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# SPIRITUAL CLINIQUE

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A SPIRITUAL CLINIQUE

# A SPIRITUAL CLINIQUE

FOUR BIBLE READINGS  
GIVEN AT KESWICK IN 1907

BY  
DR. A. T. PIERSON <sup>1827-1911</sup>

AUTHOR OF "THE MAKING OF A SERMON," "GOD'S LIVING  
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"THE BIBLE AND SPIRITUAL LIFE," "THE LIFE  
OF GEORGE MULLER," ETC., ETC.

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## A Prefatory Word.

THOSE upon whom falls the somewhat unenviable responsibility of teaching on the Keswick platform and at similar gatherings, frequently come into contact with persons who have been for years much oppressed and troubled with some chronic form of spiritual ailment. The ordinary teaching in Conventions does not always reach those serious cases of spiritual disease. They have to be dealt with individually, sometimes with very specific treatment. I have personally come into such frequent contact with this class of cases, that it occurred to me, and I believe was laid upon me by the Holy Spirit, to conduct during four consecutive morning meetings at the Keswick of 1907, a kind of spiritual clinique, selecting four of the most desperate sorts of spiritual difficulty, and seeking to show how the Master Physician, in the Word of God, treats these chronic ailments. This booklet is the outcome of this endeavour in His Name, skilfully to

diagnose and deal with these spiritual diseases.

The four selected ailments are: UNSUBDUED SIN; UNANSWERED PRAYER; PERSISTENT DARKNESS; and HABITUAL UNBELIEF. All the brethren who have anything to do with Convention teaching will agree that these are some of the most desperate kinds of difficulty we have to deal with, and we are perpetually coming into contact with them.

Somewhat as a physician puts before his class a series of representative cases of disease, and seeks to show how, according to the highest authorities they must be dealt with, I desire to indicate the symptoms of each disease and how they should be met by the application of the Divine remedy.

By way of justification of this method, I may call attention to the fact that in the Word of God we have indications that the Lord Jesus looked upon all sin as a desperate and deadly disease, to be dealt with as such.

In Jer. viii. 22, the prophet represents God as asking: "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? Why, then, is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" In Matthew ix. 6, 12, 13, a most memorable passage in the New Testament, our Lord referring probably to this

passage in Jeremiah, says, "That ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins (then saith He to the sick of the palsy), Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house."

Here He teaches that His prime purpose in healing all manner of disease and sickness among the people, and restoring the dead to life, was not simply to do mighty works, such as became Him, as the Son of God, or even to vindicate or authenticate His claim to the Messiahship, but rather to illustrate and demonstrate that He could deal with all spiritual difficulties, by dealing with those physical ailments which were types of the spiritual.

This opens up a vast field of thought. There are somewhat over thirty distinct cases of healing narrated in the Gospel narratives, no two being exactly alike, but all having differentiating features. Together they cover the whole range of physical ailments, and illustrate, therefore, the whole department of spiritual difficulty. The Lord Jesus thus shows Himself perfectly competent to deal with all spiritual troubles by thus healing all physical ills.

In the 12th verse of that same ninth chapter, He interprets His own language.



## A PREFATORY WORD

“They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.” “The righteous” are the *whole*, “sinners” are the *sick*. Thus He is Himself our authority for regarding all forms of spiritual ills as diseases, and looking to Him as the great soul Physician for their relief and cure.

I.

## Unsubdued Sin

FIRST, we seek a remedy for the disease of UNSUBDUED SIN. The 7th chapter of Romans is a kind of universal biography. I have no question that it describes the experience of the *regenerate believer*. No unbeliever can say some of the things said in that chapter, and it is a stage of the believer's experience. In the 6th chapter he is represented as taking Christ as his Saviour, and as being identified with Him in His crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection ; in the 8th chapter, as being identified with the Holy Spirit as the indwelling and victorious power of his life. But in the 7th chapter, the Spirit is not mentioned ; while in the 8th, He is nearly thirty times referred to, so that we are in the atmosphere of the Spirit when we pass into that chapter.

This language is peculiar, but very descriptive: "I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not; for what I would that do I not; but what I hate that I do. If, then, I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now, then, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me—that is, in my flesh—dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now, if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find, then, a law that when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Now he gets a glimpse of deliverance: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord;" and in the second verse of the 8th chapter, the solution is fully declared: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." He does not get freedom till

he gets knowledge of, and reception of, the full power of the Spirit of God.

What a description this is of the believer's experience in the stage to which we have referred! It seems as though the disease of sin were so desperate that, as a physician might say, it has invaded even the psychic centres of our being, paralysing the mind and heart and conscience and will with its terrific power. See the contradictions here! What a group of paradoxes! The law of God, instead of an inspiration to obedience, an incentive to disobedience! Mr. Moody told how, when he went to sleep in a room, and saw a card on the wall, "Don't turn me round till morning," he got up, and turned it round. The prohibition prompting to disobedience! Then, while there is a spiritual approval of the law of God, there is a carnal slavery to the law of sin. While the will consents in purpose, it is powerless in performance. There is the law of the mind, the true ego or self; and the law of the members the false ego or self; the spirit is in sympathy with life and holiness, but the flesh in sympathy with disobedience and death. The love of good on the one hand, and the hatred of evil on the other, but the good undone and the evil done. And so there

is a double service—the law of God on the one side served with the mind, and the law of sin on the other served with the flesh. Such are the paradoxes in this passage; but, the vital point is, that the Apostle recognises this conflict as abnormal, and utters a cry of despair, with a shout of anticipated victory. You have got to the cry of despair; the Lord would have you get to the shout of anticipated victory.

First of all, be sure you come to the *great Physician*. The devil also claims to be a physician, but he is only a quack. His methods are abnormal; they are palliative but not curative. When he sees you have a deadly disease, instead of applying the knife and cutting out the cancer, he applies a poultice. When you are under the control of some awful spiritual malady, he gives narcotics, or sedatives, or intoxicants; he puts you to sleep, or absorbs you in a life of giddy, pleasurable excitement, that you may forget your malady. He never can *cure*. You may spend all your living upon him, and you will only grow worse, and never any better.

A second caution to be taken into account, at the very beginning, is that of our Lord when He says: "Enter not into temptation." Mark the words, as though temptation were

a territory over which the devil has full sway, and out of which you are sedulously to keep. Stay out of the devil's ground. There is the devil's ground, and there is the Lord's ground. In the Book of Ruth, Elimelech—whose name means "My God is King"—because of a famine in Judea forsook that land and went off into the forbidden land of Moab. That was the devil's territory, and the judgment of God took him away. Naomi and her two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, were left, and the sons took them wives of the daughters of Moab—a second act of disobedience; and down came the judgment of God on Mahlon and Chilion, and they died also. Then Naomi, the miserable backslider, made up her mind to go back to where she came from, and so she returned to Judea, and blessing returned also to her. If you are in the land of Moab and married to the daughters of Moab, you would better get out altogether, or you may get out the wrong way by judgments. Go back to where you came from, back from the devil's land to the territory where God rules; get out of dishonest business, out of ensnaring worldly pleasure, out of the power of vicious habit—get out of the devil's territory, and as far as possible from the devil himself.

The Lord uses very drastic and decisive measures in dealing with sin. Keeping to the figure of the physician, He reminds us, in His methods, of those of the skilful physician and surgeon, which I take to be at least four. We may call them, simply for the sake of discrimination, first, the *destructive*, as when the physician uses the scalpel, the lancet, the cautery, to destroy something that is deadly, like a cancer or a tumour; secondly, the *purgative*, as where cathartics or emetics are used to cleanse the system of something that is unhealthy in its influence; or ample ablutions, as in a bath. The third method may be called *corrective*, or *counter-active*, as where an antidote is used, as in the case of a poison, or a counter inflammation to correct some form of irritation. The fourth method is *nutritive*, where tonics, stimulants and appropriate food are used to build up the strength of the patient. Some of these methods are intended to deal with that which is deadly, and expel it; others to deal with that which is living and vitalising, to strengthen and nourish it; to introduce and incorporate what is nutritious.

Our Lord's methods may be illustrated by these four modes of treatment, followed by skilful physicians and surgeons.

First, the *destructive*. When will we be done fooling with sin? There is nothing more appalling about sin than the fact that it tempts even saints to trifle with the deadly thing. Our Lord leaves us no sort of doubt as to His opinion of sin, and as to His method of dealing with all known transgression against the law of God. He uses two great words: *Repent, Forsake!* Repentance is *not a mere feeling*. It is primarily a radical and executive act of the soul—the negative side, of which faith is the positive side. In the Epistle to the Hebrews are three expressions, short pregnant, with great meaning: “Lay aside,” “Lay hold,” “Hold fast;” and they cover the whole territory of our experience. Laying aside is *repentance*, laying hold is *faith*, and holding fast is *perseverance*. Observe, that laying aside and laying hold are essentially the same act in different aspects. If I have my hands full, and you offer me something that I desire, I can only take it by dropping what I have in hand. You can take eternal life only by dropping what you have, laying aside what you are holding, and laying hold of that which is proffered. The one phase of this complex act is repentance; and the other, faith. But repentance is a great executive



act; it implies a change of attitude—turning your back upon that to which you turned your face, and turning your face to that upon which you turned your back. Repentance is thus a radical and revolutionary change of attitude.

Our Lord leaves no doubt of our duty as to all known sin. Matthew v. 29, 30: "If thy right eye make thee to offend pluck it out, and cast it from thee. . . . If thy right hand make thee to offend, cut it off, and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that the whole body should be cast into hell." Cut it off, cast it from thee; pluck it out, cast it from thee. Surely that allows no trifling with sin. If anything causes you to offend against God, be done with it for ever, and never even parley with it again! There is one kind of sinless perfection in which every Keswick teacher believes—the sinless perfection of *instantaneously and for ever renouncing every known sin*. There is no present danger of being sinlessly perfect. You may put that risk from you as so remote that it need not at this present time occupy attention. But there is risk as to *known sin*; it is atrocious to go on in a course known to be offensive to God, and

allow what is terribly deadly in its influence even upon the child of God. There is no mistake in the attitude of our Lord. He says: "Sin no more;" and He would not say that if He did not mean it. "Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace." This does not mean two different dispensations; but that while the law *commands*, it does not *enable*; and, while grace does not abate the command, it adds enabling power. The sin, therefore, which dominated you, when you knew nothing but law, shall no longer dominate you, now that you know something of grace. How plain is that language in Romans and Colossians: "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die, but if ye, through the Spirit, do mortify"—*make dead*—"the deeds of the body, ye shall live." "Mortify, therefore, your members which are upon the earth." There is no question about what this teaches, and one of the greatest advances in holiness is made by every man and woman, who, seeing this truth, in the strength of God, immediately and for ever renounces everything known, or suspected to be, wrong; for even in a matter of doubt God is to have the advantage, and not yourself.

