peace. This is all nonsense: he may enjoy peace with God as really as the Calvinist. Indeed experience would say it is more frequent than with those of the opposite school, though each in a different way look within (I believe, unscripturally). The truth is that peace rests on our faith of Christ and His work. Arminianism is no more to me than Calvinism, and I doubt that I admire one more than the other. As systems they seem to me narrow, unsound, and pernicious. But I thank God that to not a few who are committed to both sides He has given to taste of His own grace in Christ.

Be this as it may, if I confess Jesus the Son of God as Him on whom my soul rests, and on His rich redemption, the Holy Ghost says, “I can dwell there.” He does dwell there; and if so, He is graciously pleased to draw out the heart to confide and repose in God. This is what is meant by dwelling in God. It is to find in God one’s hiding-place, as well as spring of counsel and cheer and strength. One turns to Him in each trial and difficulty as well as joy. I am pretty sure there is not one of us who uses this privilege as he ought. Nor does John speak of degree at all. Such a thought is foreign to the abstract style of the apostle John. He treats of a great fact for the Christian, though it may be more or less realized, and

God dwelleth in him, and he in God
(1 John 4:15).

This is what faith receives and has. The beginning is God making His abode in us; the result is that we dwell in God. But sometimes he puts it in the order of our dwelling in God
and God in us. It would seem that he then speaks of
evidence, where he puts our part first, and then God's
abode in us. I must briefly point out the third ground, -- not
the display of love, or its operation in us, but the perfection
of love with us (1 John 4:17). It is not only that we know that
we dwell in God and He in us by this, that He has given to us
of His Spirit; but herein has love been perfected with us, that
we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He
is, so are we in this world. It is not a state given to us in
the day of judgment; we are so dealt with now; but this gives
boldness even with the thought of the day of judgment before
us. How could it be otherwise? If I really believe and am sure
that God has made me now to be what Christ is, what can the
effect of the day of judgment be but to display the
perfections, not only of what Christ is for me, but of what
you and I are by and in Christ our Lord? And this we are
now.

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The last chapter {1 John 5} speaks of another thing. Here
I must be brief indeed. It is connected with the charge at the
end of 1 John 4 to love one's brother. The apostle had shown
the various displays of divine love, with the falsehood of
professing to love God while one hated a brother. But this
might elicit the question, who my brother is. We need
simplicity, as with our God, so with His children. It is in vain
to pretend that this is hard to find out. The Spirit of God does
day lay down unsparingly and in all their fulness the tests of
divine life; but now let the question be raised, who my
brother is, and the answer is as plain as possible:

Every one that believeth that Jesus is the Christ is
born of God {1 John 5:1}.

Is it not sweet that after all the fulness of truth had been
revealed, after all the display of Christ in glory had been
made by the apostle Paul, after the apostle John had set us in
presence of the divine nature and eternal life in His person,
we have here such a proof of the unchangeable testimony to
the Lord Jesus as Christ? What was the truth that Peter and
the rest preached at Pentecost? That Jesus is the Christ. What
is the truth with which the epistle of John concludes? That
Jesus is the Christ. There is no wavering in what is divine.

No doubt there is the unfolding of truth admirably suited
to all the varying needs of the church; but when you come to
the question after all -- who and what is God's child and my
brother? -- this is what he is: the man that believes that Jesus
is the Christ. I grant you it is the very lowest confession that
the Holy Ghost could accept; and it would be a very poor
thing if the Christian only believed that Jesus was the Christ.
If made exclusive, what an unworthy dealing with all the
glory of Jesus! But it is to me a blessed thing that the Holy
Ghost maintains to the end the value of what He began with;
not that more was not made known, but that this abides in
freshness and power. No doubt such a confession might be
most unintelligent, but at least there is this divine reality in
his soul -- he does believe that Jesus is the Christ. That this
should be said at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles we
can all understand; but it seems to me that none but God
would have thought of insisting on it at the end of the
Christian testimony; as if, among the last words that the Holy
Ghost uttered, He should say -- I have been leading you into
all depths and all heights; I have laid open in fresh scriptures
the full circle of revealed truth, but I stand to what I began
with. Learn the truth, have it developed in your souls, not by
the truth developing, but by your growing up into it; but
never give up first principles.

Every one that believeth that Jesus is the Christ is
born of God: and every one that loveth him that
begat loveth him also that is begotten of him
{1 John 5:1}.

It is not now loving God only, but His children; and thus your
love is proved to be divine, and that you really love God
Himself. But there is another query often put: How am I to
know that I do love the children of God? Be sure you are in
the right path. Here it is --

By this we know that we love the children of God.

It is not by gratifying them, or going where they go perhaps,
or forcing them where you go. You might be totally
mistaken; you might hurry souls, or be drawn away by them
yourself. There is no love in either one or other, but there is
in this --

when we love God and keep his commandments.

If my soul goes out to Him in love, and I show it by
unreserved fidelity to His will, there is nothing that is more
truly an exercise of love to His children. You may seem to
the careless not thinking of them, but you are then loving
them best. When you make an object of the children of God,
there is no real love. When you are really devoted to God and
to His will, you truly love the children of God.

For this is the love of God, that we keep his
commandments: and his commandments are not
grievous {1 John 5:2, 3}.

The law was a yoke so grievous that neither their fathers nor
they were able to bear; but it is not so with the truth of God.
The law of God was for the punishing as well as testing of the
old man: the word of God is the food and directory of the
new man. But is not the world a great hindrance? No doubt;
but there is a something that overcomes the world; and what
is this? Faith. But mark, he does not say that “every one who
believeth that Jesus is the Christ” overcomes the world.
Perhaps you may see some whom you cannot doubt are the
real children of God, but they do not overcome the world.
What then will enable them to overcome the world? Believing
that Jesus is the Son of God. “The Christ,” I might perhaps
say, connects Him with the world, with the Jews and the
countries He is to govern;

the Son of God {1 John 5:5}

connects Him with the Father above the world. Such is the
difference. Thus, while holding fast and giving all its value
to the confession that Jesus is the Christ of God, I am not to
be tied to it. We need a growing sense of what Christ is, and
of His glory, in order to resist the downward tendency and
the ensnaring power of the world around; and true power
over the world is by advancing in the knowledge of Christ.
There is no other thing that will wear so well.
Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? {1 John 5:5}.

This is he that came by (ὅδε) water and blood.

John keeps us fully in the consciousness of our deliverance, but also of our responsibility (i.e., as God's children).

This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by (ἐν) water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one {1 John 5:6-8, but not verse 7 and part of verse 8 as in KJV}.

This, and no more here, is genuine scripture. A good deal of the two verses is and ought to be left out, if all legitimate authority is heeded by us.

The historical fact, which becomes the basis of the teaching, is that recorded in the Gospel, John 19:34, to which special attention is drawn in the following verse, as recorded by John who saw it;

and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe [John 19:35].

Here, instead of putting that inspired witness forward, the Spirit takes this place, the greatest of all present witnesses for Christ. The idea of baptism here is as childish for the water

as the Lord's Supper is confessed to be for the blood.

Purification, propitiation, and power answer to the three, all flowing to us in or consequent on the death of Christ, the Son of God.

If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath witnessed concerning his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not hath made him a liar; because he hath not believed in the witness which God hath witnessed concerning his Son, &c. {1 John 5:9-12}.

That is, God bears His testimony in this wondrous triad -- the Spirit, the water, and the blood, -- three witnesses, yet only one testimony: namely, that there is no life in the first man at all, and that all the blessing is in the Second; that He it is who by His death expiates my sins and purges me, and that the Holy Ghost gives me the joy of both by faith. The Holy Ghost is come not to bear witness to the first man -- He has only to convict him of sin -- but He testifies to the glory of the Second man, the riches of God's grace in Him, and the efficacy of His work in death for the believer. The church was becoming a ruin; but the believer has the witness in himself. Eternal life is superior to all change; and that he has -- even Christ -- an object of outward testimony, but also by grace in himself.

This is farther pursued, showing that it is in the Son of God.

He that hath the Son hath life {1 John 5:12};

and if a man has not the Son of God, it does not matter what else he may have, he has not life. It is in the Son, and only in Him.

Then comes the conclusion.

These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life {1 John 5:13}.

And there he stops. What is added as the last clause of 1 John 5:13 only spoils the verse. It was put in by man.

And this is the confidence, -- it is not a question of life only, but of confidence.

And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us {1 John 5:14}.

Thus after life comes confidence, and then the formal close of all follows, as we see in 1 John 5:18-21.

And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of him {1 John 5:15}.

But is there not such a thing as sin? Yes.

If any one see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for that sin that is not unto death. There is a sin unto death: concerning that I do not say that he should make request. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death {1 John 5:16, 17}.

Let me make a brief remark on this. The sin unto death has nothing to do with eternal death, but with the close of this life. It means not some extraordinarily grievous act, but any sin whatever under special circumstances. For instance, when Ananias and Sapphira lied in presence of the grace that the Holy Ghost was then bestowing on the church, this was sin unto death.

Many a man since then has told a lie which has not been so judged: it was not therefore a sin unto death.

The circumstances of the case have an important influence in modifying it and giving it character. So with any other sin. I mention this because it is there precisely where spiritual power is necessary very often; and all children of God might not see the bearing of a sin and its peculiar heinousness under a given state of things; but when once it is shown, they can understand it perfectly, because they have the life of Christ in them, and the Holy Ghost too.

All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not unto death.

We must not think that all sin is unto death; but any sin under peculiar circumstances might be.

And then the last verses sum up the whole matter.

We know that every one that is born of God sinneth not.

We saw that to be born of God, to have life, is the great doctrine of the epistle. Here is its character. Such an one does not sin,

but he that has been born of God keepeth himself,
and the wicked one toucheth him not {1 John 5:18}.

Here we have not merely its character, but its source. The character was Christ; the source is God.

We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the wicked one {1 John 5:19}.

This is the other sphere.

And we know that the Son of God hath come.

Now we have the object given.

The Son of God hath come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true; and we are in him that is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols {1 John 5:20, 21}

-- objects apt to rise with blinding power between their eyes and Christ.

Appendix on 1 John 5:7, 8

It is much to be regretted that excellent persons in all ages have been prone to rest some of their defences of the truth on untenable ground. The danger is that when any of these mistakes in proof are set aside, especially by foes of the truth, not only are such uninformed and incautious disputants apt to fight stubbornly for what is indefensible (i.e., really for self), but others, partly through timidity, partly through ignorance, may dread that the truth itself is impertilled, or be even disposed to stand in doubt of it, confounding the ill-conduct of its advocates with its own impregnable evidence.

Thus one hears with humiliation that any man of learning should seek to shelter the famous passage of the three heavenly witnesses from the reprobation which to say the least an interpolated gloss deserves, and from none so heartily as from pious men jealous for the divine glory of the Lord Jesus. Truth is itself too sacred to admit of giving quarter to that which is spurious, the continued sanction of which is hostile to the authority of the Bible, and in particular to the very point which the suspicious article is meant to support. Let us remember that the study of the authorities on which the Greek Testament rests has greatly developed during the last seventy years, and especially perhaps the last thirty. During this time many fresh manuscripts, some of great value and antiquity, have been brought to light, along with a fuller and more exact collation of all that had been previously known; and this makes an error of the kind less excusable and more painful, if it be in a quarter one respects.

I will not cite, however, from any volume of the day, but confront a sentence of the famous J. Calvin with the facts, that every intelligent Christian who may want information, but values nothing but the truth, may be enabled to judge for himself. “Since, however, the passage flows better when this clause [from “in heaven” to “in earth” inclusively] is added (!) and as I see that it is found in the best and most approved copies (! !) I am inclined to receive it as the true reading.” 39 (Calvin, Translation Soc. Comment. on the Cath. Epistles, p. 257. Edinburgh, 1855.) Then, again, Beza, who ought to have known more of the manuscripts, follows in the wake of his leader. Such statements, I confess, are inexplicable, save on the supposition both of strong prejudice and of surprising inattention to the facts of the case. For so decisive is the testimony of ancient documents (whether manuscripts, versions, or citations by the earliest ecclesiastical writers), that if this portion can be allowed to be scripture against their testimony, a fatal blow is inflicted on all certainty of evidence for the rest of the New Testament; for all the uncials preserve a dead silence as to it, more than 160 cursive, all the lectionaries, all the ancient versions except the Latin, and even of the Latin more than fifty of the oldest and best copies, and of the rest it is in some cases inserted by a later hand, and with that uncertainty of position which often accompanies an interpolation; while it is not once quoted in any genuine remains of the early Greek or even Latin fathers, even where the occasions seem most to call for it. Its supposed citation by Tertullian, Cyprian, Jerome, &c. is an illusion.

Hence Erasmus, in his first (1516) and second (1519) editions of the Greek New Testament, so far faithfully followed his MS., and did not print 1 John 5:7. It would seem that the Complutensian editors must have boldly translated the Latin version as it stands in the majority of the extant copies; for in the captious attack now before me (Annotationes Jacobi

hand scio an casu factum sit, ut hoc loco non repetatur, quod est in Graecis nostris, καὶ οἱ τρεῖς εἰς τῷ ἐν εἰσοφν. Ex hoc igitur codice Britannico reposimus, quod in nostris dicebatur deesse: ne cui sit causa calumniandi. Quanquam et hunc suspicior ad Latinorum codicesuisse castigatum. Posteaque enim Graeci concordium inierunt cum Ecclesia Romana, studuerunt et hac in parte cum Romanis consentire.” (Ib. coll. 351-353.)

Therefore Erasmus in his third edition (1522) inserted 1 John 5:7, correcting two errors and supplying the omission at the end of verse 8 in what he called the Cod. Brit. (or Montfort MS.), which probably had the Acts and Epistles added about this very time to the Gospels written a few years before, as the Revelation was added by another hand later still — copied, it would seem, from the well-known Leicester MS. Erasmus put in the passage to keep his promise, not because he counted it genuine. Is it too strong to fear that a document so framed, which cannot be traced beyond a friar named Froy, and which came in so opportunely to supply an apparent authority for a Greek text (of which more presently) for the three heavenly witnesses, points to a dishonest source?

It is remarkable too, as Sir I. Newton noticed long ago, that there is a marginal note by the side of this passage in the Complut. Polyglot, as in 1 Cor. 15:51 and Matt. 6:13, where the Vulgate is in conflict with the Greek MSS. It is a pity, however, that they were not as explicit on 1 John 5:7 as there, and that they did not cleave to the Greek against the Latin, as they did in rejecting its absurd misrepresentation of 1 Cor. 15:51. They do indeed cite Thomas Aquinas for 1 John 5:7. “Now to make Thomas thus in a few words do all the work was very artificial” (says Sir I. N., Works, vol. v. p. 522); “and in Spain, where Thomas is of apostolical authority, it might pass for a very judicious and substantial defence of the printed Greek. But to us Thomas Aquinas is no apostle. We are seeking for the authority of Greek manuscripts.”

To what then is the passage due? It is as clear as anything of the sort can be, that what we call 1 John 5:7 sprang from Augustine’s remarks on what now stands as verse 8, possibly suggested by words of Cyprian to a similar effect. Compare his treatise contra Maximum Arian. Episcop. 1. ii. c. 22. (Tom. viii. col. 725. ed. Ben.) Not that the celebrated bishop of Hippo cites the passage: what he says is professedly his comment or gloss on the words spirit, water, and blood. “Si vero ea, quae his significata sunt, velimus inquirere, non absurde occurrit ipsa Trinitas, qui unus, solus, verus, summus est Deus, Pater, et Filius et Spiritus sanctus, de quibus verissime dici potuit, Tres sunt testes, et tres unum sunt: ut nomine Spiritus significatum accipiamus Deum Patrem: de ipso quippe adorando loquebatur Dominus ubi ait, Spiritus est Deus. (Id. 4. 24.) Nomine autem sanguinis Filium quia, verbum caro factum est. (Id. i. 14.) Spiritum sanctum,” &c. From the reputation of Augustine this fanciful idea at first gained currency and acceptance, though not always in precisely the original shape; then it seems to have been inserted in the margin of a gloss, till at length, through the ignorance of the transcribers and the clergy in general, it
positively crept 40 into that text which the Council of Trent, with a temerity as amazing as the lack of knowledge it betrays, pronounced authentic. Hence the danger of demoralising Roman Catholic scholars, some of whom, like R. Simon, were doomed to do a perpetual violence to their conscience, while others, bolder in evil, misdirect every weapon that ingenuity can devise to make the worse appear the better reason. Most, no doubt, intrench themselves with a sort of blind honesty in their last stronghold: they believe what the church believes -- a pitiful answer where it is a question of revealed truth.

As to internal evidence, it is equally conclusive against the passage foisted in. To bear witness “in heaven” is nonsense; to say “on earth” is superfluous; for earth is the constant scene of testimony. Again, the Father and the Son are the true scriptural correlatives -- never the Father and the Word, which last is in correlation with God, as we see in John 1. Further, since Pentecost the Holy Ghost is distinctively said to be sent down from heaven, and this with a view to the testimony of the gospel, instead of bearing record in heaven with the Father and the Son. Lastly, those who adopt the passage as it stands in the vulgar Latin copies are led to lower the character of the witness borne; for as they of course treat the first three as divine, so they regard the last three as earthly and created witnesses, making the πνεύμα to be no other than “the created soul of Christ which he breathed forth on the cross, thus witnessing that he was true man.” It would be awkward to make the same Spirit witness both in heaven and on earth.

Objections to the omission of 1 John 5:7 have been imagined, as many are aware, for various reasons, all of which seem to me weakness itself.

1. As to the supposed breach of connexion, one has only to read 1 John 5:6 in order to be convinced that, on the contrary, the three heavenly witnesses come in most strangely between the water and the blood and the Spirit, of which that verse treated, and 1 John 5:8, which pursues the same subject. Internally therefore, as much as externally, 1 John 5:7 can only be viewed as an intrusion. The Trinity (fundamental a truth as it is, and without it Christianity is a myth) has no possible link with the context. Christ in death, yet withal life eternal, is the point on which the three witnesses converge with their one testimony.

2. The expression οἱ μαρτυροῦντες, said of the Spirit, the water, and the blood, is no difficulty without 1 John 5:7, because they are evidently personified.

3. The wonder is great how Bishop Middleton, the able investigator of the usage of the Greek article, could have so palpably erred as to say that the τὸ before ἔν in 1 John 5:8 presupposes ἔν in 1 John 5:7, and therefore that both verses stand or fall together. Previous reference is only one of the sources of the article. “Ev, I grant, might be used of the persons in the Trinity (compare John 10:30 for the Father and the Son); but τὸ ἔν is absolutely necessary for the Spirit, the water, and the blood, where identity of nature is not in question but unity of scope. Compare Phil. 2:2. Other arguments, such as that founded on two editions of the Epistle, or on the influence of Arians, or on the negligence of transcribers, do not call for a detailed consideration in this place if at all.

Of the state and manner in which the passage is found in the few real or factitious Greek manuscripts that contain it, we may observe,

(1) that both in the Græco-Latin Cod. Ottobon. (Vat. 298) and in the Greek Cod. Montfort. (Trin. Coll. Dubl. G. 97) the three heavenly witnesses are set down without the Greek article to any one of them (πστηρ, λόγος, καὶ πνεύμα ἁγιασμοῦ) -- a construction which indicates not obscurely the hand of one used to Latin (which has no article) and grossly ignorant of Greek;

(2) that the same Cod. Ottobon. gives (ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, translated in the corresponding Latin by in celo, though not ἀπὸ, as Scholz has strangely read, but, επὶ τῆς γῆς;

(3) that whilst the Cod. Ottobon. represents that the Father, Word, and Holy Spirit (εἰς τὸ ἔν ἐν ἑνὶ) “are to one purpose,” or agree in one, (translated by itself unum sunt!) the Cod. Montfort. says ἔν εἰς ἑνὸς; and both (like the Complut. Polyglot) leave out the grand point of the genuine scripture; for neither gives the smallest hint of the revelation that the three witnesses, the Spirit and the water and the blood, conspire in one testimony. I may say that the Montfort MS. unquestionably Latinizes elsewhere in 1 John, and in the immediate context, in opposition to all other Greek manuscripts.

As for the only other documents as yet produced in favour of the amplified text, suffice it to say that the Codex Ravanus of Berlin is now (as well as one of those at Wolfenbüttel) acknowledged to be a forgery, copying the very characters (in themselves peculiar) of the Complutensian Polyglot, and even repeating some of its misprints! That which Scholz cited as 173 in his list is the Codex Regius Neapolitanus, which in the text really confirms the truth, but adds on the margin in more recent characters the disputed clause. Here only, as compared with Codd. Ottobon. and Montfort., the article is duly inserted; but there is this unfortunate flaw in its value, that while the manuscript was written in the eleventh century, the addition cannot claim a higher antiquity than the sixteenth, if indeed so high. Such evidence as this might be easily multiplied by dishonest hands; but the weight of it all would be nil.

It may be worth while to mention, as corroborating the
testimony to the source of this mistake, not without fraud, that its earliest known occurrence in Greek is in the Greek version of the Acts of the fourth Lateran Council (in 1215), where it stands thus: ὅτι τρεῖς εἰσίν οἱ μαρτυρούντες ἐν οὐρανῷ ὁ πατὴρ, λόγος, καὶ πνεῦμα ἄγιον καὶ τούτοι (sic! οἱ τρεῖς ἐν εἰσίν. εὐθὺς τε προστάθησιν . . . καθὼς ἐν τοῖς κώδηξιν (Sic! = ἀντιγράφοις) εὑρίσκεται. So the passage stands both in Hardouin's Collection (tom. vii. p. 18) and in Mansi's (tom. xxii. p. 984). I can hardly doubt that this it was which encouraged the Complutensian editors to venture on their daring importation into the Greek New Testament of a passage which, however well meant doctrinally, bears the indelible trace of human infirmity, even after Stunica and his companions did their best to make decent Greek of it by inserting τὸ before οὐρανῷ, ὁ before λόγος, and τὸ before (not πν. but) ἄγιον πνεῦμα, 41 correcting also τούτοι, which was no doubt a blunder for οὐσίοι. But they went a little too far when they changed ἐν into εἰς τὸ ἐν after the first three, and left out εἰς τὸ ἐν after τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ τὸ ὄνομα καὶ τό αἷμα where these words beyond controversy ought to be. No doubt they were guided by Latin copies made since Th. Aquinas' day and that council. They refer in their marginal note to the perverse doctrine of Joachim on the Trinity, which was condemned at this very council of the Lateran.

If we turn to Thomas Aquinas, as referred to, the erroneous statement is sufficiently startling. He cites 1 John 5:7 as it stands in the later Latin copies, and reasons on the heterodoxy of Joachim, who applied the unity there, not to essence, but to affection and consent. Then, quoting 1 John 5:8, he says, "In quibusdam Libris attexitur: et hi tres unum sunt; sed hoc in veris exemplaribus non habetur(!), sed in quibusdam Libris dicitur esse appositum ab haereticis Ariânis ad pervertendum intellectum sanum auctoritatis praemissae de unitate essentiâli trium personarum (! !)." (Divi Thomæ Aquinatis. Opera, tom. viii., p. 83, Venetiis, 1776.) This probably accounts for the omission of the clause that concludes 1 John 5:8 in the Complutensian Polyglot, as well as in some of the Greek copies manufactured after the fourth Lateran Council. Some excuse may be allowed for one like the "angelic doctor," who was unacquainted with the Greek scriptures; but why then did he dogmatise on so serious a subject? Total ignorance is the only conceivable palliation of his assertions, which are notoriously opposed to truth. And what can one think of the deliberate sanction given to all this by Cardinal Ximenes and his editors in the renowned Polyglot of Alcala? Are we to shelter them also under such a plea? If not, what then?

Again, what can one judge of the knowledge or the moral integrity of keeping such up to a note 1 John 5:7 in modern reprints of Jerome's works (e.g. the Abbé Migne's, Paris, 1845) as the following? "Cæterum nota sunt pro ejus versiculi germanitate testimonia Patrum Africanaorum, Tertulliani, Cypriani, Eugenii, Fulgentii, Vigilii, Victoris, et quatuor centum Episcoporum in fidei professione, quam Vandalorum regi obtulerunt. Major omni exceptione est Cassiodorus," &c. (Patrologiae Curs., tom. xxix., coll. 846.) Not to speak of the silence of the Greek fathers on a question of the Greek text, it has been proved repeatedly and minutely that not one of these could have read the passage in the Greek as it now appears in the Vulgate. All that can be fairly drawn from Victor Vitensis' story of the symbol of faith presented by the African bishops to Hunnericus is that the three heavenly witnesses must have been then read in their Latin copies. But it is certainly not so in the oldest and best Latin manuscripts that are extant, as all intelligent Romanists must know.

41. Hence Calcaeus in the fourteenth century, and Bryennius in the fifteenth, as Bishop Marsh noticed, being native Greeks, and feeling the deficiency of the Lateran Acts in Greek, wrote ὁ λόγος καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον. The copyist of the Montfort MS. omitted the article even before πατήρ, not to speak of the other words which require it.
Lectures Introductory

to the Study of

The Acts, the Catholic Epistles,
and

the Revelation

Lecture 8
The Second and Third Epistles
of John, and Jude

There is this peculiarity about the second Epistle of John, that it alone of all the inspired communications is directly addressed to a woman, and not this only but also to her children. There are certainly good but special reasons for a course so exceptional. We know how much the word of God, not to speak of every spiritual instinct, would lead a Christian woman however gifted to seek a place of retirement and of unobtrusive service.

We feel how all that is blessed of God's grace, and I may add of God's gift, is only so much the more set off when woman, while thoroughly using whatever the grace of the Lord entrusts to her, understands nevertheless the place in which it has pleased Him to put her here below. Yet here we have one of the most stringent epistles the Holy Ghost ever wrote addressed to a woman -- the elect lady -- and to her children, as the immediate objects of it, -- not to an extraordinary apostolic commissioner, nor an elder, nor an assembly, still less an assembly with bishops and deacons. Why so? Because there was a question before the Holy Ghost of such unspeakable urgency and magnitude that all considerations must give way to it. God so ordered things that the Epistle should be sent to a woman originally, for the very purpose of showing that, whatever may be the ordinary ways of God in His church, there are occasions and seasons in which the very foundation of His grace and of His moral glory must be maintained at all cost. Wherever this is the case, no excuse can be tolerated on the score of sex or youth. Do not tell me that it is only a child or a woman. If Christ is in the question, all else must give way. Nor is this a sacrifice but real gain.

What has been remarked may serve to show us the all-absorbing consequence of what the Holy Ghost here takes in hand. Christ was undermined by those who held His name. It was a question of a true or of a false Christ. Sex was nothing now, youth not more to be considered -- all very important when things flow on regularly and in their ordinary channels. We all know how unbecoming it would be for either the one or the other to be put forward, still more to put themselves there; but the Holy Ghost addresses Himself to them here. And we shall see, as is always the case, that what might seem an anomaly in the word of God, when properly looked into, will prove to be full of grave instruction for all our souls. No other conceivable address would have been so appropriate for the second Epistle of John.

Had the present been written in general terms, like the first Epistle, much would have been lost; just as, on the other hand, I could scarcely, for my own part, imagine the first Epistle written to the elect lady and her children. All is precisely as it should be. There we find points of universal interest to the children of God, and it is a question of addressing all this family, fathers, young men, and babes. But here, where the tide of evil was now setting in strongly, where searching enquiries must be on foot, where not the ordinary evils only were increasing in an ever and rapidly accumulating volume, but the deepest peril for the basis of all our hopes, the warning is addressed fittingly both to the family and to individuals. Where the first Epistle noticed these things in a general way to all, here we come to greater precision in the evil, and here too we have to do with particular persons.

How often one has heard it urged that it is not for a woman to take upon herself to judge, and that no wise man can mean to say that these are questions for children -- that they are points of delicacy which most of all require deep theological knowledge and mature judgment; and would you expect the assembly of God to judge such matters? But the Holy Ghost here appeals to a woman and her children, and they are bound to judge; if they do not, Christ is set at nought for their own ease. It was now a question of Christ -- the Christ of God. We shall see all this more clearly as we proceed. I am only now endeavouring to show the beautiful appropriateness of that which to a superficial eye might seem somewhat out of order in the address of this Epistle.

The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth {2 John 1}.

This is another very characteristic point in the second Epistle of John. Indeed it runs all through John. In the
Gospel, as we know, Christ Himself is set forth expressly as the truth; and then his Epistles, as we have seen and may yet see, abound in the same tenacity to what was revealed by and in Christ. Here we find it still. It is interwoven into the very salutation of the epistle --

The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom

I love in the truth.

At once the issue is understood. What was at stake is here before the mind of those who read so remarkable an address. If Mary, about to become the mother of Jesus, might wonder at the singularity of the angel's salutation, assuredly this was meant to search the conscience and stir the souls of the elect lady and her children, when an inspired apostle addresses to them a communication of unwonted solemnity. How great the grace of Christ, and infinite the condescension, that shows how precious is every believer to Him! We find nothing like this in any of the preceding epistles, as to the Galatians or the Romans, the Corinthians or the Ephesians, yet I do affirm that this is precisely what was wanted here. It was a more fundamental question, and the error more fatal. It was no defence or assertion of justification by faith. John is not setting forth the proper order of the assembly of God; nor is he leading the saint into the heavenly privileges of the individual or the body. Christ was in question or nothing. Nothing, did I say? Worse than nothing. It was either the Christ of God in all His divine glory, or the greatest evil into which a man can possibly be plunged by the enemy. It was, in short, war to the knife -- the great controversy between Christ and antichrist. Solemn to think and say, the self-same crisis affects every soul now present!

I remember years ago reading a book by a celebrated character, who has now passed away from the scene, in which he dared to raise the question whether there was any particular sign in 2 or 3 John. 42 why they should be accepted as divinely inspired, more than such compositions as the pastoral letters of Ignatius. It was not that the writer took the place of being an infidel: in fact he was Rector of the English College at Rome, and since a Cardinal in this country. This dreadful feature of ecclesiasticism is not so uncommon to find; namely, an infidel argument under the cowl of a monk or in the lips of their most learned professors. Therefore one must not be surprised if one ever so eminent ecclesiastically gave the plainest evidence that he had no faith in the word of God, that he did not participate in its power. Thus the strongest form of the assertion of church authority may really betray under its robes no better than vulgar infidelity. He asked 43 how you would demonstrate from internal facts the inspiration of the second and third Epistles of St. John, finding in them neither a prophecy nor anything else which could not have been written by a very holy and pious man, without any aid whatsoever from inspiration! The same poisonous argument taints in a still baser and more audacious form Dr. Milner's “End of Controversy.” Indeed it pervades Romanism as a whole, and proves its essentially infidel character.

I think, my brethren, that our experience might supply ample ground for an answer, though probably not of such a character as would satisfy one who could make such an objection. There is a day coming when judgment will decide; but conscience, acted upon by the Holy Ghost, can form a conviction now -- not of course infallibly, for God alone is or can be infallible -- but adequately for the need of the soul. I do say, that the loss would have been immense if we had not had even these two Epistles, putting the matter on no higher ground than this. I need not say that I refuse to treat a question of scripture on a mere ground of utility. Still, we are certain that God has written nothing in vain; and if in a grave crisis of late any one scripture was needed and must have been missed, without which we might have found ourselves at a loss how to act firmly under as trying circumstances as ever befell any soul in this room, or any other, it would have been precisely the second Epistle of John.

The apostle then lets them know that he loved them all in the truth: for a believer, young or old, man, woman, or child, is best loved just for the sake of the truth. He that departs from the truth, what is he? A rebel. But they that walk in the truth, even were they children or ever so lowly, are precious to God: and His Spirit waits on such, and writes to them, and lays on them to decide before God, in their own sphere of duty, this most grave question: “Is my soul in communion with God about His own Son? Whatever may be the reputation of others, whatever my own weakness and call to walk humbly, do I feel that the one thing which is to determine all others for me is the truth, the truth of Christ Himself?” If it be so, all else will in the main be right. Hence John writes to this effect to the elect lady, whom he loved in truth, and to her children. Nor was this affection of a personal or circumstantial character:

Whom I love in the truth: and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth (2 John 1).

The revelation of God in Christ does, by the Holy Spirit, bind together in love all who know the truth. It was on account of

42. “I would ask you, for instance, how you would demonstrate (I will not speak now of the books of the Old Testament; I will take that for granted, from the historical evidence, that our Saviour and His apostles received them as sufficient to satisfy you with regard to them; but Christians are more particularly interested in the New Testament) how you would demonstrate from internal facts the inspiration of the second and third Epistles of St. John, finding in them neither a prophecy nor any thing else that could not have been written by a very holy and pious man, without any aid from inspiration. In some, indeed, of the Epistles of St. Paul you will find it exceedingly difficult to discover passages so decidedly proving a divine assistance in him who wrote them as to satisfy you that they were inspired.” -- Lectures (p. 28) on the Doctrines and Practices of the Roman Catholic Church, &c. By the Rev. Nicholas Wiseman, D.D., &c. London: Hodson, Fleet Street. 1836.

43. In the corrected edition of this lecture I find, “What internal mark of inspiration can we discover in the third epistle of St. John to show that the inspiration sometimes must have been granted here? Is there anything in that epistle which a good and pious pastor of the primitive ages might not have written? anything superior (!) in sentiment or doctrine (!!) to what an Ignatius or a Polycarp might have indited?” (Lect. ii. p. 38, ed. 1836.) Truly “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God . . . . neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”
the truth that he now wrote -- as it is said, 
for the truth's sake.

How unweariedly he puts forward that which was now to 
test them severally! (2 John 2).

For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall 
be with us for ever. Grace be with you, mercy and 
peace (2 John 2, 3).

As has been often and truly remarked, where individuals are 
thus before the mind of the Spirit of God, the need of 
mercy
is supposed and shown.

From God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus 
Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love 
(2 John 3)

-- an expression found, as far as I remember, nowhere else. It was just in its right place here. Satan was undermining the glory of 
the Son of the Father.

But if He be not this, how can I go to Him? How rest my 
soul, my all, on Him? How can God look to Him and His 
work for every soul that is brought to Himself?

Hence the apostle's source of joy.

I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking 
in truth, as we have received a commandment from the 
Father (2 John 4).

Walking in truth is the result of having the truth. The truth 
produces truthfulness. The man who has not got the truth 
cannot possibly walk in truth, and will not long wear the 
semblance of it. To walk thus was the effect of the truth itself 
known: they walked in truth,

according as we received commandment from the 
Father.

And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote 
a new commandment to thee, but that which we had 
from the beginning, that we love one another 
(2 John 5).

It was the old, but ever new word: old, because it was 
manifested in Christ Himself; new, because it is true in us as 
in Him. Divine love flows from love, and reproduces itself in 
all who know Christ the truth. But what is love?

And this is love:
not independency of each other, not agreeing to differ, or any 
of those inventions of men which are not only a departure 
from the truth, but in point of fact morally evil and injurious.

This is love, that we walk after his commandments.

You cannot separate it from Christ; you cannot separate it 
from obedience. It is love in exercise, and it is also love that 
is communicated by faith in Jesus.

This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard 
from the beginning, ye should walk in it (2 John 6).

Now he gives the reason why he writes thus solemnly to 
this lady and her children.

For many deceivers are entered into the world, who 
confess not Jesus Christ coming in the flesh. This is 
the deceiver and the antichrist (2 John 7).

Many deceivers are entered into the world;
and therefore it is needful, yea imperative, to press the claims 
of the truth of God.

Who confess not Jesus Christ coming in the flesh.
It is put here rather differently from its shape in the first 
Epistle. There the allusion was to the fact, but this as 
stamping a permanent character on Christ -- the Christ that 
came. Here it is not so much a question of His having come, 
but, as it seems to me, indicating if possible a deeper shade 
of infidelity. No doubt the same persons are referred to, but 
it would seem as having developed their infidelity rather 
more. For there is the rejection not only of the fact, but even 
of its possibility. They conceived the thought that in some 
way or another it was derogatory to Him. They denied, some 
His deity, some His humanity.

In commenting on 1 John 4, I have already remarked that 
Jesus Christ come in the flesh (1 John 4:2, 3;
2 John 7)
supposes neither His deity alone, nor His humanity only, but 
both. There is no propriety in the expression, it appears to 
me, unless it means both united in the same person. In point 
of fact it is the veering to one side or the other -- choosing a 
part of the truth of Christ so as to set aside the rest -- that is 
so fruitful a source of error here and everywhere, though 
here most fatally.

This is the deceiver and the antichrist (2 John 7).
It is far worse than bringing in division and offence, bad as 
these are; nay, it is far more serious than even the 
undermining of morality, ruinous as this must be. To sap or 
corrupt morality is no doubt to destroy oneself, and perhaps 
often others; but this is to defame and degrade Christ, the Son 
of the Father. This, then, is a bolder effort of Satan, and 
therefore John calls one guilty of it only
the deceiver 
(every false teacher is more or less a deceiver), but in this 
case also 
the antichrist.

Hence he calls them to look at home diligently lest they 
should stray. For God alone keeps the soul, and this by and 
in the truth.

Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things 
which we have wrought, 
of which the apostles had been the instrument,) 
but that we receive a full reward (2 John 8).

Then he lays down the great principle in (2 John 9): 
Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the 
doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in 
the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and 
the Son.

It is a larger principle than simply denying Christ coming in 
the flesh. No matter where it is, or how it is, if you 
overthrow the person of Christ, you transgress the doctrine 
of Christ. In 2 John 7 we had a particular case; but from it the
Spirit of God rises up to this statement of truth which meets every such case.

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ

(that is, in the teaching, which the Holy Ghost has given in His word about Christ, not about His work, but about His person),

hath not God {2 John 9}

in any sense or measure, now that Christ is preached.

