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**PULPIT MINISTRATIONS;
OR,
SABBATH READINGS.**

**A SERIES OF
DISCOURSES ON CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE AND DUTY.**

**BY
GARDINER SPRING,
PASTOR OF THE BRICK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK.**

**IN TWO VOLUMES.
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and
Miss Lucy A. Paton,
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TO

THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN, AND THOSE WHO ARE,
AND THOSE WHO HEREAFTER MAY BE CONNECTED WITH
HIS PASTORAL CHARGE,

THESE VOLUMES

Are Affectionately and Respectfully Dedicated

BY

THE AUTHOR.

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S E R M O N S.

SERMON I.

GOD GLORIFIED.

JOHN, xii., 28.—“*Father, glorify thy name !*”

WHEN that great company of the heavenly hosts proclaimed the birth of the infant Savior, their song was, *first*, “Glory to God in the highest,” and then, “Peace on earth, and good-will to men!” Such is the order of Nature, and such the arrangement of the divine mind.

There is nothing of which God is so jealous, nothing he regards so deeply as his own glory. This he is immutably resolved to secure and advance, and by all means to make all men see.

When our adorable and ever-blessed Lord uttered the words of the text, it was with him the season of deepest solicitude and anguish. The fearful scenes which awaited him were just at hand. The hour is come in which he is to be consecrated the victim of the divine anger for the sins of men; in which he must humble himself to the death of the cross; in which he must be

abandoned of heaven to the wrath of men and the rage of fiends; in which he must bow in agony his guiltless head, and drink the bitterest cup ever put to created lips. It is not wonderful that his holy soul should be overwhelmed. Anticipating every pang, and foreseeing every incident that could add poignancy to his anguish, he seems for a moment to pause and hesitate in his sad career. He is embarrassed and trembles. His language is, "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. But for this cause came I to this hour. Father, GLORIFY THY NAME!" It is an affecting thought that he must drink the bitter cup; but it is a thought still more excruciating that his Father should be dishonored. Often had he made the avowal, "I seek not mine own glory; I honor my Father." And now, when the dire alternative is that he himself should suffer and die or his Father's glory be obscured, his heart is prompt; he wavers no longer; his decision is formed.

The occasion on which we have assembled is a solemn and affecting occasion, and suggests to us solemn and affecting truths. "Father, glorify thy name!" What are we to understand by this request, and why did the Savior thus utter it? These two thoughts present the method of our discourse.

I. In the first place, WHAT ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND BY THE SAVIOR'S REQUEST?

The word *glory*, when applied to God, sometimes denotes the perfection of the divine nature, and sometimes the manifestation of that nature to the creatures he has made. There is an obvious distinction between the intrinsic and the manifested excellence of the Deity. By his intrinsic excellence is meant his essential perfections; by his manifested excellence is meant his essential perfections exhibited. There is an uncreated fullness, an eternal richness in his nature which constitutes his essential glory; and there is a resplendency and brilliant diffusion of his perfections which cast their light through all worlds and constitute his manifested glory. To *glorify* God is to advance his glory, or make him glorious. Yet his intrinsic or essential glory can not be advanced; it does not admit of increase or diminution. He can not possess more essential glory than he does, and can not be made essentially more glorious than he is. When the Savior speaks of his Father's being glorified, he speaks therefore of the augmentation of his manifested excellence. This is capable of continual growth and enlargement, and is actually receiving fresh accessions. It is continually growing more extended and more refulgent, and is susceptible of augmentation that is perpetually pro-

gressive. Notwithstanding all that has been accomplished toward the complete fulfillment of the divine purposes, there will be new exhibitions of the Deity; brighter illustrations both of his greatness and goodness; clearer developments of the reasons and motives of his vast and complex administration; so that in the progress to this consummation, and in its progressive issues, he shall be more and more glorified. In the same measure in which these varied scenes open and are presented to admiring inspection, will his true and wondrous character be unfolded; and as the drama draws to a close, and the catastrophe develops, at every step of this progressive movement will the intrinsic excellence of the divine nature be made known. His intelligence and his love, his heart and his hand, his supremacy and condescension, his equity and his sovereignty, his justice and his mercy, will shine out in their bright coloring and their increasing beauty and glory. At the time the Savior uttered this request, his Father's name had been glorified; the history of the world, and especially the history of the Church, had been resplendent with that glory. It has been glorified since by the marvelous dispensations of his providence and grace, and it will be more glorified hereafter; so that in time and eternity, in heaven, on the earth, and even in hell, the exclamation will be extorted from every bosom, "Behold, what hath God wrought!"

Something like this, if we mistake not, is the import of the request, "Father, glorify thy name." But the inquiry to which we crave particular attention, and which constitutes,

II. The second head of our discourse, is, WHY DID THE SAVIOR THUS UTTER THIS REQUEST?

It was expressed with great fervor and earnestness; it was uttered at a time, and place, and under circumstances, and with a self-sacrificing urgency, that gave it paramount importance. What were the views and what the emotions that filled his holy soul, and that thus constrained him to give his Father's glory this unrivaled pre-eminence? Here we remark,

1. In the first instance, that, *as the Son of God, and intrusted with this sacred deposit, he was jealous for his Father's honor.* He alone was fully acquainted with God, and formed a just estimate of his character and claims, and therefore he was deeply concerned for his honor and glory. He treated him, and he would have others treat him, in a way most accordant with his infinite excellence. The Prophet Elijah once said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts." The spirit of piety in heaven and on earth is in nothing more distinguished than for its sympathy with this godly jealousy. The Savior's attachment to his Father, so pure, so supreme, so constant, *must* have constrained him to desire,

above all things, that his character should be unimpeachable and without a stain. He had undertaken to become its Guardian and Vindicator in a world that lieth in wickedness. Jew and Gentile, learned and unlearned, schools of philosophy and schools of religion, had reproached his Father's character, slandered his designs, defamed his law, and revolted against his empire; and there was emphasis in the inquiry, What will become of thy great name? The Savior knew that the only effective way of honoring it was to illustrate and act out its glories. The concentrated and hidden rays must be diffused, and the living features be seen as they are. The more fully they are unveiled, and the more impressively they strike the minds of men, the deeper is the conviction of their reality and loveliness. No matter how long or how impenetrably intrinsic *turpitude* of character lies concealed; but who does not feel it an unhappiness when even mere human excellence is hidden from the public eye? When virtue languishes in solitude, and genius withers in retirement—when the heavy hand of external discouragement or internal depression checks the efforts of intellectual and moral greatness, what benevolent mind does not feel the sentiment of regret? And if in proportion to the degree of excellence is the importance that it be unfolded, beyond conception is it important.

that the excellence of the Infinite and Eternal God should appear in its own appropriate glory. This is one reason why the Eternal Son became flesh and dwelt among us. It was to show that God in Christ is the "First Fair and the First Good ; that his holiness is without a stain ; his justice neither cruel nor unjust ; his wisdom, power, and goodness such and so condescending that the world must acknowledge them ; and that in the manifestations of his grace and mercy he might "make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which, from the beginning of the world, hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ, to the intent that now unto principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known through the Church the manifold wisdom of God." There were other interests he would secure, but by all others and above all others he would have God exalted. Nothing must mar his unblemished excellence, nothing tarnish, or even circumscribe, or limit his infinite beauty and glory. No matter at what sacrifice, his Father must be glorified. Better that a thousand worlds perish, than that one should be redeemed at the expense of his Father's honor. The Son himself was about to die on the cross to save it from reproach. Not only would he have every complaint silenced, every mouth stopped, and every suspicion of wrong eradicated ;

but all that God is, and all that he does, so come to the light that it shall be approved and applauded by ten thousand tongues, and ten thousand times ten thousand consciences, and that their approbation and their plaudits shall be eternal.

2. A second motive for this request was, that the manifestation of his Father's glory is *essential to the interests of holiness in the universe*. It is no selfishness in the Deity to desire that his character should be made known. He asks nothing from creatures: they can not make him better or happier than he is. It is that he may do them good that he would unfold his great glory before their eyes. Infinite intelligence and infinite love can not propose a more wise or more benevolent end than to act upon the minds of creatures by the most affecting and effective manifestations of his own eternal, infinite, unchangeable, and varied excellence.

This manifestation was committed to the hands of his own, his only, his well-beloved Son. His great work as the Redeemer rests upon the dark background of man's universal and deep apostasy, and was designed to bring light out of darkness, good out of evil, and cause the wrath of man to praise the Lord. If we look to the Scriptures, we see the character of man portrayed in coloring sufficiently dark. Though created in the

image of God, "all flesh has corrupted its way upon the earth." They are "all gone aside; they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." Both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin. "The heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil," and they are "by nature the children of wrath," having "no hope, and without God in the world." In all the forms of enmity to God—of disobedience to his law—of forgetfulness and contempt of him, and his Word, and institutions—of works of darkness, ingratitude, and cruelty—of ignorance, blindness, and delusion—of deceit and hypocrisy—of pride, oppression, and war, the normal relations between man and man, and man and his Maker, have not only been disturbed, but violently ruptured, and the harmony of intelligent beings broken up by anarchy and confusion. The moral order of the universe has become subverted, and the sacred chain of love to God and love to man no longer binds it in one.

The Son of God was touched with a sense of this degrading wickedness, and saw at a glance how abundantly his Father would be glorified by transforming this bleak and frightful wilderness into a scene of moral beauty and luxuriant holiness. The proximate object he aimed at was to renew and reform sinful man; but there was a higher principle that governed him, and it was

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that the turning away the children of men from their iniquity, and forming a peculiar people, zealous of good works, would be to the praise of his glory who brought them out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Upon nothing do these great interests of holiness so much depend as the knowledge of God. Angels are like the God they worship. Men, all over the world, are like the God they worship. The heathen are degraded and vile because their gods are degraded and vile, and the work of men's hands. In Christian lands there is truth and rectitude, because the Christian's God is glorious in holiness. There is the command, "Be ye holy, for I the Lord your God am holy." He is holy in all his natural attributes, for they are all directed by the eternal rule of right. He is holy in all his purposes, for it was his perfect rectitude that dictated them all. He is holy in his Word; for all its principles, its laws, its threatenings, and its promises are adapted and aim only at the promotion of holiness. And he is "righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works." And this perfect character of God must be so manifested as to be seen and loved, else will men never become holy. It is necessary that they should know God in order to be like God. No man can have a clear, illumined, and bright vision of the supreme excellence and glory of a

holy God without being "changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." This is the uniform way the Spirit operates, both in first turning men from the errors of their ways to the wisdom of the just, and then advancing them toward perfection. It is a truism that scarcely needs to be repeated, that there can be no more conformity to God in any mind than there is knowledge of his true character. Other things being equal, the reason why one good man is more holy than another is that he possesses more clear and comprehensive views of God. One reason why Moses, and David, and Paul were so much more holy than most other men, is that they increased more rapidly in the knowledge of God, and were more able to "comprehend what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge." The apostle instructs us that the highest privilege and attainment of piety is to "be filled with all the fullness of God;" and the Savior, in his last prayer with and for his disciples, says, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the living and true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."

But the brightest manifestations of the Deity are made in the person of his Son; it is the great glory of his incarnation and work that they unfold the true character of God. Well, therefore,

did he pray, "Father, glorify thy name." There must be this development of the Father's character. He would *be* as merciful, as just, as sovereign, as brilliantly arrayed with light as he is now, had this development never been made; but these bright properties of his nature would never have been known, and so known as to arrest and impress the minds of men, without these strong and vivid exhibitions of them made in the person and work of his Son. Without these, sinful men would never have known what God is, and without this knowledge they would have remained dead in trespasses and sins.

God is wise. His plans are large. His designs are comprehensive. And never will his desires for the holiness of his Church be consummated until "they all come, in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." In the same proportion in which you detract from their conceptions of the excellence of the Godhead, do you detract from the variety, the value, and the degree of their holy affections. Take away from the bosoms of the holy on earth, or even in heaven, those strong affections which arise from their perceptions of the glory of God, and how will you abate their intense and high admiration of the divine nature! Separate from them those grateful

emotions which flow forth in view of his pardoning mercy on the one hand, and those deep and adoring sentiments inspired by a view of his punitive justice on the other, and those lofty and submissive emotions produced by clear views of his adorable sovereignty, and how changed their character, how faint their notes of praise! Those high and delightful emotions which the redeemed exercise toward their Savior, which elevate them in moral character above the angels, and which angels never feel, would never have found their way to bosoms which had not beheld the glory of God as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ. This is the peculiar manifestation of the Deity to which the Son of God refers in the text, and which gives rise to those forms and phases of piety that are peculiar to redeemed sinners, and which make that manifestation so essential to the interests of holiness.

3. A third reason for this request is, that the manifestation of his Father's glory is *inseparable from the highest happiness of all the holy*. God himself is the First Cause. All excellence, all blessedness flows from him, and flows only from his manifested nature. Without this manifestation there would have been no results of his wisdom, or power, or goodness; his inherent perfections would have reposed in the retirement of eternity and in the recesses of his own infinite

mind. Most literally, all created happiness depends upon the manifested excellence of the Deity; nor is it less true that it is advanced by continued and increased manifestations. Every intermission, suspension, or limitation in the exhibition of the divine glory, be the limit what it may, is itself a proportioned diminution of created blessedness.

God's character often comes out in dark dispensations; "he hath said that he will dwell in the thick darkness;" but so long as *He* is there, these very overshadowings are a good. That evil is comprised in some of these manifestations, both in time and in eternity, we know; but he suffers and will hereafter suffer no evil—no, not even the slightest pang, that can be wisely prevented, and that will not, in the end, show that infinite wisdom and goodness are on the throne. Our erring minds may not govern the world as God governs it; we might never have made the sacrifices he has made, and will make, in order to render his people happy; but this is no proof that God is not wiser than men. We should take heed lest we "charge God foolishly." There are difficulties in the divine administration; and we may well bow before the rebuke, "Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God?" Though evils may be incident to the full manifestation of his character, we know that in the final issue all will come out right.

And the source and fullness of created good will then be seen to be the knowledge and enjoyment of God. Indeed we know it now. The heart of every true Christian attests it. There is something in the divine nature, not merely for the gratified employment of our intellectual powers, but for the gratification of our most exalted and most spiritual affections. Whatever brings God to the view of a holy mind never fails to wake up its adoring reverence and joy. It may be the lily of the valley, or the cedars of Lebanon; it may be the bright sunlight, or the overshadowing cloud; it may be the whispering of the zephyr, or the thunder of the cataract; it may be the smiles of health and plenty, or grim famine and the wasting pestilence; it may be the tenderness of Calvary's love, or the quaking of Mount Sinai; it may be the song of Moses, or the song of the Lamb. But, whatever it be, if God is there, it is a hallowed scene, a scene of subduing veneration, filial submission, and confidence, and love, because it is full of God. The happiest moments in the Christian's life are those in which he thinks most of God—in which he sees and enjoys most of God—in which he has the most enlarged and impressive views of God, and dwells with intense interest and adoring wonder on his great and amiable perfections. Moses never offered a more holy or more eleva-

ted prayer than when he said, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory." David never had a more fervent or joyous desire than to "behold the beauty of the Lord." Isaiah never witnessed a more humbling yet transporting scene than when he "saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple." Ezekiel never had more of the spirit of heaven than when the hand of the Lord was upon him at the River Chebar, and he fell upon his face before the brightness of that sapphire throne where was "the appearance of the brightness round about, which was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord." Habakkuk never "rejoiced more in the Lord, nor more joyed in the God of his salvation," than when in vision he beheld God coming from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran, and his glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. Time would fail me to tell of Chrysostom and Augustine, of Anselm and Wicliffe, of Chillingworth and Charnock, of Leighton and Howe, of Toplady and Owen, of Flavel and Baxter, of Tennant and Edwards, of Anthony and Osborn, the source of whose blessedness, and most enduring and memorable comforts and enraptured joys, was derived from enlarged and affecting views of the character of God. Daniel in the den of lions, his companions in the burning fiery furnace, and

the exiled disciple in Patmos, are not the only recorded examples of the overwhelming exhibitions of the present Deity, outshining the flames of martyrdom, and giving rise to songs of rejoicing that were the prelude to the songs of the upper sanctuary. All Christian experience shows that if God be brought to the view of a holy mind, that mind will be happy; but if he be withdrawn, it will mourn like the sparrow upon the house-top. Some of those who hear me can testify that nothing could make them miserable so long as the light of God's countenance is lifted upon them, and nothing make them happy if forsaken of God. Good men can endure pain, losses, disappointments, reproach, but they can not bear to be forsaken of God.