II. The second of our Lord's methods of

dealing we have called, *purgative*; that which tends to remove out of our internal or external life, what is harmful in its influence upon our spiritual being. The Psalmist prays in the 51st Psalm: "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow; cleanse me thoroughly from my sin"—as though God might wash him or pass through him a cleansing agent. Paul writes, in 2 Cor. vii. 1: "Having, therefore, these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit." Filthiness of the flesh is outward; filthiness of the spirit is inward. "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

Does Paul preach perfect holiness? These are words of the inspired Apostle, and we fall back on Scripture, quite willing to stand with Paul, because Paul stood with God.

Surely such words can mean nothing less than that, if you see something in your outward life or inward life, contrary to God, it is to be put away. In other words, there is to be absolutely *no trifling with temptation*. Whatever there is in the conduct or character, in the manners, or the disposition,

opposed to God, every child of God should set his face deliberately and absolutely against it; looking, not to himself for strength, but to God. It is an awful thing to trifle with any form of sin.

There are seven steps in every life of evil, that are as plain as they can be. The first is trifling or parleying with temptation; the second, yielding to it; the third, habitually yielding to it; the fourth, yielding yourself up to its power; the fifth, being given up by God to it; the sixth, becoming a procurer of the devil and a tempter to others; and the seventh is hell. And hell may begin in this world. Those seven steps are indisputable. One may deny the Bible, but he cannot live in this world without knowing that these are the steps leading downwards—trifling with sin, yielding to sin, habitually yielding to sin, abandonment on one's own part, and on the part of God, to sin; becoming a tempter to others, and then landing in hell. There must be no concession to sin, no compromise with sin. Gladstone said that for parents to yield to the whims and caprices of disobedient children was of the nature of "depraved accommodations." We are guilty of many such depraved accommodations. People say in politics: "If

you cannot get a whole loaf, take half and be content." God never says: "If you cannot have entire holiness, be content with half holiness." No such compromise is encouraged in the politics of God. You are not to be content with anything but absolute conformity to His will.

III. Third our Lord uses *corrective* or *counteractive* measures, like the use of antidotes for poisons, or remedial correctives for abnormal and morbid conditions. In Gal. v., the Apostle tells us, "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh." We generally connect the word "lust" with something that is basely wicked; but it does not necessarily mean anything more than an *overmastering desire*. When such overmastering desire subdues other desires that should be highest and controlling, it is wicked lust; when it is an overmastering desire that subdues those that should be lower, it is Divine lust. The lusts of the flesh come up from below and drag the higher self down; but the lusts of the Spirit come down from above and lift the lower man up. There is a great deal of difference between these two. A balloon is a very common object in these days. You see it lying on the ground with all its apparatus,

and requiring a great deal of strength to carry it. But, when the silken envelope is inflated with an ethereal gas, it is difficult to hold it down. Gravitation is not eradicated, but counteracted. There is a levitation that counterbalances gravitation. When you get away from the gravitating power of sin, and under the control of the levitating power of the Spirit, the gravitating power of sin does not hold you down. Or, as the Rev. Evan H. Hopkins says, the iron, which is cold, black, and hard, while in the furnace is no longer cold, nor black, nor hard; though the *tendency* to coldness, blackness, and hardness remains, as you find, if you take it out of the furnace. As long as you are practically in Christ Jesus, the power of sin is counteracted; but, so far as you neglect Him and lose contact with Him, the power of sin reasserts itself. There is great expulsive, as well as expansive, power in a new affection, as the old story of Thomas Chalmers reminds us. It was a great thing to give a horse "something to think of until he got past that white stone," and you need something better to think of till you get past the white stone of temptation — to be occupied with God, and His Word, and the thoughts of His dear Son, and the hope of

your final inheritance. These are counter-acting influences to the power of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

IV. The next method of our Lord is the *nutritive*, tonics and stimulants—that which really nourishes and strengthens the vital principle being introduced into the system for the sake of such invigoration. The Lord very graciously does not leave us to negative processes. He does not simply say, “Cut off that which is sinful”; or “Cleanse yourself from that which is inwardly or outwardly evil”; “Counteract that which is evil by something which is good.” But He seeks also to strengthen and build up all that is truly godly and vitalising and energising, in the power of His Spirit. We all know there are two processes in the human body, the secretive and the excretive—one is the casting out of that which is deadly; the other, the introducing of that which is living and vitalising. Our skin, for instance, has singular facilities for perspiration. You can put your thumb over thousands of pores in the skin, all of which it is necessary to keep open, if you are to drain the system of impurities, which in that way pass out in insensible perspiration. This excretive process is going on all the time, as in the

respiration of air and the expiration of carbonic acid. But there is something else going on also. The lungs are perpetually inspiring oxygen to make up for the waste that takes place in the blood. We must not forget this side of holy living—the nutritive,—that which stimulates, vitalises, and energises the soul and the spirit. This is the great positive method of our Lord Jesus Christ—life imparted by the Spirit, fed, nourished, strengthened.

Let us refer briefly to four great methods by which God builds up spiritual life; for all that has been mentioned already, will be of little use if we do not enter heartily and devoutly and prayerfully into the methods by which God proposes to cultivate in us positive holiness. The first is His own precious Word, the second is private prayer, the third is habitual work for souls, and the fourth is habitual dwelling in the Holy Ghost. We may compare these to four things necessary to our body—The Word of God, to the food; prayer, to the atmosphere; work, to exercise; and the Spirit to the vital principle itself—thus they can be easily remembered and grasped.

There is absolutely no advance in holy living for any man or woman that neglects



*the Word of God.* In fact, nothing is more necessary to the sustaining and strengthening of the vital principle in us than a diligent and habitual feeding upon the Scriptures. "Thy Word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee." "Thy words were found, and I did eat them"; and "Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart." "I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food." What testimonies these are, even from the Old Testament Scriptures! The Word of God you can afford to *meditate on*. Lord Bacon says there are some books that are to be tasted, a few that are to be chewed and digested; and the Word of God is food that it does not do to *taste*—you must chew, digest, and assimilate it for your wants. As you roll it over and over, as a sweet morsel under your tongue, it will get to be sweeter and sweeter, and more and more prepared for this process of spiritual assimilation. A mere superficial reading does comparatively little good; but to find out what it means, to enter into the spirit of it—the letter killeth, the spirit giveth life—to compare Scripture with Scripture, to pray much over it, to get illumination from the Spirit upon it; and, above all, to embody

it in life and practice—this is making the Word of God a part of yourself; like the tree, taking the water out of the river, changing it into sap, and changing the sap into leaf, bud, blossom, and fruit, according to the 1st Psalm. Do not neglect the Word of God.

One-half of us spend more time over the daily newspapers than we do over the Holy Scriptures. It is appalling how some disciples glue themselves to a newspaper, and read even its advertisements; and yet have not time for their Bibles! How can there be any spiritual progress while the very nutriment of the soul is neglected!

The second great help is *private prayer*. In the 6th chapter of Matthew, through its opening verses, our Lord begins with the plural, but quickly passes into the singular. The second personal pronoun in the singular number occurs in the first twenty or thirty verses thirty times, in the 6th verse alone eight times, and twice more concealed in the verbs. "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father, which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." No other verse in the Scriptures has the second personal pronoun singular

in it—thou, thy, thee—eight times. Why? Because the first necessity of living in communion with God is habitually to get alone with Him. You should cultivate “the practice of the presence of God”; you should come to realise the facts of the unseen world, and the unseen God, until they become as much a verity as anything in the visible world; the eternal becoming as real as the temporal. That is the only way to meet the temptations and trials of life—the only way to be consciously encompassed with God when you go forth from your closet into the activities of life.

Nothing else will take the place of private prayer. No social or family prayer, or joint prayer between husband and wife, will answer instead of the individual prayer, when you shut out everybody, even the friend of your bosom, and shut out all sights and sounds that you may know God, and that He may speak to you, as He will never speak to you except when alone with Him; and it is infinitely more important that you should hear Him speak to you than that you should speak to Him.

The third need is *work for God*—to absorb yourself in somebody else. Suppose a man, a victim of drunkenness, reformed, regener-

ated, delivered from the domination of the old habit. What is the best way to keep free, in addition to the Word of God and prayer? Let him interest himself in reforming other drunkards, lifting up those that are fallen; let him absorb himself in an unselfish purpose, forgetting even his own temptations in those of others, his own weakness in the weaknesses of others, and he will find that "whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. And there is no respect of persons." Whatever you impart to anyone, you get back into your own soul, not only by the natural law of reciprocation, but by direct administration of grace to your own needy spirit.

Last of all, *abiding in the atmosphere of the Holy Ghost*. Here is the greatest secret of all. The best illustration of spiritual things I have ever seen is in the modern triumphs in electrical magnetism—what scientists call the "electrical field." Captain King, at Willets Point, N.Y., found an old gun, a large piece of ordnance 16 feet long. Being an experimenter in magnetism and electricity, he undertook to see how powerful a magnet he could make of that old gun. According to the principles of electro-magnetism, you

increase the power with every additional coil of wire ; and so he got ten miles of wire and wrapped it round the body of this cannon, and then magnetised the whole with a powerful battery. What was the surprise of all about him, to see solid balls of iron which weighed 200 lbs. leap up into the mouth of that cannon without a human hand touching them, and pieces of iron scattered about attached themselves to that powerful magnet. Within the electrical field the electrician will take a heap of iron wedges and spikes, and place them one upon another in architectural form and symmetry. No matter what their weight, they will stay where and as he arranges them. But, withdraw the electrical power, and his symmetrical architectural forms fall into a chaotic mass !

The Holy Spirit constitutes in the child of God a kind of Divine electrical field, and while abiding in the Holy Spirit, and subject to His influence and power, what is absolutely impossible, without the Spirit, becomes not only possible, but easy and natural, under His control. What would tumble into an indiscriminate mass of chaos without Him, assumes forms of beauty. Affections which would go out to the world, directed by Him,

move Godward: purposes that would be controlled by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life, are transformed into Divine choices; ambition becomes aspiration, things carnal are displaced by things spiritual. But get out of that spiritual field; introduce or allow in your life, voluntarily or carelessly, things that are overmastering, that come from the world, the flesh and the devil, and chaos takes place even in the life of the believer. If, in an address, one attempts to exploit himself, he loses spiritual power. A speaker must not even stop to *think* of popular applause, or how he is commending himself to the multitude, and forget that the only thing of importance is how far he is approved of God; otherwise he will instantaneously lose power. It is like stepping off the insulating stool and coming into contact with the earth, so that the electric fluid passes away from you into the ground. You have to be insulated, separate from the world, if you are to be filled with God; and only while the separation is maintained can the filling be maintained.

God Himself entreats you to stop instantaneously, and for ever, all trifling with sin, and with the world, all concession

to the flesh, and compromise with the devil. Be out-and-out for God, for holiness, for the Word of God, for closet prayer, for devotion to souls, for surrender to the Divine Spirit !