The greatest error about His work is not so directly fatal to the soul, because it does not so immediately assail the personal glory of the Lord Jesus. Here it is the doctrine of Christ Himself; and as one must beware of straying at first, let him also beware of not continuing in the doctrine of Christ. A man might have professed His name, and gone on some time with the assembly of God, accepted as a believer, or even a teacher; but if he does not abide in the truth of Christ, it does not signify what he may have been, it matters not in the least how much he may seemingly have been blessed, it is all over with him if he does not abide in the doctrine of Christ, and it becomes a necessity, not merely for the safety of oneself and others, but for God’s glory, which is concerned here more sensitively than anywhere else.

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God.

It might be said that at any rate a man might have the truth of the Old Testament, as there were such before Christ was manifested in the world; and if the person fails to enter into all the truth that Christianity has told out, can he be worse off than those who lived and died before Jesus came? The answer is that such special pleading is all in vain; he is incomparably guiltier and worse off, because now the standard is not what God once gave, but what He is giving now in a Christ fully revealed. Therefore it will not do to talk of what others knew not. This is an important practical criterion; because, although not to the same extent, it does meet the difficulty which people constantly allege founded on what their forefathers did -- possibly excellent men -- two or three hundred years ago. What is that to the present moment? If God by His Spirit causes His truth to reach us in a form and power suited to this day, if God brings it home more clearly on this point or that, these are the things which put the soul under a fresh responsibility; and this seems indicated in the form in which the Spirit of God deals with the error here.

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God.

It is not only that he lacks the blessedness of the Christian revelation, but he has not God -- he has no part nor lot with God at all. The Old Testament saints had God variously revealed. They received His word and rejoiced, according to the measure of their faith, in the truth as God then made it known to them. But now that Christ is come, now that the Holy Ghost has been sent down, now that the unfolding of Christ’s personal glory, of His exaltation, and of the infinite grace of His work, has been proclaimed, it is altogether hopeless to seek a cover of present unbelief under the ignorance of past years. It is the present unfolding of God’s mind that puts every soul to the test. Therefore not to accept it, and not to abide in it when it is received, to go back from it or to transgress, swerving to one side or the other, or abandoning it, comes to the same substantial sin and ruin.

On the other hand, here is the comfort for the elect lady and her children, and for any one else who cleaves to the truth.

He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son {2 John 9}.

There is great blessedness in thus abiding, brethren; it is a grand thing not to be easily shaken, not to be moved to and fro by every wind of doctrine, more particularly in anything about Christ. Beware of this. Weigh seriously every thought, no matter from whom it may come -- any word that even seems to turn you away from what you have, and to weaken the assurance you have from God. Never allow yourself to be shaken from old truth, if indeed you have it and know it. At the same time always hold your soul open for more; and take care that you do not confound notions you have gathered (perhaps from tradition, possibly from your own mind) with the truth of Christ, lest, when the tradition is touched, you may begin to yield to the spirit of unbelief, and either give up truth you used (or seemed at least) to hold, or burst out against the truth of God in others who know it better than yourself.

In these things assuredly we need to have the promised guidance of the Holy Ghost. We cannot start or go on without it, nor would we do so even if we could. It is the very blessedness of our souls to be kept by so holy a guide and in safe companionship. But then, just as in our ordinary walk, if we live in the Spirit, we must walk in the Spirit; so also, if we have been taught of the Spirit, we must go forward and persevere in the Spirit. This does not in the smallest degree clash with

abiding.

The only way to be kept is holding fast what God has really taught us, yet using this as the groundwork for making progress. Such is the true way to

abide.

He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son {2 John 9}.

Now that the doctrine of Christ is fully brought out in the word of God, the more sure it is that there is nothing to add. Impossible to discover a truth of God that is not already in the Bible. But there is not a little to learn which, I am persuaded, is there already. We must not confound these two things.

Who would assume that you and I know all that is in the Bible? If then a line of truth be pointed out anywhere in scripture, do not calumniously pretend that it is some further development, because you have been so dull as not to see it. It is the very point of faith to know that as God Himself is infinite, so His word contains boundless riches for us. There is that which may by the Holy Ghost be always apprehended more and more fully; and yet after all it is the same holy deposit as was given to the Christian from the beginning.
The apostle now comes to the practical consequence. He has laid down the principle in 2 John 9: now comes the practice.

If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds {2 John 10, 11}.

Mark how it is put. It is not -- bring not the true humanity, or the proper Deity; because Satan might change the doctrine somewhat, so as to save appearances for the simple. Therefore it would not do merely to specify some one particular form of error, because then the devil would have only to evade that form, and there would be no resource. But here it stands firm yet comprehensive: if a man come to you, and does not bring this doctrine (that is, the doctrine of Christ), do not you receive him. No matter what may be the particular manner in which the enemy has warped his soul, and through him dishonoured Christ; no matter what may be the peculiar nature of the false doctrine, -- if a man come to you, and bring not the divinely revealed doctrine, the Holy Ghost’s teaching of Christ in the written word, --
receive him not into your house, neither bid him greeting.

That is to say, do not bid him a common salutation. There is nothing about “God speed” in the word (χαίρετε), though “good speed” might be tolerable. The stronger terms are merely put in by the English translators. It was the ordinary form of courteous greeting every day.

This is to my mind a serious thought. Do you think, my brethren, that we all follow this out as we ought? Are we not conscious of shrinking from the cost, and of a fear if not anxiety lest we should be counted uncourteous? I can speak for one certainly; and I doubt much whether in general we are sufficiently alive to the solemnity of what Satan is always pursuing. More particularly let me add, that we stand in a position, in failure which tends to expose all God’s children to the efforts of the enemy. There are none, I presume, whom he would so much desire to drag into the mire, and thus defile the name of Jesus.

If then such an one come, of course without the doctrine, yet taking the ground of truth, you are to receive him not. Where? To the Lord’s table? No; this could not have been said to the elect lady and her children. The exhortation is quite independent of public fellowship. The question of the Lord’s table is not even raised. They are not even to receive him into their private house, nor to accost him with common greeting. Why this most severe and peremptory exclusion?

For he that biddeth him greeting
(not so much as receiving him into the house, but interchanging words of courtesy with such a man, knowingly, of course, and deliberately)

is a partaker of his evil deeds.

You, as a confessor of Christ, put your sanction on this denier of Christ. You could not do worse except deny Christ yourself; indeed, in a certain sense you are more guilty than even if you were drawn for a time into the abominable thing yourself, because then you would be honestly acting out what you had been deceived by Satan into believing; but the more you hold the true Christ, if you tamper with those who do not, the more shameless you are in unfaithfulness to Christ.

To some this may seem strong; but who has written it? who urges it? Is it a man without God? Is it not the Spirit of God who charges us in the name of the Lord Jesus thus sensitively to feel for the truth of Christ? Let us not be deaf to such a claim from such a person. Let us not reserve our warm feelings for our friends, and leave only indifference for the name of Jesus. He that greets kindly the man that brings not the doctrine of Christ is a traitor to Christ.

Let me here repeat that it is not “God speed,” for this might give a false idea. It sounds as if we were wishing him well in his work. This would be commonly inferred by one unaccustomed to read the language of the Holy Ghost. But it conveys nothing of the sort -- merely a Greek “good morning” -- what would pass in the current language of the day among one’s fellows.

He then who has anything to say to the defamer of Christ which could be fairly interpreted as a sanction, let it be ever so small, becomes a partaker of his evil deeds. It is not a question of being a partner in his evil doctrine. The elect lady and her children were of course believed to hold sound doctrine; but they are here peremptorily called to refuse any measure of countenance to one who did not bring the doctrine of Christ -- not only not to receive him into the house, but not to salute him outside it. It was a part of the loyalty they owed to Christ.

John concludes thus:

Having many things to write to you, I would not with paper and ink: but I hope to come to you, and speak mouth to mouth, that your joy may be full. The children of thine elect sister greet thee {2 John 12, 13}.

There was hearty love, but it was only in the truth, of which Christ alone is the test and obedience the effect.

+++ {3 John} +++

The Third Epistle of John again calls us to weigh the Lord's admirable wisdom in its address, --

The elder unto the well-beloved Gaius {3 John 1},

-- as we have, I trust, been satisfied of the same in the second Epistle’s address to
the elect lady and her children {2 John 1}.

Without the third Epistle we should have an immense loss; for here too we may meet the unbelieving slight already noticed in a scribe of this age by a direct assertion of its living value. A precious and needed supplement is supplied especially for these evil days. If we had only the second without the third Epistle of John, we should have the negative side without the positive -- the evil warned against rather than the good enforced. Both are most needful. What would have

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been the effect of the second Epistle of John, if that alone of
the two had been ours at the present moment? I have sought
to show how admirable it is -- matchless for its own purpose
-- and impossible to supply its place from any other part of
scripture, yet in thorough accordance with it all. It is admitted
that the principle of the Epistle is found all through the New
Testament; but the strength of the application, the incisive
edge of its holy jealousy for Christ, is only to be found there.
Yet, supposing we had not the third of John, what would be
the too sure effect? I am persuaded we should be in danger of
becoming painfully narrow; we should be in constant dread
of an antichrist in those that surrounded us; we should do
little but search with suspicion, lest each new comer to the
house should not bring the doctrine of Christ.

Now we are not called to be thus on the watch for
another’s evil. We ought never to be suspicious. It is not
faith, but flesh that expects iniquity. On the other hand, if
a man comes and does not bring the doctrine of Christ, it is not
to be branded as suspicion or want of love if one regard him
as antichrist. It is according to the truth we love, and is the
wisdom that comes from above; nay, it is real obedience and
loyalty to Christ. But to allow doubts and questions of one
who neither in himself nor in his associations makes light of
Christ’s glory is inexcusable. Here comes one bearing the
Lord’s name, not without a Barnabas who knows and can
commend him: to indulge in surmises, if without the least
evidence of this or that about him, is clearly not according to
Christ. It is here, I think, that we may learn more of the
value and special function of this third Epistle of John, which
is as decided in the cherishing of warm affections towards the
faithful servants of the Lord, as the second Epistle was
peremptory in its warning against the allowance of the
profession of Christ’s name, to shut our eyes to the fact that
there are men who abuse that name to overthrow His person
and truth.

The third Epistle accordingly is not addressed to a lady
and her children. This would not suit its object. Too often, as
we know, ladies and their children want no exhortation to go
forth with sufficiently warm affection after preachers. This
is notorious. There are few more common snares in the church
of God than the undue influence which some exercise, if they
do not seek, over females and young people. I do not speak
of such as seek the conversion of souls, but of those whose
zeal goes forth in unedifying questions which form parties,
chiefly through the medium of women and children.
Undoubtedly this has always been the case. If you search
through the history of the church, you will invariably find
that where men have wrong purposes in view, they do not
seek intelligent men, -- those who can take and keep their
ground, still less those to whom God has given grace as
faithful servants of independent judgment: they shrink from
these, and avoid a conference which might be profitable,
getting into holes and corners, where they can at leisure
indoctrinate their little coteries with the doctrines that they
bring in privily.

Of all this and more we have had sorrowful experience.
It is not a thing we have merely read about others in bygone
days. We have seen and known it ourselves: its grief we have
bitterly felt; and we ought to mention this snare, and could
not refrain, if indeed we have love for the children of God
and jealousy for the glory of Christ. Undoubtedly then it
remains true that there is the solemn fact of Satan’s enmity,
and of his using those who bear the name of Christ to
overthrow His glory, as far as he can. It is the Holy Ghost
who warns of this, though the word and experience prove
how mighty He is in behalf of the love and glory of Christ.
For indeed there are men faithful and true to that name; and
we are as much bound to go forth with loving desire and
succour, to cheer and help them in every way, showing
honour to them, as again we are responsible that no
circumstances, no past reputation, no present amiability, no
ties of flesh and blood, no consideration of any human sort,
shall weaken our solemn separation from and abhorrence of
that which overthrows Jesus.

This third Epistle then is addressed to Gaius -- no doubt
a truly hospitable and gracious man. We all know too well
that men are apt to be somewhat selfish. Women, as we must
be aware, are even by nature characterised by affection.
Men, if they have what one looks for from them, ought to
have a little judgment; but then their judgment may be warped
by selfishness, though no doubt this may be often concealed,
perhaps from themselves, by pleas of prudence and so forth.
Women, as a class, have warmer and quicker affections.

Here then the wisdom of God is very observable. The
kindest of men require to be stirred up, and need to be
exhorted strongly as to what they owe to those who go forth
in the name of the Lord Jesus. With women this is hardly to
be pressed. On the contrary, as a general rule, they rather
call for a little cooling down. But as for men, I have rarely
seen the man that was not in want of an occasional
admonition or encouragement in this kind of love. Do we not
recognize in a new form the wisdom of our God?

The elder unto the well-beloved Gaius, whom I love
in the truth (3 John 1).

He was already a large-hearted man, but he was none the
worse for being somewhat cheered on. There is a danger of
being disheartened in these labours of love. There are many
difficulties and many disappointments, and there is no man
who may not sometimes need a word from God to keep his
courage up, and his confidence in the Lord, that the springs
of his love may flow fresh and strong.

Here we have the fact that to the
well-beloved Gaius
the apostle writes with this intent. He loved him also in the
truth. Whether it was the elect lady and her children, or the
well-beloved Gaius, it is all the same thing. It was not
because of his hospitality, but
whom I love in the truth.

No doubt the apostle did much value his generosity and care;
but even in matters wholly different from those of his second
Epistle, the distinguishing feature which presses on his soul
was this: --
whom I love in the truth.
Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest
prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth
{3 John 2}.

He was not indifferent even as to the bodily well-being of
Gaius. The Holy Ghost thus inspires him to write it. It is not
a private letter, nor was it an uninspired codicil added to what
was inspired; but here it stands in a genuine apostolic epistle,
written by John the elder to his brother. He wished that he
might prosper and be in health, even as his soul prospered.

For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and
testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou
walkest in truth. I have no greater joy than to hear
that my children walk in truth {3 John 3, 4}.

It was sweet to the apostle to hear such a testimony to the
steadfastness of Gaius in the truth, as it was to hear of all he
loved.

Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest
to the brethren, and this 44 strangers {3 John 5}.

The common text and our English version seem a little
peculiar in the phraseology here, conveying the idea that
these strangers were not brethren. This clearly was not the
intention. He has before his mind brethren that were
strangers. It was not merely brethren that lived in the place
where Gaius was: this might be a manifest token of happy
friendship. But there was a greater proof of love and
hospitality in the kindness he practised to stranger brethren,
to Christians whom he did not know.

Which have borne witness of thy love before the
church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey
worthily of God, thou shalt do well: for on account
of the name they went forth, taking nothing of the
Gentiles. We therefore ought to take up such, that,
we might be fellow-helper to the truth {3 John 6-8}.

This was a special claim on brethren. They did not throw
themselves on man, on the world, on nature, but on Christ
only. It was for His name’s sake they went forth. They
looked nowhere else; and the apostle says,

We therefore ought to take up such
-- not ye but

we.

How beautifully he who lay on Jesus’ bosom puts himself
along with Gaius! Had the apostle been placed in the same
circumstances as Gaius, no doubt he would have done so; but
his place as apostle did not absolve him from the practical
manifestation of love to servants of the Lord who might be in
a position altogether different from his own. That this is the
case is most evident, because in the verse but one before he
says

thou {3 John 6};
in the verse after he says

I {3 John 8}

Unquestionably then, when he changes the
thou
either to
we
or to
I,
he means what he says.

Thus we find that if there was sorrow expressed in the
second Epistle at finding the deceivers and the antichrist
seeking an entrance among the simple, in the third Epistle
there is the joy of welcoming these faithful brethren who
went forth for Christ, and his loving hospitable heart who is
thus praised by the Holy Ghost, and his name indelibly
recorded in the scriptures of truth with theirs as fellow-
labourers.

But the bright picture has its shade.

I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth
to have the pre-eminence among them, receiveth us
not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds
which he doeth, prating against us with malicious
words: and not content therewith, neither doth he
himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them
that would, and casteth them out of the church
{3 John 9, 10}.

We have another evil designated very clearly here.
Diotrephes is the scriptural example of the clerical tribe, as
contra-distinguished from the ministry of Christ. There is no
service, because there is no love. He is the representative of
the spirit which opposes the free action of the Holy Ghost,
setting itself even against apostolical authority in order to gain
or maintain his own individual pre-eminence. Self-
importance, jealousy of others equally called to serve, scorn of the assembly, yet sometimes
humouring the least worthy for its own ends -- such are the
characteristics of clericalism. I do not mean in clergymen
only; for there are men of God incomparably better than their
position tends to make them; as on the other hand this evil
thing is nowhere so offensive as where the truth that is owned
wholly condemns it.

If Diotrephes had been called to serve the Lord, of which
there is little appearance, were there not hundreds and
thousands not less truly called to the same work as servants
of Christ by a title from Christ not less real than what he held
himself? Was he not bound to respect the title of others? You
cannot plead the title of Christ for yourself without
maintaining the authority of Christ for another. He who does
so honestly and truly could not possibly claim an exclusive
title. This was precisely what Diotrephes did, and it is the
distinctive point of the clerical system. It is not a question of
ministry, nor even of what people call “stated ministry.” Who doubts stated ministry? At the same time who can deny
that God uses servants of His who are not stated? I believe
that He maintains His own title in the church of God to raise
a man up to say a word, and it may be an important word,
who might not be called on to speak again, -- only used for a
particular purpose. God of old reserved such a right, and

44. The reading of the most ancient and best MSS. and Versions is τοῦτο
(and not as in Text. Rec. εἰς τοῦτο) §.
certainly He has not given it up now: no doubt there is a variety of ways in which He employs those who may not have any well defined place in the church of God. To abolish all these to a dead level for himself to lead and govern was the unchecked desire of Diotrephes. It is nothing more, if not less, than we often see now. Supposing persons have large gifts, the more can they afford to give the fullest scope to the lesser gifts; nor is there any surer sign of weakness in one’s work than any unwillingness to accredit the work of others.

He that values his own call on the Lord’s part to serve Him is bound by all means to hold in His name the door open for every one that is called to labour. But so Diotrephes did not. Did he profess to desire only what edified most, and so set himself against lesser gifts? He dared to rise up against the apostle himself. The truth is, he cared for himself, and loved to have the pre-eminence. We have no reason to gather that he loved anything or anybody else. Such was the man who had ventured to oppose John; and, as we see, the apostle says he would remember him. The Lord did not forget it.

But he could not close the Epistle with anything so painful. Turning to a happier theme, he says,

Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God (3 John 11).

How the key-note of the first Epistle is heard right through the last! If there were self-exalting men with and without gift, office, or influence, others there are of a different mind.

Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, and we also bear record; and ye know that our record is true {2 John 12}.

Then with the salutation he closes.

I had many things to write to thee, but I wished not with ink and pen to write to thee: but I hope to see thee, and we will speak mouth to mouth soon. Peace be to thee. The friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name {2 John 13, 14}.

There are minute differences of interest between this conclusion and that of the second Epistle, but I avoid details and pass on.

* * *

{Jude}

We enter now on the last of those letters as they stand in the common Bible, THE EPISTLE OF JUDE. I will take this opportunity of instituting briefly a comparison with part of the second Epistle of Peter, which, you may remember, I passed over with a partial notice when discoursing on that subject. Doubts have been entertained, as most are aware, by men of some learning. From their similarity in various ways they have conceived that Peter must have borrowed from Judas or Judas from Peter; and that, in point of fact, if one is inspired, the other cannot be.

Brethren, this sort of thought and speech is the result of nothing but unbelieving speculation. And I will go even farther (for it is a serious thing thus to treat scripture): I say that the speculation is as shallow as it is unbelieving.

Although no doubt there are those who consider themselves to show their superior wisdom by their doubts, I must take the liberty of saying that to dispute the inspiration of either 2 Peter or Judas demonstrates their ignorance of both. I do not mean at all to affirm that those guilty of such license are ignorant on every subject. Far from it. A person drawn into such views may be possessed of large and superior information in what has occupied his life, and there may be even certain portions of the word of God in which he is really taught of the Spirit of God. But for all that these doubts are as unfounded as they are dangerous, and dishonouring to the Holy Ghost. I am aware that some names of great weight among Protestants, as well as others quite opposed in position, have yielded to these unworthy questionings of scripture. To this I refer that those who are present may understand that it is not for want of examining their objections, and weighing well what they say against the truth, that I have ventured to express a severe judgment on their opinion.

I hope to show that Judas has not borrowed from Peter any more than Peter from Judas, but that both were inspired men, who wrote in the direct order and power of the Holy Spirit. I do not at all mean to imply by this that one did not write before the other, and that one may not have read what the other wrote. Whether this were so or not matters little really to the question. It is plain and demonstrable that the Spirit of God, if one did know of the other’s communication, has taken good care, while giving a great deal that is common to both, to give points of difference of the most essential kind. In point of fact, therefore, the criticism that comes to the conclusion that the one is borrowed from the other simply betrays its own blind incompetence. The differences are as striking at least as the resemblances, and abundantly show that Judas has not borrowed from Peter, and that Peter has a line as peculiarly his own as that of Judas, and not more so.

We have seen in the Epistles of Peter that the leading truth, besides the bringing out of the grace of Christ, is the righteous government of God under which the saints are placed. We have seen that this righteous dealing does not merely affect the saints, but will most seriously bring the world under its weight before God has closed the matter. Thus in the second Epistle of Peter, naturally, where we see the future judgment carried on even to the end of the thousand years, with the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness, the point from which the Holy Ghost views matters is men judged according to the principles of God’s righteous government. In the case of Christians all of course flows from and through grace; but those that have despised the grace of God will not be able longer to despise His government.

The second Epistle accordingly takes this up, and shows that as among the Jews there were false prophets, so now there are false teachers. Of these the Spirit of God gives some very solemn traits. It is said that they have brought in damnable heresies, even denying the sovereign Master that bought them. A word on this may relieve the minds of persons, to whom it often seems harsh that the Lord had
bought false teachers and heretics. You must distinguish between being bought and being redeemed.

It is never taught in Scripture that the Lord redeemed a heretic, or any other man that was not saved. There is not a syllable in God’s word that enfeebles the certainty of eternal life for the believer; but it is none the less clearly taught there that the Lord has bought every man whatever, saved or not, and believer or not. The result for man has nothing to do with the Lord’s purchase. He has bought the world and everything that belongs to it. This is the doctrine everywhere, whether in parable or in doctrine, whether in gospel or epistle; and this is the constant statement of the Spirit. Of course, therefore, these bad people were bought as well as the rest.

But redemption is another thought, and so far from purchase being the same as redemption, the two things are decidedly in contrast. The object of redemption is to deliver a person from the power of the adversary, to bring one who is a captive out of slavery, to set him free by the ransom paid. This is only true of the believer: he alone is brought out of captivity and made free. It is an efficacious not a nominal deliverance, and belongs only to faith. It is not merely that there is purchase-money; this is not enough for redemption, which is a question of setting a slave or prisoner free, and this is never the case unless a soul believes in Christ. But it is a different thing with purchase: you may buy that which is inanimate, and that which is bought belongs to you indeed, but possibly for harm and shame. Supposing you could purchase a person, what is the effect of the transaction? You make him a slave: thus it is the very reverse of redemption. Redemption makes the slave free, but purchase makes what you buy your property or your slave.

These two facts are both true of Christians, and meet in Christ’s blood. The Christian is both redeemed and purchased; but he alone is redeemed. But besides being redeemed, he is bought by the blood of Christ, and therefore it is that he becomes Christ’s slave. He is a bondman of Christ Jesus. Perfectly freed by redemption, he is made thoroughly a slave by purchase; and this is precisely the anomaly the natural man never understands. As for the theologians, some of them are not natural men; but one might ask in despair, what is it they ever seem to understand? The fact is that they have so confused the two things as to make the subject hopeless in their hands.

It is clear that the dispute between those called Calvinists and the so-called Arminians turns much on this point, which is then very important. Both of them agree in the error that redemption and purchase mean the same thing. The consequence is that they never can settle the question. The Calvinist is quite right in his premiss that redemption belongs solely to the household of faith; the Arminian is no less right in his premiss that purchase belongs to every creature under the effects of sin. But they are both equally mistaken in assuming them to be the same thing; and there they wrangle, as they might for ever, without advancing an inch toward settling the matter, because each holds a truth that the other denies. The truth in this question, as in many others which have distracted Christendom, is that faith receives that which the contending parties lose in the dispute; faith bows to the whole truth, instead of being shut up to a part of it. Here then in 2 Pet. 2, it will be seen that it is only a question of purchase, which does not imply that these men were ever born of God.

In the next place we are given to see the effects of their teaching and conduct: --

And many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of {2 Pet. 2:2}.

Next their covetousness is brought before us, and, more than this, the certainty that sure judgment awaits them -- that their destruction does not slumber, but is near and sure. Then Peter says (mark the expression),

For if God spared not angels that sinned

-- it is simply a question of sinning in this epistle, of righteousness and unrighteousness --

but cast them down to hell, and delivered them to chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and spared not the old world, but saved Noah, one of eight, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly, &c. {2 Pet. 2:4-9}.

These are the topics with Peter, even sin and unrighteousness. Hence he speaks of God who,

turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; and delivered just Lot

(it is righteousness again),

distressed with the filthy conversation of the godless: (for the righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their lawless deeds) {2 Pet. 2:6-8}.

Nor is this more than the beginning, not the end. They were accordingly reserved for a still greater punishment by and by. This is what is traced more particularly throughout the Epistle on the vastest scale, and finally in the next chapter.

But in Judas we may see a wholly different character of evil.

Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to the called that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ: mercy to you, and peace, and love, be multiplied {Jude 1, 2}.

Though professedly the epistle of Judas is to the saints at large, the Holy Ghost brings in the same wish of mercy as is more usually addressed to an individual soul. In fact this Epistle does individualize the saints, and it is of the utmost importance to look at truth for the individual in this place, and to lay hold of it for our own souls.

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write to you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly
contend for the faith which was once delivered to the
saints [Jude 3].

This is not so much the case with Peter; he does not speak of
any such contention.

For there are certain men crept in unawares, who
were before of old marked out for this sentence,
ungodly men.

Mark, it is not merely sin, or unrighteousness: here are seen
ungodly men, turning the grace of our God;
for it is not men’s righteousness here, nor His righteous
government. The evil is

turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and
deny

the only Sovereign Master,

and our Lord Jesus Christ [Jude 4].

Thus the measure of likeness makes the real difference
between the Epistles far more striking than if this Epistle had
been written without any points of contact with the other. Of
one thing we may be sure, that whether or not Peter referred
to Judas, or Judas to Peter, the Holy Ghost had both in view,
and distributed to each as He would; and there are no finer
samples of the action of the Holy Ghost in the touching of
similar lines of truth, and at the same time of converging with
the most consummate wisdom, and the most admirable
delicacy of expression as well as of truth, than these two
Epistles, that treat of the existent and coming evil under
different points of view. Supposing two persons take totally
different lines, it is evident that nothing is easier than for each
to pursue his own line; but supposing they come continually
close together, it is plain that there is far more difficulty to
preserve intact the truth that is given to each. The latter is the
case with Peter and Judas: but the Holy Ghost has done the
work to perfection.

I will therefore put you in remembrance, though
once for all knowing all things, how that the Lord,
having saved a people out of the land of Egypt, in the
second place destroyed them that believed not
(Jude 5).

There is not a word about this in Peter. Why here?
Because what the apostle Judas is showing is not merely
unrighteousness in conduct, but the abandonment of a position
of grace, and the virtual turning it into lasciviousness. In fact
the grand subject of Peter in his second Epistle is
unrighteousness; the distinctive subject of Judas is not this but
apostasy (that is, a departure from the place that the grace of
God gives at any given time to His own people). Accordingly
the warning is founded on a saved people in the next place
destroyed, as with Israel brought out of Egypt. It was not
persons that behaved badly, but a deadlier evil; they did not
believe; they abandoned His truth and ways.

And angels who kept not their first estate, but left
their own habitation, he hath in keeping in
everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment
of the great day [Jude 6].

There again it is the same principle. This makes it all
the more striking, inasmuch as Peter speaks of angels too, but not
at all from the same point of view. In Peter’s case it is simply
said that God spared not the angels who sinned, without a
word about leaving their first estate or not keeping it. Judas speaks of

angels which kept not their first estate, but left their
own habitation.

They apostatized also, and in this case the terms are
excessively strong, as the guilt is yet worse.

And now comes another example from among men, and
this too used by Peter. When I say used by Peter, I do not
pretend to attempt to decide the time when the two Epistles
were written; nor does it signify that I am aware of. Peter says,

And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into
ashes, condemned them with an overthrow, making
them an ensample unto those that after should live
ungodly [2 Pet. 2:6].

Whereas Judas has it:

Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about
them in like manner, giving themselves over to
fornication, and going after other flesh, are set forth
for an example, suffering the judgment of eternal fire
(Jude 7).

In this case it is evident that it is a breaking out, not merely
into sin, but into that which was beyond measure flagrant, not
evil alone, but contrary even to fallen nature. This is what is
spoken of here. The very same persons are described in a
different manner, according to the object of the Holy Ghost.

So again as to the conduct of the angels. By Peter it is
said,

Whereas angels, which are greater in power and
might, bring not railing accusation against them
before the Lord [2 Pet. 2:11].

Judas gives us the more specific charge rather than their
general delinquency:

Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh,
despair dominion, and speak evil of dignities. Yet
Michael the archangel, when contending with the
devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not
bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The
Lord rebuke thee [Jude 8, 9].

Thus it is evident that in every instance Peter takes up the
broad ground of righteousness and unrighteousness, while
Judas singles out the special character of departure from the
truth and perversion of the grace of God (that is, apostacy in
short).

But there is another difference too. They both treat of the
coming of the Lord: only Peter, true to his character, takes
the largest and most expansive aspect possible. He, and he
alone, embraces within the day of the Lord the whole of
the millennium, and even that which is just before the
millennium, and that which is just after it. He looks at what
immediately precedes the millennium, because that day really
includes divine judgments in Jerusalem and neighbouring and
even distant lands, as various steps of the preliminary
judgment of the quick (or men found in more or less open

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rebellion against the Lord, and despite of His people) before
the reign for a thousand years, properly speaking, begins.
The millennium follows this epoch, -- it may be only a little
while after, but still it is after. So again the dissolution of
the heavens and the earth does not fall within the millennium but
afterwards. There will be a short subsequent space, during
which Satan will muster all born during the thousand years
who are not born of God. Fire will devour the assembled
rebels, -- the bursting forth of divine judgment once more on
man, until the eternal judgment takes its final course, and
the heavens and the earth, then completely consumed, have given
place to the new heavens and the new earth in their fullest
sense. All these vast events are comprehended within (not the
millennium, but) the day of the Lord, either a little before it
in the one case, or a little after it in the other.

This illustrates the immense breadth of Peter. So he
treats moral questions and dispensational changes, regarding
all in this extensive way. But it is otherwise with Judas,
whose pen makes every thing precise, just as he, and he
alone, gives us in a few brief words the very gall and venom,
as it were, of the apostasy.

Woe to them! for they have gone in the way of Cain,
and run greedily after the error of Balaam for
reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core
{Jude 11}.

The only part of this evil that Peter takes up, because he
merely looks at it broadly and as a question of righteous
government, is the following of Balaam, who loved the wages
of unrighteousness. But here, although Judas seems to give us
more, it is in point of fact all defined with the greatest
possible nicety, the brief moral history of the apostasy.

These are spots (more probably, sunken rocks) in
your feasts of love, when they feast with you,
feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are
without water, carried along by winds; trees of late
autumn, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the
roots: raging waves of the sea, foaming out their
own shames: wandering stars, to whom is reserved
the blackness of darkness for eternity. And Enoch
also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied as to these,
saying, Behold, the Lord came with his holy
myriads, to execute judgment upon all, and to
convince all the ungodly among them of all their
ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed,
and of all the hard speech which ungodly sinners
have spoken against him. These are murmurers,
complainers, walking after their lusts; and their
mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's
persons in admiration because of advantage. But ye,
beloved, remember the words spoken before of the
apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; that they told you
there should be mockers in the last time, walking
after their own lusts of ungodliness {Jude 12-18}.

Thus it is not the day of the Lord as in the very
comprehensive application of Peter; but the fact of His
coming and executing judgment on those seized as it were in
flagrant sin, caught in the very act. Judas looks at a dealing
suited and due to apostates.

But there is another point of precision that, absent from
2 Peter, is peculiar to Judas. He does not merely resent the
mocking taunt,

Where is the promise of his presence? {2 Pet. 3:4}.
nor explain the delay by His long suffering and saving of
sinners; he does not merely call on the saints to walk
becomingly in holy conversation and godliness, waiting for
the new and eternal scene wherein dwells righteousness. The
characteristic word of Judas savours of special grace.

But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your
most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep
yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy
of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life
{Jude 20, 21}.

This is distinct Christian privilege, and not merely the
necessary godliness which is always binding.

And of some have compassion, making a
difference. 45

Some complain if there be a making a difference. I believe,
brethren, that, though grace and wisdom is eminently needed
for it, yet there can be no sounder principle than this. I
repeat, however, that necessarily spiritual discrimination is
wanted for each case. God is faithful, who withholds no good
thing, and to the humble gives more grace. In the long run
divinely-given wisdom becomes more and more apparent in
these matters.

But others save with fear, pulling them out of the
fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh

45. It is right to notice, if only in a note, that the manuscripts here are
singly in conflict as to the readings. The Sinai and the Vatican, with
the corrector of the Rescript of Paris, read ἐλέησε, which is only another form
of the common reading ἐλεησε, “compassionate.” But there is the
awkward repetition of the same word again as a later clause; for the older
manuscripts present a threefold division in the sentence. According to the
incomparably most ancient authorities, it would seem, on the whole, that it should stand
thus: καὶ ὧν μὲν ἐλέησε διακρινόμενος, ὧν δὲ ὠάρετο ἐκ
πολυεὐθείᾳ ἐγκακίσεως, ὃ ὧν δὲ ἐλεησε ἐν φθόνῳ, μακροειθνὴς καὶ ἀλάζων ἀπὸ
τῆς σταυροῦ ἐστηλωμένον χωτίζε. “And some when contending, but others save, snatching them from the fire, and others compassion in fear, hating even the garment is spotted by the flesh.” It is curious that Dr. E. Wells, in his “Help for the more easy and clear
understanding of the Holy Scriptures” (the part containing these Epistles
being published at Oxford, in 1715), adopted this text substantially, which
he thus translated: “And some being warring, rebuke; and others save,
pulling them out of the fire; and of others have compassion with fear,” &c.
He rejected the twofold division, and corrected the form of single words
mainly on the authority of the Alexandrian MS., with some others of less
weight, confirmed by the Vulgate, the Syriac, and the Ethiopic Versions.
With the exception of the word already pointed out, the oldest uncials agree,
we may say, in the text here presented, save that the Vatican makes, to my
mind, a mess by omitting the first ὧν δὲ, which seems to have been
an unintentional slip, as the clause is thereby rendered scarce translatable or
intelligible. Insert the words with the Sinai and other ancient MSS., and all
is plain. Hence this is the form of the sentence preferred by Tischendorf and
other modern editors. The noun διακρινόμενον of the received text
(which the English Version follows) can hardly be traced higher than the
ninth century; if it were preferable, the meaning would be as given there.
But if the more ancient reading in the accusative stand, verse 9 of this
Epistle supplies the probable sense here.

In verse 25 μόνος (without ἄραφο brought in from Rom. 16:29) is the
right reading, with the very important additions of δ. ἀ. ἤματε ὑμὲν τ. θεοῦ, and
πρό τ. ἤματε. Copyists are apt to enlarge and assimilate; they do not so
often, as here, omit.

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Then he winds all up by bringing before us our own blessed position in a manner altogether different from Peter.

But to him that is able to keep you from falling (Jude 24).

It is not merely that He is able to bring us into the new heavens and the new earth, which of course is common to all the people of God, to the righteous of all times; but here we have the special inner blessedness of those that wait for Christ, and are caught up to be with Him where He is.

But to him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present faultless before his glory with exultation, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, might, and authority, from before all eternity, and now and to all the ages. Amen (Jude 24, 25).

This is the Lord, not coming to deal with the wicked, but to take us up to be with Himself. It is not the judgment of the unrighteous, nor the righteous government of the nations on the earth, but specifically the coming of our Lord Jesus for His saints. Now he understood how Jesus could manifest Himself to His own as He does not to the world, not only in the power of the Holy Ghost while He is away (compare John 14:22), but when He comes again to receive us to Himself, to be where He is in the Father’s house.

* * *

I have thus closed this sketch of the so-called Catholic or general Epistles, which, I may be allowed to say, seems a not very appropriate classification; for James expressly addressed the twelve tribes who are in the dispersion, as Peter the elect sojourners scattered in Asia Minor, his second Epistle being expressly said to be written to the same as the first. Then what is called the first Epistle general of John has more the air of a treatise than of an epistle; nor is it clear that it too did not primarily contemplate believers from among the Jews, though undoubtedly, like the rest, meant for the direct instruction of the entire assembly of God. His second and third Epistles are as distinctly personal in address as the Epistle of Paul to Philemon. This may have been Calvin’s reason for not including them in his exposition of the Catholic Epistles: why he did not write on them at all is less intelligible. It is certainly not because they are not worthy in themselves, or of slight value to the Christian, not to speak of the homage due to the revealed word of our God. Why he did not write on the Revelation is plain enough: neither he nor any of the Reformers had any real understanding of the book as a whole, though they were not wrong in applying Babylon to Rome, and this in good earnest. The Epistle of Judas is in itself at least as general as any of those so classed; but there seems no reason to doubt that he, like his brother James, and like Peter, had the circumcision for the immediate circle of his ministry. John affords most ground for the inference that the Lord employed him to be the vehicle of divine messages among the Gentiles also. (See Rev. 1-3.)

May the Lord bless His own word, and enable us to prize every title of it; and may it have both attraction and authority over our souls, who desire to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Himself!