Yet, with all our spiritual enjoyments, we are poorly fitted, in this state of darkness and sin, to appreciate the blessedness resulting from these manifestations of the divine glory. Its brightest illustrations eye hath not seen, nor have they entered into the heart of man. No; "we know not what we shall be; but when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for *we shall see him as he is.*" We shall be like him; holy as he is holy, happy as he is happy. Oh what rapture, what ecstasy of holy beings in that bright world in their survey of the divine perfections! It is this that is the constant and essential, princi-

ple of all their enjoyment. Oh the height, the breadth, the length, the depth—this, *this* is the unfailing source of their prostrate wonder, their delighted admiration. This is the “joy that is unspeakable and full of glory.” This is that “exceeding and eternal weight of glory” yet to be revealed. These few broken and refracted rays from that eternal and uncreated Source of light and love, which now and then beam upon us with mild effulgence, and make even this dark world so gladsome, are but the glimmerings of that flame, the twilight of that day which will hereafter glow with unobscured radiance where the Lamb is the light thereof, and God its glory.

4. We remark, in the fourth place, a special reason for this request of the Savior may be found in *the personal interest he felt in the success of his redemption*. He felt an interest in his Father's honor; and well he might. But he felt an interest also in the progress and successes of this redemption. Next to his Father's honor, his heart and soul were bound up in this wondrous work. His Father would be glorified by it, while the very emanations of that glory were the pledge and means of all the holiness and all the blessedness of the redeemed. When he consented to take upon him man's nature, and bear his sins, he was not left without his promised

reward; and it was a reward fitted to gratify his love for the guilty and the lost.

In the eternal covenant of redemption, the pledge was given him that "he should see his seed, and the travail of his soul, and be satisfied;" that God would "divide him a portion with the great;" and that he should "divide the spoil with the strong." This was "the joy that was set before him" when he endured the cross, despising the shame. All the holiness and happiness of the redeemed universe result from this redemption, because this redemption furnishes the brightest illustration of his Father's glory. It is their contemplation of this stupendous work that engages the purest and most ardent affections of all holy intelligences, that attracts toward it their bending and attentive wonder, and that awakens their humblest and most exalted praise. Here are "new and perpetual sources of delight, because new and perpetual developments of the Deity." As we have already seen, but for that exhibition of the Godhead made on the cross, but for this fullness of redeeming love, the sources of the purest holiness and joy would have remained forever dry. Yet the great element and only medium of them were the Savior's humiliation and sufferings. It was in near prospect of these agonies that he uttered those memorable words: "The hour is come that the Son of Man should

be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground *and die*; it abideth alone; but if *it die*, it bringeth forth *much* fruit." He knew at what labor and cost the great harvest must be gathered in. But his eye was upon the mighty ingathering; and "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." And then it was that he gave utterance to that affecting soliloquy, and that affecting expostulation with his Father, "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour!" No, I can not say *that*. "For this cause came I to this hour. Father, glorify thy name!" Let the mighty work of redeeming love go on! Though the malignity of earth, and the rage of hell, and the wrath of God be poured out upon me; though dogs compass me, and the assembly of the wicked pierce my hands and my feet; and though he in whom I have trusted be far from me and the words of my roaring, yet let the work go on, cost what it may! Let the glad tidings of mercy go forth to apostate man, and the proclamation of heaven's love thrill land and sea! Let the light of Sabbaths dawn on this dark world, and the Church of the First-born here come up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved! Let the ministry of reconciliation go forth, and the Holy Spirit descend, and the days of Pentecostal glory come and be repeated!

Let the tender solitudes in the world of light for the successes of this Gospel be cherished and increased, and let there be joy in heaven over uncounted millions of the repenting! Let there be greater and more transforming and transporting exhibitions of the Deity through the medium of my service and my suffering. And let there be ascriptions of praise to Him who is seated on the throne, more humble and more exalted, until he shall reign whose right it is, and higher worlds look down upon this God's footstool, and say one unto another, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of Hosts; the whole *earth* is full of his glory!"

And the work *shall* thus go on. The Father answered the prayer in the memorable words, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." Yes, the work shall go on till the revolutions of earth terminate in that great revolution in which "all the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord, and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before him." Then the prayer will be fully answered, and the name of the God of heaven be glorified. He will be honored as the "blessed and only potentate," as "over all God blessed forever." The great design of his wisdom, and the great work of his love and power, will be accomplished; the fullness of his perfections flow out, and he himself infinitely and forever glorified.

Created excellence is but a drop to the ocean compared with this great glory. There is no limit to these manifestations of the eternal and infinite One. As the work of Christ is developed, so will men and angels know more of God, and serve, and enjoy, and glorify him more. Just as the insect who has never traveled beyond the leaf where it was born knows the surface of this wide-spread earth, so do we now "know in part." It will not be always so. When the knowledge of the glory of "the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea," and the administrations of his providence are more clearly seen to co-operate with the method of his grace; when he who thus goes forth among the nations, and rules over them, and glorifies himself in them and by them, proclaims his name as "wonderful in counsel and excellent in working," bright glories will break on the vision of this dark world, and voices till then unheard will say, "Blessing, and honor, and dominion, and power, and glory be unto Him who sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb forever!"

In view of these thoughts, we see,

1. In the first place, *the wisdom of God in making his own glory the ultimate end of all his works.* Well may so comprehensive a design be the grand consideration to which all others are subservient. This is no arbitrary appointment,

but results from the high importance of the end itself. The God only wise must have some commanding purpose, and this is the highest and best. There is no supreme end worthy of him but this, and none so expressive of his infinite wisdom and goodness. This is the end he aims at, and which he will secure. He is of one mind, and none can turn him; nothing shall divert him from his purpose, nothing that he will not make tributary to its advancement. His great and mighty affections concentrate here; "the zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this." It is a grand and solemn truth that *all* the perfections of the divine nature shall be vividly unfolded. Whatever of sublimity there is in the divine power; whatever of depth and extent in the resources of the divine wisdom; whatever of munificence in the divine goodness; whatever of liberality and tenderness in the divine mercy; whatever of terror and dismay in the divine justice; whatever of royalty and splendor in the divine supremacy, shall be vividly disclosed. Yes, our God shall be glorified. The more devoutly we watch these opening disclosures, the more shall we see they are full of God; and if we are *his friends*, the more shall we rejoice.

2. A second thought suggested by our subject is the importance of clearly presenting and truly receiving this great truth on which we have now

dwelt. There is no principle of more universal application than this, and none which is capable of being more usefully employed in establishing the Gospel, in combating and refuting errors, in distinguishing the precious from the vile in Christian experience, and in indicating the ways of God to man. Great questions in theology, nice points in ethics, discriminating questions in personal religion, are all settled at the cross of Christ, where the glory of God shines forth. No man understands the nature of true piety, or discovers the beauty and consistency of the doctrines of the Gospel, who does not perceive their relation to God's great glory. He who comes down from the lofty elevation that God is above creatures, and that all things were not only made by him, but *for* him, and are subservient to the glory of his name, must adopt the false, the unworthy, the abject, the wicked notion that creatures are above God, and God subservient to creatures. To every right-hearted man, nothing is second to the glory of God. He sympathizes with his adorable Lord in that he has no desires so ardent, none so joyous, as to glorify God and see him glorified. The language of his soul is, "Father, glorify thy name!" "Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; let thy glory be above all the earth!" Oh, it is delightful to take even a faint glance at this sweet truth. It sheds lustre

around all the works of God. It gives us a clew to every labyrinth in providence, and to every mystery of grace. It is the keystone of the arch, sprung by unseen hands, when they laid the beams of his chambers in the mighty waters, and stretched out the line upon the face of the earth.

3. We add, in the third and last place, our subject *gives sublimity and tenderness to the scene in which we show forth the death of the Son of God.* Oh what a scene! Who is that mighty Sufferer? and whose voice is that which, from the anguish of his soul, exclaims, "Father, glorify thy name?" And what mysterious response is that from the clouds of heaven, saying, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again?" The people that stood by heard it, and they said it thundered. It was Jehovah's voice putting heaven's sanction upon the prayer and upon the agonies of his well-beloved Son. My Christian brethren, can you come to this table without adoring thoughts of God and his Christ? As you look on him whom God hath chosen to make known his glory to the children of men, will you not come, not only with the wonder of admiration, but to learn from Christ, and him crucified, that knowledge of the Everlasting God which the created universe can not give? Will you not fix your eyes on Calvary, and as you see the reflec-

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tion of its moral glory in these emblems of that broken body and atoning blood, will you not bow before the simplicity and grandeur of the scene where the King eternal, immortal, invisible, thus shines forth? Oh what strange condescension, what awful majesty are here! and, at the same time, what benignity and tenderness! Would you have heart-affecting views of your own woe-ful apostasy, contemplate them here, for here you may discover indications of deeper guilt and a more affecting expression of God's abhorrence of sin than are seen even in the world of despair. I know of no scene on this earth so fitted to exert a mighty and permanent influence on the human mind. It tells the wonderful story of the sufferings and death of the Son of God. It was an astonishing view when first exhibited in that upper room in Jerusalem. It is equally astonishing now. For eighteen centuries this table has been spread in our world; but it has lost none of its interest. To the man who apprehends it aright it is always new. Come ye to it, my brethren, and be ye partakers of its power, and let it control your affections and your lives. Seek here higher degrees of every Christian grace. Let the world be crucified to you, and you to the world. Let it kindle your gratitude and zeal; let it give you hope when you are ready to despond; in temptation, let it fortify

you, and form you to a new and more heavenly character. There is nothing within the whole circle of motives that is of any practical importance compared with the cross of Christ. The knowledge of God as here manifested is the grand secret of a spiritual and holy life. Oh look up and see the cross. See there all that can affect, and melt, and purify the heart. There is no other transforming power. Christ crucified is the power of God to salvation.

And permit me, in a closing paragraph, in the review of this week of prayer for the conversion of the world, to say, there is no other way of converting the nations than to diffuse the knowledge of God. They are without God in the world. Nothing will avail them but the knowledge of God, and the knowledge of God as revealed in the person of his Son. Never will the nations be turned from their iniquities in any other way. Nature, reason, philosophy, science, human laws, are of no account to save the soul. We can not overrate the knowledge of God as made known in the Gospel of his Son. It has a depth the mind of an apostle could not fathom; a length, and breadth, and height to which a seraph's wing never soared. Oh thou omnipotent and infinite One, speak forth thy own glories! Father, glorify thy name! After so many ages of preparation, let this redemption spread wide

thy glories, till "a little one become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation;" till the Spirit be poured from on high, and the wilderness become a fruitful field; till this earth shall become a temple, time a Sabbath, and these years of mercy usher in the jubilee of this lost world.

SERMON II.

SPIRITUALITY OF THE DIVINE NATURE.

JOHN, iv., 24.—“*God is a spirit.*”

THE alpha and omega of creation and providence, of law and gospel, of all revealed truth, is the ETERNAL AND INFINITE GOD. But who is he? What is he? Where is he? Is he an ethereal substance? Is he a mere principle, like gravitation and electricity in the world of nature? Is he a mere divine influence, an indescribable *afflatus*, breathed forth and brooding over all created things? Or is he the First Cause of all things, the supreme Legislator, the watchful Guardian, the final Judge? Pagan philosophy has never answered these questions. Socrates could not answer them; nor could his pupils, Plato and Xenophon. Cicero could not: his celebrated treatise, “*De Natura Deorum*,” shows his honesty and solicitude, but also shows that he was “without God in the world.” Seneca, though as a philosopher and moralist he ranked among the wisest, and stood sufficiently high to be the preceptor of the youthful Nero, was ignorant of God. Had the priests of Egypt

or "the wise men of Greece" uttered the single declaration, "God is a SPIRIT, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth," there would, in some respects, have been less need of a supernatural revelation. There is not a more comprehensive, weighty, and heart-searching truth in all the Bible. Let us endeavor, in this discourse, to show what it means, and speak somewhat of its importance and practical influence.

I. In the first place, What is the import of the declaration, GOD IS A SPIRIT?

God is ONE. We speak of the different attributes of his nature, but when we do so, we speak of them as different manifestations of the indivisible Deity. He is One; the great Three in One; the eternal and infinite One; pure Spirit.

To minds like our own, there is more or less embarrassment in forming definite conceptions of that which is not the object of our senses. Hence the inherent and intrinsic difficulties which attend all inquiries in mental science, and hence the volumes, both ancient and modern, which have been written upon intellectual philosophy, and which continue to be written, as though the subject had never been satisfactorily explored. Much more may we be conscious of our incompetency to inspect, and analyze, and comprehend the unseen spirit of the great Jehovah. We are

familiar with spirit only as it is associated with matter. If, in inspecting our own minds, and in analyzing the intellectual and emotional properties of our fellow-men, we could detach them from all material substances, and contemplate them as *pure spirit*, we might have some just though inadequate conceptions of the spirituality of the divine nature.

Yet, inadequate as our conceptions are, they are not without meaning. There are but two classes of existence in the universe—matter and mind. The distinction is an obvious one, recognized in the Scriptures and by common sense. We are acquainted with both only by what we know of their properties or attributes; of their substratum, their essence, we know nothing. Mind, spirit, is that which thinks and reasons, which feels and acts. It is intellect and emotion; acting, ever acting, all act. It has no resemblance to any form of matter, whether solid, liquid, aeriform, or imponderable. Matter is properly extended, occupies space, and fills the space it occupies so as to exclude all other material substances. Spirit, while it exists in space, and inhabits a given locality, does not occupy or fill it. Matter has form and shape; spirit has none. You can not bound it by lines and angles, nor extend one part of it beyond another. Matter may be indefinitely divided; spirit is one

undivided, indivisible existence. Matter is visible; spirit is invisible. Spirit may inhabit a corporeal form, as do all the spirits of living men; it may impart voice and motion to matter; its existence and presence may be indicated by a visible appearance; but it is not the living, acting *spirit* that is seen and heard. There is no property that is common both to matter and spirit, except that they are both real existences, and were created and are preserved, in their various modifications, by the same First Cause, and for the same great end of glorifying him.

Materialists would have us believe that the *universe of being* is one *material* substance. Their theory is, that the same matter which crystallizes in the mineral, also vegetates in the plant, lives and is organized in the brute, and feels, thinks, and reasons in man; and that, as the result of some peculiar organization of matter, and some nice disposition and arrangement of its parts, the same faculties of thinking and acting are found in what the Scriptures designate as the Deity. Such is the theory in the infidel departments of natural science. But it is not argument; it is not supported even by analogy. In the ascending series from the created to the uncreated, there are gradations of being that are strongly marked. There is in the lowest order mere inanimate and chaotic matter, of which little is predi-

cated except its subserviency to material existences in a more organized form. At one remove from this is the curious and exquisite machinery of art. Above this are the beauty, instinct, and consciousness of the animal creation. A degree still beyond this is the fabric of the human frame, so indicative of the wisdom and skill of the divine Architect. Beyond this is the more wonderful structure of the human mind, invested with rational and moral faculties, and but little lower than the angels. In rank still more noble and excellent are the angelic spirits themselves that surround God's throne, the immortal princes of his kingdom, the incorporeal spirits of his heavenly court. Here there is a mighty chasm between the created and the uncreated, the finite and the infinite, creatures of yesterday and the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity. Beyond these angelic hosts we know of no intermediate existences, and no being until we arrive at the Infinite One. There, dwelling in light that is inaccessible and full of glory, and above the range of created things, is the Eternal Deity. Such is the analogy of nature, such is the philosophy of the Bible, and such is common sense. And let infidelity tell us—let the school of materialists, from Hermogenes to Priestly, tell us that since “there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty hath given him understand-

ing"—since the angels around his throne are bright with intelligence and burn with emotion, how it is that their Sovereign Maker and Lord lacks the spirituality which is the glory of his creatures.