## II.

# Unanswered Prayer

THE question put into the mouth of the unbeliever by Job, is perfectly legitimate and reverent if properly asked: ‘What profit should we have if we pray unto Him?’ I was somewhat appalled—and that really suggested this chapter—by receiving from a prominent Christian man a letter in which he confesses that he has *given up praying*. He went so far as to say that God had utterly failed him at the mercy-seat. The letter was signed by the writer’s name, and he cast himself upon me in sympathy, asking me to approach God in his behalf. It set me anew inquiring: “What profit shall we have if we pray unto Him?” and, “What is the cause of unanswered prayer?” This question I pray that I may in some measure answer, purely upon the lines of Bible teaching:



For the sake of brevity and unity I confine myself to suggestions from the Epistle of James. That Epistle, in its five chapters, has more direct teaching upon the causes of failure in prayer than any other single book in the New Testament. It has three references to prayer—in the first chapter, the fourth, and the fifth.

In the first chapter we have a hint of two causes of the lack of power in prayer—the lack of faith and the lack of patience. In the fourth chapter two causes additional—selfishness in motive, and worldly alliance. In the fifth chapter we have likewise two causes of failure, found in the lack of importunity, and in not maintaining the level of faith in waiting for answers. This is very comprehensive, but all we can do is to outline the subject as presented in this Epistle. Let us be intensely busy at business questions. These are no theoretical matters that we meditate upon, but the intensest business that the child of God can set himself to understand; for the secret of prevailing power in prayer lies at the bottom of everything else in the Christian life. There is no subdued sin without it, no relief from darkness without it, no relief from the sin and crime of unbelief without it.

Three great facts confront us at the beginning. The multitude of God's promises ; the unequivocal universality of His promises ; and the undeniable fact that the majority of prayers are not answered.

The multitude of the promises is overwhelming. There are nearly three thousand promises in the Psalms, and the Bible has more than thirty thousand in it. If you add all the indirect promises, there are nearly double that number. The largest number of those promises are addressed to the praying soul.

As to the universality of the promises, there are seven universal terms in the Bible—"whosoever," "whatsoever," "wheresoever," "whensoever," "any," "all," "every." All these universal terms are applied to prayer. It is marvellous that, with these promises facing us in the Word, and the universal terms in which they are couched, we should be obliged to confront that third and awful fact—that the majority of prayers have no perceptible answer—that the cases of answered prayer are the exception and not the rule. I cannot say what I do not believe, and I candidly believe this statement is true.

There have been various ways of trying to account for this. Some have said that the

promises to the prayerful are addressed, especially in the New Testament, to the apostles and disciples of that day. "If two of you shall agree"—*you*, apostles; "This confidence have we in Him"—*we*, apostles. This theory is mischievous! You can take the power out of the whole Bible by limiting its application in that fashion.

The second way to account for it has been that prayer is of the order of the supernatural, and hence belongs to the age of miracles; and the age of miracles is past. Very convenient for unbelief and disappointed suppliants, who know nothing of the secrets of prevailing prayer!

The third cause suggested is that the Church of God has run into a period of apostasy, and the Holy Ghost has withdrawn, and it is a time of God's silence.

But over against all these paltry, insignificant, and, in some respects, God-insulting philosophies and excuses, stands the patent fact—some people pray and get answers. Müller, of Bristol, raised the great monument of two generations past to a prayer-hearing God, and that monument still stands, and is not worn away by an acid atmosphere either. It is as bright and strong and glowing as ever. People said when Müller died:

“Very few people know Mr. Wright”; and when Mr. Wright died, “Nobody knows Mr. Bergin.” But, blessed be God, some people know *God*, and the work is going on just the same as ever, and some of the most marvellous interpositions of God have come since Mr. Müller and Mr. Wright died. The last report shows the same prayer-hearing God watching over a larger number of orphans than have been in that great group of orphan houses for ten, twelve, or fifteen years past. And they are doing what nobody else ever did—*advertising for more orphans*—not for more funds, but for more children to take care of in the name of the living God.

Look at the teaching of the Holy Spirit through the Apostle James. Sixteen words in that fourth chapter, are, in my opinion, the greatest words ever written in rebuke to prayerless souls. “*Ye have not because ye ask not. Ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss.*” Write those sixteen words in burning capitals, and let us look at them.

I have already referred to the fact of how little prayer there is; it is awful and appalling. Three things face us in the destitution of prayer: first, the insignificant time given to prayer; second, the narrow range of supplications; and, third, the little heart that

enters into them. "Ye have not because ye ask not."

But let us look at asking amiss. In the first chapter are two difficulties in the line of profitless prayer to which, first, reference is made: "Let him ask in faith, 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-souled man is in all his ways unstable." Here are the two difficulties—a lack of faith, and a lack of patience.

Lack of faith is virtually making God a liar. Let us look at the fact exactly as it is. If God promises to the praying soul, in unequivocal terms and in a multitude of forms, absolutely sure answers, then to doubt God's promises is to make Him a liar; and no blessing can come to any man that impugns the veracity of God. But the faith must be a patient faith that knows how to wait. Here is one of the most remarkable similes in Scripture—"The man that wavereth is like"—not the wave of the sea, but (Gr.) "the *surge* of the sea," the foam on the top of the wave, "driven with the wind, and tossed." At the seashore when the wind is blowing, you see two motions—one to-and-fro, that

you call "fluctuation"; one up-and-down, that you call "undulation." The Apostle James refers to both motions. "Driven with the wind" is fluctuation; "tossed" is undulation. The peculiarity of a wave is that it cannot stay anywhere; wherever it gets it falls back. If it gets ahead it recedes, and we call it a receding wave; if it gets up it goes down, and we call it a falling wave; and a double-souled man is exactly like it—mere foam, for foam is most easily moved up and down, and to and fro, of anything about the water.

The difficulty is that, if a man who has no proper faith is propelled ahead, back he goes to his other and former standards. Or if he is lifted up in ecstasy and exaltation, he cannot stay there, down he goes; he is in the trough of the sea five minutes afterwards, just like the surge of the sea, fluctuating and undulating, with no power to hold on. There can be no prevailing prayer without this power to hold on. Hundreds go and commit a thing to God one minute, and take it back the next. They are afraid that God cannot take care of it for any length of time; they must give God their aid. When God revealed to Abraham that in his old age, when

Sarah was past bearing, they should have a son of promise born to them, we are told in Gen. xv. 6 "He believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness." A great triumph! But look in the beginning of the sixteenth chapter, and see how long the triumph lasted. Abraham made an iniquitous connection with Hagar, an Egyptian maid, and that child born to him was one of the greatest curses that ever came on the earth. Why could not he have left it sublimely where faith committed it, to the miracle-working God? Even the father of the faithful failed at the crisis. In the crisis of David's kingdom, when Ahithophel was counsellor, and he and other conspirators went over to the side of Absalom in the rebellion, David had no man to cope with Ahithophel, and he prayed: "O Lord, I pray Thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness." Why did not he leave it there? Read on. As David was going up he met Hushai, the Archite, and said: "You pretend to be a traitor, and go over to Absalom's side, and make believe you are faithful to him, and watch and see what Ahithophel says, that *thou* mayest turn for me the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness." That is the trouble with us, that we commit a

thing to God in a sublime act of faith one moment, and the next moment we take it out of God's hand, and put it in man's hand, or try ourselves to take care of it—just like the surge of the sea, up and down, to and fro, never staying anywhere.

In that fourth chapter we see two other obstacles put before us. "Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." Lusts there do not necessarily mean vicious, sensual, abominable desires, but simply the carnal desires of self-indulgence, as when a man asks for money because he wants the gratification money brings; or for pleasures of the appetite, because he wants his stomach to be satisfied and gratified; or for rewards of ambition, because he wants to get on and hold the sceptre of influence over men. How many things we forfeit because they are asked for in a wrong spirit, because self is at the bottom, instead of God being the object in all. You can even ask for spiritual blessings, for the anointing of the Spirit, because you want to have all eyes turned upon you as an anointed man or woman, in order that somebody may say: "See how holy that man or woman is," or "What remarkable power goes with this or that person!" You never get



the anointing when it is sought in that way. Let us observe that, if God gave us some things that we asked for, they would be a great curse to us, and not a blessing. Remember Kibroth-hattaavah in the 11th chapter of Numbers. "The graves of those that lusted." The people, complaining and murmuring, said: "We are tired of this disgusting manna: give us flesh to eat." God said: "I will give you flesh, and you shall eat it till it come out at your nostrils;" and "ere the flesh was chewed, the wrath of the Lord came and slew the fattest of them." They got fat in the body, but lean in soul. He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their souls. Do you want that God should send leanness into your soul in sending fatness to your body, feeding your carnal and starving your spiritual nature? If that is not what you want, be careful that you do not ask from selfish, lustful motives. Agrippina, the mother of Nero, asked of her gods that they would set her son upon the throne; and the first thing he did when set upon the throne was to plan the death of his own mother. Hezekiah, when told that he should die and not live, turned his face to the wall, and began reciting his good deeds before the Lord, and

pleaded for life, and the Lord spared him fifteen years. But they were years of disgrace. He stripped the gold from the doors of the temple of the Lord and gave it to the enemies of God, and he lived long enough to beget Manasseh, who was the greatest curse that Judah ever had. He was the Ahab of Judah: and the afflictions and captivity of Judah were mainly owing to the sins of Manasseh. How much better if Hezekiah had died when the Lord gave him notice—better for him, for Judah, and for the whole world! Look out for selfishness of motive in your praying. That is one reason why God keeps you waiting until He refines away your carnality, and gets you up on the high spiritual level in which you can pray in the Holy Ghost.

“Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” Think of a woman, married to an honourable, upright, and holy man, walking through the streets in broad daylight, arm in arm with one that is attempting to supplant him, and then going to her husband for any special favour! When God sees you walking arm in arm with the world that crucified Jesus, and identified with the world

before men, how can He hear your prayer? Your prayers are an insult. All alliance with the world implies the predominance of the carnal, and the carnal can never pray acceptably. All power in prayer depends on a vision of the Eternal, on Communion with the Eternal, on the atmosphere of the Eternal, and, if you are engrossed and absorbed in the temporal, how can you breathe the atmosphere, or have a vision of the Eternal; how can you lay hold upon the powers of the age to come? There is no difficulty in accounting for failure in ten thousand cases, because the prayers are those of essentially worldly people, who know almost nothing of coming into real touch with the Eternal Spirit of God.

In the last chapter, additional lessons are taught with regard to the secrets of prevailing power in prayer and of the lack of it. "Elijah was a man of like passions as we are." Thank God for that! He got under a juniper tree, as you and I have often done; he complained and murmured, as we have often done; was unbelieving, as we have often been. But that was not the case when he really got into touch with God. Though "a man of like passions as we are," "he prayed praying." It is sublime in the original—not "earnestly,"

but "he prayed in prayer." He kept on praying. "He prayed earnestly that it might not rain," and for three and a-half years—they might have had showers and dews, but no searching rain—it rained not. "And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit."