46. Those who idolise a few of the most ancient MSS., to the practical exclusion of other witnesses and internal evidence, would do well to ponder the fact that the Sinai MS. here joins the Parisian Recipient, and the Replaces MS. with very many curveting and most versions in reading τοὺς, “you,” whilst the Alexandrian reads τοὺς, “us,” and the Vatican and the Moscow MS. of Matthew with more than thirty cursives give αὐτοῖς, “them,” to which modern editors incline.
That God should have chosen John to be the instrument of communicating the closing volume of the New Testament is worthy of our consideration. It is not a new thing for God thus to set out the strongest contrasts by the same inspired writer. He who was emphatically the apostle of the uncircumcision was the appointed witness of Christ to those who had been Jews. The final and above all the decisive message of grace, which called the Jews outside all earthly associations to Christ in heaven, was given neither by Peter nor by James, and by no other than Paul. So too the witness of grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ was, in His mind, if not in man's, the most suited medium for revealing the coming judgments of God. In truth, the moral reason lay in this: that Christ, if rejected as the object of faith, and the only channel of grace, becomes an executor of judgment. This we find formally and doctrinally in his gospel. (John 5.) And now that grace and truth were about to be utterly set at naught, as He Himself had been before by that which bore His name on the earth, John was more than any other suited to let us see the solemn visions of God avenging the slighted rights of His own Son; and this, first, by providential judgments; lastly, by Christ Himself coming in the personal execution of judgment.

Hence, although there are the most complete contrasts in form, subject, and issues between the gospel and the revelation of John, after all the person of the Lord Jesus is pre-eminently kept before us as the object of God's care and honour in both; and therefore it is that even the souls that could not enter into the main topics of its prophetic visions have always found unspeakable comfort in the various displays of Christ Himself furnished by this book, especially in times of trial, rejection and persecution. Who that knows ecclesiastical history, who that has present acquaintance with souls, is not aware that the saints of God, with ever so little light, have been exceedingly nourished and helped by the Apocalypse; while men of learning have made it as dry as an old almanac?

It is the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him {Rev. 1:1}.

Even in the gospel, which is so fragrant with His divine love, we have the frequent -- not to say constant -- admonition of this remarkable position which Christ takes. In short He is carefully regarded as man on earth, as the sent One who lives on account of the Father -- in the gospel as a man on earth, in the revelation as a man most truly wherever He may be seen, whether in heaven or on earth. This book then is the revelation of Jesus Christ,

which God gave unto him.

In the gospel it is said, God gives Him to have life in Himself. Nothing can more demonstrate how loyally He accepts, and will not speak inconsistently with, the place of man to which He stooped. For in Him was life: yea, He was that eternal life which was with the Father before the worlds were. Nevertheless, having become a man in divine grace, He speaks according to that lowly position which He entered here. In glory it is just the same, as we see in the book before us.

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants {Rev. 1:1}.

It is not now to bring them whether or not servants out of that position or even worse, and entitling them to take the place of children of God. This characterises the gospel, because it distinctively is the revelation of grace and truth in Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son. Here it is what God was going to do for His glory as the rejected man. He is going therefore to show unto His

bondmen

-- a term that would suit not only Christians now, but those who might be in another relationship after we have been taken away from the world. Hence, evidently, there is a comprehensive term employed with divine wisdom,

to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass {Rev. 1:1}.

It is not to make known what was in Christ before all worlds, but to disclose the great facts in which God was about to maintain the glory of the First-begotten, when He introduced Him into the world.

And he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John {Rev. 1:1}.

The angel, it is needless to say, is not without good
reason named in relation to the revelations which God was here giving. In the gospel we hear of eternal life in the Son, and this in the grace of God given to the believer. There the Holy Ghost was the only one competent to minister and effectuate such grace according to the counsels of God, and in the ordering of His love.

But here we have visions -- visions of God's judicial ways -- visions of what would call for judgment in the ever growing iniquity of man. He therefore sent and signified this by his angel unto his servant John.

It is another and a remarkable difference. In the gospel John may speak, but he speaks as one who had seen the Lord, -- as one who could bear his own personal voucher for whatever he utters. He may speak but seldom of himself, and this he does so effectually that there are not wanting those who have questioned whether after all he were the disciple whom Jesus loved {John 21:20}.

Undoubtedly the inference is mistaken; still there is no possibility of charging the writer with putting himself forward in the manner in which he has written. This is a very significant circumstance, more particularly as in the epistles, which contemplate the Christian company or a family or a friend, the one aim and effort is to place the children of God in immediate communion through Christ with Himself: an inspired apostle writes it no doubt, and the various members of God's family, as well as the servants of the Lord, are owned in their place. At the same time it is manifestly He who is God and Father instructing, comforting, and admonishing His own.

We have intervention on every side. God gives a revelation of Jesus; and Jesus passes it on to His angel, or rather by His angel to His servant John; and then John at last sends it to other servants. Thus we have all sorts of links in the chain. And why so? For it is somewhat novel, especially in the New Testament. How comes this remarkable introduction of God to Jesus, then from Him through an angel to one servant, who sends to other servants? How is it that we here miss that character of direct dealing with us -- that immediateness of address which is found elsewhere? The reason is as solemn as it is instructive. It is implied indeed in the analogy of the Old Testament; for God did not always address His people there. He did originally, as for instance in the ten words, though afterwards in this very particular intervention came in. But habitually God's messengers were sent to Israel, even when prophets were raised up. At first all addressed the people in His name. The word of Jehovah was sent to Jehovah's people. But what an affecting change took place at length! The time soon came when the message was not sent to the people directly. It was given to a chosen witness -- no doubt really meant for the people, but delivered to Daniel, and only so.

This prepares us for the true meaning of the remarkable change in the Apocalypse as compared with the rest of the New Testament. When the children of Israel had hopelessly betrayed the Lord -- when their departure was complete before His eyes -- not only in the first rent-off portion, the ten tribes of Israel, but even the remaining two, -- when there was a stay and a lengthening of the tranquility, -- when not only Judah, but even the house of David, the anointed king, the last regular link between God and His people, failed, then we find that God addressed not His people, but an only chosen faithful servant as His witness. It was a sure token that all was over for the present, for any immediateness of communion between God and His people. God could no longer recognise them as His own. Applying this to the present time, and our own circumstances, is it not most grave? I do not in the least doubt that God proves Himself faithful in the worst of times. It would be the falsest possible deduction to suppose that Daniel and his three companions, possibly others also, were not personally as pleasant to the Lord as David was. Did He not look with exceeding satisfaction in His grace upon that servant who felt and answered to His own feelings about His people? It was precisely because He did that Daniel received so exceptional an honour. In a certain sense it was better to be a Daniel in the midst of ruin than to have had the best position when times were prosperous, and when things looked fair. It was a greater proof of fidelity when all was out of course to stand faithful than to be faithful when all things were regular. Thus grace is always equal to every difficulty.

But it is a solemn thing to feel that such a crisis was even then come, as far as regarded the church of God here below. John stands in a position analogous to Daniel; he becomes now the object of the communications of the Lord Jesus, not that which still bore the name of the Lord here below. However the grace of the Lord might act, however He might animate as well as warn, still the address is made directly to His servant John, and not to the church; and even where we have addresses, as we shall find afterwards in the second and third chapters, they are not immediately to the churches, but sent to their angels. It is manifest that all carries out the same solemn impression.

John then, as it is said, testified the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ {Rev. 1:2}.

But this is here restricted: it does not mean the truth in general, nor the gospel in particular, though we cannot doubt that John did preach the gospel, and did nourish the church of God in all His revealed truth; but this is not the subject of the Apocalypse, nor the meaning of our text. All is here limited to what he saw. This is of importance to apprehend the scope of the passage and the character of the book. We may safely strike out the word “and,” if we respect the best authorities. The meaning then is that John testified the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. But how are we to describe or understand the word of God?

Is it any special part, or the word of God as a whole? What exactly is meant by the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ in this connexion? The answer is given by the last clause when “and” is taken away -- the visions that he was going to behold and record in this book -- whatsoever things he saw.
Thus, besides what the apostle had in his ordinary relation with Christians, and his already lengthened tenure in the service of Christ, he receives now a new character of word and testimony.

Accordingly the apocalyptic visions can be slighted only by ignorant unbelief; for they no less than the gospel or epistles are here styled

the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

They are thus carefully ushered in, but in that prophetic method which was morally fitting, in a series of visions which John saw. This is of so much the greater emphasis, as it is apparently designed in an express manner to counteract the tendency (but too common spite of it) to treat the Apocalypse as if it were of doubtful value and of precarious authority. But no; it is confessed to John by Jesus as the word of God and His own testimony. We know how many scholars have dared to insult the book in their folly, as I think we may say, with the justest rebuke of their offensive language. None the less is it

the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ,
even if it consists not of that which ministers directly to the edification of the Christian in his own position, but indirectly as announcing the doom of such as despise God and do their own will in the face of His revelation. Nevertheless it is God’s word and Christ’s testimony, though as a whole composed of visions.

In order to make this more realised by the believers then or at any other time, be it remarked that we have another word remarkably annexed which lies altogether out of the beaten path of the Lord. May we not presume that it is for the express purpose of graciously encouraging His servants as well as to anticipate the doubts and cavils of unbelief?

Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein {Rev. 1:3}.

The stated ground that follows is also to be weighed; for it is not, as men often assume, because we are to be in the predicted circumstances, it is not because the Christian or the church must pass through the troubles it describes: not a word to this effect is implied, but a different reason is given. In short, as the book itself afterwards shows that the church will be on high outside the scene of its varied troubles and inflicted judgments, so the motive assigned in the preface is of a strikingly holy nature, adapted to those who walk by faith, not by sight, and free from all selfish considerations --

for the time is at hand {Rev. 1:3}.

It is not that the time is actually come so that we must go through all or any part; but the time is at hand. God therefore writes for our comfort, admonition, and general blessing in whatever way it may be wanted; He takes for granted that we are interested in whatever He has to say to us.

The time is at hand.

It is a false principle therefore that we can only be profited by that which concerns ourselves, and supposes us to be in the actual circumstances described.

Then comes the salutation. Here too all is as peculiar as

it is suitable to the book on which we enter:

John to the seven churches which are in Asia

{Rev. 1:4}.

In no other place do we find anything akin to this. We read of the saints in one place or another. A particular assembly, or even the assemblies of a district (Gal. 1), may be addressed. Never but here occurs an address to a certain number of assemblies, particularly one so definite and significant symbolically as seven. Surely something is meant outside the ordinary course of things, where so unexampled a style of address is found. The spiritual usage of seven in prophetic scripture cannot be questioned. Nor is it confined to prophecy, for the same force holds good wherever symbol is employed. In typical scripture, as well as in prophecy, seven is the regular known sign of spiritual completeness. Who then but un instructed minds can doubt that the Lord meant more than the actual assemblies that were addressed in the province of Asia? That letters were written to literal congregations from Ephesus to Laodicea seems to be unquestionable; but I cannot doubt that these were chosen, and the addresses so shaped to them as to bring before those who have ears to hear the complete circle of the Lord’s testimony here below as long as there should be anything possessed (responsibly if not really) of a church character. The state of things might be ever so ruined; it might be even gross and false (as much was in several); but still there was an ecclesiastical profession if only for His judgment, which we do not find after Rev. 4. No such condition appears afterwards. The Lord no longer dealt so when this kind of footing vanished for the responsibility of man. In short, as long as church responsibility exists here below, these addresses apply, and no longer.

So says he

To the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come {Rev. 1:4}.

It is not “from the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The salutation is from God in His own being, the ever-existing One, He who is, and who was, and who is to come. This of course connects His present existence with the future as well as the past.

And from the seven Spirits which are before his throne {Rev. 1:4}.

Here again we find a description of the Holy Ghost decidedly different from what meets us in the New Testament generally. The allusion is clear to Isa. 11, where the seven-fold power of the Holy Ghost in government is described as connected with the person and for the kingdom of the Messiah.

And the Spirit of Jehovah shall rest, &c.

{Isa. 11:2-5}.

This seems taken up here, and applied in a far larger way for purposes suitable to the Apocalyptic prophecy. Indeed the same remark will be found true of all the use that is made of Old Testament citations and allusions in the Apocalypse. Constant reference is made to the law, Psalms, and prophets, but it is never a mere repetition, as the literalists suppose, of what was found there. This would be in effect to deprive ourselves of the Apocalypse, instead of understanding and
gathering its peculiar profit. If one identifies the Jerusalem of Isaiah with the New Jerusalem of the Revelation, or the Babylon of Jeremiah to explain the Apocalyptic Babylon, it is clear that one simply loses all the special instruction that God has given us. This is one of the main sources of confusion on the subject of the Apocalypse to this day. At the same time, if we do not start with the Old Testament revelations of Babylon or Jerusalem, or the instruction derived from the prophets generally, we are not prepared for appreciating or even understanding the Apocalypse as a whole. Thus, either to dislocate the New absolutely from the Old, or to see no more than a repetition of the Old in the New, is an almost equal error. There is a divine link in the sense as there was in the Spirit's mind an undistinguished reference; but then the Apocalypse gives it an incomparably larger range, and a more profound character. The Apocalypse looks on things after the Holy Ghost had taken His place in the Christian and in the church on earth -- above all, after the Son had appeared, manifested God the Father, and accomplished redemption here below. Hence all the fulness of divine light that had come out in Christ's person and work, as well as by the Spirit in the church of God, is necessary to be taken into account in order to give the Apocalypse its just bearing.

The seven Spirits therefore refer, as I believe, to the Holy Ghost acting in the way of government. It is the fulness of the Holy Ghost's energy as an overruling power. What the application of this may be depends on the context where it is used. We shall find it in relation to Christ dealing with church matters in Rev. 3; we shall find it in His relation to the earth in Rev. 5: but it is always the fulness of the Spirit in governmental power, and not the same Spirit viewed in His unity forming the church into one body. This we have had already in the Pauline epistles, where the proper sphere of the Christian as a member of Christ's body is treated especially, and indeed only there.

God as such is then introduced in Old Testament style and character, but at the same time applied to New Testament subjects; the Holy Ghost also is similarly brought before us. And so too with our Lord Jesus, as we shall see. Indeed, there is nothing more remarkable, especially when we bear in mind who the writer is, than the absence here of His proper relationship to the children of God. The revelation of grace is precisely what is not found in this book.

Jesus Christ appears as

the faithful witness {Rev. 1:5}.

This clearly is what He was on the earth. In a very different form it is the topic of John everywhere: we may trace Him as going up to heaven, where Paul above all contemplated Him glorified; but John's task is ever to point to Christ in connection with what He was here below. If He speaks of Him as the Lamb above, the description is founded on His being the rejected sufferer on earth.

He is the faithful witness, the first-begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth {Rev. 1:5};

-- the last displayed when He comes from heaven to earth, as He stands in resurrection the first-begotten of the dead. But what He is in heaven is exactly what is not given here. There is the most careful exclusion of His heavenly position from the relationships of the Lord Jesus that are here brought before us. Even that which connects Him with the Christian, as the One that intercedes for him in the presence of God, is here left out, though I doubt not we may see Him as the angel high priest for others in Rev. 8.

The Lord Jesus, then, is brought before us as man purposely in the last place. God was announced in His own everlasting being; the Holy Ghost in His fulness of governmental power; the Lord Jesus in that which was connected with the earth, even if He were risen from the dead; and this put in the last place, because He is viewed only in an earthly point of view.

But for all that the voice of the Christian is at once heard -- and so much the more remarkably, because it is one of the few exceptional ripples which cross the ordinary current of the book at the end, as well as at the beginning. Thus it is not without example elsewhere; but it is not what we hear when we have fairly entered on the course of the visions. Before they begin the Christian is heard, as also the bride after they close. Here the name of Jesus is enough to stir the heart in a sweet and suited doxology. He may not be described in His relationships to us, but He who is described is the one that we love. And so to him that loveth us (for this is the true rendering, and not merely that loved us) --

To him that loveth us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood; and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be the glory and the might unto the ages of the ages {Rev. 1:5, 6}.

And as this is the heart's outpouring of its own delight in Jesus, so the next verse gives a warning testimony suitable to the book, lest there should be any weakening of what Jesus will be to those who stand in no such nearness to Him.

Behold he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him {Rev. 1:7}.

This has nothing to do with His presence for us; but after our own delight and thanksgiving have gone forth towards Jesus, the testimony to others most suitably follows the song of praise that had, I may say, involuntarily burst forth at His name. It is Christ coming in judgment. He shall be seen by every soul -- if there be any difference -- to the sorest anguish above all of those that pierced Him (i.e. the Jews).

Even so, Amen {Rev. 1:7}.

I am the Alpha and Omega, saith the Lord God, that is, and that was, and that is to come, the Almighty {Rev. 1:8}.

He who is the first and the last, comprehending all in communicating His mind, which includes everything that can be given to man -- He it is who here speaks -- the Lord God, the Eternal. He puts His voucher on the book from the beginning.
Then John describes himself in a manner adapted to the testimony he is called to render:

I John, your brother, and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience in Christ Jesus, was in the isle which is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus {Rev. 1:9}.

It must be evident to a spiritual mind how remarkably suited all here is to what was afterwards about to come out. The whole book supposes saints in suffering, and this too in the form of tribulation, with their spiritual experience formed into the associations of Christ's kingdom rather than those of His body the church, yet surely suffering on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. Particular care is taken here to show it to us. Not that the full church or Christian relationship was lacking to John personally; but he stands here a representative man for others as well as ourselves. While, therefore, he had all that is properly Christian, he also had very special communications of another character for saints who will follow us at the end of this age.

Thus he introduces himself here, not as a joint partaker of God's promise in Christ by the gospel, but in His kingdom and patience in Christ. It is true for us all; but it is in harmony with the latter day sufferers, not what specially linked him with the Christians and the church. Thus the place taken here is of course that of a Christian; but that is put forward which belonged to others who would not be in the same corporate standing as ourselves. At the same time there is the most careful guard against the supposition that he was not in the full enjoyment of his own place in Christ.

This seems to be one reason why it pleased God to give the visions of this book on the Lord's day.

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day. This is the characteristic day of the Christian; it is the birthday of his distinctive blessing, and it assuredly ought to be the especial joy of his heart, not the less because it is the first day, the resurrection day of grace and new creation, not the seventh day of creation rest and law.

On that day the inspired writer John was in the power of the Holy Ghost with a view to take in and give out the visions he was to see.

And I heard behind me a great voice as of a trumpet {Rev. 1:10}.

It was significant, I think, that the voice was behind him. The main object of all prophecy tended rather to have thrown him forward. But before the Spirit of God could fitly launch him into the visions of the future, there must be a retrospective glance. In the Spirit he must be, both to shut out every impression from external objects, and to give him an entrance into all that God was about to reveal; but first of all we should recognise the fact that it was on the Lord’s day; and next that, before he was shown what was before, he must turn to the voice behind him and learn what the Lord judged of that which bore His name on the earth.

Omit the opening clause and begin,

saying, What thou seest, write in a roll, and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia {Rev. 1:11}.

The reference of the voice behind is exclusively to the seven churches. When another subject is about to open, the first voice which he heard as of a trumpet talking with him said

Come up hither {Rev. 4:1};

there is no question then of a voice behind. He is forward going to look into the future. But there must first be a retrospective notice, in which the Lord would pronounce His judgment of that which bore the name of Christendom here below.

What thou seest, write in a book, and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea. And I turned to see the voice which was speaking with me. And having turned, I saw seven golden lampstands {Rev. 1:11, 12}.

We are told afterwards what those meant.

One like the Son of man is next seen

in the midst of the seven candelsticks {Rev. 1:13},

-- which, as we are told, were the seven churches, but these viewed according to the Lord’s mind about them as a standard of divine righteousness. This is the reason why they were golden. Not only is the same principle general or constant, but it is remarkably characteristic of John's own writings. For instance, the standard for the Christian is not in anywise the law (which was so for the Jew); for us it is Christ Himself, and cannot without loss be anything else.

He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk

-- how? Like an Israelite? Not at all: the Christian ought to remember that he is a heavenly man, not an earthly one. He ought himself also so to walk even as he (Christ) walked {1 John 2:6}.

He is not under law but under grace. The reason is manifest, because the way in which we are called to walk is always according to the place and relations in which we stand. Nothing can be simpler. If I am a servant, I ought to behave like a servant. If I am a master, the conduct that might be proper in a servant would not become me. The mixture of relations is always wrong; the oversight of them is loss, their denial ruinous. For every position we are set in, no matter where it is or what, there is always the gracious power of God as our resource; but it is to sustain the person walking in consonance with the relationship in which God has been pleased to put him.

We are not now speaking of anything conventional. Life in Christ, where there is spiritual intelligence, takes one out of the vanities of the world in principle. This remark it may be well to add, because a Christian might say “As I am a gentleman, I must walk like one, and still better now that I have Christ.” But nay, this will not do for Christ. Did He thus walk? And are you not to walk as He? Do you not in this merely sink to the world's level? Are you not just taking advantage of an earthly position to escape part of what Christ calls you to? One knows how readily the heart can thus escape from what is really the blessedness of the witness which the Lord has placed in our hands. Is this Christ? We speak then of what Christ has put us in, not about nature and
its wishes and feelings. If you have nothing but nature, it would be intelligible; but if you have seen the Son of God and believed in Him, if by grace you have the same life which was in Him, so that this thing is true of Him and of you, no possible standard can suit for you as a Christian short of Christ Himself.

Thus then it is with the seven golden lampstands. All must be and was measured according to God’s own mind, and the place in which He set the assemblies. Consistency with Him as a revealed God in Christ is their rule. Therefore they appear as golden lampstands.

But John saw
in the midst of the [seven] lampstands one like the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot.

There is not now the sign of activity in service -- not the robe tucked up, as often remarked. The Son of man is seen clad in the flowing robe reaching to the feet, and He is
girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow;
and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength {Rev. 1:13-16}.

Here we have to remark that Christ is seen in a judicial point of view. He is spoken of as Son of man; and, as we know, this is the quality in which it is given Him to execute every kind of judgment. It is expressly so taught in John’s own gospel (John 5). Yet with all this another feature betrays John, and suits him as the writer most strikingly. He that is seen as Son of man is really described with those marks which belong distinctively to the

Ancient of days.

Daniel sees the

Ancient of days {Dan. 7:9, 10}.
in one way, and the Son of man in quite another. John sees the Son of man with the qualities of the Ancient of days. He is man; but the man seen then and thus is a divine person, the eternal God Himself. Now I ask any fair mind, whose style does this identification of nature suit but the writer that we are now reading? No doubt, morally speaking, He must needs execute judgment; but John could not lose sight of His divine glory, even where the subject is judgment, and the kingdom everywhere prominent.

Another thing is observable, when one looks into what is said here. A threefold glory of Christ appears: what is personal; what is relative; and finally, what is official. But there is more also. John says,

And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not: I am the first and the last {Rev. 1:17}.

Such terms alone become one who is divine. He who is first is necessarily God; and He who is first, being God, must certainly be last. Jesus declares Himself to be all this; yea, more than this --

the living one, and I became dead {Rev. 1:18}.

The phrase is the strongest possible way of putting the matter. It is not merely that He died -- this is not what He says here, though it is said elsewhere, and very truly. But He says that He became dead. This seems to imply His own willingness to die, as indeed He became what did not belong to Him personally, and what in short seemed extraordinarily incongruous with the glorious person that had been already described. This seems conveyed in the peculiarity of the words: so careful is the Holy Ghost to watch over the glory of Christ even in that which told out the depths of His humiliation.

I became dead (records John), and, behold, I am alive unto the ages of the ages {Rev. 1:18}.

We must leave out the word “Amen” -- it is spurious, and only mars the sense.

Let it suffice once for all to hope you will understand me always to speak of the text on the basis of the ancient and best authorities. There is positive evidence of the most convincing and satisfactory kind for the insertions, omissions, or changes, which may be mentioned from time to time. Do not imagine that there is anything like arbitrary innovation in this. The real innovators were those who departed by slip or by will from the very words of the Spirit; and the arbitrariness now would be in maintaining what has not sufficient authority, against that which is as certain as can be. The error then is not in seeking the best supported text, but in allowing tradition to tie us to comparatively modern and certainly corrupted readings. We are bound in everything to yield to the best authorities. So in the next words our Lord really says,

And I have the keys of death and of hades {Rev. 1:18}.

Not the common text, but this is the true order. No one goes to hades before he dies -- death being in relation to the body, hades to the separate spirit.

Write therefore [which is undoubtedly genuine] the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and what shall be hereafter {Rev. 1:19}.

This gives us, as is obvious and familiar to almost every reader, the threefold division of the book of Revelation. The things that he saw were the glory of Christ in relation to this book, as described in the first chapter, on which we have already touched.

The things which are

present the prolonged condition set forth in the addresses to the seven churches. The expression is very striking, because it not unnaturally implies that the churches were somehow to exist continuously. We can see now why it was. It is very possible, when the epistles were sent out in the days of John, that no particular emphasis would be laid on

the things that are;

but inasmuch as these things have been going on from that day to the present, we can see the immense force such a phrase thereby acquires.

At the same time another way of looking at the book is
by taking
the things that are
as already past and gone. I do not doubt that God intended this, and that we are thus given a double aspect of the book.
I have no intention to enter at any length on this way of looking at the churches as quite by-gone, and the prophecy as at once flowing on; but I mention it because it seems due to truth to name this as well as the other, according to which
what shall be after these
is when the church condition is no longer applicable at all.
What shall be after these
must be owned as the true translation of the words. "Hereafter" gives vagueness:

after these
makes it precise, and is the plain literal meaning.
The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest on
my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands. The
seven stars are angels of the seven churches: and the
seven lampstands are seven churches (Rev. 1:20).
In each letter the Lord addresses
the angel.

Who and what is he? We never hear of angel as an official
title in the ordinary arrangements of the New Testament. But
it is not at all wonderful as occurring here, where we do find
what is extraordinary. The angel is a term that suits such a
prophetic book as the Revelation. Does it mean what we
commonly call an angelic being? Not so, I apprehend, where
angels of the churches are spoken of. If we hear of the
Apocalyptic angel of fire, we readily understand this; and if
we hear of the angel of Jesus Christ as of Jehovah elsewhere,
we find no insuperable difficulty. But it is another thing when
we hear of the angel of this or that assembly. Again, we can
understand an angel employed -- a real angelic being -- as the
means of communication between the Lord and His servant
John; but it would be harsh to suppose that His servant John
writes a letter from Christ to a literal angelic being. This is
the difficulty in which those are involved who suppose that
angelic beings are here meant. I do not believe it. The
meaning appears to be that, as

angel
is used in the sense of representative, whether an angelic
being or not, so in reference to the assemblies the Lord here
avails Himself of this general truth. An angel setting forth
representation (human or not), an ideal representative of each
assembly is meant. In certain cases we know that it might be
a literal representative; for instance, when John the Baptist
sends some of his disciples, there was a representation of his
mind by men. The disciples go and give the message of him
that they followed. But it assumes a somewhat different shape
when it becomes a question of assemblies which had not
been, so far as we know, sending messengers at all.

If therefore we look at the abstract nature of the angel of
the church, what is implied by the term? I take it to be this:
that the Lord had in view not necessarily an elder, nor
a teacher, but one who might be either or both, and before His
mind truly represented, and was in a special way bound up
with the responsibility of the state of the assembly. Whoever
that might be (one, or perhaps more,) was meant by the

angel.

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write; These
things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his
right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven
golden lampstands (Rev. 2:1).

Here we are evidently on broad ground. The characteristics
are general. The first epistle, the message to the angel of the
church in Ephesus, looks at the state of the Christian
testimony on the earth in its most comprehensive form, and,
as I suppose, from the days of the apostle John himself. The
Lord accordingly presents Himself with similar latitude.

He that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand.
It is His position both ministerial and ecclesiastical -- His
relationship to the angels, or those that morally represented
the assemblies to His eye, as well as to the churches
themselves. The star is that which acted on the assembly; it
professedly was the vessel of light from the Lord for bearing
on the condition of the saints of God. If that light was
ineffectual, if there was evil mixed with it, the state of the
assembly would partake of it. If it was bright, the assembly
would be elevated morally thereby. This, I think, is meant.
Then, in Him that held them all in His right hand, and walked
in the midst of the seven golden lampstands, we have Christ
not merely as holding fast those ideal representatives, but as
also taking interest in the assemblies themselves. In short, it
is Christ in His fullest but most general ministerial and
ecclesiastical aspect, viewed, of course, according to the
tenor of the book.

The state of the church in Ephesus has the same
generality.

I know thy works, and thy labour, and patience, and
that thou canst not bear evil [men]; and thou didst try
them which say they are apostles and are not, and
didst find them liars {Rev. 2:2}.

There was faithfulness, and this very particularly in dealing
with the wickedness which Satan sought to bring in at that
time. The apostles were disappearing, and perhaps had all
disappeared save John. I do not of course affirm this; but
naturally as the apostles were departing to be with the Lord,
Satan would endeavour to furnish instruments nothing loth to
claim succession. The church in Ephesus tried these
pretended apostles, specially the angel, as one that helped
them much by grace from the Lord. The star, as we are told
here, so far acted upon the church for good. When thus tried,
they tried and found wanting those who set up to be apostles.

But there is much more here. Persistent faithfulness and
devotedness still characterised them at Ephesus.

Thou hast patience, and didst bear for my name, and
hast not wearied. But I have against thee, that thou
hast left thy first love {Rev. 2:3, 4}.

This is the Lord’s complaint against them. It is plain that it is
here as ever the first departure -- the most general symptom
of declension. What injures, and finally ruins, is invariably
from within, not from without. In vain does Satan seek to cast
down those who resting on Christ's love have Him as the loved object of their life and soul. Was it not thus when the epistle to the Ephesians was written by Paul? Had they not left their first love? It was not as once. There was failure in this respect. They had here relaxed, but not in their works. These went on diligently, as we learn here. There were works, and labour, and endurance. But where was the work of faith? Where was the labour of love? Where was the endurance of hope? That which had produced the mighty results was no longer active, nor could be. The effect went on; the spring was gone. They had abated in their first love. It was all over with them, unless they judged themselves, and in the power of the Holy Ghost Christ regained His place.

Remember therefore whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I am coming to thee quickly, and will remove thy lampstand out of its place, except thou shalt repent {Rev. 2:5}.

Whether it be Christ that is represented or the description of the state of the church, whether it be the fault that is charged home, or the remedy that is proposed, whether it be the judgment that is threatened or the promise that is held out, -- all is of the most general description. So thoroughly does the Lord adhere to topics of the largest and most common import in the letter to the angel of the assembly in Ephesus.

But this thou hast, that thou hastest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of [my] God {Rev. 2:6, 7}.

Here again it is all comprehensive. What can be wider than to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God?

* * *

In the writing to the angel of the church in Smyrna, a totally different state of things meets us. It is essentially a special case instead of the general one we have seen. The Lord was pleased to afflict after the declension from apostolic purity, and above all from first love. He allowed all sorts of trial to befall His people by letting loose the power of Satan, working by Gentile persecutors. And this is seen to be the occasion of the letter to the angel of the church in Smyrna.

And these things saith the First and the Last, who became dead and lived; I know (thy works, and thy tribulation, and thy poverty, (but thou art rich!) and the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews and are not, but a synagogue of Satan {Rev. 2:8, 9}.

Here observe it is not now a trial by false apostles. A new evil appears. As long as true apostles were on earth, Satan was never able to have Judaism recognized in the church of God. The council in Jerusalem expressly exempted the Gentiles from being put under the yoke of law. And the apostle Paul showed that it was really to annul Christ -- to fall from grace -- if the law, introduced either for justification or for a rule of life, were imposed on the Christian. For justification this is manifest; for a rule of life it is not so apparent, but it is just as real a denial of the gospel. If Christ be the rule of life for the Christian, and the law be the rule of death for a Jew, it is evident that for a Christian to abandon that for this tends to apostasy. The early fathers thus Judaized; and the leaven has gone on working ever since. To take the position of a Jew thus is to be one of those that say they are such and are not, but are alas! Satan's synagogue.

The Lord here contemplates these evil workers (which is what the criers of works come to) forming a distinct party. It is not merely Satan struggling to get in Judaism, but, as He says here,

the blasphemy (railing, calumny)

from them which say they are Jews, and are not, but a synagogue of Satan.

They have now a compact character, and can be spoken of as a synagogue. It was not merely the tendency of individuals. Individuals there were before, but this is much more. It is a formed and known party of the highest possible pretensions. They set up to be more righteous and holy than the rest, whom they denounced as Antinomian because they stood in the true grace of God. They were themselves corrupters and destroyers of true Christianity without knowing it. Deceived by Satan, they were his zealous instruments, so much the more actively deceiving others, because earnest and honest after the flesh.

The patristic party -- those commonly called "the Fathers" -- seem to be the leaders of the party here referred to. They have the awful ignominy of Judaizing the church of God. They have exercised this influence in all ages, and this is where, as I judge, their formation as a system is stigmatized by the Lord Jesus Christ. Offensive against Himself, they were wholly opposed in principle to grace. Their character is plain. They dragged down the Christian from his own heavenly associations to that of a spurious Jew. What is still more in John the significant point, they lost all the truth of a real life given to us in Christ. Thus whether it be the depraving of souls or the forming sects after an earthly mould among those who were heavenly according to Paul, or whether it be the taking them away from the life of Christ, and from walking as He walked, and simply putting them under Jewish ordinances, the Fathers, I fear, as a class, fully earned the awful distinction here assigned by the Lord.

When man thus regulated after the Jewish pattern, the whole beauty and aim of the church of God was ruined in principle. But the point of interest here is, that succession and ordinances became defined as a system about this very time. It is the great fact, in contrast with the inspired epistle, that you find even among the ante-Nicene Fathers. Here the Lord seems to me to notice its working at the same time that God was in a measure using for good those that were faithful in the heathen persecutions. Even then Satan was not idle in forming his synagogue

of those that said they were Jews, and are not.

On the other hand Christ said in view of the sufferer,

Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days.

The trial was not unlimited: the Lord defined the term of their endurance,
Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life {Rev. 2:10}.

He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death {Rev. 2:11}.

They might be hurt by the first, they would not be by that which follows and is final. It is a question of faith in God. Through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom.

And to the angel of the church in Pergamos comes a very different message. This too is special.

These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; I know thy works, and where thou dwellest.

It is a serious thing where and how we dwell.

Thou dwellest even where Satan’s throne is {Rev. 2:12, 13}.

How came this? One can understand their passing through the scene of his power, but to be dwelling there is significant. Did they like to be near a throne, although it were the throne of Satan -- to dwell there? Did they love the shadow or the glitter of human power?

Yet the Lord owns whatever is good.

Thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith {Rev. 2:12}.

It is remarkable that after the greatest persecutions, when Christendom and even Christians had been seduced into accepting the patronage of the world, up to that point there remained real faithfulness in refusing all efforts to deny the deity of Christ. Under the same Constantine, who was the instrument of thus casting the world’s shield over Christianity, was the battle fought and won against the Arian foe. It was under his authority, and indeed by his call, that the famous council sat at Nicea, and the faith of the Trinity was publicly established. I do not mean of course for Christians, who needed no such bulwark as this, but for Christendom. Thus the creed commonly called Nicene, which had for its object the assertion of Christ’s consubstantial deity, was published at this same time. I cannot but think that this state of things is referred to here:

Thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth {Rev. 2:13}.

What a solemn conjunction, that there should be this close proximity between Satan’s throne without, but withal the mercy of God still maintaining that fundamental faith of Christ’s own personal glory!

But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam.

Clericalism came in rapidly after this. The world’s authority brought in worldly objects, and now the ministry became a clergy, a more or less profitable profession. The framers of this were those that held the doctrine of Balaam. Simultaneously with this of course there was the introduction of all kinds of compromise with the world. The clergy encouraged by a misuse of scripture every sort of commerce with the world’s evil ways; as it is said here,

who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication {Rev. 2:14}.

I do not doubt that all this is symbolically expressed. But the drift is plain enough where the conscience is not blunted. Where the same evils exist, and all that which would keep the church as a chaste virgin espoused to Christ is gone, no wonder that these warnings are misunderstood. The world had got in, as it still remains, and alas! palliated most by those who owe their professional status to this frightfully corrupt and corrupting influence. And the same spirit of unbelief which let in the mischief keeps it in, decreeing the true application of the two-edged sword now as then. The Christians were dazzled by the world’s power and glory, which was put forth doubtless in protecting, not themselves only, but the public faith of Christendom in that day. At the same time they fatally compromised Christ by alliance with the world, and there followed the practical return to the world out of which grace had taken the church in order to union with Christ in glory.

So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate {Rev. 2:15}.

The first of these epistles to the angel of the church in Ephesus denounced

the deeds of the Nicolaitans {Rev. 2:6};

but now the iniquity in question (Antinomianism it would seem) had become a doctrine.

Repent; or else I am coming to thee quickly, and will war against them with the sword of my mouth
{Rev. 2:16}.

Thus the Lord was no longer fighting in defence of His own people, nor was He employing the enemy’s hatred and persecution to nip in the bud or prune evil excrescences. We have seen this just before. A greater trial appears now. Yet, alas! the state of those that bore His own name was such that He was obliged to deal thus sternly with them.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna {Rev. 2:17}.

When the church was seeking the place of public glory, the encouragement to faith was the hidden manna. Let there be at least individual even if unvalued faithfulness to the Lord Jesus. There were, I doubt not, some saints true to His name, though it was not the time when they were led or forced into the position of a remnant. It was not yet a question of coming out from the public body. There might not be energy of faith for this, but at any rate fidelity to Christ was not lacking, and where this was --

To him that overcometh, says the Lord,

I will give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written, which none knoweth save he that receiveth it {Rev. 2:17}.

To the true heart His approval is enough, and sweeter than triumph before the universe.

♦ ♦ ♦
Then follows the last of these four churches.

I cannot doubt that this letter contains an apt adumbration, as far as could be there in present facts, of what was found in mediaval times.

These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes as a flame of fire, and his feet like fine brass.

Christ is revealed now, not only in the all-discerning power of moral judgment, but also judicially prepared to act against evil --

His feet like fine brass.