But our object is, as already announced, to illustrate the divine spirituality, rather than to prove a point which the Scriptures and common sense have rendered so plain. There is no higher proof than the declaration of the Savior in his text. Some illustration of this truth may not, however, be out of place.

The *first step* toward obtaining a true conception of God as a spirit is to exclude from our ideas of him all the properties of matter; and, if we may judge from the crude notions of ancient and modern paganism, it is no unimportant step. We may not think of God as a material substance. He occupies no space; space has no relation to his nature. He has no bodily form nor shape, and can not be seen. It is true there have been *indications* of his presence and glory. Moses beheld them at the burning bush; the congregation of Israel beheld them at Mount Sinai, and between the cherubim. Isaiah saw his glory when his train filled the temple, and seraphim cried Holy, holy, holy. The exiled apostle beheld it in Patmos, when, before its overpowering brilliancy, he fell down as dead. But

it was not the Infinite and Eternal himself that they beheld. There are indices of his presence and glory now before our eyes, multiplied as the proofs of his existence and supremacy; but none of these are the invisible Deity. The pure spirit of the great I AM never yet exhibited himself to mortal eyes; "no man hath SEEN GOD at any time." These visible manifestations of the divine presence are fitted to fill the mind with exalted and adoring views of him; but his essential glory, the uncreated spirituality of his nature, lies back of them all, and far out of sight. He "only hath immortality, dwelling in light which no man can approach unto, and whom no man hath seen, or can see."

When we have thus risen above these gross conceptions, and excluded from our ideas of God those properties which belong to a material nature, we are prepared to take a step in advance of this mere negative view. We perceive in those around us, and we ourselves are conscious of a *spiritual*, in distinction from a material existence. There is within us a living, acting existence, distinct from bone, and sinew, and muscle, and nerves; an *invisible, thinking soul*, which, while it inhabits, controls the earthly house of this clay tabernacle. Let us reflect a moment upon this wonderful thing, the human soul, and endeavor to catch from it, it may be, some min-

iatue resemblance, some faint reflection of its Creator-Deity.

We have all the proof we can ask for of a living, acting spirit within us. We know as much of the nature of spirit, from the phenomena of which we are conscious, as we do of the nature of matter from the phenomena exhibited to our senses. It is that which thinks, which feels, which wills; these thoughts, these sensations, these volitions, indicate its spiritual nature. Now the fact is revealed to us that when God created *man*, "*in the image of God* created he him." The apostle declares that "*man is the image and glory of God.*" He was modeled after the perfections of the divine nature. He was the noblest of God's creatures, and bore his image. The resemblance was not in his material, corporal form, because his Creator has no bodily shape; it was in his "*living soul.*" The intellectual and moral image of his Maker was stamped upon him. Such is the representation of the apostle when he speaks of the effect of the regenerating power of the Holy Ghost upon man's fallen nature. It is "*the new man which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness.*" This immortal existence, this spark of being, ever-tending onward and upward, this moment separated from eternity—this stream, this drop separated from the boundless ocean,

resembles the fountain. And, as the stream resembles the fountain, so the fountain resembles the stream. Both are *spirit*, though one is created, and the other uncreated; though the one is dependent, and the other independent; though the one is finite, and the other infinite. To comprehend the spiritual *nature* of the Deity, it is not necessary we should comprehend its *immensity*. Spirit in God differs from spirit in angels and men, as it is incomprehensibly great and infinite; the difference here is immeasurable. Yet we know *what it is* in God, what is its essential nature, because we know *what it is* in man.

Fix your thoughts, then, upon the *spirit of man*. In contemplating it, you contemplate a wonder-working existence. It is "a living soul," endowed with marvelous capacities; and though inheriting from the apostasy of our first parents all that is dark in ignorance and error, all that is abominable in sin, and all that is abject in the condition of sinners, yet originally transparent as light, and brilliant with all the beauties of holiness; and when transformed by the new-creating hand of him that formed it, is destined to regain its pristine glory, and reascend the heights from which it has fallen. It possesses high *intellectual faculties*; there is no spirit where there is no intellect. The pure spirit of Jehovah therefore has intellect; "his understanding is *infinite*,"

and all its acts unlabored, unembarrassed, unerring, and intuitive. The soul of man, moreover, possesses *moral properties*—will, choice, affections, desires, purposes, volitions. So does the pure spirit of Jehovah. They belong to him in unsullied perfection, and in an infinite degree. He is pleased and displeased; he loves and hates; he approves and disapproves; he justifies and condemns. His emotional nature is his highest glory. Did he possess only the unclouded and severe intellectual faculties, he would be but a cold Comforter. It is a glorious truth that “God is LIGHT, and in him is no darkness at all;” but not less glorious that “God is LOVE!” There is a class of divines who are startled at the thought that any sensibilities whatever should be ascribed to the Godhead. Referring to such theologians, Chalmers, in his “Moral Philosophy,” says, “In this way the character of the Supreme is denuded of all its warmth and all its tenderness; and he is represented as sitting in cold and motionless abstraction, and as precluded by the very incapacity of emotion from all congenial fellowship with the creatures he has formed. It is not needful for the perfection of his nature that he be pruned of all his sensibilities, for some of these sensibilities are, in fact, the most precious and indispensable elements of his perfection. The metaphysical divinity of our schools does not

represent aright the character of him who is our living Sovereign ; who, all-omniscient as he is, is not on that account devoid of most intense and energetic emotion. A God of naked intelligence and power is not the God of Christianity. Instead of the rigid divinity of the schools, we might yield the warm responses of the heart to a gracious and a living Sovereign, unknown to that cold philosophy which would degrade the emotions, and banish them altogether from the upper spheres of the universe." There is no spirituality where there is no *heart*. God's love is the sun of the universe; without it every thing would be locked up in everlasting night; time, eternity, would be but an unbroken, impervious winter. God's love! it is brighter than the sun, clearer than the moon, deeper than the sea; while in its advances to this low earth it outstrips the lightning, in order to cheer the dungeons of the lost.

I love to think of God as a spirit, because there is knowledge there and truth there—knowledge that enlightens, and truth that never changes ; and I love to think of his spiritual nature, because there are emotions there—pure and holy emotions, loving emotions ; one unbroken flow of them, descending and expanding themselves upon man that is a worm, and the son of man who is a worm, and thus attracting the hard

heart of man back to its original spirituality and to the eternal fountain whence all that is true and loving flows.

This is all I know of God as a *spirit*. His infinite intelligence, combined with his infinite, and holy, and loving emotions, pure, perfect, confined by no limits, ever untiring and incessantly active—these, though they furnish no adequate conception of the divine spirituality, give us a clew to it, and put us on that upward track where we shall see as we are seen, and know as we are known. I say inadequate conception; for, when the line is definitely drawn between the material and the immaterial—when we assign to the spiritual nature of the Deity an energy, an ardor, an intenseness of thought and emotion that are bounded only by infinity—when in our fixed and steady contemplation we refine, and ennoble, and extend this intellectual and moral nature, and detach it from every imperfection, and endue it with every excellence, and realize its unseen agency pervading all worlds, we fall far below the great thought, GOD IS A SPIRIT. We may compare the human to the divine, as we compare the gas-light to the sun, or a pebble on the shore to the globes which compose the universe; but God—God is infinite; “who, by searching, can find out God?” The Lord hath said that he would dwell in the thick darkness;

while the very signs and symbols of his presence—the cloud, the smoke, the enveloped mountain, the Shekinah, its glory concealed by the wings of the cherubim—all impress the mind with the incomprehensible nature of God, and tell us that his essential glory can not be seen. Again we say, “Who, by searching, can find out God?”

Something like this is the import of the declaration, *God is a spirit*. We pass, as we proposed to do,

II. In the second place, TO SPEAK SOMEWHAT OF THE IMPORTANCE AND PRACTICAL INFLUENCE of this truth.

The simple truth that God is a spirit does not influence us as it ought. We more naturally concentrate our thoughts on what we see, than “endure as seeing him who is invisible.” We need to be more devout and spiritual in our views. The idea that God is a spirit establishes,

1. In the first place, the truth that the Lord of heaven and earth *is a personal God*. Infidelity has a Protean form; it shifts its ground, and assumes phases in accordance with the spirit of the age. “The truth is,” says the lamented Chalmers, “that infidelity, foiled in its repeated attacks on the main citadel of the Christian argument, now seeks for auxiliaries from every quarter of human speculation.” So it undoubtedly is. The present is pre-eminently the age of

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natural science. Such have been the advances in natural philosophy, geology, botany, chemistry, and electricity, that these powers of nature are thought to be omnipotent; that the world needs no other controlling power, and that beyond these there is no such being as a *personal God*. The system is little more than a combination of ancient and modern Pantheism and Materialism, making a god of every thing, and never stopping till it makes the adventurous leap into the abyss of Atheism.

Standing as we do upon the strong truth that God is a spirit, we are within a fortress that can not be invaded by such underground assaults. We affirm that a spiritual existence is a *personal existence*. When we speak of a *person*, we mean a *living being* possessed of a rational nature. A dead body is not a *person*. No form of dead matter, and no operation of dead matter, be it ever so subtle and pervading, is a person. A *person* is one to whom the personal pronoun, *I*, *thou*, and *he*, may be, without any figure of speech, appropriately addressed, and to whom alone they belong. But who ever heard of any of these powers of nature being persons? What thoughts have they? what emotions? what will? what utterances? Which of them ever said, "The Lord hath made all things for himself;" "I am the first and the last, and besides *me* there is no

God." To which of them can the words be addressed, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth or the world, from everlasting to everlasting *thou art God?*" Who ever made the confession at these shrines of nature, "All nations before thee are as nothing, and they are counted to thee less than nothing and vanity?" Who ever addressed them in the language, "O thou that hearest prayer?" When did any of these powers of nature say, "I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob?" When have they proclaimed their law, with its solemn sanctions, from Sinai? What co-eternal, co-equal Son have they given to be the light of the world and the life of men? What Church, and what ordinances, and what ministry have they raised up, and promised to be with them to the end of the world? And which of these progressively developed powers of nature is it that is to raise the dead, and call the race of man to judgment, and pronounce the sentence that shall decide their everlasting destiny? For myself, I confess to great ignorance of these natural substances. I know something of the power of natural causes, but I never heard of their saying any such things, or performing any such wonders, or asserting any such claims as these. These things belong to a personal agent—to One who possesses intelligence and emotions;

and they belong to *God*, as they belong to no other. This theory of "physio-philosophy" is as unphilosophical as it is absurd. Development! self-evolution! natural law! natural forces! what are they but lifeless, dead matter? Whence this dead matter, thus invested with self-evolving, creative power? What was it *before* this process of development began? How came it into being? Did it exist from eternity, or was it created? It was *nothing*, and could evolve nothing. Procul! oh Procul! Away with this atheistical nonsense. We recommend to these would-be philosophers the old truism of the schools, *Ex nihilo, nihil fit*. The eternal I AM is not the God of modern materialists, but the God of the Bible; he is not an ideal God, but the loving and true God; the personal God—the tri-personal Godhead.

2. In the second place, the spirituality of the divine nature gives us some *just conceptions of the divine character*. We have no just notions of God at all without this truth. His very *eternity* is not only obscured, but incredible, if dissociated from his spirituality. The spirituality of the divine nature is, if I may so speak, the primordial element of God's self-existence. It stands in no need of a supporting hand. It knows no cause; it has no beginning, and will have no end. It is an ETERNAL MIND, with no distinction

of parts, and no succession of days and years. Contemplating him as the One Eternal Spirit, we understand what it is for him to be *immutable*. We imagine to ourselves millions and millions of ages before the creation of the material universe, and then the reality comes up before us that that unchanged, unchanging One was always what he now is, and what he always will be, in the full strength and bloom of uncreated light and love. We understand, then, something also of his *immensity*. Every where, in all places at the same time; omnipresent and indivisible; "a God at hand" and "a God afar off," without being separated by distances or confined by space, himself filling heaven and earth; his infinite mind and heart encompassing all on every side; within all, cementing and holding them together, and directing them to their proper ends; all living, and moving, and having their being in God. We understand also what is meant by his *omnipotence*. "Knowledge is power." Mere matter, detached from mind, has no inherent energy. There is no power in steam only as it is condensed and directed by mind. There is no power in the warrior's sword so long as it sleeps in its scabbard. The power lies in the intellect and heart of the warrior; it lies back of his bone and muscle, and in his courageous and determined will. Just as it is the skill, the mind, the talent,

the inventive genius and intellect of the projector that gives all their force to the mechanical powers, is it the mighty intellect and effective will of the Deity that gives all their energy to the varied causes and agencies by which his purposes are accomplished in the natural and moral world. His infinite mind and heart originate all, plan all, accomplish all. Whatever in the sea, or in the bowels of the earth, or in the atmosphere, or in the lights of heaven, or in the action of material things upon things material, the remote and proximate influence of them all is in the mighty intellect and mightier love of the Great Invisible. He holds creation in his hand, he hangs the earth upon nothing, and with his finger he turns the globe of the universe upon its hinges. It is the mind, the will of God that moves every thing. His power lies in the spirituality of his nature; it is all power, because it is all spirit. Ask the stars of heaven, and the sharp lightning, and the driving storm, and the foaming ocean, and the placid morn, and the dewy eve, and the spontaneous thought and free will of angels and men—nay, “ask the beasts, and they shall tell thee, and the fowls of the air, and they shall teach thee.” Speak to the behemoth and the worm, to the leviathan of the deep and the minnow of the brook, and they will answer, “Who knoweth not that in all these the hand of the Lord hath done this?”

So, if we advert to his moral attributes, the impression they make upon our minds depends upon their association, their identity with his spiritual nature. His nature is *holy*; it is holiness itself, the fountain of holiness, the standard and pattern of holiness, the patron and support of all holiness in heaven and on earth, the reward and crown of holiness. *Goodness* is his nature, because he is a spirit. God "*is good, and he does good.*" The deed follows the thought; it is the thought acted out; the outspoken, outgoing of that benevolent, that great heart of the Deity. We love to think of these kind and gracious effusions, because they lead us to think of *him*. The pure spirit of Jehovah "*magnifies man and sets his heart upon him.*" And when this kind and loving spirit and this penetrating intelligence are roused to indignation, it is from its intolerance of wickedness—it is because he looks on sin, and surveys that abominable thing which his soul hateth; and because, from the spirituality of his nature, he can not be otherwise than a sin-hating, sin-punishing God. His deeds of justice are not deeds of passion; they are not revenge; they are not malignity. Justice is calm, deliberate, impartial. There is no unrighteousness with God. Justice in God is inseparable from his infinite intelligence and his infinite emotions. It must be so. Every right-minded being in the

universe rejoices that it is so. He gives the Great Spirit his love and confidence, and is gratified, jubilant, that such a God is on the throne.

We would thus imbue all our views of God with the element of his spirituality. We can not do his character justice, but great injustice, if we contemplate it without this completeness, this plenitude of pure perfection. Here it is that we veil our faces.