What is the lesson here? You must *keep praying*. Come up on the top of Carmel, and see that remarkable parable of faith and sight. It was not the descent of the fire that now was necessary, but the descent of the flood; and the man that can command the fire can command the flood by the same means and methods. We are told, that he bowed himself to the ground with his face between his knees—that is, shutting out all sights and sounds. He was putting himself in a position where, beneath his mantle, he could neither see nor hear what was going forward. He said to his servant: "Go and take an observation." He went, and came back, and said—how sublimely brief! one word—"Nothing!" What do we do under such circumstances? We say: It's just as I expected!" and we give up praying. Did Elijah? No he said: "Go again." His servant again came back, and said: "Nothing!" "Go again." "Nothing!" "Go again." "Nothing!"

By and by he came back, and said: "There is a little cloud like a man's hand." A man's hand had been raised in supplication, and had left its shadow on the heavens, and presently down came the rain; and Ahab had not time to get back to the gate of Samaria with all his fast steeds.

That is a parable of Faith and sight—faith shutting itself up with God; sight taking observations, and seeing nothing; faith going right on, and "praying in prayer," with utterly hopeless reports from sight. Do you know how to pray that way, how to pray prevailingly? Let sight give as discouraging reports as it may, but pay no attention to these. The living God is still in the heavens, and He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased. Even to delay is a part of His goodness.

Look still further. Elijah *kept on the height of the mountain* till he got the answer to his prayer. Do you know what it is to maintain the high plane and level of faith till the answer comes? What great mistakes are made! When the Lord lifts us up to a high level of faith and expectancy, we offer prayer on that level; but we hasten to get down to the carnal level, as if we supposed that answers could be given to the prayer of

faith on any other than the plane of faith! I have had no idea impressed on my mind from the Word of God in connection with prevailing prayer more inspiring and rebuking than this: That answers to the prayer of faith can only be received and recognised on the plane of faith. Get up into the heavenly levels to talk with God; He is not coming down to the carnal level to talk with you; He wants you to stay there till He has given you His answer. Hence the typical significance of Elijah staying up on the mountain, sight, over and over again, taking observations until the answer of God had come. It is a great thing to keep praying, and in a frame of holy expectation till the blessing comes.

It pays to stay there waiting on God. Monica, the mother of Augustine, besought God for many years that Augustine might not go to Rome, because Rome was then, as now, the centre of all the iniquity of the Continent. Augustine was a profligate, and she felt that his going to Rome would ensure his rapid ruin, and she besought God not to let him go. He did go to Rome. Did she give up? Not at all. She said: "If the Lord does not grant me what I ask, He will grant me something better."

His going to Rome was the means of his coming into contact with Ambrose, of Milan, and that was the means of his becoming converted, and afterwards a great leader and defender of the faith, one of the fathers of the early Church. So that God, in refusing the literal request of Monica, fulfilled her heart's great desire.

What a great blessing my late friend, Dr. Moon, of Brighton, has been—the projector of the great Moon System to help the blind to read the Word of God, the best of its kind ever devised. When twenty-three years of age, he was struck with total blindness. He besought God, when the symptoms were coming on, that He would deliver him from this calamity. He was an educated, cultivated man, at the beginning of his true service of God and man. But the blindness continued. What did he do? It is one of the sublime things in history. He looked up to God, and said: “My heavenly Father, I thank Thee for the talent of blindness. May I so invest that talent that at the coming of the Lord Jesus He may receive His own with usury.” Is not that sublimely, and ecstatically heavenly? The Lord soon taught him that He had permitted the blindness that he might

minister to the millions of blind people in the world; and Dr. Moon used his inventive faculties and devised this system, containing only a very few characters in combination. According to recent accounts that system has been utilised in nearly five hundred languages and dialects. So that, when this man went to heaven a few years ago, he must have found thousands who had gone to heaven through reading the raised characters by which he made it possible to commune with the Word of God. By taking blindness as a talent from God, and using it for God, he accomplished far more for God and man than he ever could have done if he had followed out the devices and desires of his own heart.

The love of God quite as often withholds as grants. Hence the necessity of trusting God to do His own way. He always gives what we ask, or something better. He consults our wants, not our wishes, like a wise and loving Father. His delays are not denials. Delay may discipline faith, teach us patience, and fit us for blessing. Moreover, there are blessed *indirect* answers to prayer. Prayer is answered most emphatically when God keeps you praying, when God keeps you in a tender state, when He leads you to



trust Him absolutely in the absence of all outward signs of answer. The sublimest triumph of prayer is to trust God absolutely when you do not get any sensible answer whatever. There is no other triumph of prayer so great as that. We should all like to live by faith and sight together ; but somehow they are incompatible.

May I sum up what I conceive to be the teachings of the Word of God, by what I call the twelve levels of prayer and answer. The first four levels are the levels of *vain praying* ; the next four, the levels of *prevailing prayer*, and the next four the levels of *Divine answer*.

Down at the very bottom is the level of known *sin*. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." When sin is enthroned and enshrined in the heart, prayers are worse than vain. The second level is selfishness, when you are asking for self-indulgence, self-gratification, something terminating upon yourself, not the glory of God. The third level is the level of *form*. "This people draweth nigh to Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me." God does not care a farthing for prayers which have no heart in them. The mere externals of worship, He says, "I cannot away with ;

it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting"—or, as it ought to read: "I cannot away with *iniquity and the solemn meeting*"—"I cannot have the two go together." The fourth level of vain praying is the level of *unbelief*, where there is no expectation of receiving, no faith in God as the Giver.

Above those levels we rise to those of prevailing prayer, and the lowest is that of spiritual desire. You want something, and it is right that you should, and you ask simply from the impulse of a strong yearning. Perfectly right! "Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." A higher level is that where you appreciate the Fatherhood of God and your relation as His child, and set up a child's claim to a Father's blessing. The desire is emphasised by your conscious relation to God as His child. The third level is that where you appreciate your position as a disciple in Christ, and claim in the name of Jesus Christ what you dare not claim in your own name. You have felt desire, you have added to it a consciousness of filial relation; and, to that, the consciousness of the disciple's relation, unknown except as we touch the fourteenth chapter of John—the first time that Christ ever spoke about pray-

ing in His name, and between the fourteenth and sixteenth chapters seven times repeated. He said, in the sixteenth chapter: "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name." Up to that time no Old Testament saint or New Testament saint had ever prayed in His name. The fourth level is where the Holy Spirit working in you, unhindered, groans after God. This is the highest level of prayer, indicated in Rom. viii., where we are told that the Spirit Himself groans within us unutterably. No words will express it, but God hears and cares far more for that than for any words, however well framed.

We come now to the levels of answer. The lowest is where you get what you ask in the way that you ask, like Eliezer, who made the specific request that the maiden who should give the camels drink might be the one appointed for Isaac; and, while he was praying, Rebekah came and did what he asked; and he does not seem to have been surprised, which is a delightful feature. He did not say: "It is a wonderful answer!" Rather let us wonder that God should not do what we ask, or as we ask.

The next level of prayer is where the answer does not come at the time, or in the way, perhaps, that we expect, or is both delayed

and disguised. In the case of Elijah on Mount Carmel it was delayed. The most marked instance in the New Testament is the Syrophenician woman. She was under the ban of the curse; she did not belong even to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel;" she had not a promise to take hold of. "He answered her not a word." Then, when He did speak, He refused, and reproached her with the only, apparently reproachful term He ever used. But look at the logic and wit of her importunity! She said: "You call me a little dog, and make that a reason why I should not have the children's bread. I make that a reason why I should have it, for the little dogs under the table do get the crumbs"—the only time that the Lord Jesus was refuted and confuted out of His own mouth. Of course, He had to give her the blessing. She made His argument against it a reason for it, and it is a most remarkable case. He seems to have gone all the way from the lake of Galilee to the shores of the Mediterranean, and back, just for the sake of that woman, for there is no record of any other act performed on the way to and fro. He went to meet this woman whom He treated with silence, and then with refusal, and apparent

reproach; but He gave her what she asked, and it is not irreverent to say He could not help it.

Notice, again, that sometimes the answer is denied, and here is yet a higher level. But compensation comes with the denial, just as in the instances of Monica and Dr. Moon. Paul (2 Cor. xii.) prayed about what is described as a "thorn," but Paul would not have made such a fuss over a thorn: it was a "stake in the flesh," and he prayed to God that it might be taken out of the way. Probably he thought it was affecting his usefulness to men. The Lord distinctly denied the request, but more than made up for the denial with overwhelming grace; and said: "My strength is made perfect in weakness;" not merely, "Your weakness shall be made an opportunity for the display of My strength," but, more than all, the only way to make God's strength perfect is for us to get into a perfect condition of destitution of soul.

The last and highest of all the levels of answer is where the answer is not only delayed, not only disguised, not only apparently denied for a time, but after your praying, God seems to preserve an absolute and obstinate silence. No answer comes, you

live and, perhaps, die, and never get an answer; but you have not a doubt of the prayer-hearing God. I asked Mr. Muller a short time before he died if he had asked anything of God that had not been granted, and he told me he had prayed sixty-two years, three months, five days, two hours—with his mathematical precision—for two men to be converted, neither of whom was converted, and there were no signs of it. I said: "Do you expect God to convert them?" "Certainly. Do you suppose that God would put upon His child for sixty-two years the burden of two souls if He had no purpose of their salvation? I shall meet them in heaven certainly." Shortly afterwards he died, and I was preaching in his pulpit, in Bristol, and referred to this occurrence. As I was going out a lady said: "One of those men was my uncle, and he was converted, and died a few weeks ago."

I have read of a most godly man who spent forty years in one church, and agonised in prayer for worldly people in his congregation, who resisted all his efforts to bring them to Christ. He not only prayed for them, and preached the Gospel to them, but lived before them in a remarkable way. A saintly man, moving up and down in the community with

the fragrance of God upon him. But he died without the sight; there was not a man of them all brought to Christ during his ministry. But when he died, and his body lay in the coffin, and the funeral service was being held, those men were brought to Christ in the presence of that dead body—a remarkable instance of God answering prayer in a wonderful way, after it was impossible for the suppliant soul to see on earth the triumphs of prayer.

Our sight is good for nothing. Sometimes it is too far sight, sometimes it is too near sight, but never accurate. Let God judge for you. Bring your cause and commit it to Him, leave it in His hand, go away from the throne of grace with absolute repose in the fidelity of a prayer-hearing God. Do not let unbelieving disciples, and that father of liars, the Devil, rob you of your confidence that God is true. Believe Him, trust Him, reckon upon Him, rest in Him; and if you do not see the answer, believe that He will show you the answer, though it may be after many days.