I know thy works, and thy love, and faith, and service, and patience, and thy last works (to be) more than the first {Rev. 2:18, 19}.

There was considerable devotedness in the middle ages, spite of the darkness and ignorance that prevailed in point of doctrine. But those who loved the Lord showed their love then not so much by intelligence in His ways, as by unsparring and habitual self-denial. I am not now speaking of what was done out of superstition, either to Mary or the church, when each was made a sort of _bona Dea_, but of the fruit of looking to Christ however simply.

Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman (perhaps "thy wife") Jezebel {Rev. 2:20}.

This was a new kind of evil altogether. It is not simply clericalism now, nor persons holding the doctrine of Balaam; but a formal state of things, as the symbol of a woman regularly represents. Examine the use of woman symbolically, and you will find, I believe, that this is true. The man is the agent that goes forward; the woman is the state of things that is produced. Jezebel therefore is the appropriate symbol now, as Balaam was just before. The activity was in the clergy, who brought in the basest compromise with the world, and sold the honour of Christ for silver and gold, for ease and dignity. Here we find Jezebel later. This was the public state of things produced in the middle ages, and tolerated where the Lord was named.

As it is said here,

_Because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess._

It is precisely the claim of the so-called church, -- the assumption of permanent infallibility -- the setting up to be a sort of inspired authority to enunciate doctrine, and to direct everything in the name of God. Is not this exactly what Romanism does? Does it not then stand in the place of Jezebel? --

_Who calleth herself a prophetess, and teacheth and seducest my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols {Rev. 2:20}._

All was the fruit, doubtless, of what had been works before, but in far greater maturity now.

And I gave her space that she should repent; and she will not repent of her fornication. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and those that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death {Rev. 2:21-23}.

Jezebel was a mother indeed -- a holy mother, said the deceivers and deceived. What said the Lord? what said those who preferred great tribulation, rather than commit adultery with her? This flagrant church-world corruption was now a settled institution. It is no mere transient cloud of error; it is a body in the highest worldly position -- a queen, but also pretending to the highest spiritual power -- a prophetess so-called, that was now permanently settled in Christendom, giving birth to a distinct progeny of iniquity --

her children.

But says He who has eyes like a flame of fire,

_I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give to each according to your works {Rev. 2:23}._

But to you I say, the rest (or remnant) in Thyatira.

The remnant is here plain. Thus we must read the text and translate it. We must leave out “and unto.” The common text which gives rise to the current versions spoils the sense completely. It is to the rest, or the remnant in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine {Rev. 2:24}, that the Lord turns.

Let us weigh a little more these remarkable words. Here we have for the first time the formal recognition of saints not included in the public state of the assembly, yet not so openly separate as was found at a later day. Still they become a witnessing body more or less in spirit, apart from that which set up the highest pretension but in profoundly wicked communion with Jezebel, as the Lord judged and stigmatized what man called “our mother, the holy Catholic church.”

To you I say, the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not known this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come {Rev. 2:24-25}.

Thus the Lord speaks with exceeding tenderness of those that were true to His name. He did not expect great things from them. I do not the least doubt that those who are commonly called the Waldenses and Albigenses, and others perhaps of similar character, are referred to here. They were true and ardent, but with no considerable light of knowledge if measured by a fuller and richer testimony which the Lord was afterwards to raise up, as foreshown in the next chapter.

The Lord at the close gives a promise suited to the condition.

_He that overcometh, and he that keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations {Rev. 2:26}._

This wicked Jezebel not only persecuted the true saints of the Lord, but sought universal supremacy -- a world-wide dominion over souls. The Lord bids them in effect to have nothing to do with her, and He will give the true power when He takes it Himself. Let them abide in the place of patience,
even though there be tribulation, as there must be if they are
content to endure for Christ’s sake now,

But he that overcometh, and he that keepeth my
works unto the end, to him will I give power over
the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of
iron; as a vessel of the potter shall they be broken to
shivers: even as I received of my Father
{Rev. 2:26, 27}.

The faithful will share Christ’s power at His coming, and be
associated with Himself in His kingdom. But even this is not
enough for grace.

And I will give him the morning star {Rev. 2:28}.

This is not association with Christ in His public reign, but in
that which is proper to Him above the world altogether. The
heavenly hope of being with Christ is promised as well as
part in the kingdom.

☆ ☆ ☆

And here, it has been well observed, a notable change
takes place. The call to hear begins to follow the promise,
instead of being before it. The reason is that a remnant is now
formed. This does not go along with the public state of
the church now. The Lord thenceforth puts the promise first, and
this apparently because there is no use longer to expect the
church as a whole to receive it. The address is to the
overcomer, who is accordingly put before the call to hear. In
the three previous churches it may be noticed, the call to hear
is first, because the Lord is still dealing with the general
conscience of the church. This is given up now. There is a
remnant only that overcome, and the promise is for them.
The Lord simply takes notice of these in His call. As for
others it is all over with them.

☆ ☆ ☆

Accordingly the division of the next chapter (Rev. 3)
seems to be happy at this point. There is an immense change
in turning to the last three churches. The ground of such a
thought lies in the fact that the introduction to Sardis indicates
the Lord beginning again a new state of things. The ancient
ecclesiastical or catholic phase of the church terminates with
Thyatira: nevertheless Thyatira in this has the peculiar trait
that it is the close of the public state of the church, and the
beginning of those conditions which go on till the Lord’s
coming. Thyatira, I have no doubt, contains within it the
mystic representative of Romanism. This can hardly be
denied to Jezebel at least; whilst

the remnant

represents those who, without being Protestants, form a
witnessing company apart from popery, yet before the rise of
Protestantism. The beginning of the third chapter introduces
the protestant state of things.

Thus we have had the general condition falling into
decline; we have had the early persecution from the heathen;
we have had the power of the world patronizing the church;
and we have had finally Romanism, which alone (from the
allusion to Christ’s coming) is supposed to go on to the end.

☆ ☆ ☆

And to the angel of the church in Sardis write; These
things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and
the seven stars {Rev. 3:1}.

There is an evident allusion to the manner in which the Lord
presented Himself to the church in Ephesus. Ephesus was the
first presentation of the general public state. Sardis gives the
rise of the new state of things, not strictly ecclesiastical -- the
Lord acting in the way of testimony, and not so much in
ecclesiastical order. Hence it is not said here that He walks in
the midst of the seven lampstands: that was ecclesiastical
strictly. But here He has the seven Spirits of God. He is God.
All power, all governing might, is in His hands, and the
seven stars, that is to say, all the instrumental means by
which He acts upon the church.

I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou
livelst, and art dead.

Such is Protestantism.

Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain,
that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works
perfect before God {Rev. 3:1, 2}.

Hence what judges Protestantism is this, that they have the
testimony of God’s word much more fully than those who had
sunk into the mere ecclesiastical formalism of the middle
ages. There the word of God had been kept away, because
the clergy and the word of God can never go together
thoroughly. It is, and always must be, the effect of the
clerical principle to substitute the authority of man, more or
less, for that of the Lord, and to weaken and hinder the
immediate action of the Spirit by the word of God on the
conscience. I am speaking not of individual clergymen at all,
but of clericalism wherever found, Catholic or
denominational, national or dissenting.

But the Protestant principle is a very different one.
People may not be true to their principles, and often are not.
Still, after all, one of the grand points fought for at the
Reformation, and gained for Protestantism, whatever might
be its defects, was this; -- that man was put fairly, freely, and
openly in presence of the Bible. God’s word was there to deal
with human conscience. I do not speak of justification by
faith; for even Luther, as I think, never got thoroughly clear
as to the truth of it. And though Catholics are miserably
deluded, Protestants do not understand justification to this
day. They have the truth in a measure, but not so as to clear
souls from bondage, or bring them distinctly into liberty,
peace, and the power of the Spirit. Even Luther never had
peace in his soul, as the settled state in which he walked. We
have most of us heard what conflicts he had, and not merely
at the beginning of his career but to the end. I do not mean
conflicts about the church, but about his soul. It is needless
to cite passages from his extant writings, which prove
how sorely he was tried by inward conflicts of unbelief,
which amply prove how far he was from the calm enjoyment
of the peace of the gospel; but it is an error to impute them
in themselves to any other cause than a lack of clear knowledge
of grace. In such a state, all sorts of things may trouble the
man who cannot rest without a question on the Lord, no
matter how able and honoured he may be. I am sure Luther
is one from whom we may all learn much; whose courage,
faithfulness, self-renunciation, and endurance are edifying and instructive. At the same time it is useless to blink the fact: energetic as he was and used of God largely, he was far behind in the understanding both of the church and of the gospel.

Yet, spite of drawbacks, an open Bible was won for God's children in particular, and for man also. This very thing condemned the state of Protestantism that resulted; because, while it was freely read, there was scarce any thought of forming all upon the Bible, and regulating all by it. Nothing is more common among Protestants, than to admit a thing to be perfectly true because it is in the word of God, without the smallest intention or thought of acting upon it. Is not this a very serious fact? The Romanists are in general too ignorant to know what is or is not in the Bible. Except the commonplaces of controversy with Protestants, they know little of Scripture. Tell them that this or that is to be found in the Bible, and they look amazed. They may not know it as a whole, having never read it save (?) under the eye of the directing priest, their confessor. The Protestant reads the Bible more at liberty, which is a real good and precious boon; but for this very reason, the Protestant incurs no light responsibility.

I have not found thy works perfect before my God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief {Rev. 3:2, 3}.

It is a sweeping intimation of the very same way in which the Lord threatens to come on the world. Now if there be in the state of Protestantism one thing more marked than another, it is that they always fall back on the world to deliver themselves from the power of the priest or the church. This has ever been the chief snare, as it is now. If even what belongs to the world be touched, they are in no small agitation about it. I am far from saying this because I do not feel for them much. Nor is it that I have any doubt that it is a great sin to wipe off all public recognition of God in the world. Impossible to believe that e.g. the unblushing worldliness one sees in the combination of Dissenters with Papists and infidels springs from just, pure, holy, and unselfish motives. It is rather to be imputed to the encroaching spirit of infidelity, where there is not also a truckling to superstition. Doubtless the infidels hope to gain the day, as the superstitious are very confident on their part; but the truth of it is that the devil will get the upper hand to the destruction of them both, and then find that the Lord will appear in His day for His own judgment of all the adversaries.

The Lord then warns the angel at Sardis, that if he should not watch, He Himself will come on him as a thief, and he shall not know what hour Christ will come on him. This is not at all the way in which His coming is spoken of for His own. They are waiting for Him -- expectantly without such an idea as His thief-like surprise. How can it surprise those who are ever awaiting Him? His coming is their joy, and for this they watch more than watchman for the dawn. The figure of the thief can be employed only for the world or the worldly-minded. So solemnly then does this language suppose that the assembly at Sardis have passed out of the practical attitude of waiting for the Lord as a loved object. All intimates that they are in great, and no doubt just, dread of Him as a judge. They have slipped into the world, and share its fears and anxieties. They have lost the sense of Christ's peace left with them. They have not the joy of His coming for them in perfect love, to receive to Himself those whom He loves. The unwelcome visitation of a thief would be utterly incongruous if they were enjoying the sweet hope according to His own word, that He is coming for them quickly.

He that overcomes should be clothed in white, for there were a few in Sardis who had not defiled their garments, and who should thus walk with Him in white; because they are worthy. This has been always the case. Precious souls are there, and our happy service is to help these then, if we can, to a better knowledge of His grace, -- not, of course, to make light of their being where they are, or of their doing what they do, yet in the fullest love to feel about them as the Lord does.

He that overcometh, -- he shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot his name out of the book of life, and will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels {Rev. 3:5}.

In the next place comes Philadelphia.

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shall shut; and shutteth, and no man shall open {Rev. 3:7}.

Every word of Christ's presentation of Himself differs from the view of Him given in Rev. 1. This marks particularly the change in the chapter, and especially in the part before us. The address to Sardis also, although allusive to that of Ephesus, is nevertheless no less clearly meant to stand contrasted with it. It is a recommencement, and so far is analogous with that to Ephesus: still, the manner in which the Lord is presented is quite new. His having the seven Spirits of God was distinct from the Ephesian picture; nor is anything at all similar in the description of the Lord Jesus given before. It is a new state of things; but when we come to Philadelphia there is far more evidence of all things new.

These things saith he that is holy, he that is true.

When the Lord is seen in the vision of Rev. 1, these are not the ways in which He is described at all --

He that hath the key of David.

In the descriptions of Rev. 2 what was said about the Lord is a repetition of what was found in the vision John had just seen. The only exception is in Thyatira, where He is described as the Son of God; and, as already remarked, Thyatira is exactly transitional. It is the beginning of the changed condition. It is a church state in responsibility though not in real power, being an ecclesiastical body which presents horrors in the Lord's eyes, but not without a remnant dear to Him. This at the same time goes on down to the end, and brings in the Lord's coming; for, it will be observed, the coming of the Lord is not introduced in any of the first three, but from Thyatira it is, because the condition intended goes on to the coming of the Lord. Ephesus does not, nor Smyrna, nor Pergamos: the only semblance of it is in threats of present
judgment. Thyatira does, and so Sardis, and also Philadelphia.

But Philadelphia also prominently brings out the Lord in person as also in His moral glory. It is now Christ Himself, and this as One that faith discovers in new beauty, not dependent merely on visions of glory which had been seen before, but Christ as He really is in Himself --

He that is holy, he that is true {Rev. 3:7}.

But more than this, it is Christ seen according to the largeness of His glory. Faith sees that the blessed One, the holy and the true, is the same that has the key of David. Old Testament prophecy -- dispensational truth -- is introduced now. It is he that openeth, and no man shall shut {Rev. 3:7}.

There is perfect liberty now -- liberty for service, liberty for every one that belongs to the Lord.

I have set before thee an open door, and none can shut it: for thou hast a little strength {Rev. 3:8}.

They are supposed to be not marked by such mighty doings, as Sardis was. Sardis did great exploits, Philadelphia nothing of the sort. Are we content to be little, my friends? to be of no esteem in the world? never to be marked by anything that men can wonder at or admire? I am supposing now a scale which attracts the world's attention.

This is exactly what is not true of Philadelphia, which is rather formed after a rejected Christ. We all know of what small account He was on earth; and so it is with Philadelphia. Has it no price in His eyes?

Thou hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name {Rev. 3:8}.

Just as Jesus was marked by valuing the word of God, and loving it -- being the only One that could truly say to Satan as true of Himself,

Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God {Matt. 4:4},

so here Philadelphia is distinguished by the same living by faith. To some it might appear a small thing not to deny Christ's name, but nothing is more precious to the Lord. Once it was a question of not denying His faith, as was found in Pergamos; but here it is Himself personally. What He is is the main point. Mere orthodoxy does not suffice, but His person, though absent, and the glory due to Him.

Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not {Rev. 3:9}.

Is not this the revival of that dreadful scourge that had afflicted the early church (even Smyrna)? Have we not heard of it? And have we not seen it ourselves? How comes it, that for so many hundreds of years only a part of what the Fathers had laboured at sunk into the minds of men, a certain portion being rejected, as we know, by Protestantism; but now, when God brings out this fresh testimony, there rises a counter-testimony? Satan revives the old Judaizing spirit, at the very time that God re-asserts the true principle of Christian brotherhood, and, above all, makes Christ Himself to be all to His people. And here we have for our instruction the fact, that the synagogue of Satan -- of those who say they are Jews, and are not -- revives. How stand the facts? How are they even in this country? What is commonly called Puseyism tends to this; and that system is not confined to this country.

You must not think it is merely a question of England; it holds equally abroad, as in Germany and elsewhere -- in fact, wherever Protestantism is found, and, above all, wherever this is provoked, either by scepticism on the one hand, or on the other by truth that condemns both with the brightness of heavenly light. In order to defend themselves on a religious footing, men fall back on a system of ordinances and of the law. This is, I think, what is meant by the synagogue of Satan here.

But the Lord will compel the recognition of His own testimony. I do not say when, where, or how; but as surely as He lives, will the Lord vindicate the truth He has given, and the testimony He has raised up for His name.

I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee {Rev. 3:9}.

Nor is this all. Not only will the Lord thus vindicate what is of Himself, but, as we know, there is an awful time coming on this world -- an hour, as it is said here, not simply of tribulation, but of temptation or trial. I am inclined to think that the hour of trial embraces the whole Apocalyptic period; that is, not merely the awful time when Satan in a rage is expelled from on high, and when the beast, energised by him, rises to his full head of power, but the previous period of trouble, seduction, and judgment. In short,

the hour of temptation {Rev. 3:10}

is, I conceive, a larger term altogether than the
great tribulation {Rev. 7:14},

and still more than the unparalleled tribulation which is to befall the land of Israel. (Dan. 12; Matt. 24; Mark 13.) If so, how rich and full is the promise:

Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth {Rev. 3:10}.

In vain men try to escape! The hour of temptation must come upon all. I dare say that some of us remember when people used to fly to Canada in order to escape the great tribulation which they expected to fall on the empire of the beast. Men's scheme was a mistake, their flight foolish. The hour of temptation will catch them, no matter where they may hide. The hour of temptation shall come upon all the habitable world,

... to try them that dwell upon the earth, be they where they may.

Who then can escape? Those who at Christ's call are caught up to heaven. They will not be in that hour. It is not only, be it observed, that they will not be in the place, but they will be kept out of the hour, of that coming temptation. What a full exemption! Such is the strength of the promise and the blessedness of it, that the Lord promises His own to be kept from the time. The only possible way I can understand of exempting any from the time is by taking them out of the scene. The Irvingites used to talk about the Lord having a little Zoar. It is not at all however a question of a place of shelter, but of complete removal from the period that is filled by the great trouble or trial that will come upon the
habitable world. How can this be secured but by removing them out of the scene before the time arrives? Such I believe the promise here to import. The godly remnant of Jews, having to do with a special and most fierce but circumscribed tribulation, have only to flee to the mountains in order to escape till Jesus appears in glory, to the confusion of their foes. It is quite another thing for Christians.

Behold, I come quickly {Rev. 3:11}!

There is not a word about His coming as a thief now, but with joy. The Lord has revived the true hope of His return; there are those who are thus waiting for Christ, and this epistle seems emphatically to apply to such.

Behold, I come quickly!

In principle it is true of all that are really faithful, but there may be Christians, as we know there are, involved in one or other of the various states which have been described, and which apparently go on to the close. It is in vain therefore to look for a formal obliteration of these co-ordinate conditions, which cannot be till the Lord comes.

Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name {Rev. 3:11, 12}.

He will be as much marked by power in the day of glory, as by contented weakness in the present scene of grace.

* * *

We have yet the last epistle to the angel of the church in Laodicea. But of this I would say but a few words, considering the late hour. The Laodicene picture is, in my judgment, the result of dislike and contempt for the testimony that the Lord had previously raised up. If people despise the truth possessed by those who are waiting for the Lord, they are in danger of falling into the awful condition that is here set forth. Christ is no longer the loved and only object of the heart; nor is there the sense of the blessedness of His coming, which leads into waiting for Him; still less is there a glorying in weakness that the power of Christ may rest on them. There is the desire to be great, to be esteemed of men, rich, and increased in goods, and in need of nothing {Rev. 3:17}.

You find here a scope, therefore, that leaves ample room for man. Hence it is that the Lord introduces Himself to them as the Amen, -- the end of every thing human, -- where all the security is in the faithfulness of God. He only is

the faithful and true witness {Rev. 3:14}.

That is exactly what the church ought to have been and was not; and therefore He has to take that place Himself. It was so before when He was here below in grace, and now He must resume its power and glory and judgment, than which one can hardly conceive a greater and more solemn rebuke on the condition of those who ought to have been His witnesses. Besides He is

It is a setting aside of man altogether; and the reason is that Laodicea is the glorification of man and of man's resources in the church.

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would that thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth {Rev. 3:15, 16}.

They are neutral in principle and practice, being half-hearted about Christ. And I am persuaded there is no place which is more likely to generate neutrality than a sound and true position, if there be not self-judgment maintained and godly sincerity. The more you stand in the forefront of the battle, with the responsible testimony of God, the more you have the grace and truth of God brought out before and by you, if the heart and conscience be not governed and animated by the power of the Spirit of God, through that truth and grace that is in Christ, sooner or later, there will be, beyond a question, a lapse back into a position of neutrality, if not of active enmity. There will be indifference to all that is good; and the only kind of zeal, if there be zeal, will be for what is bad.

This is exactly Laodiceanism.

So then because thou art neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing: and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire {Rev. 3:16-18}.

They wanted everything that was precious: --
gold

or divine righteousness in Christ;

white raiment,

that is to say, the righteousnesses of saints;

that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see {Rev. 3:18}.

They had lost the very perception of what was for God. All was dark as to truth, and uncertain as to moral judgment. Holy separateness and savour were gone.

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me {Rev. 3:19, 20}.

The Lord presents Himself even there in the most gracious way to meet their need. But the utmost promised in the word that closes the epistle goes not beyond reigning with Him. It is nothing special. For every one that is in the first resurrection is destined to reign with Christ, as even will the Jewish sufferers, earlier or later, under the antichrist. It is all a mistake, therefore, to suppose that this is a singular distinction. It amounts to this -- that the Lord will hold, after all, to His own truth, spite of unfaithfulness. There may be individual reality even where the associations are miserably untoward.

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the beginning of the creation of God {Rev. 3:14}.

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Lectures Introductory

to the Study of

The Acts, the Catholic Epistles,

and

the Revelation

Lecture 10

The Revelation 4 - 11:18

We have already seen the bearing of the seven churches to which the Lord was pleased to send the letters contained in the second and third chapters. We have found, I trust, substantial reason and ample evidence in their own contents, as well as in the character of the book itself, to look for a meaning far more comprehensive than a literal historical notice of the condition of the Asiatic churches which were then primarily addressed. It is, of course, ground well known to all that John wrote to seven churches; but that no more was meant than the existing assemblies is more than ought to be assumed. The septenary number is significant, and the division of the seven into two parts. Again, the order of their contents, as well as their nature severally, points to the same conclusion. Further, it is plain that certain phases do not necessarily abide, while at a given point in their course the language implies the state of things meant by them to continue up to Christ’s return. That point is Thyatira, and thenceforward the same feature is in Sardis, Philadelphia, and of course Laodicea. Beginning successively, these go on together. But it is equally remarkable, that the first three churches do not. What I gather from it is, that the three earlier churches are severed in character from the rest; for though all are alike typical, only the last four are used as fore-shadows of successive states of things about to ensue, and then be concurrent up to the Second Advent. We can easily understand two things: first, the succession of seven different states represented by those seven churches; and, secondly, that of the seven, three passed away, only retaining a moral bearing; whereas the last four have not this only, but a prophetic and successional bearing, and from the epoch of their appearance, run along-side of each other till the coming of the Lord Jesus.

But the remarkable fact which meets us from Rev. 4 and onward is, that we no longer find any church condition on the earth. This confirms the same fact. Had these churches not been meant to have an application beyond the literal one, how could it be accounted for? If, on the other hand, besides that historical application, they were meant to be prophetical, we can easily comprehend that the Lord did address assemblies then existing, but meant by them to give views of successional states that should be found up to the close, when four of these states go on together. Thyatira brings before us the public character of corrupted Christendom -- that which is notoriously found in Popery. Then, again, Sardis is that which is well known as Protestantism: there might be orthodoxy, but withal a manifest want of real life and power. This is followed by the revival of the truth of Christian brotherhood, with an open door for the work as well as word of the Lord, and His coming acting powerfully, not merely on the mind as a conviction, but on the affections as attaching to the Lord Jesus. This is found in Philadelphia. Then Laodicea shows us the final state of indifference that would be produced by the rejection of these warnings and encouragements of the Lord.

From Rev. 4 we have the Spirit of God leading the prophet into the understanding of not the church-state, but that which will follow when churches are no longer before the mind of the Lord -- when it becomes a question of the world, not without testimonies from God in the midst of gradually swelling troubles; but His witnesses henceforward of Jewish or Gentile character, never more after that of the church on earth. Believers we do see, of course, -- some of them of the chosen people, others of the nations; but we hear of no such church condition as was found in the second and third chapters. One of the most striking proofs of the way in which the patent facts of the word of God are habitually passed over is, that this has been so constantly overlooked. There have been hundreds, perhaps thousands, of books written on the Revelation, yet it is only of comparatively recent date that so plain, sure, and grave a feature seems to have been seen. I speak now from some acquaintance with that which has been written on the book from the Fathers down to our own days. As far as I remember, there does not occur in hundreds of the ablest books about it which have passed through my hands, the slightest reference even to this undeniable and important fact which lies on the surface of the prophecy.

I draw from this nothing complimentary to man’s mind, but the contrary. It loudly confirms those who are convinced of the necessity of the teaching of the Holy Ghost, to profit even by what is plain, certain, and obvious. There is no book so remarkable as the Bible in this respect: no learning nor acquirement, no brightness of mind or imagination, will ever, without His power, enable any soul to seize, enjoy, and use
right its communications. They may, no doubt, perceive one fact here and another there; but how to employ even these for good will never be known unless the Spirit of God give its to look straight to Christ. He that has Christ before him is soon sensible of a difference of relationship and its results. Christ has special ways of dealing with the church that are suitable to none else. This closes with the end of the third chapter.

The inference is obvious. New things come before the Lord, as well as the reader. Now, as notoriously the great mass of persons who bear the name of the Lord have assumed, without the smallest proof from scripture, that the church has always been and always will be while the work of converting souls proceeds on earth, it is clear that this assumption erects an impassable barrier against the truth. No wonder people fail to understand the Bible when they enter on its study with a principle which opposes at all points the revealed truth of God. There is no such notion in the Bible. It is found in no part either of the Old or of the New Testament; as little as anywhere else is it tolerated by the book now before us. Thus we see churches existing when the book begins; but they are found no more, when the introductory portion closes and the proper prophecy is entered on. A church condition is not, strictly speaking, the subject of prophecy, which deals with the world, and shows us divine judgments coming on its evil, when God is about to make room for good according to His own mind. Such is the great theme of the book of Revelation. But inasmuch as there were Christian assemblies then, the Spirit of God is pleased to prefix it with a most remarkable panoramic view of the church condition as long as it should subsist before the Lord on the earth. And we have seen this given with the most striking wisdom, so as to suit at the time of John, yet also as long as the church goes on always to apply, and increasingly, not every part at once, but with sufficient light to give children of God full satisfaction as to the mind of the Lord. In fact, it is the same here as in every other part of scripture: none can really profit by the word, whether in Genesis or in the Revelation, without the Spirit, and this can only be to the glory of Christ.

If this be so, we can understand the vast importance of the change that is here observable. The prophet enters by the door into heaven. Of course this was simply a vision. The power of the Holy Ghost gave him thus to enter and behold; it was not a question of sensible facts. He was immediately in the Spirit, it is said; and in heaven he beholds a throne set, and this, from its effects and surroundings, a judicial throne. It is not at all the same character of the throne of God as we know and approach now. We come boldly to the throne and find grace and mercy to help in time of need. But we find nothing of the sort here, either in the throne or in what issues from it. Even a child might read better the force of the symbols employed for our instruction. What is meant by lightnings and voices and thunderings? Is it too much to say that he who could confound the aspect of the throne in Heb. 4 with that of Rev. 4 must have a singularly constituted mind? I cannot understand how any attentive reader could fail to see the difference, not to speak of one spiritually taught. Indeed, the amazing thing is, how any person in his sober senses could conclude that the two descriptions characterize the same state of things. They stand really in the strongest possible contrast.

Here we have the throne, not of divine mercy, but invested with what was proper to Sinai: it discerns, denounces, and destroys the evil of the earth. Thus it is the seat and source of judgment on the ungodly. I admit that it is not yet the throne of the Son of man reigning over the world. The time is not come at this point for the church to reign with Christ over the earth. In Rev. 5 the reigning over the earth is spoken of as a future thing

\[\text{(shall reign over the earth \{Rev. 5:10\}}\],

and not yet a fact. Clearly, therefore, we see here a transitional state of things after the church condition ends, and before the millennial reign begins. Such is the manifest truth necessary to understand the Revelation. As long as you do not admit this, you will never, in my judgment, understand the Apocalypse as a whole.

Then we are told that the likeness of Him that sat on the throne is compared to a jasper and a sardine stone. This obviously does not refer to the divine essence, which no creature can approach to or look upon. It is God’s glory so far as He was pleased to allow it to be made visible to the creature. Consequently it is compared to those precious stones of which we hear in the city afterwards.

But there are other notable features of the throne. We are told that round about it

there was a rainbow in sight like an emerald \{Rev. 4:3\}.

God marks here His remembrance of creation. The rainbow is the familiar sign of the covenant with creation, and it was presented prominently to the prophet’s mind. The various points noticed are as in God’s mind, not merely as in man’s eyes. Thus the rainbow is not seen in a shower of rain upon the earth. It is a question of the simple truth that was set forth by it, and nothing more. So it is with all the other objects seen in this vision.

Next,

round about the throne were four and twenty elders \{Rev. 4:4\}.

The allusion is evident to the four and twenty courses of priesthood. Only it will be observed that it is not the whole number (the twenty-four classes of men), but simply the chief priests of these courses. The twenty-four elders, in my opinion, refer to the heads of the priesthood. Therefore this is of some importance to bear in mind, because we find subsequently others that are recognized as priests who were not yet in heaven, who indeed were only called out on the earth after this. Unquestionably these others became priests, but no more elders are recognized. No addition is ever made to the company of elders; they are a fixed number. Priests there are afterwards, but no heads of priesthood save these elders.

These heads of priesthood, I have no doubt then, are the
glorified saints above; and in that glorified body, as I apprehend, are the Old Testament saints as well as the New. You will see from this, that I am as far as possible from wishing to undervalue the grace of God to those of old. It seems to me that there are good grounds to infer from the prophecy itself that the twenty-four elders are not merely the church, but all those saints that rise up at the presence of the Lord Jesus (as it is written, they that are Christ's at His coming or His presence). This is unquestionable to my mind. The rising from the dead includes all saints up to that time, and of course, at the same time, the change that is described in the latter part of the same chapter (1 Cor. 15). All saints deceased or then alive appear to me meant. Thus the Old Testament saints and those of the New are changed; for the dead in Christ [1 Thess. 4:16] ought scarcely to be limited merely to the body of Christ. But the phrase the dead in Christ means all that have their relationship in Christ, and not merely in Adam; they did not die in the flesh, but died in Christ. It is not a question of Adam the first, but of the Second; but as the one embraces all the Adam family, it seems to me the other should be equally broad. Thus we must leave room in the twenty-four elders for the glorified, whether in the Old Testament times or in the New. This does not in the smallest degree compromise the special character of the church. It will be shown how remarkably this is preserved and manifested in a later point of the visions. At present I merely wish to state briefly what I believe to be the force of the symbol here.

These twenty-four elders, again, are clothed in white raiment, as also they have crowns of gold. They are seated on thrones. It is impossible to apply this to angelic beings. Angels are never so crowned or enthroned. Nowhere do we hear of an angel called to any such dignity. Power no doubt they might wield, but never do they reign; they have the execution of the will of God in outward things, but never do they administer it after this royal pattern. This is destined for the glorified saints -- for the redeemed, and not for angels; and this because Christ has given them the title of grace by His blood. As it was said in a previous chapter, He has made us a kingdom, -- priests to His God and Father. In Rev. 4 we have symbols which answer rather to the kingly title, as in Rev. 5 the same persons appear, discharging functions after a priestly type. In Rev. 4 the elders are crowned and enthroned; in Rev. 5 they have golden vials (or bowls) of odours (i.e., incense), which are the prayers of the saints. In the one, therefore, their kingly place is more involved, -- in the other their priestly occupation. This is never applied to ordinary angels as such. The only angel ever seen in priestly action is when the Lord Jesus assumes the character of an angel-priest (Rev. 8); not of course that He becomes a literal angel, but God was pleased, for reasons of sufficient weight, thus to represent Him at the altar under the trumpets.

Next we find that attention was directed both to what characterized the throne judicially, and also to the Holy Ghost as having a symbolic description suitable to the scene -- seven lamps or torches of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. Thus it is not the Holy Ghost in the gracious power which characterizes His relationship to the church, but in governmental judgment, because it is a question of a sinful guilty world -- of the creature, and not the new creation.

So too we see that the four living creatures are brought before us.

Before the throne, it is written,

there was a sea of glass like unto crystal [Rev. 4:6].

Instead of its being a laver of water to purify the unclean, it is a sea, not liquid, but of glass. It is fixed purity now. Hence it is no question of meeting what was contracted in this defiling world. Those that are here in relation to it have passed out of their failure and need; they are in heaven and already glorified. And I may just repeat what has been often said before, that all scripture testifies to glorified bodies, without a word about glorified spirits. The twenty-four elders do not mean those members of Christ who have gone by death into His presence. The numerical symbol in fact is inconsistent with such an idea -- for this simple reason, that, interpret the twenty-four as you please, it must mean a complete company. Now the saints cannot be said to be complete in any sense whatsoever till Christ have come, who will translate all the Christians alive then on earth, with all the saints who had previously fallen asleep in Him, to be glorified with Himself above.

There is no time that you can look at the departed spirits, but there are some on earth who require to be added in order to exhibit the number complete. In point of fact, so far is scripture from ever representing the separate condition of the spirits as a complete state, that its testimony is distinctly adverse. The church is viewed as in a certain sense complete at any given moment on the earth, not because of the greater importance of those who are on the earth compared with such as are in heaven, but because the Holy Ghost was sent down from heaven, and is on earth. This is the reason why (He being the one bond of the church), where He is, the church must be. Accordingly there never can be any complete state of the church at any given moment in heaven, but on earth rather till Jesus come. But when we speak of absolute completeness, it is clear that this cannot be till the Lord come and has taken all the heavenly saints out of the world, and they go up into His presence above. Then there is completeness; and this is the state that is represented by the twenty-four elders. So that we have here, therefore, still more confirmation of what has been already pressed, -- that the entire description pre-supposes the church condition done with, and a new state entered on. Such is the unforced meaning of this vision of the blessedness and glory of those who had been on earth, but are now glorified in heaven. It is a complete company in the fullest sense; the heads of the heavenly priesthood. They have passed, therefore, out of the need of the washing of water by the word. It is a sea, not of
water, but of glass, like crystal. This stamps the fact in a most evident manner.

Further, we have to notice the cherubic symbol.

And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind {Rev. 4:6}.

Thus there was perfect discernment conferred on them by God. The living creatures I understand to be symbolic of the agency -- whatever may be the agents -- that God employs in the execution of His judicial power. Consequently the qualities of power are those fitting and necessary for that execution.

The first was like a lion; the second like a calf (a young bull or steer); the third had the face as of a man; and the fourth was like a flying eagle {Rev. 4:7}.

We have thus majestic power, patient endurance, intelligence, and rapidity, all which enter into the judicial dealings that follow.

The question arises, and a very interesting one it is, not what, but who, are these living creatures? We have seen the qualities in their agency; but who are the agents? This is a delicate point. At the same time I think that scripture gives adequate light, as to those who wait on God, for everything which it is important for us to know.

It will be observed that in Rev. 4 (and it is a remarkable fact) there are no angels mentioned. You have the throne of God; you have the elders, and also the four living creatures, but not a word about angels. The living creatures celebrate God, not yet as the Most High, but as the

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come {Rev. 4:8}.

And when they do thus
give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth unto the ages of the ages, the twenty-four elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth unto the ages of the ages, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord and our God, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou createst all things, and because of thy will they were and were created {Rev. 4:9-11}.

I give it in its exact form. There is this particular stamped on the elders, that they always speak with understanding. It will be true in its measure even of the Jewish remnant that are to be called after the rapture. They are designated as

the wise that shall understand {Dan. 12:10};
so we know from Daniel and others. But the elders have a higher character, because they invariably enter into the reason of the thing. This is an exceedingly beautiful feature, which I suppose also to be connected with the fact that they are called elders. They are those who have the mind of Christ, They apprehend the counsels and ways of God.

In Rev. 4 we see that the living creatures and the elders are closely connected, but no more. We shall find in Rev. 5 that they join together. Not merely are they connected there but they positively combine. This is shown us in the case where the Lamb

takes the book, the four living creatures and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. And they sing a new song {Rev. 5:8, 9}.

The remarkable fact that it is important to heed here is this. Rev. 5 shows us for the first time the Lamb presented distinctly and definitely in the scene. It was not so even in Rev. 4, where we have seen the display of the judicial glory of God in His various earthly or dispensational characters, save His millennial one, and of course not His special revelation to us now as Father. In itself we know that Jehovah God embraces equally the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. But here the Holy Ghost is distinctively seen as the seven Spirits of God under a symbolic guise; here the Lord Jesus is not yet discriminated. The glorious vision of Him who sits on the throne may include therefore both the Father and the Son; it is rather God as such, than the revelation of personality -- the general or generic idea, not personal distinction formally. But in Rev. 5 a challenge is made which at once displays the worth, victory, and peace of the Lamb, that holy earth-rejected Sufferer, whose blood has bought for God those who were under the ruin of sin and misery. There is to be then the full blessing of man and the creature on God’s part, yea, man not only delivered, but even before the deliverance is displayed led into the understanding of the mind and will of God. Christ is just as necessarily the wisdom of God as He is the power of God. Without Him no creature can apprehend, any more than a sinner knows salvation without Him. We need, and how blessed that we have, Christ for everything! Thus, whatever the glory of the scene before the prophet in Rev. 4, that which follows shows us the wondrous person and way in which man is brought into the consciousness of the blessing, and the appreciation of the divine ways and glory.

And I saw on the right hand of him that sat on the throne a roll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals (Rev. 5:1).

The creature could not open these seals, -- none anywhere. But the strong angel proclaims, and the Lord Jesus at length comes forward to answer the proclamation. He takes up the challenge, appearing after a sufficient space had proved the impotence of all others. The comfort assured to John by the elder is thus justified; for the elders always understand. And he sees the Lion of the tribe of Judah to be the Lamb, despised on earth, exalted in heaven, who advances and takes the roll out of the right hand of Him that sat on the throne. And then they all -- living creatures and elders together -- fell down before the Lamb with a new song.