3. It is only in the spirituality of the divine nature that we have *just and right views of evangelical truth*. Errors in philosophy and religion may all be traced to erroneous views of the Great First Cause. From the Egyptian and Platonic teaching of the East, down to the conflicting lessons of Epicurus and Zeno—from the Pharisees and Sadducees of the later Judaism and the earlier ages of Christianity down to Pelagius and Augustine—from the corruptions of Rome to the great Reformation by Luther, all along through the infidelity of the eighteenth century and the loose theology of the eighteenth and nineteenth, teeming as they did, and as these current years still do, with the varied phases of an unscriptural rationalism, errors, great and small, take their departure from some erroneous views of the Deity. Truth is a rectilinear pathway; if the first deviation from it be not detected and retraced, none can tell where it will stop. We shall always be

in the dark until we have learned to answer the question, *What is God?* Though in many respects his being and his nature are unfathomable, yet in so far forth as they are revealed and understood, there is little room for jarring creeds or essential collisions in religious opinion.

The great truths of revelation are from God as a Spirit, the Father of lights, whose understanding is infinite, and whose heart of love it will take eternity to fathom. His revelation is the disclosure of his thoughts and affections; not less of his affections than his thoughts. These are the fountains of truth. If we begin at the beginning, we shall begin with God, whose spiritual nature comprises all light, all love, and therefore all truth. This is the fountain-head. "He that hath heard and learned of the Father," says the Savior, "cometh unto me." "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the living and true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." The foundation is deep, and the superstructure, with all its solidity and adornment, rests upon it as the corner-stone. Truth is but the development of the spiritual world. Just in the measure in which we have a spiritual discernment of spiritual things, shall we have an insight into the great realities that are treasured up in the intellect and heart of God. Blessed are all they who can say with the apostle, "Now we

have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." It is darkness that may be felt—it is a colder theology than the icebergs of the Northern Sea, where these strong impulses of heavenly light and heavenly love are shut out from the ministrations of the pulpit or the creed of the Church. And, shall I add, from the heart of the Christian? I can not, because I may not say this. The Christian heart is "a heart of flesh." It is a well-spring of heavenly truth and heavenly love, fed from the "pure river of water of life, which flows from the throne of God and the Lamb."

4. Just impressions of the divine spirituality indicate, in the fourth place, *the true character of personal religion*. The truth that God is a spirit discards every form and degree of idolatry, and puts its ban of reprobation upon the folly and wickedness of worshiping God by images. It solemnly forbids all visible representations of the Deity. The papal apostasy tells us that "images are the books of the illiterate;" the Bible tells us the "stock is a doctrine of vanities," and a "molt-en image a teacher of lies."

Not less does this great truth discard the notion that personal religion consists in mere visible morality. God is a spirit. *He* must be thought of, loved, trusted in, obeyed. A man

may be moral, and yet he may be ungodly. "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."

The same assurance we have that mere outward forms of religion are also worthless in the sight of God. "God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." A spiritual service is due to the spiritual Deity. That man is not safe for eternity who "draws nigh to God with his lips, while his heart is far from him." Of all beings in the world, we must deal honestly with God. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked."

True religion exists in the soul only "as the life of God in the soul of man." In all its progress, from the first alarming thought to the sweet hope of the Gospel, and from that sweet hope to the soul's maturity for heaven, it is full of God, reconciliation to God, faith in God, submission to God, joy in God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Though the interests at stake are infinite, the believing soul casts itself upon boundless intelligence and boundless love; while, in these transactions of a living faith, the spirituality of earth is responded to by the spirituality of heaven. Heaven's incarnate and sweet Messenger thus wins back the heart to holiness and heaven. It is the Spirit of God from above setting up his kingdom here below.

Thus should the spirituality of the divine nature influence us. We should carry it every where, for it is every where. It fills time; it will fill eternity. Oh eternity! eternity! how glorious to the righteous, because it is so full of God! How fearful to the wicked, because it is so full of God! Nor may it ever be forgotten that it is as a *spirit* that God is so fitted to be the satisfying portion of the soul. "My soul, wait thou only upon God." The material will die; the spirit lives. Matter can not feed on thought; mind is satisfied only with mind, the finite only with the infinite. This spiritual, this immortal existence must not be separated from God; this would be cutting off the stream from the fountain. The day will come, beloved brethren, when that fluttering intellect may be obscured in the shades of the dark valley, and that fluttering heart may beat hard against the walls of this clay tabernacle; and then, believe me, nothing but the welcome radiations of this heavenly light and heavenly love can dissipate the darkness and soothe the agitation. Near as it is, that day is not yet arrived. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." You may know much of the infinite spirit if you search for him where he is the most fully revealed. You may acquaint yourselves now with him, and be at peace. There, in that manger of Bethlehem,

unto us "a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and his name is called Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God." There is "God manifest in the flesh;" the spiritual Deity clothed in robes of flesh and blood, that men may see his face and live. Oh what an object of vivid and affecting interest is this representation of the Great Unseen! What condescension to the infirmities of our nature is this incarnation of the Deity! uniting "the realms of sense and spirit," and rendering the invisible One visible to creatures whose foundation is in the dust, and who dwell in clay! It is the very brightness of his glory and the express image of his person that we there see. There we may study the divine spirituality, and in his heavenly intelligence and heavenly love read lessons of compassion to the miserable, hope for the guilty, and salvation for the lost.

SERMON III.

THE FATHER GLORIFIED BY THE HUMILIATION OF
THE SON.

JOHN, xvii., 4.—“*I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.*”

THE light of heaven never shone upon the mere man who could honestly adopt such language as this. Never was there such a work; and never was a work so perfectly, so gloriously accomplished. His work was not literally finished until after his sufferings and death on the cross, and his burial and resurrection. He speaks, as the rhetoricians would say, *proleptically*, or antedating the event before the actual time. His work of service was past; the final catastrophe was so near and so certain that he here regards it as having taken place, and looks upon the mission upon which he entered as already fulfilled. It is his work of HUMILIATION of which he speaks in the text, “*I have glorified thee on the earth.*” It is the work he performed on the *earth*. It is a work in every view worthy of the Eternal Son, and in every view honorable to the Eternal Father. For its lofty aims, its

moral grandeur, the difficulties in the way of accomplishing it, its benevolent results, and the glory it confers on the infinite Deity, there is nothing like it in the universe. We owe it to *him* to acknowledge and proclaim its pre-eminence; and we owe it to his *Father* to show how, AS THE ETERNAL AND INFINITE DEITY, HE WAS GLO-RI-FIED BY THE HUMILIATION OF THE SON. This is the simple object of the present discourse.

I. The first step in his humiliation was HIS ASSUMPTION OF MAN'S NATURE.

As the Eternal Word, the second person in the Godhead, he decked himself with the uncreated glories of the Deity. His humiliation is spoken of in the Scriptures in contrast with his previous exaltation. "He who *was rich*, for our sakes *became poor*." The "Word was *made flesh*, and dwelt among us." *Being* "in the form of God, he thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but *made himself* of no reputation, *took upon him* the form of a servant, and *was made* in the likeness of men." His assumption of our nature was a voluntary assumption of a nature that did not originally belong to him. He was "made of a woman;" he possessed a human body and a human soul; he was formed and fashioned as a man; yet was he identified with that great and glorious being who inhabiteth eternity. This union of the divine and hu-

man is to us an inexplicable *mystery*. I freely confess it is a doctrine I never could have assented to but on the testimony of Him who can not lie, and will not deceive. The Apostle Paul speaks of it as "the *mystery*—the *great* mystery of godliness." The Creator becomes a creature! the Lord of glory inhabits a tabernacle of clay! heaven descends not only to associate with earth, but flesh and blood become one with him who dwells in light inaccessible, and whom no man hath seen or can see.

The Eternal and Infinite One is a pure spirit. The eye can not see him; the ear can not hear him; the hand can not touch him; he can not be perceived by the senses. Yet is there nothing which men more desire to see; nor is there any stronger tendency in the human imagination than to give outward form to the objects of their religious worship. Hence the origin and source of idolatry among the nations that were alienated from God, and whose "vain imaginations" led them to "worship and serve the creature more than the Creator." It is no easy matter to instill into the minds of a race whose foolish heart is darkened the idea of a purely spiritual, personal God. The patriarchal age, we know, early lost this great thought; and, notwithstanding the perceptible exhibitions of the divine presence in the Shekinah of the Old Testament, the Jews well-

nigh lost it. The nations of the earth at the present day would have very inadequate conceptions of the only living and true God were there no other revelation of him than that he is an infinite and eternal spirit, dwelling alike in every part of the universe and the uninhabited regions of eternity. We might discover the indications of a power above us in the events of every passing day. We might discover his greatness and his goodness in the earth, the ocean, the air, the heavens, and the order and harmony, the light and beauty of the planetary system. But we want to know more of God than this, and not be groping in pagan stupidity or philosophical speculation, or going about, like children in the dark, "feeling after him, if haply we may find him."

This is the great want of this benighted and ruined world. The Son of Man felt it, and came to dissipate the darkness. He would have his Father's character better known and more highly appreciated than all this. He came into the world, therefore, in order to make manifest *the true nature of God himself*. He himself was God. It is distinctly and unequivocally declared to us that "He who was in the beginning with God, and *was God*, was *made flesh*, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory." It is distinctly and unequivocally declared to us that

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"God is in Christ," that he is "God manifest in the flesh." In the wondrous union of his divine and human nature he exhibits the very "image of the God who is invisible," nay, the very "brilliance of his glory, and the express image of his person." We want to know who and what God is. If we want to know him, not only as a being of infinite greatness and majesty, but as a being of infinite goodness, and as One who, worms and sinners as we are, feels an interest in us—if we would "acquaint ourselves with him, and be at peace, that thereby good may come unto us," we must look to the incarnate Deity.

God had appeared to the world before, but never as in the person of his Son. "God manifest in the flesh" is the Deity in a new form and dress, and in hitherto unrevealed glories. "The *glory* of God shines in the face of Jesus Christ." In the fulfillment of his mission, the heavenly hosts and men on the earth saw what neither earth nor heaven had beheld before, "the realms of sense and the realms of spirit converging in one view, and discovering the Deity as he is." Those who lived on the earth during the period of Christ's incarnation saw God himself, heard his voice, and witnessed the outgoings of his power who made the heavens and the earth, and whose hand rolls the planets through immensity. When Philip demand-

ed of the Savior, "Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us," the Savior replied, "Have *I* been so long with you, and hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath SEEN ME hath *seen* THE FATHER." He is not now a God "that hideth himself, or that dwells in the thick darkness." We have but to look on him who "took not on him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham," in order to some just views of the spiritual Deity. We have but to look on that incarnate One, and inspect his character, and mark his course from the manger to the mount of his ascension, and we shall be convinced that it is "the fool," and the fool only, who "hath said in his heart *there is no God.*" We see that he is glorious in holiness and fearful in praises; that angels worshiped him, and devils and wicked men cowered before him; and we, at the same time, know that his hatred to wickedness was but the exhibition of the divine hatred, and that all his rebukes of it, and all his comminations against it, were but rebukes and comminations uttered by God himself. Amid the overawing splendor that was thrown around him, there were emotions of tenderness, of love and pity, that were stronger than death. There was a benevolence that "went about doing good;" there was a meekness and gentleness, a loveliness and a beauty, inmingled with and embellishing the severer attributes of

his character, that were fitted to woo the love and win the confidence of the weary and heavy laden. The attributes are the same in the Seen and in the Unseen. They are not the less fearful in the Seen than in the Unseen, nor the less amiable and attractive in the Great Unseen than in the incarnate Seen. Both are true delineations of the divine nature: the Unseen, in the adored sacredness of Him who dwelleth in the high and holy place, and inhabiteth eternity; the Seen, in the humble dwelling of Joseph and Mary, and the "sweet sacredness of a loving humanity." And thus was the Father glorified, his intrinsic glory manifested by the incarnation of the Son.

II. We remark, in the second place, THE SON GLORIFIED THE FATHER BY HIS SUBJECTION TO HIS FATHER'S AUTHORITY AS THE SUPREME LAWGIVER.

There is no higher authority than the authority of *law*. Law is the controlling power of the universe. "Of law there can be no less acknowledged than that her seat is the bosom of God, her voice the harmony of the world. All things in heaven and earth do her homage, the very least as feeling her care, and the greatest as not exempt from her power. Both angels and men, and creatures of what condition soever, though each in different sort and manner, yet all with uniform consent, admiring her as the mother of

their peace and joy."* There is but one Being in the universe who has the right to *give law* to all other beings, and to make *his will* the rule of action to all his intelligent creatures. The God of heaven claims this absolute and universal supremacy. He rests his claim upon his eternal existence, upon the dependence of all creatures upon him as their Creator and Proprietor, and upon the original and underived perfections of his nature. These give him the throne of the universe, and authorize him to control the will of all other beings by his own will. This he has done, requiring angels and men *to do* what he commands, and *not* to do what he forbids, upon the pain of death; nor is there a right-minded being in the universe who does not, with the apostle, pronounce the commandment "holy, just, and good." It is the result of infinite rectitude, wisdom, and goodness; it requires the best character; it professes and accomplishes the best ends; and is every way fitted to the state and character of intelligent creatures.

Yet, important and obvious as these truths are, this supremacy of the Eternal is the great question in our fallen world. It was early discussed in heaven, and produced a revolution there which resulted in the revolt and rebellion of the fallen angels. It was mooted by the devil and our first

* Hooker's Ecclesiastical Polity.

parents in the Garden of Eden, and the result was their revolt and the consequent apostasy of the race. And now, at the present hour, this great question is in progress of discussion by all the nations of the earth. Nor is it a question of minor import, nor one in which the God of heaven takes no interest. There is no question that stands abreast with this. It involves every principle of morals; it is inseparable from the highest good of the universe, and from his manifested glory who is its adorable King and Head, and with it the throne and monarchy of heaven stands or falls.

The Lord of heaven and earth has done much to vindicate his authority as the Supreme Law-giver. When, for their early revolt, he thrust Lucifer and his legions down to hell,—when, for their incurable wickedness, he swept off the antediluvian world by the flood, and burnt out the cities of the plain, and overthrew Pharaoh and his host, and sunk Babylon like a millstone into the depth of the sea, and lay waste, with fire and sword, with famine and pestilence, the nations that were bent upon their idols, these disasters were the witnesses that “the kingdom is the Lord’s, and that He is Governor among the nations.” When he first spake his law on Sinai, and wrote it twice with his own finger on tables of stone—when he convinces the consciences of

the ungodly by it, and makes them tremble, and when he writes it upon the heart of his people—facts like these stand forth as the vindicators of his supremacy.

Yet ONE LIVING WITNESS there is to the authority of the great Lawgiver far beyond all these. He who uttered the words of our text was God as well as man, and he was man as well as God. In his humiliation—here on the earth—as man, he bore the same relation to the law of God which we ourselves bear. He was “made of a woman, made *under the law*.” His relations to the law of God were those of a creature and a *subject*. He was not less under obligations of obedience than other men, nor less dependent on the providence and grace of his heavenly Father. He was accountable to the Supreme Lawgiver just as any other man is accountable; and, while the consequences of his obedience would be glorious to his Father, to himself, and to his people, a failure on his part, if such an hypothesis be admissible, would have clothed the earth in sack-cloth and bathed heaven in tears. Yet, in view of this solemn responsibility, he consented to be made under the law, and to become its subject. He veiled his heavenly glory that he might bear the testimony of a perfect obedience to his Father’s authority. Angels had borne this testimony; but there was wanting one from Adam’s

race. And One there was, and only One in the wide universe. With a loyalty equal to his love, you hear him say, "And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold; therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me." He could have avoided the responsibility and declined the service, but he chose them. No constraint was put upon him; he solicited the perilous enterprise. His language is, "Lo, I come; in the volume of the Book it is written of me. I *delight* to do thy will, O God; yea, thy *law* is within *my heart*." He desired no better service than, in this clothing of humanity, thus to glorify his Father on the earth, and finish the work he had given him to do. Both his service and his suffering were *commanded*—performed and endured as acts of obedience to his Father's will. "This *commandment* I have received of my Father;" he "became *obedient* unto death;" though "a Son, yet learned he *obedience*." It was a severe test of his loyalty, and a fiery furnace through which he passed. The world to which he condescended was a revolting and abject world. Allurements to sin and discouragements to holiness met him on every side. Men in power and meaner men; systems venerable for age, and maxims and habits sanctioned by a corrupt religion; the world, the flesh, and the devil, were all arrayed against

him, and trampling the law of God under their feet; yet, "faithful among the faithless," he lives and dies the most brilliant exemplification of the reasonableness and excellence of that law which the universe ever beheld.