### III.

## Persistent Darkness

**P**ERSISTENT Darkness is one of the most malignant and desperate of spiritual diseases. An astronomical figure runs through the Word of God, which is very helpful in the understanding of this and kindred themes. For example, Psa. lxxxiv. 11 : "The Lord God is a *Sun*."

Three words are conspicuous in John's Gospel and his First Epistle—Life, Light, and Love. The sun represents in the physical sphere light, heat, life. God, as a Sun, in the spiritual sphere, likewise represents *life*, which is the sum of all being ; *light*, the sum of all intellectual excellence ; and *love*, the sum of all moral and spiritual excellence ; therefore, to abide in God, as a Sun, is to abide in life, and light, and love ; and to turn our back upon God, and to be without God, is to abide in darkness, death,



and hate. This explains the substance both of the Gospel and of the First Epistle of John. This figure of speech illustrates many points that I shall make.

On the whole, the most suggestive text in Scripture, on this subject of darkness, is Isa. L. 10, 11. There is nothing else just like it in the Word of God.

“Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God. Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of Mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow.”

Here are represented two classes of people, both in darkness. The first class fear Jehovah, and obey the voice of His servant, and yet they walk in darkness, so deep that they have *no light*. The other class walk in darkness, but neither fear Jehovah, nor obey the voice of His servant.

The former class are exhorted to trust in the name of Jehovah and to stay upon their God—the same terms used in the song of salvation in Isa. xxvi. 3, 4: “Thou wilt

keep him in perfect peace whose mind is *stayed* on Thee, because he *trusteth* in Thee." Then, in the next verse, we find the triplicate use of the name Jehovah, the only case, I believe, in the Bible: "Trust ye in Jehovah for ever: for in Jehovah, Jehovah is the Rock of Ages." The same words are used here again by Isaiah: "Let him trust in the name of Jehovah, and stay upon his God."

The other class are warned that, to attempt to relieve their darkness by their own philosophies and vain endeavours is simply to compass themselves about with the sparks of a fire that they have themselves kindled; and the ultimate event is that they lie down in sorrow, their darkness deepening into final and everlasting despair. You might as well try to make up for lack of sunlight by kindling a bonfire, which presently goes out, and leaves you in midnight darkness. Only the sun will serve the purpose of any soul that wants enlightenment.

It is very noticeable, in this same passage, that there is not one word of comfort for any *disobedient* soul. "Is there any among you that feareth Jehovah and obeyeth the voice of His servant"? He is bidden to trust and hold on to God, and wait for the light. But there is not one word in the

whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, to bring comfort to any who continue disobedient. Whether such disobedient soul is unregenerate, or regenerate, it makes little difference—there is no word of comfort for him. If darkness comes from disobedience, it will continue as long as disobedience continues. We may as well understand that. If there is anything for which “Keswick” has stood for more than thirty years, it is for the necessity of obedience in order to light, in order to blessing. Not one of the teachers on this platform has ever winked at disobedience in any form, or given any soul any hope or comfort while continuing in disobedience. And it is taught here consistently that obedience must be a studious obedience, an obedience that looks at little as well as at great commands, and renounces even doubtful things, since God must have the advantage of doubts, and not we ourselves, if we would walk in light.

The most terrible metaphor perhaps in the Holy Scriptures is the astronomical one in Jude 13: “Wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.” That is the more striking, because, when Jude wrote, certain astronomical facts were not known. It was not known, for

instance, what would be the effect if a star broke away from its centripetal force and gave way to the centrifugal. But we know now that such a star would dash off into space, going farther and farther from its original centre, and sweeping faster and faster into the depths and infinitudes of space. Such a wandering star would get into deeper and more absolute midnight, farther away from the source of both light and heat, until it became one great crystal of ice, plunging into the infinitudes of space in the darkness of a sunless and starless midnight. This is the Spirit's way of expressing the final result of persistent and wilful disobedience to God. There is absolutely no hope for any disobedient soul; and persistent disobedience means an increase of darkness, a loss of light, and love, and life for evermore.

Let us understand this, that, whether one is a child of God or not, disobedience is *deadly*, it tends unto death; to the decay of all spiritual affections, convictions, sensibilities, and choices. Whether you are a child of God or not, at once stop your disobedience, turn at once your back upon everything sinful or doubtful, if you want to walk in light.

Disobedience must extend not only to

things purely Divine, but to things human. Wherever God has ordained authority, that authority must be obeyed. Marital authority—the wife must submit herself to her husband as unto the Lord. Parental Authority—the child must obey his parents. Ecclesiastical Authority—in the Church there must be an obedience to the powers that are ordained of God. And so in the State; there must be submission to all constituted rulers. There can be no relief or release from darkness while there is disobedience. I have known a wife, after years of gloom, to come at once into light by a proper wifely submission to her husband. I have known a child to come out of years of darkness by going to a parent that had been disobeyed, confessing and forsaking a long course of disobedience, and coming under parental authority. God only knows how many are in darkness because they are rebelling against His order, whatever that may be, in things purely Divine, or in things human but subject to Divine ordinance and direction.

But, supposing there is the fear of Jehovah, and obedience to the voice of His servant; supposing there is obedience to all constituted authority, both in heaven and on earth — conscientious, studious, habitual

obedience, may there not still be darkness? This text concedes it.

Let us look at the remedy for such gloom.

First, *physical disease* may have something to do with spiritual darkness. The body, soul and spirit are so intimately connected that we cannot quite say where the influence of one or another begins and ends, because the influences of body and spirit are reciprocal. We are learning this more and more through increased, careful, microscopical examinations of the body in our day. There is such a thing as a holy care of the body, in cleanliness; in careful, abstemious, and prudent diet, neither eating what is injurious, nor more than is healthful. There is much sin, committed against God at our tables, and no wonder if clouds come over the spirit when the liver is pouring black bile into the stomach; and when the whole circulatory, respiratory and perspiratory system is, in a large degree, rendered morbid by habits of what, no doubt, God considers positive sin. For instance, in Asaph's 77th Psalm, we read about his running sore in the night, and his insomnia, and complaining against God, and vain attempt to get hold of God. In the middle of the Psalm he says: "This is my infirmity"; in other words, "I am a fool; God is not

at fault—it is myself.” We see, in Job’s great trial, how when his afflictions came upon him, he lost sight of God in a measure, and began to complain and murmur against Him partly as a result of his physical condition.

There may be also mental disease—melancholia is a form of virtual insanity, and often largely the fruit of mere wilfulness. The great majority of cases of insanity betray such abnormal self-will that nobody can say whether wilfulness does not tend to insanity. If, therefore, the will were thoroughly given up to God, surrendered, so far as self-indulgence is concerned and the determination to have one’s own way, many cases of insanity might become impossible, especially to the child of God. It is important that we should learn to get and keep a healthy physical and mental tone; and nothing will help it like absolute obedience to almighty God in things physical and spiritual.

Delusion may sometimes cause darkness, leaving one to the control of notions that are false to God’s truth. It is always possible for a believer to run into that snare. One of the chief arraignments of the Roman Catholic System is that it tends to becloud human souls with superstitious errors. It puts the priest between the soul and God in

baptism, preventing the child from being incorporated into the church, according to papal notions. It puts the priest between the child and the knowledge of God, in His Word, and makes him the interpreter of truth. It puts the priest between the child and the reception of the body of Christ, so-called, in the Mass. It puts the priest between forgiveness of sins and the soul in Confession ; between the soul and the Holy Spirit, in Confirmation ; between the believer and the right to preach and minister, in Ordination. And it carries this interposition even to the last hour, in Extreme Unction, putting the priest between the soul and heaven ; yes, even after death, in prayers for the dead, it puts the priest between the soul and actual entrance into eternal joys. No wonder that people of Roman Catholic communions are immersed in deep darkness. They are the subjects of the greatest delusion that this world has ever seen under the name of religion, when the Devil, with his masterpiece of strategy, insists upon the interposition of man between the human soul and Almighty God in every conceivable relation of life.

Legalism is often, in our Protestant churches, taught and preached ; so that awakened souls, instead of looking away



from their works to the accomplished and finished work of Jesus—and even believers, after they have found salvation in renouncing their own works—expect to find justification, sanctification, and acceptance with God, through something that they themselves have done. The consequence is that all such get into darkness, because they continue to “come to the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire; unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they had heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more. . . . And so terrible was the sight that” even “Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake.” How can a soul ever find peace, lingering under the brow of Sinai? Do you not know that Sion is the only place of security and serenity? And if you, having found your way to Calvary, go back to linger under the shadows of Sinai, you cannot blame God for your darkness. There is nothing but darkness to be expected there.

Again, people get the delusion that all suffering is a *judgment* from God. They know not how to make the distinction between hereditary evil, coming down from

generations before them, or punitive judgments, and the purely disciplinary and educative suffering, designed to develop faith, patience, and holiness. Many have no idea of these things, and when suffering overtakes them, they say they do not know what they have done that God should visit them with judgment. "Like as a father chasteneth his children, so the Lord chasteneth them that fear Him;" "Whom the Lord loveth He correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth," so that the absence of such correction is a sign of the bastard, and not the son, and, instead of such correction being a token of judgment, it is a token of love. If you interpret God's chastisements as judgments and curses, you must get into darkness.

A morbid habit of introspection will account for a vast amount of darkness in the children of God—for ever looking within instead of without, at themselves instead of at Christ. In only two instances in the New Testament are we taught to examine ourselves, and it is for a specific purpose, in both cases. There is no authority in the Word of God for this morbid habit of introspection which is at the bottom of nine-tenths of the cases of persistent darkness

that I have met in the course of my ministry. I have received a letter from a woman—I have had plenty from men as well, but the majority of such letters come from women. Woman is more religious in her nature than man, and for that very reason, if she becomes morbidly introspective she is apt to get into more desperate darkness than a man. This letter states that the writer has absolutely abandoned all hope that she is a child of God, or an heir of heaven. She thinks she has committed the unpardonable sin, while every line of her letter shows she has not. The tenderness of conscience, the anxiety to be the Lord's, the desire to undo the past of her life—such frames of mind are inconsistent with having committed the unpardonable sin. The conviction that one has committed such sin is almost an inevitable result of persistent self-scrutiny. There are two results, either of which may come from this subjective process: one is despair, because you see nothing good in yourself; the other is self-complacency, because you think you do see something good in yourself. In the first case you will reach hopelessness; in the other, what is even worse, self-gratulation.

While referring to this sin against the

Holy Ghost let it be added—for I have no doubt there are many who may read these words who are fearful lest they have committed that very sin—that it is specifically described in the New Testament, so that we may recognise it. It is not so much an *act* as a *state* in which an act becomes possible. Again, it implies such moral blindness and hardness as probably precludes the consciousness of having committed such a sin. Then, still further, it is possible to cultivate a morbid sensibility of conscience that makes you like a man that is flayed, with every nerve exposed to irritating influences. Excessive self-scrutiny simply strips off what was intended to protect you against abnormal sensitiveness, and then you wonder at the acute and agonising sensitiveness that makes you think you are everything you ought not to be, and have never known anything of God.