It is striking that after this, as we are told,

I saw, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the living creatures and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands;

who said with a loud voice,
Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power
{Rev. 5:11, 12}.

Here we have the angels, who are now distinctly and prominently brought forward. Why is this? How comes it that no angels appear in Rev. 4? And why is it that we have them in Rev. 5? There is always the wisest reason in the ways of God of which scripture speaks, and we are encouraged by the Spirit to enquire humbly but trustfully. What is marked by it seems to be this: that the assumption of the book into the hands of the Lamb, and His preparing to open the seals, marks a change of administration. Up to that point of time, angels have held a sort of executory ministry of power from God. Where judgments were in question, or other extraordinary intervention on His part, angels were the instruments; whereas from this point of time, it appears to me that the Spirit of God marks the fact of a vast change, however they may still be employed during the interval of the last of Daniel’s seventy weeks. It is providence yet, not manifested glory.

The title of the glorified saints is thus asserted. We know for certain, as a matter of doctrine in Heb. 2, that the world to come is to be put not under angels but the redeemed. Here it appears to me that the seer is admitted to a prophetic glimpse that falls in with the doctrine of St. Paul. In other words, when the Lamb is brought definitely into the scene, then, and not before, we see the elders and the living creatures united in the new song. As one company, they join in praising the Lamb. They sing,

Thou art worthy, for thou hast redeemed {Rev. 5:9}, and so on. Thus we have them combined in a new fashion; and, what is more, the angels are now seen and definitely distinguished. Supposing, for instance, that previously, the administration of judgment was in the hand of angels, it is easily understood that they would not be distinguished from the living creatures in Rev. 4; because, in point of fact, the living creatures set forth the agencies of God’s executory judgment; whereas in Rev. 5, if there be a change in administration, and the angels that used to be the executors are no longer so recognised as such in view of the kingdom, but the power is entrusted to the hands of the glorified saints, it is simple enough that the angels fall back, being eclipsed by the heirs, and no longer in the same position. If previously they might be understood to be included under the living creatures, they are henceforward to take their place simply as angels, and are therefore no longer comprehended under that symbol. This, the suggestion of another, appears to commend itself as a true explanation of the matter.

From this, if correct, as I believe it to be, it follows that the four living creatures might be at one time angels, and at another saints. What the symbol sets forth is not so much the persons that are entrusted with these judgments, as the character of the agencies employed. Scripture, however, affords elements to solve the question, first by the marked absence of angels, who, as we know, are the beings that God employed in His providential dealings with the world, and this both in Old Testament times, and still in the days of the New Testament. The church is only in course of formation;

but when it shall be complete, when the glorified saints are caught up, and the First-begotten is owned in His title, they too will be owned in theirs. For as the Lord is coming to take visibly the kingdom, we can readily understand that the change of administration is first made manifest in heaven before it is displayed upon earth. If this be correct, then the change is marked in Rev. 5. The general fact is in Rev. 4; the approaching change is anticipated in Rev. 5. This appears to be the most satisfactory way of accounting for that which is here brought before us.

All the results are celebrated for every creature when once the note is struck (Rev. 5:13).

Next we come to the opening of the seals. Rev. 6 has a character of completeness about it, with this only exception, -- that the seventh seal is the introduction to the trumpets in the beginning of Rev. 8. This does not call for many words on the present occasion.

And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, Come {Rev. 6:1}.

Ought we to have here, and after the other three horses, the words “and see”? It appears, that they are wanting in the best text 47 in all these passages. In every one of the cases the sentence ought to be come.

The difference comes to this, that “come and see” would be addressed to John; whereas according to the better MSS. the come is addressed by the living creature to the rider on the horse. Clearly this makes a considerable difference. One of the living creatures steps forward when the first seal is opened, and says, Come; and at once comes forth a rider on a white horse.

Let us inquire into the force of each severally.

I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him: and he went (or came) forth conquering and that he might conquer {Rev. 6:2}.

It is the answer to the call. The first then comes forth, and the character of his action is prosperity and conquest. Everything shows this. It is the earliest state that the Spirit of God notices as brought about in the world. After the mighty change we have already seen to have taken place in heaven, there is a mighty conqueror that will appear here below. We are all aware that this has been applied to a great variety of things and persons. Sometimes it has been supposed to mean the triumphs of the gospel, sometimes Christ’s coming again, and as often antichrist, and I know not what. But what I think we may safely gather from it is this, that God employs a conqueror who will carry everything before him.

It is not necessarily by bloodshed, as in the second seal,

47. Yet in every instance the Sinai MS. supports the inferior copies against the Alexandrian, and the Rescript of Paris with the better cursive, &c.
which gives us carnage if not civil war. Hence the rider is not on a white horse, the symbol of victory; but remounted on another, a red horse, with a commission to kill, and a great sword. Imperial power which subjugates is meant by the horse in every state; but in the first case imperial power seems to subject men bloodlessly. The measures are so successful -- the name itself carries such weight with it -- that, in point of fact, it is one onward career of conquest without necessarily involving slaughter. But in the second seal the great point is

that they should slay one another [Rev. 6:4].

It was possibly even civil warfare. There the horse was red.

In the third seal it is a black horse, the colour of mourning. Accordingly we read now of a chamix of wheat for a denarius, and three chamixes of barley for a denarius. That is, the price was the rate of scarcity. The ordinary price a little while before we know to have been incomparably less; for notoriously a denarius would have procured as much as fifteen chamixes. Now it is needless to say that fifteen times the ordinary price of wheat would make a serious difference; but however this may have been, certainly the rate current in St. John’s day is not a question that is easily settled. Naturally rates differ. The increase of civilization and other causes tend to make it a little uncertain. That there is a difficulty in ascertaining with nicety the prices at this particular epoch is plain from the fact that men of ability and conscience have supported every possible variety of opinion -- plenty, scarcity, and a fair supply at a just price; but I do not think it is worth while to spend more time on the point. The colour of the horse, to my mind, decisively proves what the nature of the case is. Mourning would be strange if it were either a time of plenty or one governed by a just price; black suits a time of scarcity. Some will be surprised to hear that each of these views has had defenders. There are only three possible ways of taking it; and each one of these has had staunch support. Every one of these different interpretations has been insisted on by learned men, who are as liable as others to waver sometimes to one side, sometimes to another. There is no certainty about them. The word of God makes the matter plain to a simple mind. The unlettered in this country or any other cannot know much details about the price of barley or wheat at the time of St. John, or later; but he does see at once that the black colour is significant, especially as contrasted with white and red, and not at all indicative of joy or justice, but very naturally of distress; and therefore he feels bound to take this in company with the other points of the third horse and its rider.

The fourth seal was a pale or livid horse, the hue of death. Accordingly the name of its rider is Death, and Hades followed with him. To make the force still plainer, it is said that authority was given to him over the fourth of the earth, to slay with the sword, and with hunger, and with death (pestilence perhaps), and by the beasts of the earth.

The fifth seal shows us souls under the altar, who had been slain for the word of God, and for their testimony, who cried aloud for vengeance to the Sovereign Ruler. They are vindicated before God, but must wait: others, both their fellow-servants and their brethren, must be killed as they were ere that day comes.

The sixth seal marks a vast convulsion, a partial answer to the cry as I suppose. Many a person thinks that those in question are Christians. But if we look more clearly into the passage, we may learn that this again confirms the removal of the church to heaven before this.

How long, O Sovereign, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? [Rev. 6:10].

Is this a prayer, or desire according to the grace of the gospel? Reasoning is hardly needful on a point so manifest. I think that any one who understands the general drift of the New Testament, and the special prayers there recorded by the Holy Ghost for our instruction, would be satisfied but for a false bias otherwise. Take Stephen's prayer, and our blessed Lord, the pattern of all that is perfect. On the other hand we have similar language elsewhere: but where? In the Psalms. Thus we have all the evidence that can be required. The evidence of the New Testament shows that these are not the sanctioned prayers of the Christian; the evidence of the Old Testament, that just such were the prayers of persons whose feelings and experience and desires were founded on Israelitish hopes.

Does not this exactly fall in with what we have already proved -- that the heavenly glorified saints will have passed out of the scene, and that God will be at work in the formation of a new testimony, which will of course have its own peculiarities, -- not of course obliterating the facts of the New Testament, but at the same time leading the souls of the saints more particularly into what was revealed of old, because God is going to accomplish what was predicted then? The time is approaching for God to take the earth. The great subject of the Old Testament is the earth blessed under the rule of the heavens, and Christ the head of both. The earth, and the earthly people Israel, and the nations, will then enjoy the days of heaven here below. Accordingly these souls show us their condition and hopes. They pray for earthly judgments. They desire not that their enemies should be converted, but that God should avenge their blood on them. Nothing can be simpler, or more sure than the inference.

And it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until both their fellow-servants and their brethren, that were to be killed as they were, should be fulfilled [Rev. 6:11].

This is an important intimation, as we shall see from what follows in the Apocalypse. They are told that they are not the only band of the faithful who are given up to a violent end: others must follow later. Till then, God is not going to appear for the accomplishment of that judgment for which they cried. They must wait therefore for that further, and, as we know, more furious outburst of persecution. After that, God will deal with the earth. Thus we have here the latest persecution, as well as the earlier one, of the Apocalyptic period distinctly given. The apostle Paul had spoken of himself as ready to be offered up: so these were and are seen therefore under the altar in the vision. They were renewed
indeed, and understood what Israel ought to do; but they were clearly not on the ground of Christian faith and intelligence as we are. Of course it is a vision, but still a vision with weighty and plain intimations to us. They had the spirit of prophecy to form the testimony of Jesus. Judgment yet lingers till there was the predicted final outpouring of man's apostate rage, and then the Lord will appear and put down all enemies.

At the same time, as we have already seen passingly, the next seal shows that God was not indifferent meanwhile. The sixth seal may be regarded as a kind of immediate consequence of the foregoing cry. When opened, a vast shaking ensues, -- a thorough concussion of everything above and below, set forth mysteriously, as in the previous seals.

The sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the whole moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell on the earth, even as a fig tree, shaken by a mighty wind, casteth its untimely figs. And the heaven was removed as a scroll rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places {Rev. 6:12-14}. This is merely the appearance before the seer in the vision. We are not to suppose that heaven and earth will be physically confounded when the prediction is fulfilled. He saw all this before his eyes as signs, of which we have to consider the meaning. We have to find out by their symbolic use elsewhere what is intended here by the changes that passed over sun, moon, stars, and the earth in the vision. And the result of course depends on our just application of scripture by the teaching of the Holy Spirit.

Then we are told in plain language, not in figures, that the kings of the earth, and the great and the rich, and the chilarchs, and the mighty, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains {Rev. 6:15}. This it is well to heed, because it would be evident that if it meant that the heaven literally was removed as a scroll, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place, there could be no place to hide in. Thus to take it as other than symbolic representation would be to contradict the end by the beginning. This, then, is not the true force. Supposing heaven really to disappear, and the earth to be moved according to the import of these terms in a pseudo-literal way, how could the various classes of terrified men be saying to the mountains,

Fall on us and hide us {Rev. 6:16}?

It is plain, therefore, that the vision, like its predecessor, is symbolical; that the prophet indeed beheld these objects heavenly and earthly thus darkened and in confusion; but that the meaning must be sought out on the ordinary principles of interpretation. To my mind, it represents a complete dislocation of all authority, high and low -- an unexampled convulsion of all classes of mankind within its own sphere, the effect of which is to overturn all the foundations of power and authority in the world, and to fill men's minds with the apprehension that the day of judgment is come.

It is not the first time indeed that people have so dreaded, but it will be again worse than it has ever been. Such is the effect of the sixth seal when its judgment is accomplished, after the church is taken away to heaven, and indeed subsequent to a murderous persecution of the saints who follow us on earth. The persecuting powers and those subject to them will be visited judicially, and there will ensue a complete disruption of authority on the earth. The rulers will have misused their power, and now a revolution on a vast scale takes place. Such seems to me the meaning of the vision. The effect on men when they see the total overturning of all that is established in authority here below will be that they will think the day of the Lord is come. They will say to the mountains and rocks,

Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who is able to stand? {Rev. 6:16-17}.

It is an error to confound their saying so with God's declaration. It is not He but they who cry that the great day of the wrath is come. There is no excuse for so mistaken an interpretation. It is what these frightened multitudes exclaim; but the fact is that the great day does not arrive for a considerable space afterwards, as the Revelation itself clearly proves. The whole matter here is that men are so alarmed by all this visitation, that they think it must be His coming day, and they say so. It is very evident that the great day of His wrath is not yet come, because a considerable time after this epoch our prophecy describes the day of His coming. It is described in Rev. 14, 15, and especially 19. When it really arrives, so infatuated are the men of the world that they will fight against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them. Satan will have destroyed their dread when there is most ground for it.

* * *

After this, so far is the great day of His wrath from being come, that we find in the parenthesis of Rev. 7 God accomplishing mighty works of saving mercy. The first is the sealing of 144,000 out of the tribes of Israel by an angel that comes from the sun-rising. Next there is vouchsafed to the prophet the sight of a crowd of Gentiles that none could number,

out of every nation, and tribes, and peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and they cry with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb {Rev. 7:9, 10}.

Here it is not simply “salvation,” but salvation to God, in the quality of sitting upon the throne (we have seen in this book, His judicial throne). In other words, the ascription could not have been made before Rev. 4. Its tenor supposes a vast change to have taken place. It is not the fruit of a testimony during all or many ages. All this is merely men's imagination, without the smallest foundation in scripture. So far from its being a picture of the redeemed of all times, it is
expressly said to be a countless throng out of Gentiles contrasted with Israel, and this in relation to God governing judicially. It is not universal therefore. These Gentiles stand in manifest contrast with the sealed out of Israel. One of the elders talked about them, and explained to the prophet, who evidently without this would have been at fault. If the elders mean the glorified saints, these Gentiles are not. Most assuredly they cannot be all saints, because the hundred and forty-four thousand of Israel we have seen expressly distinguished from them. Who are they and what? They are a multitude of Gentiles to be preserved by gracious power in these last days. They are not said to be glorified; nor is there reason to doubt that they are still in their natural bodies. When they are said to be before the throne, it proves nothing inconsistent with this; because the woman; for instance, in Rev. 12, is also described as seen in heaven; but, you must remember, this is only where the prophet saw them in the vision. We are not necessarily to gather that they were to be in heaven; John saw them there, but whether it might mean that they were, or were not to be, in heaven, is another question. This depends on other considerations that have to be taken into account, and it is for want of due waiting on God, and of adequately weighing the surrounding circumstances, that such serious mistakes are made in these matters.

In this case it is perfectly plain to my mind that they are not heavenly as such. There are weighty objections. First of all, we find them definitely contra-distinguished from Israel, who clearly are on earth, and thus naturally this company would be on earth too, -- the one Jewish, and the other Gentile. Next they come out of the great tribulation. Far from its being a general body in respect to all time, this proves that it is a very peculiar though countless group, -- that it is only persons who can be preserved and blessed of God during the epoch of the great tribulation.

In the millennial time there will be a great ingathering of the Gentiles; but these are not millennial saints. They are saints from among the Gentiles, who will be called to the knowledge of God by the preaching of the everlasting gospel {Rev. 14:6}, or the gospel of the kingdom {Matt. 24:14}, of which we hear both in the gospels and in the Revelation. We all know that the Lord Himself tells the disciples that this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations (or all the Gentiles);

and then shall the end come {Matt. 24:14}. Now this is just the very time spoken of here. It is clearly not a general summary of what is going on now, but a description of what is yet to be, specially just before the end when the great tribulation bursts out. And there is the fruit of divine grace even then in this vast crowd from the Gentiles, the details of whose description fall in with and confirm what has been remarked already.

I have already drawn attention to the fact that they are distinguished from the elders. If these mean the church, those do not; and as all admit that the elders represent the glorified saints, the inference seems to me quite plain and certain. Undoubtedly we might have the same body represented at different times by a different symbol, but hardly by two symbols at the same time. We may have, for instance, Christians set forth by a train of virgins at one time, and by the bride at another; but in the same parable there is a careful avoidance of confusion; and no such incongruous mixture occurs in scripture. It is not even found amongst sensible men, not to speak of the word of God. So here the prophet tells us that one of the elders answers his own enquiry,

What are these arrayed in white robes? and whence come they? {Rev. 7:13}.

These are they who come out of the great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Clearly therefore they are believers or saints.

Therefore are they before the throne of God {Rev. 7:14, 15}, which I take to be not a description of their local place but of their character, -- that it is in view of, and in connection with, the throne. This, we have seen, makes it to be limited to the particular time, and not vague or general; because the throne here differs from what it is now, and the millennial throne will be different from both. It is that very aspect of the throne which may be called its Apocalyptic character, to distinguish it from what was before or will be afterwards.

Again, not merely are they there themselves, but it is said,

He that sitteth on the throne shall
-- not exactly “dwell among them,” but --
tabernacle over them {Rev. 7:15}.

It is the gracious shelter of the Lord's care and goodness that is set forth by it. This is of importance: because, though God now dwells by the Holy Ghost in the church as His habitation through the Spirit, it will not be so when these Gentiles will be called to the knowledge of Himself. There will be -- what is more suited to his character -- His protection. Of old God had His pillar of cloud, which was a defence and a canopy over the camp of Israel (though He also dwelt in their midst); here, too, He graciously shows it is not alone the sealed of Israel that enjoy His care, but these poor Gentiles. It is added that they shall not hunger any more, neither thirst any more; nor in any wise shall the sun fall on them, nor any heat {Rev. 7:16}. I confess to you that I think such a promise is much more exactly adapted to a people about to be on the earth, than to men in a glorified state above. Where would be the propriety of a promise to glorified people not to hunger or thirst any more? If to a people on earth, we can all understand the comfort of its assurance.
For the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall tend them, and shall lead them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes {Rev. 7:17}.

Then comes at length the seventh seal. This is important, because it guards us effectually against the idea that the sixth seal goes down to the end, as many excellent men have imagined in ancient and modern times. It is clearly incorrect. The seventh seal is necessarily after the sixth. If there is an order in the others, we must allow that the seventh seal introduces seven trumpets which follow each other in succession like the seals. These are described from Rev. 8 and onward.

I saw the seven angels who stand before God; and to them were given seven trumpets {Rev. 8:2}.

Then we see a remarkable fact, already alluded to -- an angel of peculiarly august character found before the altar.

And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given him much incense, that he might give [efficacy] to the prayers of all the saints at the golden altar which was before the throne {Rev. 8:3}.

Hence it follows that, while there are glorified saints above, saints are not wanting on earth who are sustained by the great High Priest, however little their light, or great their trial. Thus we have here the clear intimation that while the glorified are above, there will be others in their natural bodies yet accredited as saints here below.

But there is another trait which demands our attention. Under the trumpets the Lord Jesus assumes the angelic character. Everything is angelic under the trumpets. We no longer hear of Him as the Lamb. As such He had opened the seals; but here as the trumpets were blown by angels, so the angel of the covenant (who is the second person in the Trinity, as He is commonly called) falls back on that which was so familiar in the Old Testament presentation of Himself.

Not of course that He divests Himself of His humanity: this could not be; or if it could be imagined, it would be contrary to all truth. The Son of God since the incarnation always abides the man Christ Jesus. From the time that He took mankind into union with His glorious person, never will He cut it off. But this evidently does not prevent His assuming whatever appearance is suited to the prophetic necessity of the case; and this I conceive is just what we find here under the trumpets. We may observe that an increasingly figurative style of language is employed. All other objects become more distant in this series of visions than before; and even Christ Himself is seen more vaguely, i.e., not in His distinct human reality, but in an angelic appearance.

Here then it is written that

the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it unto the earth.

The effect was

voices, and thunders, and lightnings, and an earthquake {Rev. 8:5}.

Further, in this new septenary we must prepare ourselves for even greater visitations of God’s judgments. There were lightnings and voices and thunders in Rev. 4, but there is more now. We find, besides these, an earthquake added. The effect among men becomes more intense.

And the first sounded his trumpet, and there was hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth {Rev. 8:7}.

This I take as a violent down-pouring of displeasure from God. Hail implies this. Fire, we know, is the constant symbol of God’s consuming judgment, and it is mingled with blood. It is destruction to life in the point of view that is intended here. We have to consider whether it is simple physical decease or dissolution in some special respect.

It will be noticed in these divine visitations that the third part is particularly introduced. What is the prophetic meaning of the third {Rev. 8:7}?

It appears to answer to what we have given us in Rev. 12 (i.e., the properly Roman or western empire). I believe that it would thus convey the consumption of the Roman empire in the west. Of course one cannot be expected in a general sketch to enter on a discussion of the grounds for this view. It is enough now to state what one believes to be the fact. If this be so, at least the earlier trumpets (though not these only) are a specific visitation of judgment on the western empire of Rome. Not only was this visited, but

the third of the trees were burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up {Rev. 8:7}.

This is a contrast. The dignitaries within that sphere were visited, but there was also a universal interference with the prosperity of men here below.

And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third of the sea became blood; and the third of the creatures which were in the sea, which had life, died; and the third of the ships were destroyed {Rev. 8:8, 9}.

It was in this case a great earthly power, which as a divine judgment dealt with the masses in a revolutionary state to their destruction. Thus not merely the world under stable government, but that which is or when it is in a state of agitation and disorder; and we find the same deadly effects here also, putting an end, it would seem, to their trade and commerce.

The third angel sounded, and there fell from heaven a great star, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third of the rivers, and upon the fountains of the waters {Rev. 8:10}.

Here the fall of a great dignitary or ruler, whose influence was judicially turned to embitter all the springs and channels of popular influence, is before us. The sources and means of intercourse among men are here visited by God’s judgment.

The fourth angel sounded, and the third of the sun and moon and stars was smitten; that is to say, the governing powers -- supreme, derivative, and subordinate -- all come
under God's judgment -- all within the west.

And I saw, and I heard an eagle flying in mid-heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to those that dwell on the earth, by reason of the remaining voices of the trumpet of the three angels that are about to sound [Rev. 8:13].

It is a vivid image of rapidly approaching judgments, “angel” being substituted for the better reading eagle by scribes who did not appreciate the symbolic style of the prophecy here.

In Rev. 9 the two next, or fifth and sixth trumpets, are described with minute care, as indeed these are two of the woe trumpets. There remains the third woe trumpet, the last of the seven, which is set forth at the end of Rev. 11, where we close.

The first of the woe trumpets consists of the symbolic locusts. For that they are not to be understood in a merely literal way is clear, if only for this reason, that they are expressly said not to feed on that which is the natural food of locusts. This creature is simply the descriptive sign of these marauders.

To another remark I would call your attention: that the first woe trumpet answers in the way of contrast to the hundred and forty-four thousand that were sealed of Israel; as the second woe trumpet, namely, that of the Euphratean horsemen, answers by a similar contrast to the countless multitude of the Gentiles. As some perhaps may think that this contrast must be vague and indefinite, I shall therefore endeavour to make my meaning plainer. It is expressly said that the locusts of the vision were to carry on their devastations, except on those that were sealed. Here then is an allusion clearly to those whom God set apart from Israel in Rev. 7.

On the other hand, in the Euphratean horsemen we see far more of aggressive power, though there is also torment. But torment is the main characteristic of the locust woe; the horsemen woe is more distinctively the onward progress of imperial power, described in most energetic colours. They fall on men and destroy them; but here the third [Rev. 9:18] re-appears. According to the force given already, this would imply that the woe falls on the Gentiles indeed, and more particularly on the western Roman empire.

It seems also plain that these two woes represent what will be verified in the early doings of the antichrist in Judea. The first or the locust raid consists of a tormenting infliction. Here accordingly we have Abaddon, the destroyer, who is set forth in a very peculiar fashion as the prince of the bottomless pit, their leader. It is not of course the beast yet fairly formed; but we can quite comprehend that there will be an early manifestation of evil, just as grace will effect the beginning of that which is good in the remnant. Here then we have these initiatory woes. First of all a tormenting woe that falls on the land of Israel, but not upon those that were sealed out of the twelve tribes of Israel. On the other hand, we find the Euphratean horsemen let loose on the Roman empire, overwhelming the Gentiles, and in particular that empire, as the object of the judgment of God.

Such is the general scope of Rev. 9. As to entering into particulars, it would be quite out of the question to-night. Other opportunities do not fail for learning more minute details, and their application.

Rev. 10 in the trumpets answers to Rev. 7 in the seals. It forms an important parenthesis, that comes in between the sixth and seventh trumpets, just as the sealing chapter (Rev. 7) came in between the sixth and seventh seals: so orderly is the Apocalypse. Accordingly we have here again the Lord, as it seems to me, in angelic garb. As before in high-priestly function, He is the angel with royal claim here. A mighty angel comes down from heaven, clothed with a cloud -- the special sign of Jehovah’s majesty: none but He has a title to come thus clothed. And, further, the rainbow is on His head; it is not now a question of round the throne: here there is a step in advance. He is approaching the earth; He is about to lay speedy claim to that which is His right.

The rainbow was on his head, and his feet as pillars of fire

-- supreme authority;

and his feet as pillars of fire

-- with firmness of divine judgment.

And he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot on the sea, and his left on the earth, and cried with a loud voice, as a lion roareth [Rev. 10:1-3].

John was going to write, but is forbidden. The disclosures were to be sealed for the present.

And the angel whom I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his right hand to heaven, and sware by him that liveth for the ages of the ages, who created heaven, and the things therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things that are therein, that there should be no longer delay [Rev. 10:5, 6].

There was no more to be any lapse of time allowed; but God would terminate the mystery of His present seeming inaction as to government. He is now allowing the world, with slight check, to go on its own way. Men may sin, and, as far as direct intervention is concerned, God appears not, though there may be interferences exceptionally. But the time is coming when God will surely visit sin, and this immediately, -- when there will be no toleration for a moment of anything which is contrary to Himself. This is the blessed age to which all the prophets look onward; and the angel here swears that the time is approaching. There is going to be no more delay; but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God also shall be finished [Rev. 10:7].

The mystery here is, not Christ and the church, but God’s allowing evil to go on in its present course with apparent impunity.
And then John is told at the end of the chapter that he must
prophesy again before peoples, and nations, and
tongues, and many kings {Rev. 10:11}.
The meaning of this more clearly appears soon. There is a
kind of appendix of prophecy where he renews his course for
especial reasons.

Meanwhile, I would just call your attention to the
contrast between the little book which the prophet here takes
and eats, and the great book we have seen already sealed with
because it treats of a comparatively contracted sphere; and
open, because things are no longer to be described in the
mysterious guise in which the seals and yet more the trumpets
set them out. All is going to be made perfectly plain in what
falls under it here. This is the case accordingly in Rev. 11.

The angel proceeds to say,

Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar,
and them that worship therein. But the court which
is without the temple leave out, and measure it not;
for it is given to the Gentiles {Rev. 11:1, 2}.

Jerusalem appears in the foreground. This is the centre now,
though the beast may ravage there.

And I will give 48 to my two witnesses, and they
shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and
threesome days, clothed in sackcloth.

Their task is for a time comparatively short -- for three years
and a half.

These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the Lord of the earth
{Rev. 11:4}.

The witnesses are two, not because in point of fact they are
historically to be limited to only two individuals, but as
meaning the least adequate testimony according to the law.
To make it two literally seems to me a mistaken way of
interpreting prophecy, and the Apocalypse in particular,
as being eminently symbolical, which Daniel also is in measure.
To forget this practically is to involve oneself in clouds of
error and inconsistency.

Thus, for instance, one hears occasionally, for the
purpose of illustrating the Revelation, a reference to Isaiah,
Jeremiah, or the like; but we must remember that these
prophecies are not in their structure symbolical, and therefore
the reasoning that is founded on the books and style of
Jeremiah or Isaiah (Ezekiel being partly symbolical, partly
figurative) cannot decide for Daniel or the Apocalypse. Here
then are symbols which have a language of their own. Thus
the regular meaning of

two,
symbolically, is competent testimony -- enough and not more
than enough.

In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every
word be established {2 Cor. 13:1}, see also
Deut. 17:6, 19:15}.

According to Jewish law a case could not be decided by one
witness; there must be at least two for valid proof and
judgment.

The Lord shows us that He will raise up an adequate
testimony in these days. Of how many the testimony will
consist is another matter, on which I have little or nothing to
say. One can no more reason on this than on the twenty-four
glorified elders. Who would thence infer that there will be
only so many glorified ones? and why should one think that
there will be only two to testify? However this may be, those
who are raised to witness are to prophesy for a limited time.

And if any man desire to hurt them, fire proceedeth
out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and
if any man desire to hurt them, he must in this
manner be killed {Rev. 11:5}.

Is this then, I ask, the testimony of the gospel? Is it thus
the Lord protects those that are the preachers of the gospel of
His own grace? Did fire ever proceed out of the mouths of
evangelists? Did a teacher ever devour his enemies? Was it
on this principle Ananias and Sapphira fell dead? Are these
the ways of the gospel? It is evident then that we are here in
a new atmosphere -- that altogether different state of things
is before us from that which reigned during the church
condition, though even then sin might be unto death in
peculiar cases. I refer to no more proofs now, thinking that
enough has been given.

These have authority to shut heaven, that it rain not
in the days of their prophecy.

That is, they are something like Elijah; and they have
authority over the waters to turn them to blood
{Rev. 11:6}.

In this respect they resemble Moses also. This does not mean
that they are Moses and Elias personally; but that the
character of their testimony is similar, and the sanctions of it
are such as God gave in the days of those two honoured
servants of old.

And when they shall have finished their testimony,
the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit
shall make war against them, and shall overcome
them, and kill them {Rev. 11:7}.

They are preserved in spite of the beast, till their work is
done; but directly their testimony is concluded, the beast is
allowed to overcome them. It is just as it was with the Lord.
The utmost pressure was brought against Him in His service.
So their hour, we may say, has not yet come, just as He said
of Himself before them. There was all possible willingness to
destroy them long before, but somehow it could not be done;
for the Lord protected them till they had done their mission.
We see this in the character of grace which filled the Lord
Jesus -- which essentially belonged to Him. Here we meet
with the earthly retributive dealing of the Old Testament. The
Spirit will form them thus; and no wonder, because in fact
God is recurring to that which He promised then, but has
never yet performed. He is going to perform it now. He does

48. Probably here, as in Rev. 8:3, the word implies “efficacy” or “power,”
as the translators saw in one text if not in the other.
not merely purpose to gather people for heavenly glory; He will govern on earth the Jews and the Gentiles in their several places -- Israel nearest to Himself. He must have an earthly people as well as a family on high. When the heavenly saints are changed, then He begins with the earthly. He will never mix them all up together. This would make nothing but the greatest confusion.

And their corpse shall lie on the broadway of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified {Rev. 11:8}.

It was Jerusalem, but spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, because of the wickedness of the people and their prince. It had no less abominations than Sodom; it had all the darkness and the moral bondage of Egypt, but it was really the place where their Lord had been crucified, i.e., Jerusalem. So the witnesses fell, and men in various measures showed their satisfaction.

And [some] from among the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations see their corpse three days and a half, and do not suffer their corpses to be put into a tomb. And they that dwell on the earth rejoice over them, or make merry, and shall send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those that dwell on the earth {Rev. 11:9, 10}.

But after the three days and a half God's power raises up these slain witnesses, and they ascend to heaven in the cloud, and their enemies behold them.

And in that hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain seven thousand names of men: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven. The second woe is past; behold, the third woe cometh quickly {Rev. 11:13, 14}.

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Lastly we have the seventh trumpet. This is important for understanding the structure of the book. The seventh trumpet brings us down to the close in a general way. This is quite plain, though often overlooked.

And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdom of the world of our Lord and of his Christ is come {Rev. 11:15}.

You must translate it a little more exactly, and with a better text too. The true meaning is this:

The kingdom of the world

(or

the world-kingdom,

if our tongue would admit of such a phrase)

of our Lord and of his Christ is come.

It is not merely power in general conferred in heaven, but

the world-kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ is come, and he shall reign for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders, that sit before God on their thrones, fell on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God the Almighty, that art, and that wast; because thou hast taken thy great power, and hast reigned. And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come {Rev. 11:15-18}.

Here, it will be observed, the end of the age is supposed to be now arrived. It is not merely frightened kings and peoples who say so, but now it is the voice of those who know in heaven. Further, it is the time of the dead that they should be judged.

It is not a question here of the saints caught up to heaven, but a later hour,

that thou shouldest give reward to thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and to those that fear thy name {Rev. 11:18}.

Not a word is said here about taking them to heaven, but of recompensing them. There will be no such thing as the conferring of reward till the public manifestation of the Lord Jesus Christ. The taking of those changed out of the scene is another association of truth. The reward will fail to none that fear the Lord's name, small and great. He will also destroy those that destroy the earth {Rev. 11:18}.

This is the true conclusion of Rev. 11. The next verse (Rev. 11:19), beyond a question to my mind, though arranged in our Bibles as the end of this chapter, is properly the beginning of a new series. I shall therefore not treat of it tonight.

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Lectures Introductory

to the Study of

The Acts, the Catholic Epistles,

and

the Revelation

Lecture 11

The Revelation 11:19 - 16

We begin now what may be called the second volume of the Revelation. The prophetic part of the book divides into two portions at this point. This is another land-mark that cannot be despaired of, if we would acquaint ourselves with its structure and the bearing of its contents. And it is absolutely requisite to have, at any rate, a generally correct understanding of its outline; else we are in imminent risk of making confusion, the moment we venture to put the parts together, or to form anything like a connected view of that which it conveys to us. The meaning will be made plainer, if I repeat that the seventh trumpet, which was the closing scene before us, brings us down to the end in a general way.

This is constantly the habit of prophecy: take, for instance, our Lord’s prophecy in Matt. 24, where, first of all, we are given the broad outline as far as verse 14 -- the gospel of the kingdom [Matt. 24:14]

preached in all the world for a testimony to all nations; and then the end comes. Having thus brought us down to the close in a comprehensive manner, the Lord turns back, and specifies a particular part of that history in a confined sphere, namely, from the time that the abomination of desolation is set up in the holy place. This clearly is some time before the end. It does not indeed go back absolutely to the beginning, but it returns a certain way, in order to set forth a far closer and more precise view of the appalling state of things that will be found in Jerusalem before the end comes.

Just so is it in the Revelation. The seals and the trumpets which follow one another conduct us from the time that the church is seen in heaven glorified till judgment closes, i.e.

the time of the dead, even that they should be judged {Rev. 11:18},

and the day of wrath upon the earth. Evidently this is the end. Then, in the portion which begins with Rev. 11:19, we return for a special prophecy. The prophet had been told that he must prophesy again before many people and kings; and I suppose that this is the prophesying again.

So the temple of God is now seen to be open. It is not a door opened in heaven to give us the general view of what was to take place on the earth as regarded in the mind of God. This John did see, the general view being now closed; and we enter on a narrower line of things. The temple of God

was opened in heaven, and there was seen in His temple the ark of His covenant. It is the resumption therefore of the old links with His ancient people Israel. At the same time it is not yet the day of blessedness for the Jew. Nor is heaven itself opened for Jesus, attended by risen saints, to appear for the judgment of the beast and the false prophet with their train.

It is a transition state of things. When God deigns to look upon and gives us to see the ark of His covenant, He is going to assert His fidelity to the people. Of old He gave promises, and will shortly accomplish all which had been assured to their fathers. The ark of His covenant is the sign of the unfailing certainty of that to which He bound Himself.

And there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings,

and besides not

an earthquake

only, but

great hail {Rev. 11:19}.

In the first scene in Rev. 4, when the door was seen open in heaven, there were

lightnings, and voices, and thunderings {Rev. 4:5},

but there was not even an earthquake. In Rev. 8 this addition appears. Now besides there is hail. Clearly, therefore, we are coming to far greater detail in the way of judgments from heaven on the earth.

Then the first sign was beheld above.

There appeared a great sign in heaven {Rev. 12:1}.

We are not to suppose that when the prophecy is fulfilled, any woman will be seen either in heaven or elsewhere as its accomplishment. This is a fertile source of mistake in the interpretation of these visions. Her being seen in heaven shows that, it is not a mere history of what is taking place on earth, but that it is all viewed in God's mind. Consequently it is seen above. In point of fact, what the woman represents will be Israel on the earth. The woman is a symbol of the chosen people viewed as a whole, for a future state of things

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that God means to establish here below. She was

clothed with the sun.

Supreme authority is to be seen now connected with Israel,
instead of her being in a state of desolation, down-trodden by
the Gentiles.

And the moon under her feet

is an allusion, I suppose, to her old condition of legal
ordinances, which, instead of governing her, are now subject
to her -- under her feet. How aptly the moon sets forth the
reflected light of the Mosaic system is evident to any
thoughtful mind. In the millennium this will not be wholly out
of sight as now under Christianity, but re-appear: only it will
be in manifest subordination, as we may see in Ezekiel’s
prophecy.

And upon her head a crown of twelve stars

{Rev. 12:1}.

There is the evidence of human authority in the way of
administration here below. In short, whether it be supreme,
derivative, or subordinate authority, she is seen with all
attached to her. Israel is therefore the manifest vessel of the
mighty purposes of God for the earth; and God so looks at
her and presents her to us. Thus it is as complete a change as
can be conceived for Israel. But this is not all.

She was with child, and cried, travailing in birth, in
pain to be delivered {Rev. 12:2}.

It is not yet the day for joyous and triumphant
accomplishment of the divine purpose, when before Zion
travails she is to bring forth, and before her pain come she is
to be delivered of a man-child. There is weakness and
suffering yet, but all is secured, and the end is pledged.

Then there is another sign; namely,

a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten
horns, and seven diadems upon his heads

{Rev. 12:3}.