He does more than vindicate his Father's authority as the Supreme Lawgiver. It is a remarkable declaration concerning him where it is said, "He will *magnify* the law, and make it *honorable*." He had wants like those of other men; he had infirmities that were human; he endured abuse, insult, injury, and wrong; he carried the spirit of self-denial to its utmost limit; "yet he did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth;" he was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners."

The man Christ Jesus was in this respect the wonder of the universe. There were wonders in his birth; there were wonders in his death; but his life was a greater wonder, and so remote from every thing else that is human, that God has not only "anointed him with the oil of gladness above his fellows," but, from regard to his spotless righteousness, justifies all who believe in him in every age of time. The obedience of our first parents before their apostasy, the obedience of unfallen angels, were fit objects of God's approbation; but never was the divine authority so honored, and heaven's high and universal legis-

lation so glorified, as by this unreluctant, unrecoiling obedience of Jesus of Nazareth. We need not wonder that "God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name that is above every name." One such man in our world is enough to immortalize the race; enough to redeem it, and throw around it a lustre that shall survive the flight of time. It was an earthly service; but there is a moral glory in this vale of his humiliation that reflects its beams upon the eternal throne, and decks the great Lawgiver with light as with a garment.

But there were brighter manifestations of the Father's glory made by the Son than these. They are seen,

III. In the third place, IN HIS SUFFERINGS AND DEATH ON THE CROSS.

If we inquire why the race of Adam was not left in all the pollution and guilt of their apostasy, unprotected by any redeeming procedure, the answer is, "*God so loved the world* that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The love of God is emphatically the glory of his nature. In answer to the prayer of Moses, "I beseech thee, show me thy *glory*," God replied, "I will make all my *goodness* pass before thee." The most finished and adorned portrait of his character is drawn by his own un-

erring pencil in three expressive words, "God is love." He is not merely *good*; he is *goodness itself*. He is not merely kind and loving; he is *love itself*. We can never know the extent of his love. Finite minds can not comprehend it. Angels cover their faces with their wings when they contemplate it. The loftiest, and purest, and most active minds in the universe roam and range over it, but they find it an ocean of love, without bottom or shore. It "passeth knowledge." God is most glorified when these rivers of love and mercy flow out; and he most glorifies him whose person and work open wide the channels, so that they may and do inundate this sinning and suffering world.

It is the established statute of the divine kingdom that "without the shedding of blood there is no remission," and the demonstration is perfect when we look to the death of the cross. The bloody deed on Calvary demonstrates to the universe that spotless rectitude and immutable justice are delightfully harmonious with pardoning love; and so perfect is the demonstration, that neither angel, man, or devil has reason to complain that, in his offers of mercy to the race, and in actually dispensing it to all who repent and believe the Gospel, there is any relaxation of the claims of that justice and judgment which are the pillars and habitation of God's throne. The

same reasons that require that sin should be punished, require the atonement for sin in order to its forgiveness. Abreast with this law of works stands another law, the law of faith, that "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth from all sin." The one is the glorious Gospel of the blessed God, combining the demands of justice and grace; the other is the steadfast law that "the soul that sinneth it shall die." If "the ministration of death was glorious, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory." Glorious truth! "HIM hath God set forth to be a *propitiation*, to declare his *righteousness* for the remission of sins that are past, through the *forbearance* of God, that He might be *just*, and the *justifier* of him that believeth in Jesus."

Thus safely and thus gloriously were secured the free expressions of divine love to a guilty world, and secured by the Son, "the just in the place of the unjust." By "his stripes we are healed." He "was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Thus it was that he is "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." It was a fearful sacrifice, but his heart was set upon it. No finite mind can conceive the extent of his sufferings. Emphatically he was "the man of sorrows, and acquainted with griefs." Yet so absorbed in his work were his strong and ardent af-

fections, that, go where he would and do what he would, here his mind and heart centered. Already had this master-purpose drawn him from his Father's bosom; and, cost what it might to secure the object of his mission, he was ready for the sacrifice. When the hour had come, and he set his face toward Jerusalem, his soul was indeed troubled; there was a horror of great darkness upon him, but there was no misgiving. "Father, the hour is come, and what shall I say? Save me from this hour? But for this cause came I to this hour. Father, GLORIFY THY NAME!" There he humbled himself, and became obedient unto the death of the cross. There were no divine consolations to convert his sorrows into joys. Even the joy that was set before him, from a knowledge of the happy consequences of his sufferings, did not blunt the edge of the sword. There he hung, carrying our griefs and bearing our sorrows. There he hung, while heaven's heavy justice woke against him, and despair and grief wrung agony from his bosom. There he hung, life ebbing away drop by drop, till, worn out with torture and debility, one last sigh commits his departing spirit into his heavenly Father's hands, and he gives up the ghost.

Well did he say, "I have glorified thee on the earth." Had he not done it, what dark clouds of justice would have come between this wretch-

ed world and the Sun of righteousness! what obscurations of the divine glory! what a total eclipse of God's redeeming love! what agony and despair! what an oppressive doom! what a consuming fire! what a yawning gulf! It had been even so had not the Son glorified the Father's love—had not a rainbow gilded the dark cloud—had not descending angels brought the glad tidings of great joy—had not the Comforter announced, "It is Christ that died." Adorable Master! Thou alone hast finished the work that was given thee to do. How delightful the thought that God is thus glorified by the humiliation of the Son! "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, traveling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the wine-fat? I have trodden the wine-press alone, and of the people there was none with me; for the day of vengeance is in my heart, and the year of *my redeemed* is come." The Savior knew what we are so slow to learn, how to "glorify God in the fires." We see now how the pent-up glory of the divine nature breaks forth. Past ages have seen it, and future ages will see it more. A nation born in a day, and the highway of nations the way of holiness, and

floods of blessings poured upon the earth till there shall not be room to contain them, are all the outgoings of that glory secured by the humiliation of the Son. But his course on earth was not finished, even with his sufferings and death on the cross. We remark,

IV. In the fourth place, the Father was glorified by the Son in that he was BURIED, AND CONTINUED UNDER THE POWER OF DEATH FOR A TIME.

It was not his deepest humiliation that he hung a lifeless corse upon the accursed tree. He must be consigned to the tomb, and that dear form dwell among the dead. Could his pallid lips have spoken then, they might well have said to his boasting enemies, "This is your hour, and the power of darkness." It was a dark day to the orphan Church when he "made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death." Nothing but his dead body remained, and to be wept over by his sad disciples. The child of Mary, at whose birth angels sung, "Glory to God in the highest;" the Lamb of God, at whose baptism the Holy Ghost descended and rested on him, and a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased;" the same Jesus who was tempted in the wilderness, and where heavenly messengers "came and ministered unto him;" the same Jesus who taught on the mountain-top, in the

Temple, in the streets of Jerusalem, and on the Lake of Galilee, and spake as never man spake; the same Jesus who healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and raised the dead; the same Jesus who stilled the tempest, walked upon the sea, and cast out devils, *was there* in the new sepulchre hewn out of the solid rock, a huge stone laid upon the mouth of the cave, sealed, and guarded by a commissioned cohort of Roman soldiers. Nothing else is left of him. To the eye of sense he is *all there*, never to rise until the trumpet shall sound at the last day. What a triumph to the mob, who wagged their heads as they gazed upon the crucifixion, and exclaimed, "If thou be Christ, come down from the cross!" I seem to hear them say, "Where now is the world-famed Nazarene, this Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews?" Where is he who said that "God was his Father, making himself equal with God," and who "hath life in himself, even as the Father hath life in himself?" Where is he from whom his followers, in their joy, had looked for better things, and in their sadness said one to another, "We trusted it had been he who was to restore again the kingdom to Israel?" He is the dead Christ now. He is the unresisting and silent captive of the king of terrors. The Prince of Light himself is veiled in the darkness of the grave, and himself

the inglorious prey of the mighty. What is he now more than other men, who are "of the earth, earthy"—earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes?

Empty words was this impudent and saucy triumph. Jesus of Nazareth was indeed dead and buried, but his course *on earth* was not finished. He could not have risen according to the Scriptures if he had not died; he could not have "glorified God on the earth" if he had not risen. He was to live again, and by a forty days' residence on the earth demonstrate to the world that his mission was no failure. He was to live again, and by a forty days' residence on the earth prepare his followers for their work, and for his ascension to "the glory he had with the Father before the world was." God did not "leave his soul in Hades, neither did his flesh see corruption." They were but three short days and nights that he lay in the heart of the earth, when, according to the Scriptures, on the morning of the third day, an angel appeared and rolled away the stone from the mouth of the sepulchre, and HE came forth who is himself "the resurrection and the life," and who was to be henceforth acknowledged as the Lord of the living and the dead. This was the seal of his mission and of his Father's glory, progressively manifested from the day he was laid in the tomb of Joseph

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of Arimathea to the day when he was taken up and a cloud received him out of the sight of men.

He himself once said, "Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and *die*, it abideth alone; but if it *die*, it bringeth forth much fruit." That dead body in the sepulchre was like "the handful of corn on the top of the mountains, the fruit whereof shall shake like Lebanon, and they of the city shall be like the grass of the earth." It was thus that he obtained the mediatorial throne, and glorified his Father by his triumphs over all his Father's enemies, and by becoming "Head over all things to his Church." It was his highest, his brightest crown, that from the darkness of his grave such lustre was reflected on the eternal throne. From the manger of Bethlehem, from the bar of Pilate, from the cross, and from the silent and empty sepulchre, where the napkin was deposited that was about his head, the triumphant banner went forth to which the outcasts of Judah shall assemble from the four corners of the earth, and in its angel-flight through the nations, call Jew and Gentile to behold the "glory of God as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ." Seen, and foreseen, and enjoyed as these realities are and will be, how delightful the vision, how enrapturing the joy! God blessed forever! God glorified, through the humiliation of his Son!

Beloved hearers, dwell a moment on the words "I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work thou hast given me to do." Was there ever such an exemplification of a perfectly disinterested piety as this? Then hear this Captain of our salvation as he supplicates, "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory I had with thee before the world was," and say, is he not worthy of this reverence? Has he not fulfilled the terms of the everlasting covenant, and sealed it with his blood? Does he not deserve his reward? Has he not made out his claim to the high inheritance of the Only Son? and now, that he has "by himself purged our sins," to sit down on the right hand of Majesty on high? Since God himself "hath highly exalted him, and given a name that is above every name," shall we not unite in putting the crown on that Head to which are awarded the "many crowns," and ourselves proclaim his triumphs, and show forth his most worthy praise?

Behold, behold here the "sure foundation" of the believer's confidence and hope, and the only support of the perishing soul! This is the redemption, and this the Redeemer, "disallowed of men, but chosen of God and precious." He himself says to us, as he did to Simon Peter, "On this rock will I build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Rea-

son may build her systems on the wisdom of men; self-righteousness her hopes on presumption; imagination may build its castles in the air, but Christianity rests on this solid rock. "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation." Every thing else is floating uncertainty and a refuge of lies. Go to the bedside of the dying infidel if you would know at what peril men turn from this Rock of Ages. This rock alone will bear up every thing that is built upon it. He that liveth "is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him." And will you not all come to him who, by his obedience to the death of the cross, thus glorified his Father, and laid the foundation of that kingdom which "is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost?" His work on earth is finished, and now he is going forth to make his people willing in the day of his power; and woe to the man who, by his persevering rejection of this great salvation, obstructs his way to his holy hill of Zion, and would fain stigmatize him as a dishonored Savior, a wandering exile, despised and rejected of men, and not having where to lay his head! Believe us when we say there is no safety out of Christ. Credit his own words when he assures you that "he who believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be

damned." It is no fiction that the day is coming that will prove this solemn declaration true. Oh, I would fain lead you from every other refuge to Christ alone before that wrathful day shall come. It will be no murmuring of the breeze, but a storm that shall overturn the foundations of all earthly things, a flame that shall pervade the elements, and melt them with its fervent heat. I would not be the witness of your agony when you stand in the judgment if you live and die strangers to the only hope of lost man.

To you, my Christian hearers, the voice of God speaks to-day, not out of the midst of the fire. You are witnesses of the truth of the words the Savior uttered in the days of his flesh, "He that hath heard and learned of the Father cometh unto ME." You have learned to glory in his cross as he gloried in his Father's glory. You hail his conquests, though thus dearly bought. How sacred this hour, and how constraining these "cords of love!" Let them bind us to more fervent attachment to his person, more faithful devotement to his service, more earnest supplication for the advancement of his and of his Father's glory. We look upon him to-day in his humiliation; he commands us to do so "in remembrance of Him" who left the heaven of his joy to die on the cross. That mournful

scene is closed, and the bitterness of death is passed. It is the uncreated glory which hovers over this broken bread and this fruit of the vine. It is holy ground, and we "look on him we have pierced," but whom "God has exalted to be both Lord and Christ." Come, Christians, and with humility and thankfulness behold this Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. Here in the world where he was born, where he obeyed, suffered, and died, and whence he rose and ascended to live and reign forever—let us once more show forth his death, and contemplate his unutterable love. Oh for more of the spirit of the beloved disciple, when his affectionate heart burst forth in the memorable song, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests to God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion forever!" It is the song of the redeemed, "the new song." Let it sound through the earth, and never die away but to break forth in everlasting raptures to the Lamb that was slain!

SERMON IV.

NONE BUT CHRIST.

JOHN, vi., 68, 69.—“*Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life; and we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.*”

To a man who feels no interest on the subject of religion, such a question as this, and such an answer, are of minor consideration. But let us suppose that reason and conscience are awake within him, and that no subject of inquiry so deeply interests him as that which relates to his spiritual character and immortal destiny. Such a question and such an answer could not then be regarded with indifference. He might indeed be embarrassed, because he finds conflicting opinions in the world not a few. Yet his own mind is too wide awake to be satisfied without impartial inquiry. In vain does he plunge into business and amusement in order to drive away reflection; the whirl of earth can not drown this one great care. The inquiry is perpetually recurring, *To whom shall I go?* what shall be the last resort for my soul's salvation? Nor can he rest until this great question is decided.

And are there no such inquirers now in this sanctuary? *We* are dying men, yet sinful men; frail as the tender grass, yet born for immortality. What is our confidence, what are our immortal hopes and prospects? "To whom shall *we* go?" These are grave and solemn questions. And the answer is grave and solemn. It was Simon Peter's question, and Simon Peter's answer, in the immediate presence of his divine Lord. Let us direct our thoughts,

I. In the first place, TO THE QUESTION ITSELF;
"Lord, to whom shall we go?"

We must have some religion. The religious principle in man forms as truly a part of his nature as his intellect. His nature can not be developed, much less satisfied, without consulting it. What, then, shall our religion be?

Shall we be *Atheists*? Not until we can throw off the consciousness of our responsibility to "a power above us;" not until we can persuade ourselves that this vast creation came into existence without an adequate cause; that this wonderfully contrived and beautifully arranged world had no wise and intelligent contriver; and that this material and intellectual structure which we see around us, and which the annals of time teach us has existed for thousands of years, has no Supreme Legislator to govern it, no wise counsels to mark out its progress, and no kind and watch-

ful Providence to care for it. We gain nothing by becoming Atheists, and we lose every thing. We can not afford the loss, because we can not afford to "live without God and without hope." Any religion is better than blank Atheism.