Dr. A. J. Gordon had a desperate case of this kind in his congregation. He went to see a woman on her dying bed, and began to console her. Regarding such cases, he said, "I never attempt to assure any man or woman who is in that state: I dare not, I leave that to God." As he tried to comfort this woman, she said: "It's no use; I know

that years ago I committed the unpardonable sin. But when I am gone, people will say: It's strange that God should send that woman to hell who has been living an upright, consistent life, and was known as one who gave away a great deal to the poor. Now," said she, "do not you ever allow God to be impugned, or anybody to insinuate that He is not a holy, just, pitiful, and loving God." In her unsparing condemnation of herself she was specially zealous to justify God.

An unrenewed disposition will also bring darkness. Let us recur to our astronomical figure. In science you may separate the light ray from the heat ray, so that while you obstruct the one you get the other. You cannot do that in the spiritual life. If you obstruct the ray of love, you lose the ray of light; and so John says in his First Epistle: "He that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth." So far as you discourage the love of God from possessing you and exercising itself through your life, you obstruct the light of God from bathing and illuminating you. Therefore, so long as an envious, uncharitable, impatient, resentful temper is exercised, or allowed within you, toward even your bitterest enemy, or vilest traducer, you shut

out the light of God in shutting out His love ; for so long and so far as you are a stranger to His love, you are a stranger to His light. It is most important to understand that, in order to have true peace, there must be renewed and sanctified temper. We must not indulge an unholy or unlovely disposition. Many of those who teach on the Keswick platform have known men or women to step out into a new life of peace and love, instantaneously, upon renouncing some long-cherished resentment.

Let us look a little further into the effect of an unholy disposition. By the microscopic examination of the blood we can tell whether malignant tempers have been influencing a patient. This is a wonderful discovery of the last few years. We can trace the influence of malignant temper and disposition upon the very structure of the human body ; it leaves its mark. Any indulgence of that which is wrong, in spirit, thus leaves its impress even upon the body. If this be so with regard to the physical, what must be the effect on the subtler spiritual nature ?

It was a favourite saying of Bancroft, the historian, who was a vigorous old man at ninety, that the secret of a long life is in

never losing one's temper. The remark was simply a concrete way of expressing the hygienic value of amiability—a principle which, until lately, has scarcely been considered in the training of children. Hitherto we have regarded fretfulness, melancholy, and bad temper as the natural concomitants of illness. But modern science shows that these mental moods have actual power to produce disease. No doubt in most cases imperfect bodily conditions are the cause of irritable and depressed feelings, yet sometimes the reverse is true, and a better knowledge of physiological laws would show them to be effect rather than cause. The fact that discontented and gloomy people are never in good health is an argument in favour of the theory that continual indulgence in unhappy thoughts acts as a poison and creates some form of disease.

Darkness may sometimes be due to *Divine discipline*. There can be little doubt that sometimes God allows for a time a pall of darkness to come on a human soul for a purpose, just as in the case of Job, or Jonah. John Wesley, beautiful Christian as he was, passed for hours into a "horror of darkness," at one time, and when he came out of it he began to sing:—

“ I the chief of sinners am,  
But Jesus died for me”

C. H. Spurgeon had his times of darkness, and, after one of them, he said: “ I am living on four words, and I am going to die on them—‘ Jesus died for me.’ ” And the late Bishop of Durham, it is said, in his declining days, had a period of despondency, and sought from his chaplain some words of comfort and consolation such as he had often ministered to others. God may permit such discipline for the strengthening of faith, and educating of patience, leading you to look to Him in supplication and trustful waiting, when there are less external signs of His favour and blessing.

Sometimes, darkness may be the effect even of a vision of God. A young woman said to me lately: “ After your address on having a vision of God, I got into darkness and distress. I have humbled myself, as you showed me I ought, but I cannot lift myself up.” “ No,” said I, “ let God lift you up; you are told to humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, and *He* will lift you up.” “ But am I to endure this distress of mind, and sorrow, and suffering, and humiliation until God pleases to raise me ? ” “ Yes, only be careful that you follow Scriptural direc-



tions. Look to Him, stay yourself upon Him, trust in Him ; do not ' kindle your own fire, nor compass yourself about with sparks.' God may have some purpose in allowing this delay before He gives you true uplift and exaltation."

I have no question that sometimes spiritual darkness is the result of *diabolical agency*, How solemn are Christ's words in Luke xxii. 53: "This is your hour and the power of darkness." How solemn is that record by John: "It was night"—night in more senses than one—the darkest of human history when the midnight of Gethsemane and Calvary enshrouded the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no question—some of us have known somewhat of it in our own life—that when you are trying to live nearest to God, a diabolical assault may encompass you for a time with the power of darkness. It is remarkable that, in that sixth chapter of Ephesians—one of the two Epistles in the New Testament that lift us to the highest Alpine summit of Christian privilege—there is a more solemn warning against the devil than in any other part of the Word of God. The fact is, whenever one is in the heavenlies he is sure to meet the Devil. As long as you are down in the earthlies, under the control of the flesh,

he will probably let you alone, because his subordinate agents are taking care of you already. But, when you rise above the power of the world and the flesh, look out! The general-in-chief will not allow you to escape his power without turning all his force against you. Do not be surprised if you have diabolical assaults at the very time when you have been lifted into the highest spiritual ecstasy. What are those "fiery darts" of Eph. vi. ? Of course, the reference is to the darts and arrows sent into the midst of the enemy, and especially his fleet, to set everything on fire that they touched. And what are "the fiery darts of the devil" but the blasphemous and obscene suggestions that he seeks to lodge in our minds. We do not know where they come from, and we abhor them when they find their way there. They are from the devil's bow. Always remember that you are not responsible for the presence of unholy suggestions, but only for the *cherishing* of them. You are not responsible for the foul birds that come to your window; but you are responsible whenever you allow Satan's fowls of the air to find a nest within you. You cannot prevent bad people from ringing your door bell, but you need not admit them into your house. Catherine of

Siena, in the Middle Ages, used to have remarkable dialogues with the Lord. After days of intense diabolical contest, when she came out of it, she said: "O Lord, how couldst Thou forsake me and leave me to the devil's power?" "But I did not forsake thee, Catherine." "How could I have had all these vile thoughts?" "But, Catherine, did you welcome those thoughts?" "Thou knowest that I abhorred them, and cast them from my soul as vile." "That was because I was with thee in that awful conflict. Hence those suggestions of the devil were infinitely abhorrent to thy nature." So you are not responsible for diabolical suggestions, but only for the degree to which they find welcome in your soul.

Let me now add some suggestions as to how relief may be found, in addition to those already made incidentally.

In the first place, turn to the truth that Almighty God has revealed in *Holy Scripture*. Do not go to human books; go to the Divine Book. Immerse yourself in the Holy Scriptures. Let the light of God correct your errors, superstitions, delusions, and false notions. Sir Edward Peary in his Polar explorations thought he was going ten miles a day on his sledges toward the North

Pole ; but he discovered that the icefloe on which he was sledging was itself distinctly moving twelve miles southward every day ; so that he was actually going two miles backward instead of ten miles forward ; and he found out that fact by *looking at the sky*. When Livingstone, in the heart of Africa, was persuaded that his guides were either ignorant of the direction in which they were going, or else deceiving him, he studied his compass, and found out his latitude and longitude without their help. It is a great thing to keep your eye upward ; to cease to look at human standards, traditions and modes of doing things, seeking human help, and compassing yourself about with sparks ; and keep your eyes fixed on the stars ; for, somehow or other, nothing under the stars goes exactly right. The best watch sometimes is fast or slow. Nothing under heaven is accurate. But, blessed be God, the celestial clock has not varied one thousandth part of a second for the last thousand years. The sun and north star always appear where they ought to be. If you get celestial signs by which to guide yourselves, you will come out of many errors, due to human teaching and perverse traditions, which make the Word of God of none effect. Seek com-

fort first of all, in the Word of God, and the Spirit of God and the place of secret prayer. "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

A great physician in America had an interview with a patient who was subject to peculiar nervous prostration. He said; "Madam, I want you to go home and devoutly study your Bible an hour a day;" and he bowed her out without further ceremony. She said to herself: "After all, this prescription does not cost me anything. Suppose I try it." She went home, and held communion with God for an hour a day, and at the end of a month she was entirely cured. Then she went back to her doctor, and said: "I was angry with you, doctor." "Yes," he remarked, "I supposed you would be;" and taking down his own Bible from the shelf, he said: "Do you see this? I read it before every operation, and go to work in the light of God's Word. I read it before visiting my patients, and it is the only thing that keeps me, in the strain of my profession, from darkness and despair. I knew that you needed it, and that it was the only remedy that would meet your case."

In conclusion, remember the text we started with: "Trust in the name of the

Lord, and stay yourself upon your God." Remember Hudson Taylor's words: "The devil may fence us round, but he cannot roof us in, he cannot prevent us looking up." Those are beautiful words in Psalm xxxiv. 5 (R.V.): "They looked unto Him and were *radiant*." Notice again the astronomical figure. You set your face to the sun, and the sun lights up and illumines your features; and you look unto God as your Sun, and you become radiant. Leave yourself in God's hand. Never seek any consolation that is not found in God, for if you find any other you are the worse for it—it is false consolation. Triumph in God, notwithstanding your darkness. I have spoken of the great stratagem of the devil in turning our minds introspectively upon our own spiritual state to involve us in despair. Thousands of people, true believers, in the Christian Church, are in the snare of the devil's darkness. He robs them of their testimony by discouraging their hearts, and stops them in holy service to other souls by persuading them that they are probably without ground of hope themselves. If there are any master tricks of the devil, they are found, first, in preventing people from coming to Christ at all; and, if he cannot do that, in making them of

no use practically after they have come. I feel like saying to every child of God: Forget your darkness, and go to work for somebody else. Look at those words in Isa. lviii.: "If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday; and the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones; and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not." Our Lord Jesus Christ said: "He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." What is it to follow Christ? Not simply to obey Him, but to do as He did. How did He do? Was there ever seen on earth a life of such self-abnegation as His? It could not be said of Him: "He saved Himself; others He cannot save." His great thought was to save others. When you forget your own salvation in absorption in the salvation of others, it is not unlikely that you will pass out of your darkness into the light of life.

A young man in college had fallen into this snare of the devil. A time of revival came, and the chaplain wanted him to go and visit other students, "I cannot do it; I have no

hope for myself!" "How did you get into that condition?" "By grieving and neglecting the Spirit." "But you do not want other students to do that?" "No!" Then supposing you go and warn them *not to grieve the Spirit?*" He went, first of all to a profligate in the college, and said: "Why do not you turn to Christ?" "There is no hope for me" was the reply. "Look at the life I've been living, I've been such an awful sinner!" "Well, but Christ is perfectly able to save the chief of sinners. Do not you see it? *I see it myself!*" And out of his own darkness he came. Forget yourself, try to make some poor sinner see that there is no unpardonable sin, except sin unrepented of and as you try to guide poor sinning souls to Calvary, you will find that Calvary's blood is sufficient for you.