It is Satan, but here invested with the form of the most
determined and successful enemy that Israel ever had; for bad
as was the tyranny or Nebuchadnezzar, it is evident that the
Roman power trod down Jerusalem with a far more
tremendous and permanent tyranny. This therefore makes the
unfolding of this double sign so much the more striking. It is
not that she is delivered yet; but she is seen by the prophet
according to the mind of God. This is to be her place, -- a
mighty encouragement, considering what she must pass
through before it is all realized. Before this is effected, the
enemy is shown in his character of rebellious apostate power.
The dragon has seven heads -- i.e., the completeness of ruling
authority; and ten horns, -- not exactly completeness, but at
any rate a very large distribution approaching it, in the
instruments of the power wielded in the west. Man is never
thus complete. What God gave the woman we saw -- twelve
stars. The dragon has only ten horns. There was a full
succession of all the various forms of government, which I
suppose to be referred to in the seven heads; but God would
not give it that completeness of administrative power even in
form which belonged to the woman. All will be in due order
when the Lord Jesus takes the government of the earth into

His hands in the age to come.

Verily I say unto you, That ye who have followed
me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit
on the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit on twelve
thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel
{Matt. 19:28}.

The twelve apostles of the Lamb are destined to this special
place of honourable trust.

His tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven
{Rev. 12:4}.

Here is what seems to show that the third part has a distinct
connection with the Roman empire. We saw the third part for
the first time in the trumpets, both in the four earlier trumpets
and also in the sixth. I have no doubt the Roman empire is
particularly in view; and by the Roman empire we are to
understand what was properly Roman -- the western portion,
not what the Romans actually possessed, because they
conquered a great deal that belonged to Greece for instance,
and Babylon, and Medo-Persia. This was far east; but the
properly Roman part was western Europe. There the dragon’s
power was particularly felt. It
drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and cast
them unto the earth; and the dragon stands before the
woman that was about to bring forth, that he might
devour her child as soon as she should bring forth.
And she brought forth a male son, who is about to
shepherd all the nations with a rod of iron: and her
child was caught up unto God, and unto his throne
{Rev. 12:4, 5}.

There are some things that require explanation here. First
of all, a notion prevails that the woman is the church. There
may be some Christians now present who have been so
taught. A few words, I think, are quite sufficient to dispel the
illusion. The church is never represented as a mother in
scripture: still less could it be the mother of Christ. Viewed
as a woman, the church is the bride of Christ, not His
mother; whereas the Jewish body may be truly represented as
His mother in symbol. Christ, as man, came of the Jews after
the flesh. Accordingly, it is very plain that He is the one here
described as the male. The same truth is most evident from the
scriptures, whether we take the psalms or the prophets.

Unto us,

Isaiah says,

a child is born, a son is given {Isa. 9:6}.

Again, in the second psalm, we find that the one who is not
merely the child of Israel, but acknowledged and honoured by
God Himself as the Son, was to rule the nations with a rod of
iron. There can be no doubt, therefore, that the Lord Jesus is
the one here prominent as the male child.

This, then, furnishes an unquestionable and important
key to the meaning of the scene we are now entering upon.
The woman represents Israel in the mind of God, -- Israel in
its full corporate character.

Another remark seems to me just. Although Christ, I
have no doubt, is referred to as the man-child born of Israel,
it may be no small difficulty at first sight to some minds how

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to bring in the birth of Christ in this chapter. Indeed, it is a very fair question, and ought to be met. Let it then be observed, that here the Spirit of God is not proceeding with the course of the prophecy. I have already explained that He goes back. Consequently, so far all is perfectly open as to the point of time to which He returns. And another thing should be taken into account -- that in this portion there is no date serving to fix the time when the birth of the man-child takes place. But then it may be asked, why should the birth of the man-child be introduced here, seeing that it was a patent fact that the Lord had been born, had lived, and died, and gone to heaven long before? There was nothing new to tell. All this was long and well known through the gospel, as well as in oral teaching to the Christians; why then should it be set forth so strangely in this prophecy? The reason I believe to be, that God desired in this very striking manner to rehearse it mystically, and not at all in full open statement, so as to combine it with His translation to heaven and to His own throne. There was a further link -- with the re-opening of God's dealings with the Jews, and the eventual restoration of the nation. All are introduced here together.

Thus it is plain that God is not at all disposing these matters now as a question of time, but of connexion with Christ their centre. John is going to enter into the final scenes after this; but before this is done, we have God's counsel shown about Israel. This brings forward the devil in his evil opposition to that counsel; for it was surely what the adversary most of all feared. Satan invariably opposes Christ with greater tenacity of purpose and hatred and pride than any other. Recognizing in Him the bruise of himself and the deliverer of man and creation, there is a constant antagonism between Satan and the Son of God that is familiar to us all. But there is more than this: Satan sets himself against His connexion with the poor and despised people of Israel. Nevertheless, before God openly espouses the part of Israel, there is the remarkable fact that Christ is caught up to Him and to His throne. Not a word is said of His life; not a word even about His death and resurrection. As far as this passage goes, one might suppose the Lord caught up on high as soon as He was born. This shows us how remarkably mystical the statement is. It is history neither anticipated nor in fact. Had it been an historical summary, we must have had His life noticed with those mighty events on which all hopes for the universe depend. All this is entirely passed over. The reason, I think, is just this, that it intimates to us, as in Old Testament prophecy, how the Lord and His people are wrapped up, as it were, in the very same symbol; even as, in a yet more intimate way, what is said about Christ applies to the Christian.

On this principle then I cannot but consider that the rapture of the man-child to God and His throne involves the rapture of the church in itself. The explanation why it is thus introduced here depends on the truth that Christ and the church are one, and have a common destiny. Inasmuch as He went up to heaven, so also the church is to be caught up.

So also is Christ {1 Cor. 12:12}, says the apostle Paul, when speaking of the church; for we must naturally suppose the allusion is to the body rather than to the head. He does not say, so also is the church, but so also is Christ.

In a similar spirit St. John, in this prophecy, shows us first of all the male child taken to a place in heaven entirely outside the reach of Satan's malice. If this be so, and granted it has a remarkable bearing on what has been already asserted as to the book: we here begin over again, with a particular point of view as the object of the Holy Ghost in this latter portion. Before doing so, John gives us first the general purpose of God about the Jews.

This is strictly in order. We might have thought that the more natural way would be first of all to state the rapture of the man-child; but not so, God always does and describes things in the wisest and best method. The fact is that Christ being born of Israel, there is and ought to be first set forth the tracing of His connexion with Israel. The next fact is the devil's opposition to the counsels of God, and hindrance for the time being, which gives occasion to the Lord Himself taking His place in heaven, and eventually to the church following Him into heaven. After this comes back on the scene the Lord's intention to make way for the effectuating of His counsels as to Israel and the earth. In short, therefore, the first portion of the chapter is distinctly a mystical representation of the Lord's relationship with Israel and of His removal out of the scene -- the effect of the antagonism of Satan; but it also gives room for God's binding up, as it were, with Christ's disappearance in heaven, the church's following Him there in due time. For the church is united to Christ. In this way the rapture of the man-child is not a mere historical fact. Christ's ascension to heaven is brought in here because it contains as a consequence the church's subsequent removal to be with Him where He is, His body forming one and the same mystic man before God,

the fulness of him that filleth all in all {Eph. 1:23}.

If this then be borne in mind, the whole subject is considerably cleared.

She brought forth a male son, to rule all nations with a rod of iron {Rev. 12:5}.

There is not the slightest difficulty in applying this to the man-child, viewed not personally and alone but mystically; and the less, because this very promise is made to the church in Thyatira, or rather to the faithful there. It will be remembered that at the end of Rev. 2 it was expressly said that the Lord would give to him that overcame power over the nations, and he should rule them with a rod of iron, just as He Himself received of His Father. Does not this most strongly confirm the same view?

And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should nourish her there a thousand two hundred [and] threescore days {Rev. 12:6}.

In Rev. 12:7 we have a new scene; and here we come much more to facts, -- not to counsels of God or to principles viewed in His mind, but to positive facts; and first of all from above, as later on we shall find effects and changes on the earth.
And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels went to war with the dragon; and the dragon warred and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast down, the ancient serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, who deceiveth the whole world, was cast unto the earth, and his angels were cast with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ; for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, who accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by reason of the blood of the Lamb, and by reason of the word of their testimony, and loved not their life unto death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them {Rev. 12:7-12}.

It is evident that at this time persons are spoken of as dwelling in heaven who sympathise deeply with their suffering brethren on earth. Such is the incontestable fact; and soon after Satan will have lost that access to the presence of God in the quality of accuser of the brethren that he had previously possessed; nor will he ever regain the highest seat of his power which is then lost. He is no longer able to fill heaven with his bitter taunts and accusations of the saints of God.

Woe, however, it is added at this time, to the earth and to the sea! for the devil has come down unto you, having great wrath, knowing that he hath a short season {Rev. 12:12}.

This clearly connects the dispossession of Satan from his heavenly seat with the last crisis of Jews and Gentiles at the end of the present age. We find here the hidden reason. Why should there be such an unwonted storm of persecution? why such tremendous doings of Satan here below for a short time, for three years and a half, before the close? The reason is here explained. Satan cannot longer accuse above; accordingly he does his worst below. He is cast down to earth, and never regains the heavens. Again, he will be banished from the earth, as we shall find, into the bottomless pit by and by; and then, although let loose thence for a short time, it is only for his irremediable ruin; for he is cast then (not merely into the pit or abyss, but) into the lake of fire, whence none ever comes back.

Such is the revealed course of the dealings of God with the great enemy of men from first to last.

From Rev. 12:13 the history is pursued not from the heavens, but on the earth.

And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the male [child]. And to the woman were given two wings of the great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished there a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent {Rev. 12:13, 14}.

Thus power is given to escape, rapid means of flight from Satan’s persecution. It is not power to withstand Satan, and fight the battle out with him, but the facility given to flee from his violence. This seems to be what is meant by the two wings of the great eagle -- a figure of vigorous means of escape. That which is in nature the most energetic image of flight is vividly applied to the case before us.

Then we find the enemy, baffled by God’s provision, using other efforts.

And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood {Rev. 12:15}.

That is, he here endeavours to stir up the nations (such as are, I suppose, in a state of disorganisation) to overwhelm the Jews. In vain; for the earth

-- what was under settled government at this time -- helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth. And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, that keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus {Rev. 12:16, 17}.

By these are meant such of the Jews as will be remarkable for their power of testimony. The woman represents the more general idea of that people. The remnant of her seed are the witnessing portion. You must bear in mind that all the Jews of that day will by no means have the same spiritual power. There will be differences. Some will be much more energetic and intelligent than others. Satan hastens therefore, and endeavours to put down those that seem most useful as the vessels of the testimony of Jesus.

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This accordingly leads to the plans that Satan sets up for the purpose of accomplishing his long-cherished design of supplanting not only gospel and law, but the testimony to the kingdom of God in the world. And there are two especial methods which Satan will adopt, suited to catch a twofold class of men who are never wanting in this world -- natural men, some of whom like power, as others like religion. I am not now speaking of any who are born of God; but it is clear that man’s heart runs either after intellect and power, or into religious formality. The devil will therefore put forward two main instruments as leaders of systems that express human nature on either side, exactly suiting what the heart of man seeks and will have. Thus Satan has designed from the beginning to set up himself in man as God. For he too will work by man, as God Himself is pleased to develop all His wondrous ways and counsels in man. As the Lord Jesus is not only a divine person but the expression of the divine glory no less than of His grace; and as the church is the object of His love in heavenly blessedness, and Israel for the earth; so the enemy (who cannot originate but only corrupt the truth, and lie by a sort of profane imitation of the counsels of God) will have his beasts no less certainly than God has His Lamb. In Rev. 13 this is made plain. There are these two beasts; the first civil power, the second religion, and both apostate.

And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns {Rev. 13:1}.
The beast that emerges from the revolutionary Roman world is just adapted for the dragon to fill with opposition to the purposes of God. In Rev. 12 the dragon was seen similarly characterized as the beast. Both have the forms of power peculiar to the Roman empire. But there is a difference also:

And upon his horns ten diadems, and upon his heads names of blasphemy {Rev. 13:1}.

The dragon has the diadems on his heads; the beast shows us more the actual facts -- the horns crowned. The dragon represents the enemy of Christ in his political employment of the Roman empire, and this from first to last; so that the heads or successive forms of power are said to be crowned, not the horns, which were only as a fact to be developed before the close of its history -- at the earliest not before the Gothic barbarians broke up the empire of the west. On the other hand, in the beast of Rev. 13 we see, not merely the hidden spirit of evil making use of the power of Rome in its various changes, but the empire in its final state when the deadly wound done to the imperial head was healed, and Satan shall have given to it thus revived his power, his throne, and great authority. Now this is the very time when the ten horns receive authority as kings {Rev. 17:12}; it is simultaneously and continuously with the beast, as Rev. 17 informs us; and hence the horns of the beast are seen crowned (not merely the heads, as in the dragon’s case previously).

Further, the beast is described afterwards in remarkable terms, which allude to the beasts so well known in Dan. 7.

And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and its feet were as of a bear, and its mouth as a lion's {Rev. 13:2}.

Here we have certain qualities that resemble the three first-named beasts of the prophet Daniel. Though Satan does not originate, he adopts whatever will suit of that which has been, and endeavours by this most singular combination to bring out the beast or fourth empire (for there is none to succeed) so as to surpass for the last days everything known of old.

What is meant by a beast? An imperial system or empire, but withal refusing to recognize God above. Man was made to own Him, and alone does, as taught of God. Man alone of all beings in the earth was made to look up to One above, and is responsible to do the will of God. The beast does not look up but down; it has no sense of an unseen superior.

The fool hath said in his heart that there is no God {Psa. 14:1; 53:1}.

In principle this is true of every unrenewed man; but here it is the more tremendous, because an empire ought to be the reflection of the authority that God in His providence has conferred on it. No empire has avoided the moral sentence implied in the symbols, but this beast will go beyond all that have ever arisen. At the time that the prophecy was given the fourth beast was in existence; but the prophet was given to see that out of a state of political convulsion, just before the last three years and a half, and connected with Satan’s expulsion from heaven by the power of God, this beast rises up out of the sea. That is, there will be a state of total confusion in the west, and imperial power will rise up. This is the one here described:

And I saw one of the heads as it were wounded to death; and its deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast {Rev. 13:3}.

It is not hard to see sufficient grounds for gathering that the wounded head was the imperial form of power. The empire of the west will have been long extinct, when, strange to say, it reappears in the latter day. But there is a great deal more than simply the revival of imperialism, which draws out the astonishment of the world. They had thought it all over with the Roman empire. They could easily understand a new empire; they could readily conceive a Teutonic kingdom, or a Muscovite dominion, or any other of large space and population; but the revival of the Roman empire will take the world by surprise. This is a part of what is here referred to. The grounds of this assertion, however, depend on Rev. 17, so that I cannot now enter into minute evidence, nor do I wish to anticipate what will come before us in the next lecture. Let it suffice to give what I believe to be the truth revealed about it as we pass onward.

But then it is not simply that this empire had qualities of power that belonged to more than one of the previous empires, and that it had its own peculiarity in that it was marked by the revival of imperialism at the close. We are told that

they worshipped the dragon, because he gave authority to the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? And who is able to make war with him? {Rev. 13:4}.

It is evident, therefore, that we have here an apostate and idolatrous state of the world. The dragon is worshipped, as is the beast; and 2 Thess. 2 is plain that worship is paid to another personage connected with, but distinct from, these both, called

the man of sin {2 Thess. 2:3},

which is much more a religious power. The first beast is a political body; the religious chief will not be in the west at all, but in Jerusalem, and a very special object of worship in the temple of God there at the close.

This is a difficulty to some, because it is distinctly said that this man of sin will not tolerate any other object of worship. But then you must remember that they are all the same firm. Therefore to worship the one is pretty much to worship the other; just as in regard to the true God, there is no worship of one person in the Godhead without the same homage to the others. It is vain for any to pretend to worship the Father without worshipping the Son, and he that worships the Father and the Son can only worship in the power of the Holy Ghost. When we worship God as such, -- when we say “God," we do not mean Father only, but Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. So precisely in this awful counterpart, the fruit of the energy of satanic craft and power at the close. The worshipping of the dragon and of the beast seems therefore quite consistent with divine worship paid to the man of sin.
The fact is, they are, as often remarked with justice, the great counter-trinity -- the trinity of evil as opposed to the Trinity of the Godhead. The devil is clearly the source of it all; but then the public leader of his power politically is the beast; and the grand religious agent, who works out all plans and even miracles in its support, is the second beast or man of sin.

This appears to be the true and mutual bearing of all, if we bow to all these scriptures. I am aware that differences of thought exist here as in almost everything else. But this objection has no force at all. The only question is, what best satisfies the word of God, -- what most faithfully answers not merely to the letter of it, but to its grand principles? I am persuaded, therefore, that far from any real obstacle in the fact of these three different objects being combined in worship, on the contrary the force and nature of the case cannot well be understood unless this is seen.

Let us pursue the other points which the scriptures set before us.

And there was given him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given him to continue [or act] forty-two months. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that tabernacle in heaven [Rev. 13:5, 6].

Here again it seems evident that there is a people in heaven removed from exposure to the power either of Satan or of the public instruments of his malice in the world. There are also saints here below. The tabernacle above may be blasphemed, and those that dwell there Satan may revile, but he cannot touch -- cannot even accuse longer before God. He turns therefore all his power to deal with man on the earth.

And it was given him to make war with the saints (clearly those that are not in heaven),

and to overcome them: and authority was given him over every tribe, and people, and tongue, and nation.

And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him [Rev. 13:7, 8].

It will be seen that there is an invariable distinction between the crowd of the Gentiles scattered over the world, and those that dwell on the earth.

The difference is that the former class is a larger term, embracing the world at large; whereas by the latter is meant a considerably narrower sphere, whose character of earthliness is the more decided, because it had known the heavenly testimony of Christ and the church. The name might be still held; but apostate hearts deliberately preferred earth to heaven, and would surely have their portion in neither, but in the lake of fire.

It is solemn to see that this is what Christendom hastens to become: infidelity and superstition are rapidly forming it now. All that is at work is bringing about this earthly and godless state of things. Never since the gospel was preached were men more thoroughly settling down in the endeavour to improve the earth, and consequently to forget heaven day by day, only thinking of it as a dismal necessity when they die, and cannot avoid leaving the world. But as to turning to heaven, both as a hope full of joy and as a home for the affections, whenever was it more thoroughly kept out of the minds of men? All this then prepares us for the designation given to the people that did hear of heaven but deliberately gave up all the hopes connected with it to settle down on the earth. They were dwellers on the earth. The others are every tribe, and people; and tongue, and nation [Rev. 13:7],

that have heard comparatively little about the gospel. But he will endeavour to deal with both; and more particularly all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him,

whose name is not written in the book of life of the slain Lamb from the foundation of the world [Rev. 13:8].

Carefully bear in mind that from the foundation of the world belongs not to slain,

but to the writing of the name. John does not mean that the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world, but that the name was not written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain. Compare Rev. 17:8.

If any man have an ear, let him hear. He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity [Rev. 13:9, 10].

The importance of this statement was to guard the saints themselves from taking power peremptorily into their own hands. They might cry to God, they might ask Him to arise and judge the earth, but they were not to fight themselves. As the beast would take power, so should he suffer the consequence. He might lead into captivity, but into captivity he must go. He might kill with the sword, but he must be killed himself: indeed, his would be a still more awful doom. At the same time patience, with this retributive sanction annexed, is put in as a general principle, and stated in such a form as to apply to any one. It was surely and particularly meant to guard the saints from mistake and wrong. I do not think the direct application is to the beast, but rather warning to the saints of God.

Here is the patience and faith of the saints [Rev. 13:10].

This gives the application.

In the latter part of the chapter we have a second beast. This calls for more attention, because there has been and there is a danger of some confusion and difficulty on this subject. Let it be observed that the second beast it is which more particularly resembles in wickedness what the Lord Jesus was in goodness. It is indeed a beast;

that is, it has a kind of imperial power, though very likely on a far smaller scale than the first beast. Still it has the character of empire attached to it. It is a beast, and not merely a horn. Then the horns that it has have a peculiar character.

He had two horns like a lamb.
There was the pretence of resembling the Messiah. But he spake as a dragon (Rev. 13:11)

It was really the expression of Satan.

And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence (Rev. 13:12).

It is, therefore, plain that the second beast is really the more energetic of the two, and the active instrument of evil.

And this is always the case in every form of wickedness that has ever been forged for this world. The promoters of it -- the persons that exercise the influence, sometimes unseen, sometimes publicly -- are as a rule those that put religion forward. The religion of the earth is the prolific source of all the worst evil that is done under the sun. The devil could not accomplish his plans if there was not such a thing as earthly religion. Is not this an awful thing to think of, and a solemn thing, too, for those that have the smallest connection with it?

Accordingly in this case, observe, the second beast which resembles Christ, and takes that place, does not come out of the sea, or the turbulent state of the nations, but out of the earth. It is a more settled state of things when this beast appears, who exercises all the authority of the first beast before him (that is, in his presence, with his full sanction: it is not usurpation; it is not in any sense something done without him; but it is done in his presence, as is here said);

and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast

(there is an understanding between them),

whose deadly wound was healed (Rev. 13:12).

It is remarkable that in 2 Thess. 2 we do not hear of his causing the world to worship the first beast; but that he compels or at any rate claims worship, and is himself worshipped as God. For he arrogates divine worship to himself.

It makes the whole matter plain, if we remember that the first beast means the Roman empire, and, consequently, its seat is the west. The second beast, on the contrary, is in the land of Palestine, and has a Jewish form. Any one who looks at 2 Thess. 2 can see that we are in view of what will be in the land of Judaea, and not in Rome. It is the temple of God that is particularly seen, where the man of sin sets himself up as an object of worship. Only we must remember that we must read scripture with scripture. Supposing I treat the second chapter of 2 Thess. as giving me all that the Bible tells about the man of sin, I foreclose scripture, and must have an imperfect account. On the other hand, if we take only what we have in Rev. 13, we shall want certain elements necessary for completing the sketch. I believe that all this is arranged with consummate wisdom by God, because He does not want us to read only one part of His word; He wishes us thoroughly to search into all His word. He will not give a proper understanding of holy writ, unless there be a real confidence in and value for all that He has given us. Consequently it is only by putting together these scriptures, as to which there is ample light to show what is referred to, that we can really understand the subject.

Now it is quite plain in the first part of the chapter that we have before us a mighty political power. It is equally certain that 2 Thess. 2 describes not a vast imperial system so much as a religious power. An utterly lawless personage is the man of sin, but still essentially a religious power. It claims to itself what belongs to God; and this is precisely what we find connected with the second beast.

We may remark another feature in the symbol here. It had two horns. The reason, as I suppose, is connected with the whole testimony of John. Any one who has looked into it will see that even as to our blessed Lord Himself, the general bent is to show what He was on earth -- not what He is in heaven. I admit there are exceptional passages in John; but while Paul’s object is to direct us to Christ in heaven, as the characteristic point of his witness, John on the contrary draws particular attention to what He was on earth.

This seems to me of importance for the meaning of these two horns. The Lord Jesus, as all are aware, was a prophet on earth; and assuredly, as we know, He will reign as king over the earth. But what lies between? He is priest; but He is priest in heaven. Accordingly it is not the place of John but of Paul to bring out the heavenly priesthood of Christ. John never; as far as I know, develops the offices of Christ above. Not that he points out what connects itself with them, as for instance, in Rev. 13, and again in Rev. 14, as well as in John 17, 20. But these are quite exceptions. The general strain of John is to dwell on Christ manifesting God here below. Paul’s doctrine is man glorified in heaven.

Accordingly this I believe to be the key to the two horns of the beast. When the Antichrist appears, he will not take the place of being a priest; far higher will be his assumption. He will set up to be a prophet and a king, yea, a king imitating what Christ will be to Israel. We have two horns, not seven; -- it is an imitation, but not of the full power of Christ. In the Lord we see perfection of power, just as could be said of the Holy Ghost in His fulness of power for government. In the Antichrist there is the pretension to what belonged to Christ connected with the earth, and with the most marked absence of what pertains to Him in heaven.

This is no mean evidence by the way, that the idea of applying all this to the papacy as its full meaning is a mistake; for the essential feature of the papacy lies in its assumption to be a living earthly representative of Christ’s priesthood. It is precisely the corruption of what is heavenly and not Messianic. Popery is much more antichurch than antichrist. Such is the difference. But when Rev. 13 is fulfilled, there is no question of the church any longer. The Christian body will be no more seen on earth; the saints of the high places are on high. Accordingly it is not a mere sham clothing with the priestly power of Christ which the antichrist makes, but a false assumption of His prophetical place which was on the earth, and of His kingly sphere which will be on the earth. This personage claims both powers. He has two horns like a lamb, and is active in, the performance of great signs and wonders. He has a double activity. First of all, he borrows the controlling influence of the Roman empire, -- he exercises all the authority of the first beast. Besides this, he does a vast
deal on his own account which the Roman emperor could not do.

And he worketh great signs, that he should even make fire to come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men {Rev. 13:13}.

That is, he imitates the power not only of Christ but of God. He claims to be the Jehovah God of Israel. Just as Jesus is Jehovah as well as Messiah, so this vessel of Satan’s power in Jerusalem will emulate what God did by Elijah to disprove the claims of Baal. Fire, we know, came down and consumed the sacrifice of old, and God demonstrated as clearly that Baal was not God, as that Jehovah was. So the second beast will do wonders, not really, but in appearance.

He worketh great signs that he should even make fire to come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by reason of those signs which it was given him to work in the sight of the beast {Rev. 13:13, 14}.

All showeth that this is the antichrist. The first beast does not work any miracles whatever. He astonisheth the world by reviving imperialism; but this is a very different thing, and cannot properly be called a sign. It may and will amaze men, but is not a miracle. But the beast out of the earth or land, which is incomparably more active and energetic than the first, does work great signs (no doubt by Satan’s energy, but still he works them); and the consequence is that he deceiveth them that dwell on the earth, saying to them especially


to make an image to the beast, which had the stroke of the sword, and lived {Rev. 13:14}.

I am not prepared to say whether this is or is not the abomination of desolation set up in the holy place. It seems to resemble that idol, and may probably be the same thing.

And it was given him to give life to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark on their right hand, or on their foreheads: and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is a man’s number; and his number is six hundred thirty-six [and] six {Rev. 13:15-18}.

The various guesses that have been made respecting this number are most inadequate. It may be that it is one of those secrets that cannot be unravelled until the person appears, when we may be sure that at least the wise will understand it. That we are to understand it now is, I think, more than we ought to assume. To what moral profit could it possibly serve? Assuredly everything that can edify and refresh the soul, and that can be used by the Holy Ghost for real blessing in separating us from the world and attaching us to heaven, and, above all, to Christ, we may gather from the Revelation rightly understood now. Indeed, I believe we can gather a great deal more than those who are to be in the circumstances will be able to reap in their day. But there may be points of minute application kept back by the wise reserve of God, who does not indulge mere curiosity, as this would be. Such knowledge will be of practical importance only when the time comes; and therefore I do not doubt that this is just one of those points in which the Lord does not gratify men’s minds now. I have heard no explanation that carries any force along with it. Many of those which have been offered entirely and obviously fail -- for instance, “apostasy” and such like explanations. “Apostasy” is not the number of a man; nor for similar reasons can “apostate” stand, nor, perhaps, “the Latin man” or kingdom, though certainly entitled to attention. Further, it does not seem, as generally thought, to be the number of antichrist, the second beast, but of the Roman empire, or rather Emperor, in final antagonism to Jehovah and His anointed.

Next we come to Rev. 14, where we have neither the counsels of God as opposed by Satan, first in heaven and then in earth; nor the plan and instruments by which Satan gives battle to those counsels. All this we have had in Rev. 12, and 13. But now we enter on another line of things. What is God doing with His own? Nothing? Impossible! All must be active and good. God, therefore, is pleased to reveal to us a variety of ways in which He will put forth His power, and send both testimony and warning suited to the crisis; and this is given with remarkable completeness throughout the seven divisions into which this chapter naturally divides itself.

The first is a certain numbered multitude separated to the Lamb on mount Zion. The Lord Jesus is about to insist on His rights in the midst of Israel; and Zion is the known centre of royal grace. Royal, I say, because it is Christ asserting His title as Son of David; but it is also royal grace, because it supposes the total ruin of Israel, and that the Lord in pure favour begins there to gather round Himself once more. This accordingly is the first form in which God displays His action for the last days. The devil may have his beasts and horns; God has His Lamb; and the Lamb now is not seen on the throne in heaven, or taking a book. He stands on mount Zion. It is a notable point of progress toward the kingdom that is clearly brought before us before the close.

And I looked, and, lo, the Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred and forty-four thousand, having his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads {Rev. 14:1}.

They are not spoken of as conscious of any such relationship, as it is not a question of their Father, not of His Father and their Father. Nothing of the kind is ever found in the Apocalypse but

his Father’s name on their foreheads.

And I heard a voice from heaven, as a voice of many waters, and as a voice of great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: and they sing [as it were] a new song in presence of the throne, and in presence of the four living creatures and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty-four thousand, which were bought from the earth. These are they who were not
defiled with women; for they are virgins {Rev. 14:2-4}.

These saints had not corrupted themselves; and the name of the Lamb is coupled with them. With Babylonish wickedness here below they had nothing to do; they were pure, and are associated with the holy Sufferer.

These are they that follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were bought from among men, firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault {Rev. 14:4, 5}

[“before the throne of God” is spurious]. Such is the first action of God. It is a complete remnant, not said to be from the twelve tribes of Israel, such as we saw in Rev. 7; but this is particularly of the Jews. They were gathered out from those guilty of rejecting the Lamb. And now God answers all that and other wickedness by this merciful and honourable separation to the Lamb, who is now about to be installed in His royal seat on mount Zion.

The next scene gives us an angel flying.

And I saw,

it is said,

another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having [the] everlasting gospel to preach unto those that sit on the earth, and unto every nation, and tribe, and tongue, and people {Rev. 14:6}.

Why is it called everlasting?

We must remember that the gospel which is being preached now is a very special gospel, and in no way an everlasting gospel. Nobody ever heard the gospel that is preached now till Jesus died and rose and even went to heaven. That is to say, the gospel as it should be preached in and out of Christendom depends on the most stupendous facts ever accomplished here below, for which God waited more than four thousand years even of man’s dwelling on the earth before He would or could righteously send it forth. Consequently the gospel of the grace of God, as we know, is not properly (never in scripture) called the everlasting gospel.

I suspect that most use these terms without thinking what is really meant. When they call the gospel now the everlasting gospel, they have probably some vague notion that it connects us with eternity. They think it a fine-sounding epithet, conveying I really do not know what; but at any rate it is to be supposed that there is some idea in the mind of those that so characterize

the gospel of God {Rom. 1:1, 15:16; 2 Cor. 11:7; 1 Thess. 2:2, 8, 9; 1 Pet. 4:17}.

It is certainly a mistake, if scripture is to decide.

Everlasting gospel

means what it says. It means those glad tidings that always have been and always will be true: whatever else God has made known to man, this has always abode unchanging. What is it then? The glad tidings of God always were that He purposes to bless man by the promised seed Christ Jesus to set him up over the rest of creation, to have dominion as His image and glory. At the very beginning the first chapter of Genesis proves that this is God’s mind for man here below. The end of all things will proclaim the selfsame thing. The millennium will be a grand demonstrative testimony to it. In the new heavens and the new earth man will be thoroughly and for ever blest.

The declaration of this I believe to be the everlasting gospel. In the latter day it will act as the setting aside of the lie of Satan, who puts and would fain keep man in a position of estrangement from God, who is morally forced to be the judge of man instead of being the blesser of all upon the earth, and consequently to cast him into hell. All this, it is plain, is the fruit of Satan’s wiles; but the everlasting gospel presents God as the blesser of man and creation, as it always was in His mind, and as He will certainly bring it to pass; not, of course, for every individual man, because those who despise His mercy in Christ, and those especially who having heard despise the gospel of His grace, must be lost for ever. I am speaking now of what always was before Him, and always kept before man in His word.

The way in which the subject is spoken of here confirms this.

Fear God,

is the message,

and give glory to him

{there is thus the evident contradiction of idolatry};

for the hour of his judgment is come {Rev. 14:7}.

Then will be the downfall of all those that oppose God, not only of all the vanities of the nations; but of all those that heed or sustain them against God.

Worship him that made heaven and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters {Rev. 14:7}.

Clearly therefore it is the universal message of God to man, and connected with His creation glory. The solemn threat of His speedy judgments is a ground of pressing on the blinded consciences of man the claim of the honour solely due to Him.

There are no doubt many who think it an extraordinary circumstance that God should send out such a message as this in days rapidly approaching. Let me say why such a difficulty is felt. It is because men conjecture and judge out of their own position and their own relationships. But never can we understand anything aright as long as we reason and conclude thus. It is not the way to understand any part of the Bible, least of all perhaps prophecy. If it be a question of our conduct or duty, it is indispensable to stand on our proper relationship; we must abide carefully in the place that God has given us, while bowing to the word of God that applies to us there. How can we act intelligently or rightly as Christians unless we, knowing what it means, believe we are Christians? We only glorify our God and Father just so far as we look up as children to Him as our Father, and as saints own Him as
our God. This is surely true. But here no Christians are said to be on earth: we have elect Jews; we have nations, along with

those that sit upon the earth [Rev. 14:6].

That is, there are men, apparently apostates, under the latter designation, as well as the general mass of mere nations, tribes, tongues, and peoples. It seems then that God comes down, as it were, to meet them on the lowest possible ground of His own truth. And what is that? They are called to fear God and give glory to Him; and this is on the ground that He is Judge, just about to deal with His own world. He calls upon them to abandon all that idolatry into which they will have fallen, particularly in those days.

And I have not the slightest question myself that at this present moment there is the working of a leaven that will end in idolatry, especially (if there be in this a difference) for the higher orders of this country, who will drag in the lower also. In the humbler classes there is in another way that grossness of love for sensible objects and show that will prepare them for idolatry. But I repeat that there is the active instilling of a spirit, no doubt more subtle and refined in the educated classes, which, in my judgment, will infallibly school them into naturalistic idolatry before many years are over. There is, on the one hand, the material tendency of modern science and literature; there is, on the other, the condescending patronage of times that are past. On these dangerous tracks all that is now energetically leavening the world tends to bring man back to heathenism again; i.e., the apostasy.

However this may be judged by those who hear it, we must remember that there will be also another cause of a most solemn nature, which is plainly revealed: God is going to pour out a judicial delusion on Christendom. It is certain that He will not only inflict severe blows of judgment, but give men up to believe a lie -- the great lie of the devil. Here is the great truth of all times: -- that God, the God who has now revealed Himself in Christ and by redemption, alone is the due object of worship. So far then is this message, to my mind, from being a strange thing that it appears exactly suitable to man as then situated, and no less to God's wisdom and goodness.

Another consideration perhaps may help some as connected with this, and confirmatory of it, founded on Matt. 25, where the nations are called up before the Son of man when He sits as King upon the throne. It will be remembered that He tells those whom He designates as the sheep that, inasmuch as they did what they had done to His brethren, it was really to Him; as, on the other hand, the insults fell on Him which were aimed at them. These acts of kindness, or the contrary, will be owned by the Lord here. It is no use for people to call it the general judgment, or the judgment of our works. It is not. The one principle before us in this scripture is His dealing with the living Gentiles, or the nations according to their ways with His brethren; and it will require real power of God to act aright then. The pressure against His messengers will be enormous. If any receive them well, it will be from faith. I grant that the measure of their faith is small. That to honour His brethren is virtually to

honour Himself, they do not themselves know. When they stand in presence of the King, how astonished they are that He should regard what was done to the messengers of His gospel in the last days as if done to His own.

Certainly these Gentiles were wrought in by divine grace, yet very evidently they will not be what you would call "intelligent." But then how often must we beware of making too much of this! What a constant snare it is to slip into an unconscious criticism! Men are apt to give themselves an exaggerated importance on the score of their knowledge. God, I am sure, always attaches a far higher value to the heed paid to the Lord Himself, and this too in those that He sends out. It is always a cruel test. It will be so then most of all, because these messages will go forth to the nations on the earth when, growingly lifted up and self-satisfied, they are summoned by messengers, poor and contemptible in their eyes, who will solemnly proclaim the kingdom just coming -- the King who is coming in person to judge the quick apart from and before the judgment of the dead. But some souls here and there will receive them, not only treating them kindly, but this because they receive the message. The power of the Spirit of God alone will give them this faith. None less than God Himself will incline their heart. Accordingly the Lord will refer to this reception, or the kindness that accompanied it, as an evidence of their heeding Himself in the persons of His messengers.

This I consider to be similar, if not the same, as the everlasting gospel; indeed it is called by Matthew the
gospel of the kingdom [Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 24:14].

I am inclined to infer that the
gospel of the kingdom
and the

everlasting gospel
are substantially identical; and that it was thus described because it was always in the purpose of God to establish this kingdom over the world, and to bless man himself here below. This Matthew, in accordance with his design, calls rather the
gospel of the kingdom,
because Christ is going to be King. John, it would seem, calls it the

everlasting gospel,
because it is in contrast with special messages from time to time, as well as with all that had to do with man as he is here below. At this most corrupt time, then, the message will be sent forth, and certain souls will receive it by God's grace.

Thus the second scene in the chapter is the proclamation of the everlasting gospel unto those settled down on the earth, and to the nations, &c., as the first section was the separation of a remnant of Jews to the Lamb on mount Zion.

The third section, which may be passed over with comparatively few words, is a warning respecting the fall of Babylon. An angel comes forth, saying,

Babylon is fallen, is fallen, the great city, which
made all the nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication {Rev. 14:8}.

The fourth is a warning about the beast. And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice. If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark on his forehead, or on his hand, he also shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mingled without mixture in the cup of his anger; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up unto ages of ages: and they have no rest day and night, who worship the beast and his image, and if any one receiveth the mark of his name {Rev. 14:9-11}.