Shall we take refuge in the *Deism of modern infidelity*? This is better than Atheism, because it teaches there is a God and a superintending Providence, a moral government, and, in some sort, a future retribution. It has in its ranks the names of learned and philosophical men, acute reasoners, and accomplished scholars. "The young and thoughtless are found under its banners, and the wicked and irreligious are attracted by its impiety." But the best that can be said of it is that it is a *negative* religion. It does not reach the depth of our wants. It tells of beauty and grandeur, and of the analogies of nature, and the wondrous laws of matter and mind, but it reveals no way of life to men lost in sin.

Shall we, then, go to any of the more loose religions which put on the phases of Christianity? There is a religion which does not outrage any of the laws of visible morality, nor of honorable intercourse between man and man; but, from all we have seen or read of it, we doubt much if it is a safe religion. Like the Deism of infidelity, it is a bundle of negatives. It denies man's

lost condition as a sinner, and all those truths which exhibit the true character of God, the essential principles of his government, and the only hope of a lost world. Men fall in with it because they have too much conscience to become infidels, and too much hostility to God's truth to become honest and consistent Christians.

Shall we, then, betake ourselves to some of the varied forms of that subtle system *which teaches that all men will be finally saved*? There are, no doubt, strong tendencies in the human heart to such a fascinating theory. There would not be an infidel in the world if the Bible contained such a doctrine as this. Infidels would be the loudest advocates for the Word of God if that single word *hell* were blotted from the sacred record. Either this system is false or the Bible a forgery. Who does not see that it obliterates the radical distinction between the righteous and the wicked, and demolishes at a stroke all the obligations to personal holiness? Truth and holiness, hope and heaven, are too precious to be intrusted to such a sophistical and insidious theory as this.

Shall we, then, be content with *a religion which we ourselves can work out by the deeds of the law*? There is now, and ever has been, a great deal of such religion as this; it is the kind of religion that is most natural to a serious mind, and seems to correspond with the dictates of an honest con-

science. But the embarrassing question in these self-righteous efforts is, *How much better* must men become in order to attain eternal life? *Where is the dividing line* between that measure of iniquity, beyond which they have nothing to hope, and that measure of goodness, beyond which they have nothing to fear? They are *sinner*s; and nothing is more preposterous than to hope for justification at the bar of God by the law which they have violated. There is no need of the Gospel if men can be justified by the deeds of law. The time will come when conscience is clamorous and exacting, and then this self-righteous religion will be weighed in the balance and found wanting.

Shall we, then, as a last resort, rest in *the form of true godliness, without its power*? This is the most subtle and the most specious of all the delusions of the Great Adversary. Here Rome rests, and counts her beads, and sprinkles her holy water, and says her prayers to the Virgin, and makes her sign of the cross. Here, to a melancholy extent, Protestantism reposes, satisfied with its evangelical creed, its baptismal altar, its communion-table, and its outward forms of religious worship. But is it not obvious that the Bible strikes deeper than this, every where teaching that "God is a spirit, and must be worshiped in spirit and in truth," and that, with all its fair out-

side, the religion of mere form is rottenness and death? True godliness must have power—power to attract the heart to God and heaven; to wean from sin and earth, and attach to truth and duty. We may not rest in such shadowy things as forms.

The question comes back upon us, therefore, *To whom shall we go* for the truth and the salvation of God? To whom? Yes, to whom? And let the apostle answer the question when he says to his divine Master, “Lord, to whom shall we go but to *thee*? THOU hast the words of ETERNAL LIFE, and we know and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.” He had no inducement to make this avowal except his own deliberate, and enlightened, and heaven-inspired convictions. He was satisfied that this is the only resort of an honest and inquiring mind, and, like thousands of others, he acted up to his convictions. Let us then, as,

II. The second object of our discourse, vindicate and enforce this answer. .

It is the answer of the Bible; it is our answer; it is your answer; it is the only answer that can be given. We all feel that it is an immeasurable trust which is thus committed to Christ when we repose our immortal hopes on him, and confide in him for *eternal life*. Is he, then, worthy of this confidence, and will he “keep

that we have committed to him until that day?" In reply to this inquiry, we remark,

1. In the first place, *he has given abundant proof of his divine mission, and that he was authorized by the court of heaven to come into our world on the great errand of saving mercy.* During the first four thousand years after the creation, the God of heaven had done much for the redemption of men by raising up and sending into the world heaven-taught messengers, and by instituting sacrifices and symbols which prefigured the way of life. But his benevolent purpose was not accomplished until, in the fullness of time, he "sent forth his Son." And when He came, he came as a divinely commissioned messenger from the court of heaven. He did not profess to come in his own name, but in the name and by the authority of his Father. Every where he made this open avowal. From his very cradle, therefore, he showed the world his credentials. At his baptism, and throughout his public ministry, and on his cross, he demonstrated his claims as the One sent from God. His personal character, his instructions, his miracles of mercy, his resurrection from the grave, his ascension into heaven, and the promised outpouring of his Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, all show that never were credentials more complete and convincing. The four Evangelists furnish a

collection of facts that are inexplicable, unless his mission was sanctioned by the supreme authority of heaven. Though poor and uninstructed, an unknown and dishonored Jew, possessing no rank or authority in Church or state, he was the wonder of his age. Men came from afar to behold him, and princes trembled in his presence; devils knew him and deprecated his displeasure, and angels worshiped him; the winds and the sea obeyed him; disease fled at his approach, and the dead came forth from their graves at his bidding. He did not aspire to wealth, or secular dominion and fame; his kingdom was not of this world; his object was purely spiritual; yet he exerted an influence on his own and all subsequent ages such as has never been known in the history of our world. "He came, not to do his own will, but the will of the Father who sent him." We remark,

2. In the second place, thus commissioned, he *accomplished the end for which he came*. He actually procured eternal life for all his followers. In order to accomplish this, he had to *do* much and to *suffer* much. There was service and there was suffering. His was to live on this earth as no one ever lived, to die upon it as no other ever died. Nay, it was not so much to *live* as to *die*; to "give his life a ransom for many." This he could do; this he had a right to do. He alone,

of all the sons of men, had a right over his own life. He was *sui juris*. "I have power," he says, "to lay down my life, and I have power to take it again." This was his work, and this work he accomplished, and for the revealed purpose of rendering it consistent with the divine nature and the divine law for pardon and eternal life to be bestowed on those who deserved to die. The wondrous arrangement of infinite wisdom was to substitute the innocent in the place of the guilty; and this procedure, extraordinary as it was, approved and ratified in heaven, was the only basis of man's redemption. The relation he sustained both to the divine and human nature abundantly qualified him for the service and the suffering, and gave the highest security that the work should be impartially and successfully prosecuted. He was the friend of God, and came to honor him; he was the friend of sinners, and came to save them; he was the friend of law, and magnified and made it honorable; he was the friend of justice, and satisfied it; he was mercy's friend, and showed how mercy could be exalted by justice, and justice adorned by mercy. The righteous and holy Lawgiver himself being judge, there is no violation of heaven's unalterable jurisprudence in this arrangement, no sacrifice of any one principle of the divine government in thus giving eternal life to

all contrite and penitent transgressors. His death is instead of theirs; his righteousness is instead of theirs. Thus it is that he *procures* eternal life, "bearing our sins in his own body on the tree;" conquering death and the grave; ascending up on high, and there pledging his love, his power, his faithfulness, that "whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

3. In the third place, he *has revealed and made known the eternal life he has thus procured*. In this his Gospel stands pre-eminent, and above all other pretended or real revelations; higher than Moses and the prophets, and totally eclipsing all the oracles of the pagan world. On the most important subjects the heathen oracles were silent; on those in which they made their communications their utterances were ambiguous and doubtful, and given forth from some deep and obscure cavern of the earth. In vain do we look to their philosophers or their moralists for any satisfactory solution of the great problems in which, as accountable and immortal beings, men have the deepest interest. When we turn from all these, and all others, to the Gospel of the Son of God, we find that these revelations solicit inspection. They are express and determined; they are unobscured and clear; they are faithful and true, and in their tendency holy and righteous; and

they all centre in the great object of his mission, and are themselves "the words of *eternal life*." His communications respect truths and principles which lie at the basis of the divine government; they unfold realities which none knew and were able to reveal but he who was "in the beginning with God, and was God." Wondrous things they were: eternity and time in one; God and man united in the same mysterious person; earth and heaven combined; mortality put off to put on immortality; heaven, earth, and hell, with all their inexplicable wonders; the doctrine of pardon and the doctrine of justice; the selected scene of man's probation and discipline, and the contrasted scenes of his everlasting retribution, both resplendent with the glories of the divine nature—these things, and such as these, were to him as ordinary thoughts, and as the overflowings of a mind in which all fullness dwells. So rich, so varied are they, and so adapted to man's intellectual, moral, sensitive, and immortal nature, that they develop, and are destined to bring to maturity, his whole nature and his entire being. No created mind ever soared so high, plunged so deep, or extended so far. Had Plato, or Seneca, or Bacon uttered them, they would have been canonized as more than human. Whatever of obligation and duty; whatever of encouraging motives, and reforming and trans-

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forming influences ; whatever of hope, and promise, and blessedness helpless man requires, and miserable man longs for—unknown as they were to human reason, and unattainable by human effort—Jesus Christ has revealed, and to the weakest faith of his weakest followers. Such a One we may go to ; such a Savior we may confide in. The very pagans will rise up in the judgment against us if we heed not his counsels, and find not in his words of life all that answers the demands of an otherwise hopeless immortality.

4. We remark, in the fourth place, *Jesus Christ imparts the life eternal which he thus reveals*. He has commanded that his Gospel be preached “to every creature ;” and to all the hearers of this Gospel he *offers* its blessings freely, “without money and without price.” His language is, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth ; for I am God, and there is none else.” He accompanies these offers *with promise*—the promise of pardon and life to every one that cordially falls in with this method of his saving mercy ; assuring the world, on the word of his oath, that “he will in no wise cast out” any that come to him. Men do indeed doubt the sincerity of these offers. Guilt is suspicious ; and they suspect the fullness and all-sufficiency of this gracious provision. They do not like the salvation it proposes, because they do not love a holy God,

a holy law, a holy Gospel, a holy life, and a holy heaven, and therefore "they will not come to him that they might have life."

And here, wonderful to tell, the gracious and omnipotent Savior interposes, in order to *impart* the blessings that are thus made light of and rejected. There is a power superior to their dark suspicion, and stronger than their iron-hearted obduracy. It is a blot on human nature that men are thus vile; but it shows how worthy he is of their confidence, who, in this their dire extremity, goes forth to "seek and save that which is lost." False religions had done their best to quicken men who were dead in sin; nature, and reason, and learning, and science, and civilization, and human laws had done their best to break the chains of man's ignominious servitude to that world, the friendship of which is enmity to God; but no motives could conquer, no means reclaim them; nor would they have been conquered and reclaimed had he not been mighty to save.

"O Israel! thou hast destroyed thyself, but in Me is thy help." He came, not merely to procure salvation, and make the offer of it to guilty men, but to impart it. Touched by the power of his Spirit, millions have looked to him as their refuge, and found in him pardon and peace—strength for their weakness, purity for their pol-

lution, light and hope for their darkness and despair, "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption," all in and from him. Not one of these would have entered into his rest had he not begun and perfected their redemption. "Lord, to whom shall we go but to thee?" I add,

5. In the fifth and last place, that, in going to Christ, *we find a certainty in our convictions and an assurance in our faith which we do not find elsewhere.* Every other religion, to say nothing of its delusion and imposture, is at best supported only by faint probabilities and bold conjecture. There is no certainty, no assurance, either of faith, hope, or charity, in its purest forms. Well did Simon Peter, when he had started the inquiry, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" superadd the weighty thought, "Thou hast the words of eternal life, and we *know and are sure* that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." There is no uncertainty, no conjecture, no balancing of probabilities where the soul truly rests on Christ. "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation." True Christians have something to rest upon. They have been taught of God, and have a spiritual discernment of spiritual things. They believe too much, they have felt too much, they know too much and too certainly ever to go away from Christ. They *know* the Gospel is true, not only

by considerations addressed to their understanding, but by their own experience. It has accomplished for them what nothing else can accomplish. They have proved it, and have found that it is no failure. There is an inward sympathy between the state of their own minds and the truths of the Gospel which bears testimony to the verity and the preciousness of these truths.

“A Christian dwells, like Ariel, in the sun.
Meridian evidence puts doubt to flight.”

God's Spirit within him testifies with God's Spirit in the Gospel that there is salvation in no other name than that of Jesus. He may never feel so utterly unworthy and ill-deserving as when his confidence in Christ is the strongest—as when, with a broken heart, he lifts his eye to Calvary, and exclaims, *It is enough!* Dissatisfied with every thing else within him and without him, he looks to Jesus and exclaims, *I will trust him for every thing, and trust him forever!* None but Christ! none but Christ! “Lord, to whom shall we go? *Thou* hast the words of eternal life, and we know and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.” Such was Simon Peter's question, and such his answer. Be they yours and mine!

In our conclusion of this discourse, we remark that it teaches us,

1. In the first place, the *danger of loose senti-*

ments on the subject of religion. If the truth of Christ and the spirit of Christ form the only safe religion, then it is fearfully hazardous to rest anywhere else. Yet is there great looseness of religious opinions in the world. Those there are who think that it is of little consequence what a man's religion is, provided he is only sincere. But it is not to be forgotten that we may be sincerely wrong as well as sincerely right. We may be in the road to hell, and sincerely believe that we are in the road to heaven. "There is a way that seemeth right to a man, but the end thereof is the way of death." But if there is no other refuge but Christ, their delusion will not profit them. "If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are *lost*." Every man feels that he has a right to his own religious opinions, be they what they may. Yet let every man remember that he is as accountable to *the laws of Christ's kingdom* for his belief as for his practice. No man is better than his religious principles. In the sight of God, he has no more right to think as he pleases than to act as he pleases. Light has come into the world, and he has no more right to a wrong opinion than he has "to love darkness rather than light." His principles ought to be such as are revealed in the Bible, and such as will stand in the day of trial. If he would be safe, he must be faithful to God, to

God's truth, and to his own soul. Errors that shut out all conviction of sin, and all due sense of the justice of God; that deny the necessity of regeneration, and break the force of the divine threatenings, only lead the soul from Christ. Beware of all this, beloved hearers. You may not be Atheists, nor infidels, nor Universalists, nor Unitarians; yet you may be in danger from errors that with equal certainty lead you to reject the Son of God. Oh ye, who *go about to establish a righteousness of your own by the deeds of the law, to the rejection of that righteousness which is by faith in the Son of God*, whence this self-complacent spirit, and why are you so slow of heart to learn this first and great lesson inculcated by his cross, that he "came not to call the righteous, but *sinners* to repentance?" Oh ye, *who have a name that ye live and are dead*, why is it that you are satisfied with the form of godliness without the power; the shadow without the substance; the cold, dead carcass without the living Christianity? It is not Christ upon your lips, nor in your creed, nor in your ordinances; it is not Christ on the cross, nor Christ on the throne; it is "Christ in you" which is the hope of glory.

2. Our subject, in the second place, *furnishes strong encouragement to the weary and heavy-laden sinner*. God hath said, "The soul that

sinneth *shall die*." Some of you feel this, and ask what you shall do. You are out of Christ, and are sensible that you are condemned, and justly. Yet here you are, bowed down like a bulrush, and dare not venture to hope in God, and consecrate yourselves to him on the merits of his Son. To all such persons our subject addresses its counsels in the language of Simon Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go but to thee?" Oh why do you not fall at his feet and say, "Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief?" Why hesitate, when he sets the door wide open, and invites you to enter in? Why stand counting your sins, when he assures you that, though they be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; and though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool? Why complain of difficulty, and plead your need of his imparted grace, when that very dependence is your only hope, and you are bidden to "take hold of his strength?" Why so suspicious as to dream of some excluding decree never existing, that shuts you out of heaven, while you lose sight of those gracious invitations of his love that would fain take you in? Is there not something inexplicable in this anxious, yet this hesitating state of mind? I pray you hesitate no longer. Let not another Sabbath, another *hour* pass, without finding you at the foot of the cross. Let it be recorded on earth

and in heaven to-day whether you will have this Christ or no.