My last word is an exhortation, that you should triumph in God, and thus defeat the devil. The question is whether he or God shall have the victory. Be determined that he shall not triumph, but that God shall. Forget your feelings, your states, your past life of sin, forget everything except that Christ came into this world to seek and save that which was lost. Then triumph in God in the darkness, and despite



the darkness, defying even the darkness itself, because "the true light shineth." Get out into the light by ignoring the darkness. Obey God, cherish a holy disposition, look after the health of your body and soul, take the Word of God as your guide, take the Spirit of God as your controlling power. Then, encompassed in the armour of God, defy Satan to do his worst. Stand aside, let Christ and Satan fight out your battle. You are quite incompetent to conquer. But there is the Overcomer and in that Overcomer you yourself may overcome.

#### IV.

## Habitual Unbelief.

**W**E have designedly left to the last the sin, folly, and crime of unbelief, partly because this great sin lies at the basis of every other, partly because it is the one sin that damns the soul, and partly because its removal means the relief of all other forms of spiritual difficulty.

If there were no unbelief, there would be no unsubdued sin, no unanswered prayer, and no persistent darkness. And yet the majority of people rank unbelief among the venial rather than the mortal sins; they apologise for it as at least a very trifling form of offence against God, and some even think of it as in some sense rather attractive because it implies humility of soul, the sense of one's own unworthiness. Many cannot claim God's promises because of such self-abasement. One of the master snares of the devil is to

inspire a mock humility in the place of a true humility. For while it is presumption to believe when God has not spoken, or to hope when He has not given us ground for hope, it is equally presumption not to believe when He has spoken, and not to hope when He gives a promise.

First of all the key-text of this whole subject is Heb. iii. 12, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." The word *unbelief* carries quite a different sense from *disbelief*. Disbelief is properly a denial of truth; belief is the acceptance of truth; unbelief is the failure to lay hold upon truth. One who does not at all disbelieve, may be in everything unbelieving. I am quite aware that the word *disbelieve* is not found in either Testament, and that the word *unbelief* as translated is often, in the Original, the equivalent of *disbelief*. But in the majority of cases *unbelief* does not carry the idea of *denial of truth*, and in at least one passage the distinction is manifestly drawn—1 Tim. v. 8—where the Apostle says of a certain offender against God that "he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel," which is not a clear translation, for the first word is emphatic, and the second is

a weaker word. It might be translated, "hath denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever," that is, he is a disbeliever, and has practically said, "It is not so." He has affirmed the thing not to be true; therefore he is worse than one that does not deny that it is true, but fails to make it available to himself. A very important distinction. Three different men may have one offer of blessing. One does not believe there is anything in it, that there is any real blessing offered. He is a disbeliever. Another believes that there is a blessing offered, but does not accept it for himself. He is an unbeliever. The third believes that there is a blessing offered, and he is bound to have it. That is a believer. You are to judge which you are.

There are two very strongly contrasted facts. The first is, as has been intimated that man makes so little of the sin and crime of unbelief; and the second is, that God makes so much of it. It is one instance of the striking difference between God's judgment and man's judgment of things. The only way to show this is to examine the main passages of Scripture in which *unbelief* is brought to our attention, consecutively, from Genesis to Revelation. Turn, first of all, to Exodus xvii. The people have come out of Egypt and have

arrived at the wilderness of *Sin*—a typical place for an exhibition of the crime of unbelief—and they pitch in Rephidim. There is no water to drink, and now the people chide with Moses, and complain and murmur against the Lord, and even find fault with having been brought out of Egypt to die in the wilderness with thirst. You remember how the Lord interposes to supply them with water from the smitten rock. Here is the remarkable verse, the 7th—the key to all that follows in the Bible—“And he called the name of the place Massah,” which means *temptation*, “and Meribah,” which means *provocation* or, better still, *exasperation*, “because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the Lord.” Notice, what was the temptation? The temptation was that God should forsake His people. What was the provocation? It was that God should destroy His people. Keep these two thoughts before you: the unbelief tempted God, on the one side, entirely to withdraw from His people, and, on the other side, finally to destroy them. What a terrific sin and crime unbelief must be when it tempts God and provokes God to such an extreme as that!

Notice, also, for it is most important: In what did this particular crime of unbelief,

on this occasion, consist? They provoked and tempted the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us, or not?" That was as much as saying, "Is the Lord dead, or is He living? He has promised to go with us from Egypt to Canaan; is He true to His word? or is He a liar? is He an immutable God? or is He a changeable God?" At one time, when a great anti-slavery orator in America, in the crisis of affairs, was finding fault with God for allowing slavery to be continued in America so long, a poor old coloured slave rose in the meeting and said, "Mr. Douglas, answer me this question: Do you think that God is dead?" A singular rebuke from a poor, ignorant coloured woman. She was enduring slavery with the confidence that God was not dead and that a time of retribution and deliverance would come. And here the children of Israel, just brought out of Egypt, with a strong hand and mighty arm, with tremendous judgments on the Egyptians, and deliverances for themselves, no more than got to Rephidim than they said, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

Notice, also, the provocation? This was a want of water; and two of the greatest miracles already performed on their behalf had been miracles with water. When they

went over the Red Sea, God piled up the waters as a wall, and then He let down the wall on the pursuing Egyptians. And when His people came to Marah, where the water was bitter and they could not drink, He showed them a tree which, being dipped in the waters, turned them to sweet, refreshing draughts. Yet they forgot all about His deliverances. When they come to the third trouble about water, all the memory of the previous dealings of God was cast into oblivion and they said, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

Turn now to Num. xiv. There we are just at the crisis of affairs. The people have come to Kadesh-Barnea, so far on the borders of the land of promise that to this day we are not quite sure whether it was not inside the limits of the land. God had brought them out to bring them in. They were not at the starting-point now; they were rather at the goal; and, if they had been believing, they might have entered at once into possession of that land, and saved themselves the other thirty-nine years of journey in the wilderness, and leaving their own carcasses by the wilderness way. They sent spies into the land, and the spies all came back and told the same story, that it was an attractive land flowing

with milk and honey, where the giant Anakim dwelt, with their walled cities and chariots of iron. It is sometimes said that ten spies brought a false report, and two spies a true report. That is a mistake. They all brought the same report, so far as the land was concerned ; but that in which Caleb and Joshua differed from the other spies was this : they besought the people in faith to go up and possess the land, to take sides with God and defy those foes ; and the other ten admitted the fertility of the land, but advised them not to attempt to cope with the giants. And because Caleb and Joshua had not only set an example of belief in God, but urged all others to believe, the people were going to stone them to death and would have done so, but for the Voice that spoke out of the Pillar of Cloud. Look at what unbelief can do. Not only did it prompt the people to rebel against God, and refuse His promised possession, and halt on the very borders of the land, to which He had brought them with such wonderful interposition ; but it made them ready to stone those that urged them to the career and conduct of faith. A most marvellous exhibition !

Now see what God says : " Because all those men which have seen My glory, and My miracles which I did in Egypt and in the



wilderness, have tempted Me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to My voice; surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked Me see it; but My servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed Me fully, him will I bring into the land, whereunto he went."

Not only did his seed possess the land, but the inheritance of Caleb was the very stronghold of the Anakim; and when he was past eighty years of age, he still retained his original and pristine youthful vigour to drive out those Anakim and take possession of their fortress. Most remarkable! But every other man that came out of Egypt, of an age bearing arms, but these two, fell in the wilderness, so that the entire wilderness way was lined with a double row of graves, from Sinai to the Jordan. If you will calculate the number of deaths in the wilderness, you will see that they would be sufficient to line that way on both sides with corpses; and all because of the sin and folly, insult and outrage of unbelief. The "ten times" is not simply a chance number used by way of completeness. This is the tenth occasion on which the people had tempted and provoked God—at the Red Sea in fear of the foe; at Marah

as to the bitter water ; in the wilderness of Sin as to food ; in the gathering of manna on the Sabbath—which they were forbidden to do—because they did not believe in the providence of God ; at Rephidim in their complaint of the lack of water ; at Sinai in setting up a calf as a kind of visible object of worship ; in the cursing by the son of Shelomith, recorded in Lev. xxiv. ; in their lusting for flesh at Kibroth-hattaavah (the grave of lust) ; in the report of Aaron and Miriam against Moses ; and in the panic at Kadesh-Barnea.

Turn now to Isa. vii. 9. It is only a sentence, but it belongs to the history of this tremendous crime of unbelief. Isaiah is bidden to say to Ahaz, on behalf of God, “ If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.” One hundred and thirty years after this, Jehosophat said this to Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem at a crisis of peril ; only that he used the positive form instead of the negative. He said, “ Believe, and ye shall be established ” ; Isaiah had said, “ If ye will *not* believe, surely ye shall *not* be established.” Whenever God sets a particular text in the Bible in a peculiar and unique form of rhythm or rhyme, or a play upon words, or something of that kind, He

means that it shall stand out conspicuous. This verse is not translatable from the Hebrew; it has a rhythm and a rhyme about it that cannot be easily reproduced. I have tried to reproduce it, but with very little success, in this little couplet:

“ If in God ye do not confide,  
Surely in power ye shall not abide.”

That comes near to it. Or

“ Surely, if ye will not believe  
Neither blessing shall ye receive.”

There is something very striking in the Hebrew of this passage that shows God means it shall stand out in this prophecy of Isaiah as a permanent lesson to His Church, that an unbelieving soul forfeits blessing, and makes confirmation in holiness, and a further knowledge and enjoyment of God's presence, impossible.