So far these divine dealings all go in pairs: as the work among the Jews, and then a final testimony to the Gentiles; then the warning about Babylon, and another about the beast.

Here is the endurance of the saints, that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus {Rev. 14:12}.

Then we come to the fifth, which is rather different. It is a declaration, that

Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord from henceforth {Rev. 14:13}.

From this time nobody that belongs to the Lord is going to die, and those that die in the Lord (i.e. in fact all who have thus died) are just on the point of blessedness, not by personal exemption but by the first resurrection and the reign with the Lord, which will terminate all further persecution and death for His name. The wicked must pay the wages of sin, and be destroyed by the judgments of God; but there shall be no more dying in the Lord after this. As a class these are to be blessed (not to die) henceforth.

And I heard a voice out of heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed [are] the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth. Yea, saith the Spirit, that they shall rest from their labours; for their works do follow with them {Rev. 14:13}.

There is an end of such sorrow and labour: the Lord is going to take the world and all things in hand.

Accordingly in the next scene

I saw, and, behold, a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sitting like unto [the] Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Send thy sickle, and reap; for the hour is come to reap; for the harvest of the earth is dried. And he that sat on the cloud thrust his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped {Rev. 14:14-16}.

It is not here a question of gathering in. The Son of man is seen with the crown of gold, King of righteousness, not yet manifested as King of peace.

And then the close of all the scenes comes.

And another angel came out of the temple that is in heaven, having himself also a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, that had authority over the fire; and called with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Send thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripened {Rev. 14:17, 18}.

This goes farther. For the harvest the call was out of the temple; here it is out of the temple that is in heaven. It is not only wrath on earth but from heaven. And another angel comes out from the altar (i.e., the place of human responsibility, where God manifests Himself to sinners in the sacrifice of Christ, judging sins but in grace). So much the more tremendous His vengeance on the earthly religionists who despise Christ and the cross in deed if not in word. This angel has authority over the fire, the sign of detective and consuming judgment. In short, we have here the harvest and the vintage, -- the two great forms of the judgment at the close; the harvest being that judgment that discerns between the just and the unjust, and the vintage being the infliction of unmingled wrath on apostate religion,

the vine of the earth {Rev. 14:18},

which is the object of God's special abhorrence.

It is plain, therefore, that here we have seven distinct acts in which God will interfere in the way of forming a testimony, of warnings to the world and comfort to His people, and finally of judging the results as far as the quick are concerned.

But a very peculiar scene is described in {Rev. 15, 16}. On this one need not now bestow more than a few words.

I saw another sign in heaven.

It is clearly connected with what we have had in Rev. 12.

And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having seven plagues, the last; for in them is filled up the wrath of God {Rev. 15:1}.

You will observe; that it is not yet the coming of Christ. This is of importance to show the structure of this portion of the book. We must carefully beware of supposing that the seven bowls are after the Son of man is come for the harvest and the vintage of the earth. We shall find, so far from this being the case, that the vision must go back, -- I do not say to the beginning of Rev. 14, but before the end of it. The very last of the bowls, the seventh, is the fall of Babylon. Now that act of judgment would correspond to the third dealing of God in Rev. 14. The first was the separation of the Jews; the second the everlasting gospel to the Gentiles; and the third the fall of Babylon. Thus the last bowl only brings us up to the same point. Hence the bowls must not in any way be supposed to follow after Rev. 14, but only after its earlier part at the utmost. This is important, because it may help some to gather a juster idea how to place chronologically the various portions of the book. The last bowl is also the last outpouring of God’s wrath before the Lord Jesus Christ comes. Consequently it must precede the latter part of that chapter. It synchronizes, we have seen, with the third out of its seven consecutive sections. The end of Rev. 16 does not in point of time fall
lower than the third step in those of Rev. 14. The fourth probably, but certainly the fifth, sixth, and seventh are events necessarily subsequent to all the bowls.

Let us look then a little into the subject.

I saw as it were a sea of glass {Rev. 15:2}.

But here it is distinguished in its accompaniments from the description in Rev. 4. There the elders were seen on thrones, with the sea of glass bearing its silent but strong testimony that these saints had done with earthly need and danger, -- that those who required the washing of water by the word are not contemplated in this scene. This is all intelligible and even plain. When the glorified saints are caught up to heaven, they no longer require what was set forth by the laver and its water to purify; for the sea of glass attests that the purity was fixed. The fact is, that they were beyond the scene where water was needed to cleanse their daily defilements.

Here it is not merely a sea of glass, but mingled with fire. What does this teach? It declares, in my opinion, that these saints passed through a time of fearful fiery tribulation, as did not the elders. The absence of the fire in connection with the elders is just as significant as the presence of fire in connection with the saints in collision with the beast and the false prophet, of whom we are now speaking. If people ask you, “Are the saints to pass through the time of tribulation?” the right answer is, What saints do you mean? If you mean those that are presented by the elders caught up at Christ’s coming, clearly they will not. Scripture is positive. If you only mean that some saints are to pass through that tremendous time, it is unquestionable. In short, we have only to distinguish, and all becomes perfectly plain: by confounding the two classes all is made a mass of obscurity. But scripture cannot be broken.

Here then we find a sea of glass mingled with fire.

And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and those that have gained the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God {Rev. 15:2}.

The victory over the beast is never predicated of the elders in any sort; nor is there any connection with the elders here. It is a closing scene of fearful trial. This is important. The victories here are confined to the time when Satan’s last plans become consummated. These were delivered from them probably before the beast falls. At any rate, the time does not seem of prime importance, but the fact is undeniable that these conquerors belong exclusively to the time of the last efforts of the devil through the beast and the false prophet. They are strictly speaking therefore Apocalyptic saints, and the final company of them. It will be recollected that in our last lecture we saw the first sufferers. Although these may have fallen under the hand of the Roman Empire, they really got the victory over it, and are here seen standing on the sea of glass having harps of God. Their melody in praise of the Lord was none the worse for the sea of tribulation through which they had passed into His presence.

And they sing the song of Moses, servant of God,
angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who liveth unto the ages of the ages. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; and no one was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled [Rev. 15:5-8].

It is not now the ark of God’s covenant seen in the opened temple. It is characterised as the tabernacle of the testimony, and judgments follow on apostate Gentiles, not the revelation of the divine counsels touching Israel.

Then (Rev. 16) we have these seven bowls poured out. It is not now “the third” as under the trumpets, with which the analogy is close; there is no restriction to the western empire of Rome. The whole apostate sphere is smitten, and with yet more severity. The first, as we know, was on the earth; the second on the sea; the third on the rivers and fountains of waters; and the fourth on the sun. Thus all the different departments of nature, whatever may be symbolized by them (and their meaning seems to me neither indeterminate nor obscure), were visited by the bowls of God’s wrath.

The three later bowls, like the three woe-trumpets, come to closer quarters with men.

The fifth angel poured out his bowl upon the throne of the beast. It is clear therefore that we have here a Gentile sphere before us, which fits in with the prefatory scene.

The fifth angel poured out his bowl upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds. And the sixth angel poured out his bowl upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings that are from the sun-rising might be prepared [Rev. 16:10-12].

The Euphrates was the boundary that separated the empire on its oriental frontiers from the vast hordes of uncivilized north-eastern nations destined to come into conflict with the powers of the west in the latter day. Thus the way is made plain for them to come forward and enter into the final struggle. This seems the meaning of the drying up of the great river.

And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of demons, working signs, which go forth unto the kings of the whole habitable earth, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God the Almighty [Rev. 16:13, 14].

This gives proof of what I have just now referred to. There is about to be a universal uprising and fight to the death between the east and the west. But the Lord has designs which neither side knows nor regards, and He is no indifferent spectator.

Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. And they

(for I take it so)
Lectures Introductory

to the Study of

The Acts, the Catholic Epistles,

and

the Revelation

Lecture 12

The Revelation 17 - 22

It is necessary that we should all bear in mind, if we have not observed it before, that Rev. 17 does not pursue the chronological course of the prophecy. It is a description, and not one of the visions that carry us onward. The seventh bowl contained under it the fall of Babylon, which was remembered before God, to give to her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath {Rev. 16:19}.

This chapter explains how it was that Babylon was so offensive to God, and wherefore He judged her thus sternly. But, in point of fact, in giving the description of Babylon, the Holy Ghost enters even more into an account of her relations with the beast, the imperial power of which we saw not a little last night. Accordingly these are the two main objects of judgment brought before us in the chapter. It is true, the beast's judgment is only referred to as a defeat under the hand of the Lamb. The particulars are reserved for a later point in this prophecy. We must therefore look a little into the two objects -- Babylon and the beast.

The principle is very clear. Man has always sinned in one or other of these two ways, looking now at sin in its broadest forms. The woman -- the strange woman -- sets forth corruption, human nature indulging itself in its own evil desires, irrespective of God's will. The beast is the expression of the will of man setting itself up in direct antagonism to God. In short, one may be described as corruption, and the other as violence.

There is, however, a great deal more than this on the subject, and given with great precision in scripture, because this is merely the principle of sin in one or other form from the beginning. It will be observed that in this case it is one of the angels that had the seven bowls who comes forward and says to John,

Come hither; I will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore (or harlot) that sitteth upon [the] many waters {Rev. 17:1}.

There were two particular effects of her evil: the one, illicit commerce with the kings of the earth; the other, intoxicating the inhabitants of the earth with the wine of her fornication.

So he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness {Rev. 17:3} -- a thorough waste as to the knowledge or enjoyment of God. The woman was there seen sitting on a scarlet-coloured beast, i.e., the well-known imperial power of the Roman Empire, -- full of [the] names of blasphemy in its wicked opposition to God, and clothed with the forms we have already seen --

seven heads and ten horns {Rev. 17:3}.

The Spirit of God regards it in its final shape and completeness, as far as it was permitted to attain it.

The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stone and pearls {Rev. 17:4}.

Everything that could attract the natural man was there; and all that which to him looks fair enough on the side of religion. But she has a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication. 49 Idolatry is the awful stamp that she bears, and this too both in what she gives to man, and in what is written on her forehead before God.

Upon her forehead was a name written, Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of the harlots and of the abominations of the earth {Rev. 17:5}.

Men have been beguiled here and there, and from an early date, to set aside the true bearing of this chapter. Sometimes they have contended for its application to pagan Rome. Sometimes, again, they have sought to turn it aside toward Jerusalem in her corrupt state. But a grave consideration soon disposes of both views by the relation to the beast, and more particularly by what will be shown a little farther on. The application to old pagan Rome is harsh and purposeless enough; but the attempt to refer it to Jerusalem is of all schemes the most absurd; for, far from being borne up by the imperial power, Jerusalem was trodden down by it. If there was any Gentile power since John’s day, which did not sustain but persecute and suppress Jerusalem, it was Rome,

49. Most copies, it would seem, read τής γῆς “of the earth;” the Alex. and others give αὐτῆς, “of her.” The Sinai MS. has both.
instead of being a gaudy harlot mounted on that vast empire.

At the same time the attempt to apply Babylon to ancient Rome is almost as unhappy; and for a plain reason. As long as Rome was pagan, there was neither the full bearing of the seven heads, nor did so much as one of the ten horns exist. The decem-regal division of the broken empire in the West, as all know, was long after Rome had ceased to be heathen. Nobody can dispute that this remarkable cluster of kingdoms in Europe was the fruit providentially of the destroyed unity of the Roman empire when the barbarians invaded it. With that love of freedom which they carried from their German forests, they would not allow the one iron rule of the ancient empire to subsist longer, but set up each their own kingdom in the different fragments of the dismembered empire. Thus the attempt to apply it during the pagan period is altogether futile on the face of the matter. We shall find that the scripture affords much light to decide the true bearing of the prophecy, and that no application to the past can possibly satisfy the conditions satisfactorily. If ancient times failed fully to meet the requirements of the chapter, it is evident that the middle ages are passed without its fulfilment as a whole. When we come to the full application of the prophecy, we must look onward to the latter day.

This falls in with what we have seen of the book in general; but I do not deny that certain elements which figure in the Apocalypse then existed and still exist. No one can soberly deny that Babylon in some sort had a place then; but that the special, and above all, the full character of Babylon was manifested as here portrayed is another matter. We may surely say her cup was not yet full. There was not yet fairly out before men what God foresaw as that which must finally provoke His judgment. Again, to my mind it seems demonstrably true that the relation to the beast here brought before us must in all fairness be allowed to look onward to a later stage of Babylon. Thus there is no question that some of the actors in the final scenes of the great drama were already there, as the reigning city, and the Roman empire. Moral elements too were not wanting: the mystery of lawlessness had long been at work, though the enemy had not yet brought in the apostasy, and still less the manifestation of the lawless one. But whatever subsisted then, that which the Spirit here presents as a whole cannot be found realized at any point of time in the past. We must perforce therefore look for a still more complete development before the Lamb judges the beast after the ten horns along with it shall have destroyed Babylon.

There is another remark to make. It is hard to see how Roman city, or anything civil connected with it, could be called mystery.

It is partly because of this that many excellent men have endeavoured to apply the vision to Romanism; and I admit that there is found a measure of analogy. That religious system has an incomparably nearer connexion with this mysterious harlot than anything we have yet spoken of. There is no doubt that Rome in some form is the woman described in the chapter: the seven heads or hills clearly point to that city, which of all cities might best and indeed alone be known as ruling over the kings of the earth. There is therefore much to be said for the Protestant application of the chapter as compared with the Praterist theory of pagan Rome. Yet it will be found imperfect, for reasons which, I think, will be clear to any unbiased mind.

There stands the solemn brand graven, not on the blasphemous beast, but on the forehead of its rider,

Mystery; Babylon the great [Rev. 17:5].

The question is, why is she thus designated? If only an imperial city, what has this to do with mystery? The simple fact of conquering far and wide, and of exercising vast political power in the earth, does not constitute any title to such a name. A mystery clearly points to something undiscoverable by the natural mind of man -- a secret that requires the distinct and fresh light of God to unravel, but which when revealed thus is plain enough. And so it is with this very Babylon that comes before us here. Justly does she gather her title from the old fountain of idols and of combined power without God: confusion being here the characteristic element, the designation is taken from the renowned city of the Chaldeans, the first spot notorious in both respects.

But the attempt, again, to apply what is said here to a future city of Babylon in Chaldea seems to me no less vain. There is a distinct contrast between the city John describes and the ancient Babylon, in that the latter was built on the plain of Shinar, while the former is expressly said to have seven heads, and these explained to mean seven mountains. I admit that there may be something more in the symbol than the literal hills of Rome, because they are said to be also seven kings. At the same time we are not at liberty to eliminate such a feature out of the description. It is written to be believed, not to be ignored or explained away.

In short, it would seem that God has hedged round His own draft of Babylon so as to make it quite plain that Rome, city and system, figures in the scene; and this too necessarily involving a mediæval description, though the full result will not be till the end of the age: for she rides the beast or empire characterized so as naturally to involve the past barbarian irruption and the resulting ten-kingdomed state. Again, that it supposes Rome after it had professed the name of Christ I think is not to be doubted, if only from the expression mystery attached to Babylon. It clearly contrasts this mystery with another. We have not to learn what the other mystery means; we know well that it is according to God and godliness. But here is a mystery altogether different: --

Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of the harlots and of the abominations of the earth [Rev. 17:5].

Here were joined good and evil in godless union, for the worse, not for the better, -- this alliance, unholy in principle, irremediable therefore in practice, between God and the natural man, who substitutes rites for the grace and word of God, for the blood of Christ, and the power of the Spirit, and employs the name of the Lord as a cover for grosser covetousness and ambition, yet more aspiring than the vulgar world. All these things have their place in Babylon the great.
She is the mother of the harlots, but also (and with still deeper guilt) of the abominations of the earth. This brings in idolatry, real shameless idolatry too, not merely that subtle working of the idolatrous spirit that every Christian has to guard against. Here it is the positive worship of the creature besides the Creator, yea, and notoriously more than He. For who knows not the horrors of Mariolatry? Babylon is the parent of the abominations of the earth {Rev. 17:5}.

It is not therefore a question of virtual idols suitable to ensnare the children of God, but of that which is adapted to the earth itself, -- thorough-going palpable idolatry.

Such is God’s account of Babylon the great. Take notice of this (which confirms the application just now contended for), that when John saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus, he wondered with great wonder. Had it been simply a persecution from pagans, what was there to wonder at in their deadly hatred of the truth and of those who confess it? That an openly heathen metropolis, devoted to the worship of Mars, and Jupiter, and Venus, and other wicked monstrosities of pagan mythology should be irritated with the gospel which exposes it all, and should consequently seek to injure the faithful, was to be expected, and a necessary result, directly that the uncompromising spirit of Christ was known. Had those who preached said nothing about heathen vanities, had they merely presented the gospel as a better thing than anything the pagans could boast, I do not doubt that the pagans themselves would have acknowledged thus much. And it is pretty well ascertained that there was a discussion among them, even to the suggestion by one of the most wicked of their emperors, whether Christ should not be owned and worshipped in the Pantheon, hundreds of years before Constantine, indeed from the earliest epoch of the gospel. But there never was the thought of giving Christ the only place He could take. For Christ has not only a supreme but an exclusive place. Now there was nothing more repulsive and fatal to paganism in every form than the truth revealed in Christ, which exposed every thing that was not itself -- not the truth, definite and exclusive. Consequently Christianity, as being directly aggressive on the falsehood of heathenism, was of all things the most offensive to Rome. That pagan Rome, therefore, should set itself against Christianity was to be expected, and so the fact proved.

But it was no such evil which astounded the prophet. He was filled with astonishment that this mysterious form of evil, this counter-testimony of the enemy (not antichrst, but antichurch), should seem and be largely accepted as the holy catholic church of God, that Christendom, if not Christianity, should at the same time become the bitterest of persecutors, more murderously incensed against the witnesses of Jesus and the saints of God than ever paganism had been in any country or all ages. This very naturally filled him with intense wonder.

And the angel said unto him, Wherefore didst thou wonder? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman {Rev. 17:7}.

Had he really penetrated under the surface, and seen that beneath the fair guise of Christendom the woman was, of all things under the sun, the most corrupt and hateful to God, it would not be so much to be surprised at. Therefore says the angel,

I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, that hath the seven heads and the ten horns. The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, beholding the beast that he was, and is not, and shall be present {Rev. 17:7, 8}.

The closing phrase here is the description of the beast in its last state, in which it will come into collision with Babylon. Let us bear this in mind. It will help to show us that, whatever may have been the past conditions of Babylon, there is a future one; and it is in that future one that Babylon is to perish. For remark, the beast or Roman empire is described here as that which once existed, which then ceased to exist, and which assumes a final shape when it reappears from the bottomless pit. Bad as pagan Rome was, it would be false to affirm that it ever had come out of the bottomless pit. When the apostle Paul wrote to the saints at Rome, he particularly specified at that very time the duty of absolute subjection on the part of Christians to the powers which then were. Of course the application to the Roman empire would be immediately in the mind of any Christian at Rome. There was no doubt at all of the character of the emperor; there never had been a worse than he; yet God took that very opportunity to lay this on the Christians as their duty to the worldly authority outside and over them. It was ruled in general that the worldly powers were ordained of God. But this is not to emerge from the bottomless pit.

But there is a time coming when power will cease to be ordained of God; and this is the point to which the last condition of the beast refers. God in His providence did sanction the great empires of old; and the principle continues as long as the church is here below. Hence we have to own the divine source of government even when its holders abandon all such thoughts themselves, and maintain their rule in the world as a thing flowing from the people irrespective of God. But the day is coming when Satan will be allowed to have things his own way. For a short time (what a mercy that it must be only for a short time!) Satan will bring forth an empire suited to his purposes, as it springs from Satanic principles which deny God; and this is part of what appears to be meant by the beast ascending out of the bottomless pit.

It shall go into perdition,

50. The description here is simply character, not dates. If a person drew from this, for instance, that the beast was to carry the woman, Babylon, when it had as a fact all that is meant by the seven heads and the ten horns, it would be an error. The angel implies nothing of the sort. It is a question of distinctive character, apart from that of time, for which we must search other scriptures.
it is therefore added,
and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names are not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and shall be present {Rev. 17:8}.

"Yet is" is a most unfortunate expression. It is the fault, however, of the bad Greek text of Erasmus; Stephens, &c. It should be,

and shall be present. 51

There is no thought of making such a paradox to perplex the mind. The true reading here is neither hard nor doubtful save to unbelief. There is no paradox in the message whatever. It is all plain and simple --

the beast that was, and is not, and shall be present.

But all this will be a great reversal of man's history and political maxims. There never has been a like experience. What empire has existed, then sunk, and finally reappeared, with higher pretensions and power, only to perish horribly? It is altogether foreign to history. One of the most approved axioms is, that kingdoms are just like men in this respect, that they begin, rise, and fall. As man does not believe in the resurrection of man, it is no wonder that he does not believe in the resurrection of an empire. The chief difference is that in man's case it is God who raises him, whereas in the empire's not God but the devil will raise it again. Beyond controversy, however, it is a most unusual and abnormal reappearance, which is altogether exceptional in the history of the world. Accordingly the resuscitated Roman empire will carry men away by a storm of wonder at its revival. Little do they know, because they believe not what is here written, that it is about to come out of the abyss or bottomless pit. That is, Satan will be the spring of its final rise and power; he, and not God in any way whatever, will give it its character.

And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. And there (or they) are seven kings {Rev. 17:9, 10}.

I have already touched on the double force of the symbol -- mountains.

Five are fallen, one is, the other hath not yet come {Rev. 17:10}.

That is, the sixth head (reigning then in John's day) was the imperial form of government. Nothing of the sort can be plainer. We have here a note of time of signal value. A seventh should follow; and what is more, the seventh was in one aspect to be an eighth.

And the beast that was, and is not, even he is an eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth unto destruction {Rev. 17:11}.

In one sense it would be an eighth, and in another sense it would be of the seven; the eighth perhaps because of its extraordinary resurrection character, yet one of the seven because it is outwardly old imperialism again. This explains, it seems to me, the wounded head that was afterwards healed. It is of the seven in that point of view, because it is imperialism; but it is an eighth, because it has a diabolical source when raised up again. In this way there never has been anything of the kind before.

And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have not yet received a kingdom; but they receive authority as kings (not at but for) one hour with the beast {Rev. 17:12}.

They are all to reign concurrently with the beast. This also is a no less important element for understanding the chapter. All who have looked back on the history know, that when the ten kings appeared, there was no beast or imperial power. It was the destruction of the imperial unity of Rome that gave occasion for the well-known ten kingdoms which the barbarians set up afterwards. I am not raising any question about the ten. We know that sometimes there were nine, sometimes eleven or more; but supposing this all perfectly certain, I affirm that, according to history, they did not receive their power as kings for one and the same time with the beast. This is the meaning of

one hour with the beast.

The very reverse is the undeniable fact. They received their power as kings when the beast ceased to exist. Thus the difference is complete between past history (if we look at the extinction of the empire and the rise of the ten kingdoms) and the certain fulfilment of the prophecy in the future, when we look at what God has really told us. I do not acknowledge the language to be either difficult or ambiguous. Man alone is to blame who has misapplied it. Yet one allows freely a partial application already. We can quite understand that God would comfort His people in the dark ages by this book; and a very imperfect glimpse at its real meaning might in His grace serve to cheer them on in their trials as far as it went. From Rome saints had suffered; and it was easy to see that the revealed persecutress is called Babylon, and identified with the governing city of Rome. So far they were right. Nor is there any real reason to wonder at their deriving help from partial light. It was but an imperfect view they got even of justification; a far scantier perception, if they could be said to have had any, about Christ's Headship of the church, His priesthood, or almost anything else. And thus it was but a little glimpse they had of prophecy. But we can understand that the Lord could and did make that little go far, and do no little good.

But is there any reason why we should content ourselves with the measure enjoyed of old? Such is the hard bondage which mere historical tradition imposes on its votaries. Holding on to what others knew before them, or little more, they reduce themselves to a minimum of the truth. When God is so gracious, His word rich, full, and deep, it does seem sad to see His children content with just enough to save their souls, or keep them from positive starvation. In presence of grace I do not think this is for His glory, any more than for

51. Even the Complutensian editors give the right text here; and it would seem that Erasmus failed to use his MS. aight. For according to unquestionable testimony the Reuchlinian copy has καθ' ἰδρέστι like some half-dozen cursive, which was probably a mistake for πάρεσται.
their own blessing. The only right principle in everything is to go to the source of divine truth, and to seek there refreshment and strength and fitness for whatever our God calls us to. And unquestionably God has been awakening the attention of His people in a remarkable manner to the value of His word, and not least of all to the portion we are now examining.

It is plain that what the verse contemplates is neither the Roman power when there was one head of the empire, nor the eastern or Byzantine part of it after that partition, nor the western state of division under the kings who succeeded the deposition of Augustulus; for in the mediaval state there may have been ten kings (in contrast with the ancient state of the beast without them), but no beast or imperial system with its chiefs. This is what drove men to the idea of making the pope to be the beast. But that idea is wholly insufficient to cover or meet the word of God, which gives clear and strong reasons that prove the mistake of applying this to the pope as its complete fulfilment. For that which comes distinctly before us in this one verse is the twofold fact, that the ten horns here contemplated receive their kingly power for the same hour or time as the beast, and not subsequently, when his rule was extinguished. He gets his power and they get theirs for one and the same time.

This disposes of many a web of comments; for we find at once what is perfectly simple, what any child of God who believes this to be the word of God must own. Bringing in history here embroiled the subject; and those who appeal most to its evidence are the very men who seem in this to ignore its facts. But the most ordinary knowledge suffices; for who does not know from the Bible that there was a Roman empire when Christ was born, one emperor, and no such state as that empire divided into ten kingdoms? We find a decree going forth that all the world shall be enrolled. Of course there must needs be a consultation with the kings, when the kings exist and become an accredited part of that empire, as rulers subordinate to the beast. But no; it was an absolute decree that went forth, and this indisputably, from a single head of the undivided empire. Centuries after came in, not only the division into east and west, but the broken up state of the west, when there ceased to be an imperial chief. But the prophecy shows us the beast revived and the separate kings reigning for the same time, before divine judgment destroys them at the coming of Christ and His saints. Hence this certainly must be future.

How this precisely fits in, let me say, with the state of feeling in these modern times; for “constitutionalism,” as men call it, is the fruit of the Teutonic system supervening on that of the broken up Roman empire. It was the barbarians who brought in the prevalent ideas of liberty as well as feudalism, and accordingly it is they that have firmly stood for freedom; so that all the efforts to reconstitute the empire which have been tried over and over again have hitherto issued in total failure. The reason is manifest: there is a hinderer --

one that letteth {2 Thess. 2:7}.

It cannot be done till the moment comes. When its own season arrives, as it surely will, the divine hindrance is to be removed, and the devil then is allowed to do his worst. The political side of this is described here with surprising brightness and brevity. The ten horns with the beast are all to receive authority -- the beast of course wielding the imperial power, they as kings, all during one and the same time before the end comes. Clearly, therefore, it is future. It is impossible to refer it to the past with any show even of reasonable probability, I will not say of reality or truth. Scripture and facts refute all such theories.

They have one mind, and give their own power and authority to the beast {Rev. 17:13}.

Hitherto the reverse of this has been true in history. The horns have constantly opposed each other, and even sometimes the pope. Since then the world has not seen the imperial power to which all bow. Have we not all heard of the balance of power? This is what nations have been constantly occupied with, lest any one power should become the beast. If some few have joined on one side, some are sure to help the other, because they are jealous of any one acquiring such a preponderant authority and power as to govern the rest. But in the time really contemplated here all this political shuffling will be over.

These have one mind, and give their own power and authority to the beast, or their imperial leader.

These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them (for he is Lord of lords and King of kings), and they that are with him, called, and chosen, and faithful {Rev. 17:13, 14}.

But still we have not the end of Babylon yet. Her part in the corruption of the high and the intoxication of the low -- her idolatrous character -- has come before us. We have seen her connection with the beast; but there is a conflict coming. The woman was allowed to ride the beast -- to influence and govern the empire first, but at last to be the object of hatred to the ten horns and the beast, who expose, rob, and destroy her.

And he saith to me, The waters which thou sawest, where the harlot sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues {Rev. 17:15}.

Such was her influence stretching out far beyond the beast.

The Gothic hordes were not yet incorporated with the empire, still less were they horns of the beast, nor did they give their power to it, but destroyed it rather. They broke up the beast yet more than Babylon. Past history therefore in no way suits the prophecy.

And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast

{Rev. 17:16}.

Here I am obliged to say that our authorized version, and not merely it, but our common Greek Testaments, are altogether wrong. This is known so well, and on such decided grounds, that it would be unbecoming to withhold the fact. There is no uncertainty whatever in the case. It is certain that we ought to read (not “upon” but)
and the beast.

This is of great importance. The horns and the beast join in hating the whore. Not only are they supposed to be coexistent, but united in their change of feeling against Babylon. The friendships of the evil are not lasting.

These shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire {Rev. 17:16}.

It is not the gospel, nor the Holy Spirit, but the lawless revived Latin empire with its vassal kingdoms of the west, that combine and destroy Babylon. Unhallowed love will end in hatred. They will then treat her with contempt and shameful exposure. Next they will seize her resources. Finally they will destroy her. Can anything be less reasonable (even taking that ground, low as it is) than that the various rulers of the western powers, Catholic kings, join the Pope in destroying his own city, or his own church, whichever Babylon may be made? Some evade the difficulty by referring the desolation to the Gothic powers; and these Protestants, as if they were mere Praterists? What confusion! Is not this reason enough for saying that not even the shadow of solid ground appears for the system?

Hence the effort of some to prop up a manifestly false reading. It is due to the exigency of a notion which fears and is irreconcilable with the truth in this place.

The ten horns which thou sawest AND the beast {Rev. 17:16} would give unquestionably the right form of the verse.

Thus everything implies their simultaneous presence for the same time and common action with the beast, in plundering and then destroying Babylon. God uses them for this object, -- the setting aside of her, the great religious corruptress, whose centre is found at Rome. We can easily understand that the overthrow of the ecclesiastical power is necessary to leave a full field unimpeded for the imperial power to develop itself in its final form of violence and rebellion and apostasy against the Lord. Yet religion, be it ever so corrupt, acts as a restraint on human will, as a government does, however evil. Even the worst of governments is better than none. That a corrupt religion is better than none I will not say: at any rate it troubles men; it is a thorn in the side of those who want no religion at all. Hence the horns and the beast join together and desolate the harlot. That kings had dallied with her, that the beast had once borne her up, will only turn to gall the more bitter to her, who, faithless to God, had staked the usurped and abused name of Christ to win what was now lost for ever.

For God put [it] into their hearts to do his mind, and to do one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled {Rev. 17:17}.

It is a time of strong delusion, be it remembered.

And the woman whom thou sawest is the great city, that hath kingship over the kings of the earth {Rev. 17:18}.

None but Rome corresponds.

The woman is the more general symbol designating her as the great imperial city;

the harlot {Rev. 17:16} is her corrupt religious character, embracing papal Rome, but not ending with Popery as it is.

Rev. 18 need not delay us long. It is a description, not of Babylon’s relation to the beast, but of the city’s fall, with certain dirges put into the mouth of the different classes that groan because of her extinction here below. But along with that God warns of her ruin, and calls on His people to come out of her.

Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.

For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities (Rev. 18:4).

Then the word is,

Awdar her even as she awarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she mixed, mix to her double. In as many things as she glorified herself, and lived luxuriously, so much torment and sorrow give to her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am not a widow, and I shall in no wise see sorrow {Rev. 18:6, 7}.

That is, Babylon is viewed in this chapter not so much in her mysterious and religious form, giving currency to every kind of confusion of truth and error, of good and evil, intoxicating, corrupting, and seducing, as all can see, through her wickedly religious influence; but she is viewed here as the most conspicuous aider and abettor of the world in its luxuries and delights and the pride of life, -- of what men call “civilization.” This is accordingly traced in our chapter with considerable detail, and with the sorrow and vexation of all the different classes who on the fall of Babylon groaned over her destruction, and the loss of their wealth and enjoyment.

But the graphic account does not end until the Spirit of God shows us another view of Babylon altogether. A mighty angel takes a stone and says, when he cast it into the sea,

Thus with violence shall be thrown down Babylon the great city, and shall be found no more at all {Rev. 18:21}.

The reason is given at the close; not only by thy sorcery were all the nations deceived, but above all

in her was found [the] blood of prophets and saints, and of all the slain upon the earth {Rev. 18:23, 24}.

What a solemn and weighty fact in the government of God! How can it be said that this vile, corrupt, idolatrous system of the last days was blood of all martyrs?

52. It now appears that the Cod. Reuchlin. Capnionis, which was used by Erasmus, and lately discovered after a long obscurity by Dr. Delitzsch, reads κελ (not κελ) τῷ ὄ. as the Complut. Polyglot, and all editions of the least critical value. Scholz 5 note (“rec. cum cod. pl. *) is a myth. I am not aware of any MS. in its favour, though some versions represent it.
She followed and had inherited the spirit of all, from the days of Cain, who had lifted up their hands against their righteous brethren. Instead of taking warning from the wickedness of those before her, who had seduced on the one hand, and persecuted on the other, she had, when she could, gone on increasing in both, until at last the blow of divine judgment came. It is thus that God is wont to deal as a rule in His judgments, not necessarily on the one that first introduces an evil, but on those that inherit the guilt, and perhaps aggravate it, instead of taking warning by it. And when God does judge, it is not merely for the evil of those then judged, but of all from the first budding of it till that day. This is not unrighteous, but, on the contrary, the highest justice from a divine point of view.

We may illustrate it by the members of a family. Supposing, for instance, a drunken father: if the sons had one spark of right feeling, not only must they feel the utmost shame and pain on account of their parent, but they would endeavour (like the sons of Noah who had a due sense of what was proper to their father) to cast some mantle of love over that which they could not deny, yet would not look at, but surely above all things they would watch against that shameful sin. But alas! there is a son in the family, who, instead of being admonished by his father’s wickedness, takes license from it to indulge the same. On him the blow comes, not on the wretched parent. The son is doubly guilty, because he saw his father’s nakedness and felt it enough to hide. But he ought to have withstood it -- I do not mean in vengeance (for that belongs to the Lord), but as holily hating the sin itself, yet withal in the deepest compassion for his parent. But far from that he has, on the contrary, persevered in the same evil course, as badly or worse than his father. Then and thus is aggravated guilt in the case of this wicked son.

It is a precisely similar case here. Babylon had once heard the varied testimony of God; for what had she not heard of truth? The gospel had been preached there, as she of Chaldea was not without law and prophet. Babylon must hear, I do not doubt, the final testimony of God -- the gospel of the kingdom that is to go forth in the last days; but she loves her pleasure and power, and refuses truth. She will despise everything really divine; she will only use whatever of God’s word she can pervert for increasing her own importance, and gaining a greater ascendency over the consciences of men, and enjoying herself more luxuriously in this world; for she will go far to obliterate all remembrance of heaven; and to make this world a kind of paradise which she embellishes, not with pure and undefiled religion, but with the arts of men and the idolatries of the world.

This it is precisely which will bring out the indignant judgment of God upon the last phase of Babylon, so that the guilt of all the blood shed on the earth shall be imputed to her, and she may be judged accordingly. It does not hinder, of course, that in the judgment of the dead each man is judged for his own sin. This remains true. The day of the Lord on the world in no way sets aside His dealing with individual souls. The judgment of the dead is strictly individual, judgments in this world are not. His blows on this world come more nationally as on Israel; incomparably more severe, as in possession of greater privileges, is the judgment of corrupt Christendom, or Babylon as it is called here. But according to His principle of government it is not merely personal guilt, but that which, from despising the testimony of God, is thus morally accumulating from age to age in the ratio of the testimony of God and the wickedness that has been indulged by men in spite of it. This may suffice for Rev. 18.

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After these things I heard as it were a great voice of a great crowd in heaven, saying, Alleluia, the salvation, and the glory, and the power of our God: for true and righteous [are] his judgments: because he judged the great harlot, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And they said Alleluia a second time; and her smoke goeth up unto the ages of the ages {Rev. 19:1-3}.

The Spirit of God contrasts with the fall of Babylon the marriage of the bride, the Lamb’s wife. Babylon was the spurious church as long as it was a question of the church, and the final corrupter when it could be no question of this longer, and there went forth the closing testimony of God. I do not doubt that there was a corrupt form in connection with Israel in times past. That is, there was first the literal Babylon, of course; but here it is symbolical. A mysterious lawlessness inherits the well-known name of Babylon when Rome is brought forward; and it does not merely embrace Christian times, but the end of the age after the church has gone, when the course of divine judgment comes. Bear this in mind: to leave the last part out is fatal to any accurate understanding of the Revelation.

We find, accordingly, the four and twenty elders and four living creatures here brought before us for the last time. That is to say, the heavenly saints are viewed still as the heads of the glorified priesthood, and also the executive in the administration of God’s judgments. But a voice issues from the throne, saying,

Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him; both small and great. And I heard as it were a voice of a great multitude, and as a voice of many waters, and as a voice of mighty thunders, saying, Alleluia, for the Lord God the Almighty reigneth. Let us be glad and exult, and give the glory to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready {Rev. 19:5-7}.

Now we find the symbol of the bride brought before us, and the elders and the living creatures disappear. The bride is in view.

Are we then to understand that the elders and the living creatures are together taken absolutely as the bride now? that those who were meant under the figures of the elders and of

53. It is the aorist in Greek, which in such a case as this it is difficult correctly to represent in English; for neither “reigned” nor “hath reigned” could convey that God had entered on His kingdom, but rather that it was past.
the living creatures assume the name and figure of the bride?
In my opinion it is not absolutely so. The elders do show us the heavenly heads of priesthood (embracing, as I believe, the Old Testament saints and those of the New); i.e., they are not limited to the church, Christ’s body. Then, when the Lamb and His purchase by blood are celebrated in heaven, the four living creatures join the elders, though each is distinct. The glorified saints are to administer power in a way far beyond angels. The living creatures are from Rev. 5 coupled with the elders, as we find them in the beginning of Rev. 19.