3. In the third and last place, our subject is well fitted to *confirm the faith and hopes of the people of God*. It is no uncommon thing for persons to think they are Christians when they are not Christians, and who, though they are zealous in the cause of Christ for a little while, and exemplary in their deportment, turn back and become worse than they were before. So it was with those referred to in the paragraph which contains the text, and in the time of Christ. "Many went back, and walked no more with him." And so it is now. But, beloved friends, in view of the thoughts suggested in this discourse, we are persuaded of better things of you—things that accompany salvation. You have not found any better religion than the Gospel of the Son of God, or any guide and refuge more gracious and more faithful than he. When pursuing calamity comes upon you, and the world disappoints your hopes, there is no being in the universe who will hide you more safely in his pavilion. When the storm lowers, and weariness of earth disheartens, and death invades, and when unpardoned sin and guilt rear their horrid forms before your trembling heart, your only refuge is the sinner's Friend. Sweet privilege is it here, so near his throne, to say, "*Thou hast the words*

of eternal life, and we know and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." After all your hopes, *you* will not go away from Christ, and consent to cast your lot with those who draw back, and walk no more with him. What a desolate world would this be without Christ!

"To whom, my Savior, shall I go,
If I depart from thee?
My guide through all this vale of woe,
And more than all to me."

Such is *your* confidence *in him*, your dependence *upon him*, your complacency *in his redemption*, and your desire to be saved *in no other way*, is it not? Come, then, and cheerfully consecrate yourselves to him afresh, with all that you have and are. Take him for all the purposes of your salvation, receive him as your own, and say with Thomas, "MY Lord and MY God." Look to his death as the greatest, the most fearful, yet the most tender, the most affecting, the most glorious reality in the universe, and *trust* in it as though you saw that bleeding victim, that Lamb of God, bearing away your sins before your eyes, and thus strengthened and comforted, let us look above it to the heavenly mansions where he is gone. "Seeing we have a great High-priest who has passed into the heavens, Jesus Christ the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession." "Hold fast that thou hast; let no man take thy crown!"

Your crown and mine—oh wondrous grace! his purchase, his gift—cast at his feet on whose head are “many crowns”—we, with ransomed millions, and they with us, ascribing to him all the glory of our salvation.

SERMON V.

THE THRONE OF GRACE.

HEBREWS, iv., 16.—“*Let us, therefore, come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*”

THE apostle, in this chapter, had been urging the Hebrew Christians to constant watchfulness against apostasy and to high attainments in holiness. He took pains to teach them that the heavenly career is one of unsleeping vigilance and unrelaxed effort, and that there is no point in this ascending progress where the child of God may lie down and slumber. He must pursue his way with an ever-quickenened energy, and lay hold on eternal life.

But, in such a course, he needs resources that are altogether above his own; and he is here directed to One from whom he may derive all his sufficiency. After having described the character of Jesus Christ, this apostle thus exhorts those to whom he addressed this epistle: “Seeing, then, that we have a great High-priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not

an high-priest which can not be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." He then proceeds to urge the privilege of believers in having free access to God through him. There, before his throne, let them spread their every care, and confession, and request. This is his encouraging language: "Let us, therefore, come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

In taking a purely practical view of this subject, we propose to inquire

Where we must come, agreeably to the apostle's direction;

For what we must come;

When we must come; and

How we must come.

I. I am to show *where* we must come, in conformity with this apostolic invitation.

It is "the throne of grace." Nothing is more simple in its nature, or the nature of its influence, than the faith of the Gospel. It is "the belief of the truth;" and the influence of it arises from the importance of the truth believed. Revealed truth is received on the testimony of God himself, and exhibits him as "the Lord God, merciful and gracious." Through the sacrifice of his Son, he proclaims himself the God of pardons.

In applying this great and encouraging truth for the purpose of stirring up the Hebrews to the duty of prayer, the apostle would awaken in their bosoms all the emotions of filial gratitude and Christian hope, and urge them to the alacrity and perseverance, to the earnestness and importunity of men who knew "the grace of God in truth." He would have them feel the vital power of the fact that where "sin reigned unto death, grace reigns, through righteousness, unto eternal life by Jesus Christ." To the fallen angels the Lord of heaven stands in the relation of an offended and angry Lawgiver; to fallen men he stands in the special relation of the God of grace.

The place, therefore, to which the people of God are here invited to come, is "the throne of grace." It is a *throne*, because it is the emblem of sovereign power and dignity; as it is written, "Thy *throne*, O God, is forever and ever." It is the place where he peculiarly manifests his supremacy; as it is written, "Heaven is my *throne*, and the earth is my footstool." Here are the insignia and embellishments of royalty, indicating the extent and magnificence of his dominion which ruleth over all; as it is written, "A *glorious high throne* is the habitation of our God." Yet is it a *throne of grace*; else, with just conceptions of our own unworthiness and ill desert, and

of the majesty and glory of the universal Lord, and his unspotted holiness, it would be to such sinners only a consuming "fire." When it is represented as a "throne of grace," it is a figurative representation, denoting God himself as the hearer of prayer. It is no particular *place*, because God is equally present in all places at the same moment of time. Under the ancient dispensation, Jerusalem was the place where men ought to worship; Zion was the spot where the tribes were required to appear. There was the altar, and there the mercy-seat overlaid with gold, and overshadowed by the cherubim. But these were all types or prefigurations of the unrestricted privileges of God's people under the Gospel dispensation. Jesus Christ told the Samaritan woman that the time was coming when the worship of God should no longer be confined to the mountain of Samaria nor to Jerusalem, but that the Father would every where be worshiped in spirit and in truth.

The throne of grace, therefore, denotes a *gracious God*. By it believers have, in every age, understood the readiness of God to hear and answer their supplications through Jesus Christ. It is very properly represented as a throne, because he who sits upon it is the Sovereign of all worlds, and, even when he exhibits his greatest tenderness and love, does not lay aside the badges

of royalty and empire. Yet mercy here mingles her invitations amid all its greatness and splendor, and is its highest adornment. It is not the throne of judgment nor the seat of terrors. Grace reigns there — illimitable, matchless, sovereign grace. Its foundation is grace; its garniture is grace, garnished with all manner of precious stones; and the gates of it are not shut at all by day nor by night. All are welcome to it, and to its nearest approaches and its most intimate fellowship. There it is that the God of grace so often sends down the spirit of adoption into the hearts of his children, whereby they are enabled to cry, "Abba, Father!" There he applies the exceeding great and precious promises, and fills their hearts with joy and their lips with praise. "Through HIM they have access by one spirit unto the Father." They are subduing beams of grace and mercy which there melt the hard heart, till its affections go forth in wonder, love, and joy. "The throne of grace," what sweet memories are associated with these sweet hours of prayer! How often is the sweet thought of the Psalmist there realized, "Return unto thy *rest*, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee?" The Mediator of the New Covenant has received authority there to bless every sincere and humble suppliant. Oh, let us prize the "throne of grace." The best means of keeping near to God

is that mercy-seat, where the "blood of sprinkling" is so freely scattered. "There the battle is lost or won." Wonderful condescension! There, at that throne, a creature, dust and ashes, a sinner, vile and ruined, speaks with God:

"Tells all his woes, enumerates his wants;
Yea, pleads with Deity, and gains relief."

But

II. In the second place, *for what* we must come to this throne of grace.

The language of the apostle is, "Let us come to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help." The true suppliant never goes to the throne without an object. It is a sense of his wants and his dependence that drives him there. When once his eyes are opened to a view of his condition as a creature, and his ill desert as a sinner, a thousand wants stare him in the face. His errand at the throne is for all the fruits of God's love. He wants pardon, purity, strength, health, life, righteousness, peace, and security; in short, he finds that he wants every thing which the covenant of grace contains, and which his own experience indicates. He has no other means of getting his wants supplied but by going as an impoverished sinner, a poor beggar, to the Father of all mercies, and imploring the supplies his exigencies require. He is furnished with an errand, therefore, whenever he

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looks upon himself; and with the authority from him who has said, "Ask, and it shall be given you," he goes, not merely to seek, but *obtain* mercy; not merely to ask, but *find* grace to help."

The apostle specifies two general objects of supplication, which every child of God feels the necessity of obtaining at all times—*mercy* and *grace*. He goes to God for *pardoning mercy* as a sinner justly condemned. The minds of God's people are often painfully agitated by a view of their own iniquities. They have deep impressions of the heinousness and guilt of sin; their own hearts are laid open to their view; their willful and deliberate wickedness agitates them, and they regard it as a doubtful question whether or not they have obtained mercy. "By the law is the knowledge of sin;" and when they compare their own character with this high standard, it is no marvel that they are honestly perplexed by the inquiry, "Have I any well-grounded assurance of pardoning mercy?" They find the law in their members warring against the law of their minds, and bringing them into captivity to the law which is in their members; and there is no relief from such perplexity but at the throne of grace, where the bondage and the burden of sin are most deeply felt, and where the bondage is so often relaxed and the burden falls off. The errand is a specific one when the wounded spirit

repairs thither to plead with God, and to inquire if there may not still be hope even for such a sinner. If you were at the door of his closet, you might hear him as he says, "For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great." And there it is that he learns that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin—that there is an infinite sacrifice for the chief of sinners, and that the vilest may obtain pardon and salvation through the great atonement of God's dear Son.

And there he repairs not only for pardoning mercy, but for *grace* to help. It is a principle of the Gospel, and it is invoven with the experience of every child of God, that without Christ he can do nothing. There is no duty, no service for God or his fellow-men for which he is qualified without those gracious affections that are imparted by the Holy Spirit. There is no temptation he will resist, no danger he can avoid, no progress in the divine life to which he can address an encouraged mind, without daily communications of grace from on high. Such are the inconstancy of his faith and every holy affection, that he is drawn, sometimes by cords of love, and sometimes by agitating fears, to the throne of grace for those quickening and refreshing influences of the Holy Spirit which alone can keep him from falling, and enable him to hold on and

hold out to the end. There the Spirit helpeth his infirmities. There he may behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord, and be changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. The great High-priest of his profession has told him, "If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, much more shall your Father which is in heaven give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him." And there, many a time, after struggling under the assaults of his enemies, and after surmounting difficulties and discouragements, he is made to rejoice in the Lord and joy in the God of his salvation. These are what the suppliant wants, and prays for, and obtains. He would have pardon and peace. He would have the gift of the Holy Ghost and the promise of eternal life. He would live to glorify God and enjoy him forever. He would be freed "from the body of this death" through Jesus Christ our Lord. He would be purified from his moral defilement—would have his heart the habitation of his Father in heaven, and his body a temple of the Holy Ghost. He would be enlightened, cleansed, guided, cared for, comforted, and cheered in his good fight of faith. He goes to One who possesses all power in heaven and on earth, whose treasures of grace are inexhaustible, and in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

These are great blessings, but not too great for God to bestow.

But we proceed,

III. To show *when* we should come to the throne of grace.

The apostle, in the text, speaks of a "time of need." It is always a time of need, and never more so than when we are the least sensible of it. It is in seasons of outward ease and security that the Christian is most surrounded with snares and temptations. "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint." "Be thou my strong habitation," says David, "whereunto I may *continually* resort." But while the *spirit* and habit of prayer become the believer at all times, there are peculiar seasons for this devotional exercise. There are *times of need*, when the soul feels her indigence and necessity, and the throne of grace is peculiarly precious.

The season of prosperity is a time of need. When there is a very small admixture of evil in our cup, and every bitter and nauseous ingredient seems to have been taken away, and no comfort is forbidden us, and our prospects are every where gilded with a vivid hue, it is in truth a time of need. Such is the corruption of the human heart, that large measures of earthly good are very apt to exert an unhappy influence upon our spiritual welfare, and to lead us to forgetful-

ness of God. Prosperity is the furnace that tries the soul. The goodness of God ought to lead us to repentance, and claims from us a grateful return. But how natural it is for apostate man to forget the Giver in the enjoyment of the gift. "Worldly, sensual, devilish," are the characteristics of those who are swollen with pride and fullness of bread. Many a professed Christian, by his sloth and inactivity, has wounded the Savior in the house of his friends, while, by his excessive worldliness, he has given the enemy occasion to blaspheme. Nor is there any refuge from this stupefying and dazzling influence but the throne of grace. Just in the proportion to the snares which prosperity is weaving for the graces and hopes of the believer, is there need of fortifying himself against its wiles by watchfulness and prayer. "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe!"

The *day of adversity* is also a "time of need." Is any among you afflicted, let him pray. Prayer is precious at all times, but doubly so in the hours of trial. Weariness and disappointment, grief and sorrow, calamity and wretchedness, find relief at the throne of grace. There are sorrows which may never be told but to the hearer of prayer. They are sad and depressing sorrows, and would remain shut up within the sufferer's bosom but for the invitation, "Call upon me in

trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." How precious the promise, "In the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion; in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock." Those from whom God has taken lover, and friend, and their acquaintance into darkness, crave alleviation in their affliction which the world can not give. Miserable comforters are they all. Sorrow can not be drowned in the cares or joys of the world. They can not be forgotten; the scar of the wound tells the tale long after the wound is healed. They can not be endured without looking higher than the world, and away beyond the everlasting hills. Fortitude may brave calamity, but nothing but intercourse with him who can avert it or remove it, and who alone can support and cheer the soul that is blasted by the storm, and whose office it is to comfort all that mourn, can soothe the heart of tenderness, and bid the weeper be at peace.

The season of temptation is a time of need. When the adversary from without and corruption from within assail the confidence and steadfastness of God's people, the name of the Lord is a strong tower, into which they run and are safe. Let not this be deemed a visionary danger. The believer's conflict is not only with the world and the flesh, but with the devil. He is the enemy of souls, and a cruel enemy, going about seeking

whom he may devour; crafty as a serpent, and ferocious as a roaring lion. He excels in intelligence and strength, and employs them but for bad purposes. The Michael of Daniel and the Apocalypse is he alone who can limit these powers of darkness. For this purpose was he manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Satan is the destroyer; Jesus is the Savior. The conflict between them began with time, and will end only with time, when the Savior's glory will be manifest in his own triumph and the overthrow of the enemy. It is at his throne of grace, therefore, that the issue of the conflict is decided at every fresh invasion of the foe. There is the counterwork of the great adversary. "If God be for us, who is against us?"

The season of darkness and despondency is a time of need. There are such seasons. When the adversary can not pervert the soul to presumption, he would fain drive it to despair. Seasons of lukewarmness precede the chills of spiritual death. The Spirit of God is grieved, and evil thoughts, infidel and atheistic thoughts, vile lusts, and, it may be, sad miscarriages in the Christian life, suggest to the mind the doubt if it has not already made shipwreck of the faith. Dr. Owen, in his "Meditations on the Glory of Christ," remarks, "Some would fain have evangelical joy, peace, and assurance to countenance

them in their evil frames and careless walking; but it will not be." In his treatise on "Spiritual-mindedness," he observes that, "Under an habitual declension or decay of grace, no man *can* keep or maintain a sense of the love of God, or of peace with him." It is no unkindness on the part of our covenant God that a guilty conscience and a peaceful hope can not dwell together in the same bosom. We need not wonder if we walk in darkness then, and see no light. And where shall the wanderer go, in order to be brought back to duty and to peace, but to him who restoreth the soul, and leads it in paths of righteousness for his name's sake? Never would the doubting be confirmed, the benighted illumined; the backslider restored, unless reclaimed by him. True, they have forfeited his care; yet there is an open door to his throne of grace. "Search me, O God, and try me, and see what wicked way there is in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." This is their refuge and only hope. "What time I am afraid I will trust in thee." When darkness thickens and fears multiply; when faith and hope are staggered and shrink away; and when they are forced to cry, like Peter, "Lord, save, or we perish!" *he does save.* The heavenly Comforter may always be found at the mercy-seat, taking an interest in all the fears and wants of his people, and making inter-

cession for them with groanings that can not be uttered.