Let us go back to Psa. lxxviii. This psalm is called Asaph's parable; that is to say it treats the entire history, from Egypt to Canaan, as a parable designed to teach a great lesson. The whole of that career is reviewed, and the main emphasis of this entire psalm is on this temptation, this provocation, this forgetfulness of God, this not believing God, this not remembering God,

which constitute such atrocious treatment of Him. You will find, for instance, four times in this psalm, "They provoked the Most High"; three times, "They tempted Him"; once, "They grieved Him"; and over and over again such expressions occur as these: "They believed not God," "They trusted not in His salvation," "They tempted and provoked the Most High God," "They provoked Him to anger with their high places, and moved Him to jealousy with their graven images." Read the psalm, and interpret in the light of this parable the whole story that occupies Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—four books of the Old Testament given to this amazing exhibition of persistent and habitual unbelief toward God, until, under Joshua, they entered into the land of promise, still to repeat their crime and sin of unbelief, until they were finally rejected. Notice in the heart of the psalm that most significant expression (v. 44) "*Yea, they turned back, and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel.*" You say "There can be no limitation of Omnipotence." Surely there can be. There are two spheres of power—one the physical, and the other the moral. In the physical sphere nothing is needed but energy. But in the moral

sphere everything depends upon co-operation. God can do anything in the physical sphere that lies within the bounds of physical power, because He has omnipotent energy. But God, in the moral sphere, can do nothing that is not consistent with the co-operation of His moral subjects.\* We must look at this; it is most important. If I go along the street and see a man lying in the gutter, dead drunk, I can by purely physical energy lift him up and carry him home. But I cannot, by physical energy, make that drunkard a sober man, a total abstainer. There has to come in moral suasion and persuasion, the influence of moral force; there must be co-operation. And so Fenelon used to say—and it is a philosophic saying—“In matters of morals, force is a mistake. Force can never persuade. The only thing that force can do is to compel, and that makes hypocrites.” It is a remarkable saying, and I pray you, remember it. In the moral sphere of power there must always be co-operation: God scorns to treat human beings as machines. He never made an intelligent being that had not power to sin if he chose; otherwise obedience would

\* A coloured preacher thus explained election: “Breddren, de Lord, He vote fur ye, and de Debbil, he vote agin ye, and when you vote wid de Lord, dat's election.”

be mechanical, artificial, compulsory. The very fact that sin has entered the universe, in the angelic and human realms, shows that both angels and men were made in the image of God, with the capacity for independent moral action. It is a tremendous thought that even God Himself cannot control my moral frame, or constrain my moral choice. He cannot prevent me from defying Him and denying Him. He would not exercise His power in such directions, if He could, and He could not if He would. Is it not an awful fact that there are some matters in which we may limit God? and in so far as we limit Him, we limit ourselves. "Jesus could do no mighty works in Nazareth," where He was brought up, "because of their unbelief." Until you can get out of your way the mountain of unbelief in your own soul, you cannot remove the mountain of unbelief in others who reject your Master. You have got to get the unbelief out of your own soul first, and then you can do mighty works for God.

Turn to Luke i. Here is recorded one of the most striking cases of unbelief in the whole New Testament. It belongs in the historic line of thought and study on unbelief. Zacharias was a remarkable man—one of the

few of whom it is written that he was "righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." He is wearing the very robes of a priest; he is before the altar of incense, which stood for prayer and supplication, and acceptable offering and worship. Right there in the administration of the duties of his course, in the peculiar and consecrated garments of his priestly officé, while engaged in the solemn service of the offering up of incense, God sends to him His own glorious angel, not only to tell him that his prayer is heard, and that Elizabeth shall bear a son, but to make unmistakable His message by giving him in the three verses that follow, an outline of the entire career of John the Baptist. And yet, Zacharias, the priest, the praying man, in the office of his course, notwithstanding his righteousness and blamelessness before God, has the arrogance and impudence to ask, "Whereby shall I *know this?*" as if there were needed any confirmatory sign of God's emphatic promise when announced to him under these circumstances. Then there came upon him a typical judgment. He was, no doubt, from that moment a deaf-mute—not only speechless, but deaf, for you will observe, in the next chapter,

how they did not speak to him, but communicated with him through a writing-tablet; which shows that he was a deaf-mute, stone deaf and absolutely unable to speak even in a whisper. What does that suggest? That unbelief shuts your ear to God, and shuts your mouth to men. The prevalence of unbelief on your part may make you deaf to further communication from God, and absolutely worthless in your testimony to men—a paralysis of your hearing, and a paralysis of your tongue. There are scores of disciples to-day who cannot hear plainly what God speaks, because of a habitual unbelief, and their testimony also has been wrecked. They have nothing to say; they cannot witness, "God has done this for me," because they have not put Him to the test; they have no testimony for their sorrowing and distressed fellow human beings, because of their own position of unbelief before God.

Turn to Heb. iii. 7—iv. 11. This whole section of this Epistle is a New Testament review, a parable of that same desert journey treated in Psa. lxxviii. Never study that story in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, without putting over alongside of it this remarkable passage in Hebrews. God has given us here an inspired explana-



tion, interpretation, and application of the whole story of the Israelites in the desert. Here again we meet these two awful words referred to already in Exodus xvii., *temptation* and *provocation*, over and over again. "Some, when they had heard, did provoke"; "Take heed, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God"; "To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation." Study the whole passage, and see how we are taught here, that all those men who left their carcasses in the wilderness fell simply through unbelief; and you may leave your carcasses in the wilderness if you do not give up the crime and sin of your unbelief. It does not say that you will be finally lost. You may get into heaven as by a back door; but your *present rest in this life*, for which, I believe, Canaan stands—spiritual liberty and fertility, constant communion with God, abiding in His presence, victory over the enemy—all these things, together with "the peace of God that passeth all understanding," you may permanently forfeit, so far as your present life is concerned, simply by the crime of unbelief.

Turn to Heb. vi. 6: "Seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and

put Him to an open shame." Compare Heb. x. 29: "Who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith He was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace." Both of these passages are essentially an arraignment of unbelief, in that highest form of crime of which unbelief is capable. This demands most careful attention, lest we fail to realize the awful criminality of unbelief.

There are three things that unbelief makes void. First, it makes void the Word of God. It were as well that God had not spoken to you and emphasised His promises by such universal terms and such repetitious forms of statement, if you do not believe His promises and take and appropriate them as the basis of your faith and life. This is just as plain as it can be. Of what use are all the thousands of years of preparation of this Bible, if God's Word does not become to you personally the basis of your whole trust and conduct!

Then unbelief also makes void the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. God gave His only Son a sacrifice for the world, He gave all He had, He gave at infinite cost, for an infinite ransom was paid. If you reject Jesus Christ,

or fail to make Him your Saviour, it is for you as though God had not given Christ, and Christ had not died. This stupendous sacrifice on the part of God you are virtually flinging away as nothing. We can never appreciate the tremendous guilt of unbelief if we do not see that thus it crucifies the Son of God afresh. That is to say, it is as though you crucified Him for nothing, and put Him to an open shame without any reward for His sufferings; and, instead of sprinkling the blood on each side of the door-post, and above the head, as your protection, you are pouring it out on the threshold and trampling it under foot; instead of taking shelter under it, you are treating it with contempt. What an arraignment of unbelief.

More than this, you are doing despite to the Spirit of grace. There was a probation of *law*. God said to Adam, "This do and thou shalt live." But Adam failed in his probation of law, and the chance of such probation for ever passed away from the human race. There can never be a second probation of law, for law must always regard you as a transgressor. God therefore gave a new probation of *grace*. He put His Son before you on the Cross and said, "You have only to believe in Him, and your sins shall not be mentioned to you."

And so He pretermits your offences. Rom. III. 25 (marg.). What is pretermission? It is more than remission. Pretermission is *passing by*, through Divine forbearance. You sin. God passes your sin by. You sin again, and in ten thousand forms. He passes them all by, He puts them behind His back, for the time, to see how you are going to deal with His Son. This is your probation of grace. If you accept His Son, He never returns to those sins; they are swallowed up in oblivion by virtue of the atoning blood. But, if you reject His Son, He is compelled, as governmental Judge, to take up everyone of those sins that He has pretermitted for the time being, and deal with them in legal justice, giving every transgression its just recompense of reward; and ending up by dealing with you for that greatest of sins, the rejection of Christ, with the offer of pardon—the rejection of the Atonement.

And so, unbelief not only crucifies the Son of God afresh, and puts Him to an open shame, trampling under foot the blood that should have been put on the door-posts on each side, and over head; but it makes the dispensation of grace by the Holy Ghost absolutely void, nay, worse than void; for the grace that, instead of saying, "This do

and thou shalt live," says, "This *believe*, and thou shalt live," goes for nothing, and worse than nothing, only adding to the condemnation of the transgressor. It needs the tongue of an angel to do justice to this theme. But it is an awful fact that men consider unbelief a trifling sin against God, while it is the one damning sin, the one sin that, if persisted in, has no forgiveness, because it forfeits forgiveness and rejects the Atonement.

We are now prepared to understand why, in Rev. xxi. 8, we find, in that fearful catalogue of sin and crime against God, unbelief put alongside of the most flagrant iniquity: "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." Observe, and do not forget it!—the same condemnation that awaits the abominable—the murderers, the whoremongers, the sorcerers, the idolaters, is reserved also for the *unbelieving*. Do not ever think of unbelief as a trivial sin when God puts it in such an awful category of crime.

Let us review this terrible indictment

and argument. Unbelief limits the power of God, and limits the power of man; unbelief paralyses testimony, and makes us deaf to the voice of God; unbelief is a permanent forfeiture of blessing, as when Esau bartered his birthright for a mess of pottage, and could not get back what he had sold, at any price whatever. You may lose your life's opportunities and privileges, and even God cannot give them back; for He cannot restore the lost hour, the wasted year, the mis-spent life. What unbelief has forfeited, no power can give back. He may restore the years that the palmer-worm, the locust, the canker-worm, and the caterpillar have destroyed, by an extra-abundant harvest to the famished land; but He can never give such compensating abundance to the famished life of an unbelieving soul. If you have lost your time of sowing, you cannot make up for it in your time of reaping; if you have lost your chance of confiding and trusting, you cannot make up for it in the repentance of a dying bed. God gives life, with all its capacities, talents, opportunities, and privileges, for service. If it is invested for self, it can never be got back to invest for God; if it is lost through unbelief, it can never be got back by a final act of faith.

The question is, What are you going to do with your life? Unbelief virtually makes void the Word of God, the Sacrifice of Christ, and the dispensation and work of the Holy Ghost; and therefore unbelief is represented in the Bible, as the one and only thing that exasperates God. That is not too strong a word with which to translate the original. *Exasperation* means *to rub into roughness*. The original is a remarkable word, which can hardly be translated by any other term. The idea is that the very grace of God is perverted into opposition and roughness by an unbelieving soul; that even infinite forbearance has a limit, and this limit is reached in unbelief. God is not so much exasperated by the transgression of every command of the Decalogue, as He is by the one form of sin found in the rejection of His promises in the Word, of His sacrifice in His Son, and of His pleading and tenderness in His Spirit.

There is but one thing to do with unbelief, for ever abandon it! Whatever else you do, solemnly covenant with God that you will believe His Word, trust His Son, yield to His Spirit; that you will step out upon His promises, and dare to venture something for His sake, without regard to feeling; and with

single-hearted resting upon His immutable Word. The French translation of Hebrews x. 23, is —“ *He who hath made a promise can keep His promise.*” To do that is faith! Do not look at surroundings, do not ask for signs or wait for further evidence, but walk right out on the Divine promise— trust it absolutely, for the subduing of sin, for the answering of prayer, for the dispersion of darkness; and the triumph of faith will also be the victory over sin, the triumph of prayer, the emergence of the soul out of darkness into the conscious light of God!