But now, when those symbols disappear, because of a new action of God (namely, the consummation of the church’s joy), the elders and the living creatures disappear, and we have not the bride alone, but another class of saints, who at once come forward.

And to the bride was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of saints {Rev. 19:8}.

I say

righteousesses,
not “righteousness.” It is not what Christ puts on them, but a recognition even at this time of whatever has been of God -- the working I do not deny of the Spirit of Christ. But it is what each saint has, though the blessed thought here is that the church has it not merely in the way of each person possessing his own; the bride has the whole of it (that is, the church in glory). The individual has his own fruit too. This remains true also in its own place, as we shall find; and when it is a question of reward, this is precisely the grand point; but when it is a question of the bride above, that is the way in which it is presented here, as we may see clearly from Rev. 19:8. The Spirit of God implies that it is decidedly not the righteousness here which is by another, and we thereby imputed righteous, but righteousnesses personal and actual. Of course the other is true. Before God we have that which is found only by and in Christ, which is another and a higher character altogether as compared with the righteousnesses of the saints.

Besides the bride thus arrayed,

He saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage-supper of the Lamb {Rev. 19:9}.

Here you may see the reason for saying that the four and twenty elders and the four living creatures are not absolutely the church, because when that symbol applies, and the one of the bride comes forward, we have got others too. What I judge, then, is that the guests, or those that were called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb; refer clearly to the Old Testament saints. If so, they are there in the quality not of the bride, but of those invited to the marriage of the Lamb; but I do not think them the Apocalyptic saints for the simple reason that, as shewn in the next chapter, the Apocalyptic saints are not raised from the dead yet. These remain as yet in the condition of separate spirits. That is not at all the way in which the guests are spoken of. I think, therefore, that the elders and the living creatures comprehend both the Old Testament saints and the church, the bride of Christ, -- that consequently, when the bride is mentioned, there were these others who had been included in the elders and the living creatures, but who are now seen as a separate body. No doubt all this may seem to some a little difficult, but it is no use evading what is hard. We must face difficulties; we must bow to the word; we must seek to learn through all. We do not mend matters by hasty conclusions, we only complicate the truth. And it appears to me that here we are bound to account for the presence of these others that are at the marriage-supper of the Lamb, but appear as guests, and not at all in the quality of the bride. In general this has been either passed over in the chapter, or some unsatisfactory inference has been flung out, which can only embroil the prophecy. I do not, of course, complain of particular persons, but of the general vagueness in which the passage has been taken -- unless, indeed, the more common course be not to ignore it.

Then the prophet falls down to pay homage to the angel; and this gives rise to a weighty admonition. It is not only that the angel corrects the act by asserting that he is a fellow-servant of him and of his brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. On that account it was altogether out of place to pay homage to him instead of to the God who had sent him to serve. But he tells us further that the Spirit of prophecy, who prophesies in this book, is the testimony of Jesus. Thus the divine testimony is not, confined to the gospel or the church, but the prophetic Spirit which characterizes the Revelation as a whole, after the church is translated, is equally a testimony of Jesus. This is most important, because it might be (as it has been) forgotten by some who make the gospel and the corresponding presence of the Spirit to be the same at all times; as others have thought, because Rev. 4 and sequel treat of Jew and Gentile, and the state of the world under God’s judgments, that this cannot be a testimony of Jesus at all. But it really is.

The Spirit of prophecy
-- and such it is all through the Revelation after the seven churches are done with -- is the testimony of Jesus {Rev. 19:10}.

We know the Holy Spirit rather as a spirit of communion with Christ. By and by, after our translation to heaven, He will work, and as vitally in those who bow to God, when it will be the reception of the prophetic testimony which is here owned to be none the less the testimony of Jesus.

Then heaven is opened, and for a sight most solemn. It is not now the temple opened there, and the ark of the covenant seen when Israel’s security is seen, as the object of God’s counsels; nor is it a door opened above, as we saw it when the prophet was giving his introduction to the prophecy of God’s dealings with the world as a whole, though in both cases all manifestly clusters round the Lord Jesus. But now heaven is opened for yet graver facts, and of incalculable moment for man and the universe and the enemy. It is Christ Himself about to be displayed in His rights as King of kings, and Lord of lords; and this in the face of the world.

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse
Victorious power put forth to subdue is the meaning of the white horse.
And he that sat upon him called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war {Rev. 19:11}.
It is no longer a question of sustaining His saints in grace, but of sovereign power for judging the earth.
His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many diadems.
There was judicial discernment with the distinct possession of all titles to sovereignty.
And he had a name written, that no man knew but he himself {Rev. 19:12}.
He is coming forth in indisputable human glory, but the greatest care is taken to let us know that He had that which was above man -- above the creature; for no man knoweth the Son but the Father {Matt. 11:27}.
Here it would seem we have just what answers to that: this name none knew but He Himself. He was a divine person, whatever new position He assumes for the world.
And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood.
He comes to execute vengeance, and with a sign of death for rebels.
And his name is called The Word of God {Rev. 19:13}.
He was the word of God in the revelation of grace; when known, by and by, it will be as the executor of God's judgments. He equally expresses what God is. The gospel of John and the Revelation perfectly disclose both, whether in grace or in judgment.
And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white, pure {Rev. 19:14}.
Here we learn at once of what His train consists. They are glorified saints, and not angels. And this is entirely confirmed by Rev. 17, where it was told us that they are with Him when He comes. When the beast dares to fight with the Lamb, He shall overcome the beast; and they that are with Him,
called and chosen and faithful {Rev. 17:14}
-- terms, as a whole, entirely inapplicable to the angels. The angels are never “called,” although they may be “chosen;” and though termed holy, I do not recollect that they are ever spoken of as “faithful.” "Faithful" is what belongs to a man. It supposes the effect and the exercise of faith. “Called” is most evidently inapplicable, because calling supposes that the person is brought out of one condition and raised into another and a better one. This is never the case with an angel. The fallen angels are not called, and the holy angels never need to be -- they are kept. Calling is the fruit of active grace on God’s part towards man, and only towards him when fallen. Even man himself when he was innocent in Eden was not called. Directly he had sinned, the word of God came, and he was called. It is very evident, therefore, that the saints in a glorified state are here represented as following the Lord out of heaven. They are not seen here as the bride. This would have been altogether inappropriate for such a progress: when the King comes forth riding to victory in the judgment of wicked men -- of the world, it is not in the quality of bride, but of armies or hosts, that the saints follow Him; and these include no doubt the guests as well, i.e., all the glorified take their place in His train.
At the same time you will mark that these are not said to be executors of judgment as Christ is. 54 It is to Him that God has given all judgment -- not necessarily to us. We may have a special task in it, but this is not the work for us, as it seems to me. Hence there is no sword proceeding out of our mouth; nor are the saints or heavenly hosts said to be arrayed in such a sort as the Lord. It is simply said that the glorified are to follow the Lord in victorious power, and nothing more, clothed in fine linen, white, pure {Rev. 19:14}.
Angels we know from other scriptures will be there, but of this we hear nothing here. But out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron {Rev. 19:15}.
What makes it the more notable is this, that the rod of iron is promised to us -- not the sword. Then there is the reigning power, but not the execution of judgment in this awful fashion which is attributed to the Lord Himself. But He treadeth the winepress of the fury of the wrath of the Almighty God
-- another character of judgment never attributed to the saints, that I know of.
And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King of kings, and Lord of lords {Rev. 19:15, 16}.
Then follows the proclamation of the angel, and the invitation to the supper of the great God, to eat the flesh of all the great ones of the earth.
And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, Come, gather yourselves together unto the great supper of God; that ye may eat flesh of kings, and flesh of chiliarchs, and flesh of strong [men], and flesh of horses, and of those that sit on them, and flesh of all, both free and bond, both small and great {Rev. 19:17, 18}.
And then comes the gathering and the battle.
And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. And the beast was taken
(taken alive);

54. It is the more strikingly characteristic, because of such language as Psa. 149:6-9, which speaks of all the saints contemplated on earth for the day of Jehovah.
and with him the false prophet that wrought signs in his presence, with which he deceived those that received the mark of the beast, and those that worshipped his image {Rev. 19:19, 20}.

Thus the second beast is no longer seen as an earthly power, but as a prophet -- of course a false prophet. All the energy to mislead men in the presence of the first beast was long in his hands, and now nothing more is spoken of. The spiritual power is wholly in the hands of the false prophet. It will be understood when one says "spiritual" that none is meant save of a wicked kind.

Alive the two were cast into the lake of fire burning with brimstone {Rev. 19:20}.

Thus eternal judgment was executed at once. They were caught in flagrant treason and rebellion: what further need of any process of judgment whatsoever?

And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which [word] proceedeth out of his mouth: and all the birds were filled with their flesh {Rev. 19:21}.

Their doom was awful, but by no means after the same sort as their two leaders.

Then another and immensely important act is described, -- the binding of Satan. He is no longer to be allowed to prowl about the world ensnaring and destroying.

And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years {Rev. 20:1, 2}.

It is not therefore his final judgment. The angel cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal over him, that he should no more deceive the nations, till the thousand years should be completed: after these things he must be loosed a little time {Rev. 20:3}.

And then we come to a most cheering disclosure:

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and [I saw] the souls of those beheaded on account of the witness of Jesus, and on account of the word of God: and those who had not worshipped the beast, nor his image, and had not received his mark upon their forehead, and on their hand; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years {Rev. 20:4}.

I do not suppose that many words are required by the present audience to show that we are not to understand the scene as a mere figure of Christianity. There are probably but few, if any, here who do not understand it as the fore-shadow of a real resurrection. In short, it is not tropical language, as when it is said of the prodigal son --

This my son was dead, and is alive again {Luke 15:24};

or of the restoration of Israel, which is compared to a resurrection from the dead for the rest of the world. Here the vision was of thrones with sitters, and others caused to join them; and the inspired explanation is that it is the first resurrection -- the rising of the just from the dead. Let us look at the different groups that are seen to have part in the first resurrection.

First,

I saw thrones, and they sat upon them.

The thrones were already filled. Instead of judgment being executed on them, it was given to them. They themselves were to judge. Who were they? Who are the persons thus invested with judicial authority of so glorious a nature and to reign, as we see later, with Christ? Clearly the same saints whom we have seen first set forth by the elders in heaven, subsequently by the elders and the living creatures, next, by the bride and the living creatures at the marriage-supper, and finally by the armies that followed the Lord out of heaven.

It is no longer a question either of celebrating the ways and counsels of God, or of the war with the beast and king. Accordingly it is another figure. It is reigning. There are thrones filled with certain persons, who reign along with Him. Thus the language of symbol is as definite as any other. There is no lack of precision, but the very reverse. Peculiar energy indeed attaches to symbolic language. But what is also of consequence to observe is, that John saw souls -- the souls of those beheaded on account of the witness of Jesus, and on account of the word of God. These are the martyrs of Rev. 6, those long since seen under the altar, poured out like burnt-offerings to God. It will be remembered that it was said to them that they must wait. They had cried to the Sovereign ruler to avenge their blood on their foes, but they were told they must wait a little for some others, their fellow-servants and their brethren, to die as they had. Here accordingly we have them all. For there follows another company of martyrs who suffered when the beast set up, his worst and final pretensions. When the second beast appeared, he even strove to put to death those who would not worship the beast, nor pay homage to his image, nor receive his mark. These compose the third class here spoken of.

The first were such as came out of heaven after Christ, being already raised from the dead and glorified. Consequently they sat upon the thrones at once; while the two latter classes, described in the rest of the verse, were still in the separate state --

and the souls.

Take this quite simply and literally. It does not mean persons merely, but the souls of beheaded persons. He saw their condition: it was part of the vision.

Here were thrones, and people sat upon them, changed before this into the image of Christ's glory. Then come others in the condition of separate spirits or souls, whom the prophet saw -- two different classes of them -- those beheaded for the witness of Jesus and the word of God, and those who refused the beast in every form. The proof of the third class should have been given a little more distinctly than in our version. It should not be "and which had not," but rather,

and those who had not worshipped the beast, nor his image, neither had received his mark upon their forehead, and on their hand; and they lived and

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reigned with Christ a thousand years {Rev. 20:4}.

Thus such as were in the separate state were reunited to their bodies, and lived and reigned like those who were already on the thrones. They

lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

Thus nothing can be simpler or more beautiful than the way in which this verse sums up the Revelation as a whole. The visions of this prophetic book open, not with the rapture of saints to heaven, but the sight of saints already raptured, often before the seer in the visions, but seen always in a complete condition without addition to their number. Accordingly the rapture of the church with the Old Testament saints must have already taken place, all (as I have no doubt) being caught up at the self-same time to be with the Lord above.

We have seen that these follow the Lord out of heaven, and are next seen enthroned. When the Lord takes His own throne, they take theirs by grace. But, further, we find that the saints who had suffered for Christ, during the time that the others were in heaven, are now reunited to their bodies and live, the Lord waiting for the last martyr that He might not leave out one of those who had died for His name. All the sufferers, either in the early persecutions of Rev. 6, or in the later persecutions (see Rev. 15) up to Babylon’s extinction, were now raised from the dead. They lived, and were put therefore into a place and condition suitable for reigning with Christ, no less than the Old Testament saints and the church itself. Such is the meaning of the verse --

The rest of the dead lived not again till the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection {Rev. 20:5}.

Let it be carefully observed here that the first resurrection does not mean all rising exactly at the same moment. This is a mistake. We know that the change of all those caught up takes place in the twinkling of an eye; but it does not follow that various bodies are not raised at different times. For certain there are two great acts of resurrection, -- one when the Old Testament saints and the church are caught up to heaven, the other when Satan was bound after the beast and false prophet were thrown into the lake of fire, as well as Babylon judged. Thus (without speaking of the resurrection of the wicked at the close) there were certainly more acts than one, not to speak of the two witnesses put to death and caused to rise after three days and a half, when the spirit of life entered them, and they not only arose, but went up to heaven, as we know. I speak not of anything that might be deemed exceptional or peculiar, but of two acts of raising saints. From the manner in which resurrection is referred to in scripture, does not God leave room for this?

I will raise him up at the last day {John 6:40, 44, 54}.

At the last day

does not mean merely an instant of time. Whether it were the Old Testament saints and the church, or the Apocalyptic saints, if I may so distinguish them, it was in an instant that each were raised, but there was some space between them.

What is there to hinder it? There is no expression in the word of God which binds all to rise at the same instant. Those that do rise at the same time rise, no doubt, in a moment; but that there are to be various acts of resurrection is not only not contrary to scripture, but required by its own descriptions. This verse declares it, and there is no other interpretation that can stand even a moment’s fair discussion.

This being so, it adds immense clearness in the understanding of the book. And what shall we say of the wonderful wisdom of the Lord? It is called the first resurrection {Rev. 20:5}.

This does not intimate we have seen that there is only one act of raising, but that all who share that resurrection, whenever raised, are raised before the millennium begins; so that when the reign of Christ takes place, all such have part in the first resurrection, including Christ Himself, raised at least 1800 years before the church; then the church, with the Old Testament saints; then these Apocalyptic saints at any rate some years after. All this gives us a true and just view of the various parties that have a share in the resurrection.

This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years {Rev. 20:5, 6}.

It has been remarked by another, and justly, that the expression

they shall be priests of God and of Christ

summarily puts out of court the interpretation that supposes a figurative resurrection. For it is clear that, though principles might reign, to be priests is quite inconsistent with a mere figure. It is also clearly a personal reward to those who had suffered.

When the thousand years expire, Satan reappears on the scene to the sorrow and ruin of the Gentiles who were not born of God. But it is for the last time, not of the age only but of the various dispensations of God.

And when the thousand years are completed, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to war {Rev. 20:7, 8}.

This is clearly of moral importance. The glory of the kingdom does not preserve when men in their natural state are exposed to the adversary. The millennial nations, the number of whom is as the sand of the sea {Rev. 20:8}; fall a prey to Satan.

And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and encompassed the camp of the saints, and the beloved city {Rev. 20:9}.

The beloved city is Jerusalem; the camp of the saints, I presume, is a larger circle and embraces all of Israel and the Gentiles who, being converted, refuse Satan’s deceit. It is an evident contrast with the state supposed in the wheat-and-tare field of Christendom which is found at the end of the age.

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Wheat and tares grow together till the process of judgment separates. At the end of the millennium the righteous and the wicked form two distinct arrays; though even then there would appear to be a line drawn between the surrounding camp, and the beloved city Jerusalem on earth, where the Jews were. The unrenewed of the nations are now compassing them with their countless hosts, as if to eat them up like grasshoppers.

And fire came down out of heaven from God, and devoured them. And the devil that deceiveth them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where both the beast and the false prophet [are], and they shall be tormented day and night unto the ages of the ages {Rev. 20:9, 10}.

Then follows another scene still more solemn -- the most awe-inspiring of all we can contemplate, at the same time full of blessing for the Christian to look onward to as that which will for ever put aside every trace of evil, and vindicate good where man must altogether fail. Here accordingly is seen but one throne. It is the divine judgment of man -- eternal judgment. Even when God was judging providentially in the beginning of the Apocalyptic visions (Rev. 4), associated thrones were seen. When Christ came personally to judge and govern the quick (Rev. 20:4), there were thrones; for the risen saints reign with Him. But now there is but one throne: Christ judges the dead.

And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heavens fled away {Rev. 20:11}.

This is of immense moment doctrinally, because it decisively proves that it is altogether unfounded to assume, as is popularly done, that the Lord only returns at this juncture. In the coming of the Lord all include His coming to the habitable earth. Now manifestly, if the Lord does not come before this, there is no world to come to; for the earth and heavens are fled. The common notion, therefore, that the coming of the Lord is at this point is an evident fallacy upon the face of this scripture that describes it, not to speak of others elsewhere. It is not a syllogism that is wanted or that can satisfy here: only require, only believe, the word of God. A single verse dispels clouds of arguments.

I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled; and place was not found for them {Rev. 20:11}.

I admit that afterwards no doubt the new heaven and the new earth are seen; but who contends that this is the sphere to which the Lord comes? To this earth He is coming, and not merely to the new earth in the eternal state. To the same world in which He suffered, according to the scriptures, He will come back. But for the eternal judgment heaven and earth are fled away; and then we see the new and eternal universe. Hence He must have come back previously to both. With this agrees His coming out of heaven in judgment of the earth, described in Rev. 19. He came to the world, and avenged His people on the beast and the false prophet with the kings and their armies; and after that the risen saints reign with Him over it a thousand years. I say not on but over the earth. He with the glorified saints will have their home on high, but none the less shall they reign over this very world for the allotted time.

Then, as we have seen, comes the final test of the nations of the earth after that kingdom has run its course, and the devil let loose once more deceives flesh and blood after the analogy of all other dispensations. That age of visible glory is inefficacious to change the heart of man, though in the absence of the enemy and the controlling presence of the great King, they render feigned obedience for a long while. It can govern and bless but not convert man. Even the proclamation of the grace of God is powerless save it be brought home by the quickening energy of His own Spirit. In short, no testimony can avail, no work, power, or glory without the word of God applied by the Spirit of God. But in this is shown -- what it is of importance to see -- the true nature of the kingdom or millennial reign.

That day does not mean a time when everybody will be converted, but when the Lord Jesus will govern righteousness -- when overt evil will be judged, and good be sustained perfectly for a thousand years. When any wrong is done, it will be dealt with. As far as the display of government goes, it is according to God morally, and for His glory, though I deny not for a moment that there are elements of evil which are never allowed, but kept under if not expelled. But that the heart of man even so is not renewed becomes manifest, when Satan at the close deceives all that are not converted; and these, as we are told, are countless

as the sand of the sea {Rev. 20:8}.

Do not wonder at the vast numbers, or at their defection. The thousand years of peace and plenty will have given occasion for an ever-growing population, spite of a world thinned by divine judgments which open that era. It is to be supposed that it will far exceed anything yet seen on the face of the earth. At the beginning there will have been carnage, as we know, among both the western powers and the eastern powers. In fact, we may say, all nations will be desolated by judgments of one kind or another; but for all this the world proceeding for a thousand years with every outward blessing, and the most admirable government administered by the blessed Lord Himself, will issue in the teeming and prosperous races of mankind. It will be a state of nature unexampled for the fruits of the earth and the enjoyment of all that God has made here below. Consequently there will be an increase in population such as never has been approached since the world was made, yet it afterwards appears, that Satan will not fail to turn the masses of the nations into one vast rebellion against the objects of God’s special favour on the earth -- the saints -- wherever they may be, and the beloved city of Israel, as we have seen.

Then comes not the destruction only of these rebels by divine judgment, but the dissolution of heaven and earth. And Jesus sits on the great white throne. It is the judgment of the dead as such, who now rise and give account of their deeds. All the dead are there who had not part in the first
resurrection. The nature of the case exempts of course the saints of the millennium; 55 and this very simply, because they are never said to die at all. There is no scriptural reason to infer that any saint dies during the thousand years, but rather the contrary. Scripture is positive in Isa. 65 that death during the millennium only comes as a specific judgment because of open rebellion. When a person dies, it will be a positive curse from God; if he die even a hundred years old, it will be like a baby dying now. Man converted will then not merely reach the natural term -- if I may so say -- of a thousand years, but pass that bound. If alive before the thousand years, he will live after the thousand years; in fact, literally he will never die, though I do not doubt, on general principles, that the saints of the millennial earth will be changed at the very time when the heavens and earth disappear. Of course they will be preserved through that crisis in some sort of way suitable to divine wisdom. God has not told us how, nor is it our business. He has reserved the matter, though not without enough to guide our thoughts, as we have seen. It is one of those cases which every now and then appear where God checks and reproves our foolish curiosity, as He alone knows how to do perfectly.

Flesh and blood, we know,
cannot inherit the kingdom of God {1 Cor. 15:50}.

According to the general scope of scripture, then, we may be quite sure that these saints, kept during this universal dissolution of the atmospheric heaven and the earth, will be translated to

the new heavens and earth wherein dwelleth righteousness {2 Pet. 3:13},
in a condition new and meet for the eternal state into which they are ushered. Let others speculate, if they will: I am persuaded that he who essays to conceive the details is merely striving to draw a bow beyond the power of man. For I am not aware that any scripture treats of the subject, beyond laying down principles such as we have sought to apply to the case.

And the dead were judged,
but not out of the book of life, which has nothing to do with judgment.

The dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works {Rev. 20:12}.

Why then is the book of life mentioned? Not because any of their names were written therein, but in proof that they were not. The book of life will confirm what is gathered from the books. If the books proclaim the evil works of the dead that stand before the throne, the book of life offers no defence on the score of God’s grace. Scripture records no name whatever among those judged written there. There was the sad register of undeniable sin on the one side; there was no writing of the name on the other side. Thus, whether the books or the book be examined, all conspire to declare the justice, the solemn but most affecting righteousness, of God’s final irrevocable sentence. They were judged every man according to their works.

And if any one was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire {Rev. 20:15}.

Thus the only use that seems made of the book is negative and exclusive. Not that any of those judged (and the scene described is solely a resurrection of judgment) are said to be written there: we are shown rather that they were not found in that book.

Again, death and hades are said to come to their end, personified as enemies.

And death and hades were cast into the lake of fire.
This is the second death {Rev. 20:14}.

Thus was concluded all dealing on the Lord’s part with both soul and body, and all that pertains to either. The race was now in the resurrection state either for good or for evil; and thus it must be for ever. Death and hades, which had so long been executioners in a world where sin reigned, and were still doing their occasional office where righteousness is to reign, themselves disappear where all traces of sin are consigned for ever.

In the first eight verses of Rev. 21 we have the new heaven and the new earth, but besides, awful to say; the lake of fire. Indeed it must be so, because, as we read in the end of Rev. 20, there the lost were cast. But still it is a very solemn fact to read, and that which we are bound to preach -- that even in the perfect state of eternity, while there is the brightness of the heaven and of the earth into which no evil can enter, you have all the evil that ever has been -- all the wicked of every clime and of every age cast into the fixed condition of eternal judgment in the lake of fire.

Observe another very important fact. All the dispensational names of God disappear. It is only God and man now. There is nothing more to hear of nations; nothing more to do with separate countries, kindreds, or tongues. It is the eternal state; and also, in fact, the fullest description of that state which is furnished in the Bible. But a very different point of interest is to be observed.

Although there is such a levelling of human distinctions, and men have to do directly with God -- that is men raised from the dead or in their changed condition -- we still see the holy Jerusalem --

the holy city, new Jerusalem {Rev. 21:2},
separate from the rest of those that fill the new heaven and earth. This is of great importance, because if the new Jerusalem be, as I have no doubt it is, the bride the Lamb’s wife, then we have her separate condition asserted in eternity.

I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God
(alluding to this very city)
{is with men {Rev. 21:3}.}
That is, the tabernacle of God is regarded as a separate object, no doubt associated with men, but not confounded with them. Men are not regarded as composing this tabernacle; they co-exist.

The tabernacle of God [is] with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, their God. And God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more, nor sorrow, nor crying, nor shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away [Rev. 21:3, 4].

All things are thus made new; and, further, these words are faithful [Rev. 21:5].

Nothing more is to be done.

And he said unto me, It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit these things; and I will be to him God, and he shall be son to me. But to the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part [is] in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death [Rev. 21:6-8].

Here occurs a remarkable change in the sequence of the visions, though easily understood; for it must be evident that there is nothing to follow this in point of time. We have just seen that it is the eternal state. Consequently, here we must most unquestionably go back to be shown an important object in the prophecy which could not, without interrupting its course, have been described before. In short, it is as we saw in Rev. 17, after Babylon had been brought before us in the course of the prophecy. We had seen Babylon twice: first, in the circle of God’s warnings and testimonies; and then as the object of God’s judgment under the seven bowls. Then we have a description of Babylon given. It would have been incongruous to bring in that long description before, because this must have interrupted the flow of the prophetic stream.

Exactly the same thing is repeated here, and what makes it more apparent is the similarity of the introduction on each occasion.

And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife [Rev. 21:9].

Who does not see that this is precisely analogous to the verse which opened the description of Babylon? I take it, therefore, that God intended this analogy to be noted by us; that it is not a pursuance of the prophecy, but a description of the holy city previously named; just as the other was a description of the corrupt city, whose judgment had been announced. We had Babylon with a spurious ecclesiastical but a really murderous character, and at the same time guilty of corruption with the kings of the earth. Here is seen the holy city coming down out of heaven from God, which is declared to be the bride, the Lamb’s wife, in the plainest contrast with the great harlot. Yet to this heavenly city, after Christ comes, the kings of the earth bring their offerings and their homage; but there is no excitement of the nations, no filthiness of fornication, no abominations, no blood-guiltiness. In short, Babylon, the disgusting counterpart of the holy city, in earthly ambition seeks the kings and the masses for her own present objects, while the other suffers now and will reign then. The one therefore throws much light upon the other.

But what I particularly call your attention to is the exceeding importance of heeding the retrospect at the bride, or new Jerusalem here, and the consequent removal of the difficulty caused by taking the last vision of this book as part of the prophetic series which begins in Rev. 19. Not so. It is an added digression for the purpose of describing an object already named passingly in the foregoing series, which closes at Rev. 21:8. As Rev. 17 was a descriptive digression, so is the portion from Rev. 21:9. The account given of Babylon in Rev. 17 does not follow Rev. 14 or Rev. 16, in point of prophetic time, but differs from them in structure. It gives a retrogressive account of Babylon’s character, and shows how it morally compelled the divine judgment. So here a description is given of the bride, the Lamb’s wife, and we learn how it is that God will use her for unmeasured goodness and blessing and glory in the millennium, as the devil during this age has used Babylon to accomplish his wicked plans here below. Just as the city of man’s confusion was seen in her vile, degraded, and degrading relations with the beast, this city is seen in her pure and glorious relations with the Lamb.

And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb. And he carried me away in [the] spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God [Rev. 21:9, 10].

It is not into a wilderness the prophet is carried, but he is set on a mountain great and high, and shown -- not the great, but the holy city Jerusalem. The great city was either guilty Jerusalem or Babylon. This city is seen now as the holy vessel of divine power for governing the earth during the millennium, having the glory of God: and her brightness was like a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal [Rev. 21:11].

Then follows a description of the wall, gates, foundations, and general position.

Having a wall great and high, having twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names inscribed, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel [Rev. 21:12].

It was important, just because it is the bride, the Lamb’s wife, to show that angels are there, and further, that Israel is not forgotten. The very name indeed shows something similar; not of course that the church can ever be earthly. Still God does not forget His ways with His people; and the angels here are only in the quality of porters, if we may so
speak; they are at the gates. And as for the twelve tribes of Israel, they are merely written there, nothing more. No hint whatever is given that they constitute the city, but there is the inscription of their names outside. That city will be a constant remembrancer of those who went before restored Israel here below, as undoubtedly it will be used for their blessing during the millennium, but not for theirs only. We shall find, on the contrary, its aspect is toward the universe, yet is there the special place of Israel; and quite right it is that it should be so.

On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb {Rev. 21:13, 14}.

These would appear to be (save Judas Iscariot, of course) the twelve apostles that were peculiarly associated with Christ in His suffering path on the earth. God is sovereign. It is not meant that he who was more honoured in service than any of the twelve, he whom the Lord used for bringing out the church of the heavenly places, will not have his own most singular dignity in this glorious scene. Still God acts in a wisdom far above man, and holds to His principles even there. The twelve apostles of the Lamb will accordingly have their own special place. We can fairly trust God that He will not give a worse place to Paul; yet I do not think that this is his place.

And he that spake with me had a golden reed as a measure, that he might measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. And the city lieth foursquare, and its length is as much as the breadth {Rev. 21:15, 16}.

Thus there is a completeness and perfection about it suited to its present character.

Afterwards we come to the description of itself, -- of its wall, its building, its foundations, and its gates. Here it is the city described in itself; on which we need not now enlarge.

Further, a negative point of great importance is presented by the seer.

And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God the Almighty is the temple of it, and the Lamb {Rev. 21:22}.

This was no lack. On the contrary, it proved the immediateness of communion. The temple would suppose a medium. The absence of a temple is therefore no loss but a gain for this city. It furnishes material for a contrast between the earthly Jerusalem and the heavenly city, because if there be one thing more remarkable than another in Ezekiel’s description, it is the temple. But here there is none; a temple is for the earth. The heavenly city, which is the full expression of blessedness on high, has no temple because it is all a temple.

The Lord God is the temple of it, and the Lamb, as far as we can speak of any.

And the city has no need of the sun, nor of the moon, that they should shine for it {Rev. 21:23}.

This too must not be viewed as if it were a loss. As for the earthly land and city, the moon will have her light increased to that of the sun, and the sun shall be sevenfold. But here there is neither; and this again is an evidence of gain, not of loss.

For the glory of God enlightened it, and the Lamb is the lamp thereof {Rev. 21:23}.

Creature lights are gone.

After the nations in Rev. 21:24 omit the words “of them which are saved.” You must with the best authorities leave out this addition, if you would have the true force of the verse. It is a wholly unwarranted interpolation.

The nations shall walk in the light of it {Rev. 21:24}.

Any one of spiritual judgment can see that it should not be “nations of them which are saved.” What would be the meaning, if so read? We can understand a remnant saved out of one or more nations, but who ever heard of “nations of them which are saved”? It is altogether unfeasible, and it shows how carelessly we read the Bible that people are not stopped by such an expression. The fact is, in the very best authorities it does not exist at all. The “saved” is a term which, so far from belonging to the nations, is expressly applied to the Jewish remnant when it is a technical term. But “nations of them which are saved,” is a most anomalous expression, and betrays man as the author of it.

And the nations shall walk in the light of it.

It is plain that they are not in this city.

The kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour unto it {Rev. 21:24}

-- not into but unto. That is, it is simply an expression of the homage that they pay.

And the nations shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour unto it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for night shall not be there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations unto it. And there shall in nowise enter into it anything that defileth, nor making abomination and a lie: but only those written in the book of life of the Lamb {Rev. 21:24-27}.

Moral unfitness has its just censure; but sovereign grace must be asserted also.

Then we have another glorious description.

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb {Rev. 22:1}.

It is not now lightnings and thunders and voices. These were simply the characters of provisional judgment that filled the interval after the church was gone, and before the reign with Christ. But when Christ and the church peacefully reign, such is the imagery that suits -- a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding
out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the broadway of it, and of the river, on this side and on that, [the] tree of life,

-- bearing not merely as the original one did, but now according to the fulness of the provision of God's grace for man, for man in glory first, but for man on the earth also, but for man in glory --

producing twelve fruits, in each month yielding its fruit: and the leaves of the tree for the healing of the nations {Rev. 22:1, 2}.

Man on the earth has his portion in the goodness of a God who is manifesting His kingdom.

And no curse shall be any more: and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him {Rev. 22:3}.

All this description closes in Rev. 22:5.

After that we have the admonitions to the end of this book. On these I may say but a very few words.

Rev. 22:6 commends these sayings afresh. And the coming of the Lord is urged in connection with it.

Behold I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the words of the prophecy of this book {Rev. 22:7}.

Then again the character of it, as derived from Christianity having already taken its place, is asserted.

Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book {Rev. 22:10}.

In Daniel's time, and even to Daniel himself, the book was sealed. The old oracles were sealed then: not so John's.

And he, saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is near {Rev. 22:10}.

In Daniel's time it was not at hand. To the church the end is always near. In her own course, and in the matters of her portion, the church does not know time at all. Everything that belongs to the body of Christ is unearthly and unworldly. The church is heavenly: and in heaven there are no times nor seasons. There may be lights of the heaven to mark times and seasons for the earth, and again on the earth. But the church consists of souls called out from the earth, and is not of the world: consequently to the church the time is always at hand. When Christ at God's right hand was announced, even from the very beginning, He was ready to judge the quick and the dead. He remains in that condition of readiness from the time when He sat at God's right hand till the present. The church goes on according to the will of the Lord, who might according to His own purpose lengthen or abridge the space. It is entirely in His hand, and in none other's. Whereas for the Jew, there are necessary dates and momentous changes that must take place; and hence, as Daniel represents the Jew, we have the difference kept up. To the Christian this book is not sealed. All is opened, and this because we have the Holy Ghost dwelling in us;

for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God {1 Cor. 2:10}.

Therefore we find in connection with the book a most solemn warning.

Let him that is unrighteous be unrighteous still: and let the filthy be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still {Rev. 22:11}.

When the hour comes that is spoken of here, it is not for us, but for those who will be found after we are gone. All is then fixed. There will be no time for seeking mercy, as it were: whatever the state in which the Lord at His coming will find us, all is closed up and fixed. Accordingly,

Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me.

We see that it is in connection with the foregoing -- not merely His coming for us who will keep the sayings of it, but for those whom He will find here below --

to give to each as his work is {Rev. 22:12}.

Further, after this Jesus introduces Himself, as well as sends His angel.

I Jesus sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright the morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come: and let him that heareth say, Come: and let him that is athirst come: let him that will take the water of life freely {Rev. 22:16, 17}.

Thus the name of Christ, not merely as the root and the offspring of David, but as the bright morning star, calls out responsively the heart of the church, and this too under the guiding activity of the Holy Ghost. The church cannot hear of Him as the bright morning star without at once desiring that He should come. She does not, it is true, say, "Come quickly." This would not be fitting for the church nor the Christian. Patience or endurance of hope is what becomes us. But it is blessed that He says,

I come quickly {Rev. 22:20};

and it is only Christ who in scripture ever says so. But we as properly say,

Come {Rev. 22:17}.

We desire that He should come quickly, but we leave this to Him, because we know His love, and can trust Him. We know that if He tarries, it is not that He is slack concerning His promise {2 Pet. 3:9}, but that

His longsuffering brings salvation to many {see 2 Pet. 3:9}.

And who would defraud either the soul of salvation, or the Lord of showing it?

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come {Rev. 22:17}.

It is to Jesus. To whom else could they say it? The bride breathes out this word to the bridegroom; and the Holy Ghost it is that gives strength to her desire that He should come. But there is a message also for others. There is a word to him that hears.

Let him that heareth say, Come {Rev. 22:17}.
He is urged to take up the same cry. If you are a believer, do not be afraid, even if you know but little; for the Lord neither forgets nor slights those who may he comparatively unintelligent. He has, I think, exactly that class in view when He sanctions the calling him who hears to say

Come {Rev. 22:17}.

The bride represents those that are spoken of in the normal possession and enjoyment of their privileges. There are many who are not so; but the Lord does not forget them.

Let him that heareth,

then,

say, Come.

If they have only heard His voice, this after all is the incalculable boon; yea, it is the turning-point of all blessing. It is not the enjoyment of all, but it is the hinge on which all depends. It is the way to all, if it be not the actual entrance into and enjoyment of it.

Let him that heareth,

then, be encouraged to

say, Come.

There is nothing in Jesus to harm him; there is everything to bless; there is Himself to be enjoyed, even if they have failed in the full knowledge of it here below.

But then while there is such a call to Christ, while the believer is not to be afraid, but to call on the Lord to come, the church does not forget those that are poor sinners, let them be deeply conscious of it, or let them be those that are only made willing by the grace of God (which is the feeblest expression of the sinner’s need, just as you have the feeblest expression of the saint in the previous call). So we find the Lord has room for all that is the fruit of His own grace only, -- for the appeal of grace, even when there is not the answer to it. Yet grace despised necessarily ends in judgment.

And let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely {Rev. 22:17}.

Then the book concludes after a solemn warning against either adding to or taking from its contents.

He that testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus {Rev. 22:20}.

Surely I come quickly.

After so long a tarrying how blessed! After so many sorrows, trials, difficulties, dangers, how sweet to have such a word, and to know that He who speaks is the holy and the true, and surely about to come in the faithfulness of His love! He will not fail to take up the gage He has given our hearts. He is coming, and coming soon for us.

May our hearts answer freely to His word of love and truth with our

Amen {Rev. 22:21}.

His grace be with all!
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