The season of difficult and arduous duty is a time of need; and it is at the throne of grace that we most effectually learn how insufficient are all human skill and energy, how little it corresponds with the divine purposes to make a display of human power, and that it is only when we feel most deeply our own absolute incompetence that divine power and grace are seen to shine and triumph. It is then that the "worm Jacob is made to thrash the mountains and beat them small, and make the hills as chaff."

Do the *people of God feel a tender concern for his kingdom*? does vital piety languish and Zion mourn? do the desolations of the Church and the world rise in mournful extent before them? *then it is a time of need.* Zion mourns, and few come to her solemn feasts; but Zion's God and King is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. When every resource fails, the throne of grace remains. There we learn that God has not forsaken, and will not forsake his inheritance. It is a token for good when his people are brought to his throne to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. To go to God, to ask of him, to receive from him, and for that cause and kingdom which lie nearest his heart, is the best proof of the power of prayer. We know that he loves his Church, and is hon-

ored by her enlargement both in numbers and in the beauty of holiness. Her declension is truly a time of need. Be her wants our wants—her griefs and sorrows ours. Never let us cease to pray for Zion. Nothing affords such relief in days of darkness as prayer.

Thus, throughout all his course, and in all his relations to the Church and the world, the Christian will find that there are times of need which make the throne of grace his welcome and glad resort. And when he is about to end his course—when, as a hireling, he has finished his day—when earth and time recede, and the time has come when it is appointed unto him once to die, he finds it a time of need. His beating heart is at rest at the throne of grace. There are no horrors there, and there is no foe. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. Its sting is gone. It is Christ to live; to die is gain.

IV. Our fourth and last object is to show *how* we must come to the throne of grace.

“Let us, therefore,” says the apostle, “come *boldly* to the throne of grace.” There is a self-confidence and temerity in prayer that are inconsistent with reverence and holy fear. There is a self-righteousness like that of the boasting Pharisee, a self-complacency, a flippancy even, in this solemn service, that are out of place before the throne of the Most High. While we should ap-

proach it with the warm emotions of a devotion-al spirit, it should be with self-abasing views of our character as sinners, and with profound and elevated contemplations of infinite greatness and goodness. It is an humble religion the Gospel enjoins, and nowhere more emphatically than in acts of devotion. If angelic spirits veil their faces, and cast their crowns before the throne, they are not inflated notions of his sanctity that become a praying sinner.

Yet is there such a thing as *holy boldness* in prayer. It is the hope and confidence of a sinful yet redeemed intelligence coming to the God of all grace, and in the name of the great High-priest of the Christian profession, and there making his appeal to the resources of infinite love and power. It is the spirit of Abraham when he interceded for Sodom. It is the spirit of Moses when he prayed for Israel. It is the spirit of Elijah at Mount Carmel. It is the spirit of Daniel in Babylon—of the disciples on the day of Pentecost—of Paul and Silas in prison, and of our ever-blessed and adorable Lord in Geth-semane. The suppliant is bold, because he has the truest views of God and himself. There is sincerity in his prayers; there is earnestness; there is fervency; there is resistless importunity, because God bids him ask that he may receive; because, the greater the blessing, the more is the

love of God gratified in bestowing it, and because the more he bestows for the sake of his Son, the more is his Son glorified. God will not be offended by this boldness so long as we ask in Christ's name, and but for that which is for his honor and our good. There is every thing to encourage such boldness. There is not a solitary instance on the sacred record in which such boldness is forbidden, nor a solitary intimation in all the Bible that God has said to the seed of Jacob, "Seek ye me in vain." God loves this filial freedom because it is right, because he imparts and cherishes it, and because it honors him as the great Giver. The filial thoughts and filial affections of his creature and child then have sweet fellowship with the paternal thoughts and affections of our Father who is in heaven. With the instinctive simplicity of a child the suppliant goes to him, and, if his wants are urgent, feels confident of all needed supply; and, if danger threatens, eagerly runs to his arms, and feels assured of his protection. God never alters; in the divine wisdom, goodness, and faithfulness there is no change or variation; and this gives boldness of access to his mercy-seat. He is bold to ask, because he is bold to confide and bold to submit. He has a holy vehemence, and is intent on the object of his supplications. And as he draws near to God, and feels that he has ob-

tained an audience, he is bold to say with Jacob, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me."

Truly, my brethren, "our fellowship is with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ." You know by experience that there is such a thing as a "pouring out of the soul" at the throne of grace, and not unfrequently a melting of heart and tenderness of affection that breathe themselves forth as the Spirit gives them utterance. You know what it is to take hold of his covenant, and apprehend his strength and promises; nor can faith be too strong, nor confidence rise too high, when pleading God's promises. The spirit of prayer is often the sweetest pledge of things prayed for. When the helpless suppliant stirreth up himself to take hold on God, he has power and prevails. The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Alas! alas! how little are these truths appreciated, and how much is the throne of grace neglected! My brethren, God has erected the throne of grace that we might come to it, and come to it with boldness, in the name of our great High-priest. But is there no evidence among us that this high privilege is little thought of? Oh, whence are these winters of the soul, these sad declensions, this mournful inconstancy? The dews of heaven distill upon Zion whenever she maintains her intimacy with God. 'Tis there, where

tains her intimacy with God. 'Tis there, close by the mercy-seat, that every grace grows as the lily, and casts forth its branch as Lebanon. There is no growth where there is little prayer. There may be leaves, for they may be forced and nourished by art. But there is little that is fed by the showers and the rays of heaven, where the soul does not often place itself beneath the cloud and the sun. The reason why you find the toils and struggles of your career so irksome is that you so seldom stir up yourselves to take hold on God. To be sensibly passing from one point of attainment to another, from one victory over the world to another; to be crucifying the flesh, with its affections and lusts; to be increasing in heavenly wisdom; to be cheerfully devoted to every duty; to be rising in spiritual-mindedness; to be aspiring with ardor after large measures of holiness, you must hold frequent communion with God. This want of spiritual health is a sure indication of the neglect of prayer. A godly life would not be so irksome; it would not be such a weariness to serve God; the yoke of Christ would not be such a burden if you dwelt nearer the throne of grace. Would you be unembarrassed by the difficulties and perplexities of your way; would you tread upon the lion and the adder, and the young lion and the dragon trample under your feet; would you walk in your way

safely, so that your foot shall not stumble ; would you mount up on wings as eagles, and run and not be weary, and walk and not faint, you must learn more boldly to wait on the Lord.

Prayer is the distinguishing privilege of the family of God. It is the characteristic mark of his children ; of every one of whom it may be always said, as soon as God begins his gracious work upon the heart, "Behold, he prayeth !" To each one of you I would say, Is this characteristic *yours*? The question of the most vital importance to every one of you is, *Am I a Christian?* I ask every one of you, *Are you a man of prayer?* There is nothing uncertain or indeterminate in the import of this plain inquiry. Heaven or hell stand revealed before you, as you live and die men of prayer. Examine yourselves, and see on what ground you stand. All of us are either men of prayer, or men who neglect this sacred and precious duty. When I ask you whether you are men of prayer, I propose a question which divides this assembly ; and it is a question which God expects every one of you to answer to his own soul, and to take the comfort or terror of the answer as a faithful conscience shall apply the truth to every man's bosom.

Beloved hearers, *Is it not a time of need with us now?* Are there not wants which every child of God feels the need of presenting before the throne for *himself*? Have you no sins which

are a burden too heavy for you to bear? Have none of you lost your first love, and become languid and dull in the Christian cause? Have none of you become worldly and self-confident? Do none of you enter upon the duties of religion with sins that are unrepented of, and consciences that are defiled? Do none of you feel yourselves embarrassed in your access to the Lord's table, and obstructed and prevented from the performance and enjoyment of those public duties which the profession of Christianity requires of you? Are you not interrupted in your enjoyments of God? Have you not found that just so far as you have departed from God, God has departed from you, and withdrawn from you his gracious and comforting influence? In truth, it is a time of need with you. The throne of grace is the only refuge for the soul thus entangled and ensnared. Oh, for Zion's sake, do not rest, and, for Jerusalem's sake, keep not silence, until her righteousness go forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burneth. These spiritual desolations will not be repaired if we have no heart to pray over them. God has not been a wilderness to us, a land of darkness. If we asked for bread, he has never given us a stone. He waits that he may be gracious. We may come to him, and we may come *boldly*, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need.

VOL. I.—I

SERMON VI.

CHRIST WEEPING OVER JERUSALEM.

LUKE, xix., 41.—“*And when he was come near he beheld the city, and wept over it.*”

THE affecting declaration in the text is made concerning the Savior as he was going to Jerusalem for the last time. Just as he was ascending the Mount of Olives, which lay over against the city, a multitude of ineffably tender thoughts rushed upon his mind, and *he wept*. Long before his incarnation was this favored city the place of his occasional habitation among men. Here his glory rested above the mercy-seat upon the ark of the covenant; here he had deposited his law, and the significant memorials of his faithfulness and power; and from this radiating point were his truth and grace to go forth to the ends of the world. Here he was to establish the first and the most renowned Christian Church, and accomplish “the promise of his Father” in the long-expected effusions of his Spirit. But a little distance before him lay the garden of Gethsemane, where he was to sink in despondency in anticipation of his coming conflict. From the

Mount of Olives, too, he could look across the city to Calvary, where, in lingering and excruciating sorrow, he was so soon to pour out his soul unto death. Need we marvel that he *wept*!

Yet it was not for *himself* that these tears flowed—it was over that ill-fated city. His own sorrows were lost sight of and forgotten in theirs. “O Jerusalem! Jerusalem! thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” They had filled up the measure of their iniquity; and the cry of it had ascended to heaven. The wrath of God was just about to descend upon them in the destruction of their city and Temple, and in the sufferings and injuries of a scattered, abused people—a people that were to be a “hissing and a by-word,” a “living miracle of what they deny,” an awful memento of the fearful consequences of “not knowing the time of their visitation.”

There is much in the condition of such men to interest every benevolent mind; there is, indeed, every thing which might well draw tears from every eye, and lamentations from every tongue. In illustrating these thoughts, I remark,

I. In the first place, *Jerusalem, at the period when the Savior was on the earth, had reached*

the lowest degradation of human wickedness. Its history, from the days of Malachi to John the Baptist, is the narrative of unparalleled progress in error and crime. "Never," says the Jewish historian Josephus, speaking of his countrymen a few years after the birth of Christ, "never was there a time since the beginning of the world more fruitful in wickedness." And their proud and splendid capital, like all other large cities, was the very hotbed of moral corruption. Many a cool and subtle skeptic was there, and many a formal Pharisee, and many a proud Rabbi, and many a hypocritical and bigoted observer of the laws of Moses, and many a sect or school, and many a combination of vile and wicked men, and many a wealthy Jew, whose palace was walled about with gold, were there, whose only bond of union was their common malignity to the Son of David. There was the perjured scribe, and there the guilty Sanhedrim, thirsting for his blood who was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel; concocting his trial and condemnation, sharpening the nails, and mingling the vinegar and gall. It was a sad, a heart-rending view. When he beheld the city it was a sink of corruption, a mass of fermenting iniquity, whose heavy exhalations were ascending toward heaven.

And these same outlines of wickedness mark the character of all the incorrigible; they stand

out in bold relief in the history of such men in every age, and especially in Christian lands. All may not be so matured in wickedness as these Jerusalem sinners, yet such are the extremities of wickedness toward which they are advancing. Every man is, by nature, "dead in trespasses and sins." Sin is the moral element of his being, the spirit with which he is familiar from his infancy, the monster which has a dwelling in his bosom while he sleeps in the cradle, and which entwines itself more and more intimately with every thought and fibre of his heart, from childhood to youth, from youth to manhood, and from manhood to old age. Yet it is not every such man that turns out to be an incorrigible sinner. There is a period in the history of millions of such persons when they no longer refuse to repent and believe the Gospel. They are the *incorrigible* we are speaking of, and whom nothing can induce to quit their sins for the Savior of sinners.

Nor is there any stronger proof of that abyss of wickedness into which such persons have fallen than the compassion of the Savior thus expressed in tears. Compassion is not what such men deserve, nor does the Son of God think the less ill of sin because he thus commiserates the sinner. He knows how to look upon him with abhorrence, but he knows also how to look upon him with pity. Compassion such as his here

finds something to interest it, because it finds that which is most fitted to call it forth. Never does it so truly act in keeping with its heavenly nature as when it thus pities the greatest sinners, and, because the greatest, on that very account the most miserable and helpless. It is one of the most encouraging truths in the book of God, and one of the most affecting that ever reached the human ear, or can be entertained by the heart of man, that sins of the highest enormity and the deepest die do not put men beyond the pale of the Savior's pity. It is a touching thought to such a man that there is a gracious Being in the universe who thus goes after the lost sheep, and seeks them out even in the drear night and the deepest wilderness. If pity has a throne in the universe, it is in the heart of Him who bled on Calvary; and if any where it has befitting objects, they are those whose nature is thus defaced, defiled, despoiled and undone.

This compassionate Savior contemplates the sinful character of men somewhat as an anxious father would regard the character and course of a beloved yet heedless child, who had turned his back on God, and abandoned himself to corruption and disgrace. He would be displeased and irritated, but most of all would he be depressed and weep. That holy and harmless One looks on sin with peculiar emotions; it is more afflictive

to him than any other being; he alone knows how to commiserate it. Amid all the reproof and threatening that have dropped from his lips, he has never lost his tenderness for the guilty and wretched perpetrator; his heaviest denunciations have been mingled with sighing and sadness, and many a time the portentous cloud of his indignation has exhausted itself in tears. And he is the same sympathizing Savior still. Many a time, even now, exalted and glorified as he is, would he retire from the honors and praises of his throne to some bower in the celestial Paradise and weep, if tears could melt the heart of his incorrigible enemies. But this is not all. We remark,

II. In the second place, *Jerusalem had finally rejected God's offered mercy.*

This is always one of the characteristics of incorrigible wickedness, and it was eminently so of the city over which the Savior wept. The Jews were his "peculiar people," his "kindred after the flesh." Of all the nations of the earth, they were selected as the honored lineage from which he received his human nature, among whom he was born, lived, suffered, and died, and to whom he made the first offers of his great salvation. But he came "to his own, and his own received him not." They neither revered nor loved him. They quarreled with his preaching, they were of-

fended with his miracles of mercy, and would not acknowledge him as their Savior. He had sent to them his prophets, and them they stoned; and now he came himself, with all the proofs of his divine mission clustering upon him every where and in every form, but they would not receive him. They "made light of him," and they despised and insulted him. He told them his errand of love; he committed himself to their hands; and when, by a word, they might have rescued and honored him, they gave the preference to a robber, and clamorously demanded that he should be crucified. And when, in the last extremity, Pilate himself urged them to release him, they only replied in the fearful and fearfully executed imprecation, "His blood be on us and on our children!" And when that blood was shed, and its first offers of pardon brought to them who so wickedly shed it, they turned with scorn from that fountain of ablution and grace. It was a sin of high enormity that they crucified him, but this was not the front of their offending. It was that, after he had removed all excuse for their unbelief by sealing his credentials with his blood, they remained too much in love with sin and the world to repent and believe on him. He saw it; he felt it; he foresaw it all when he stood on Mount Olivet. It was his grief; it is no marvel that it affected him to tears.

Such scenes as these are of no unusual occurrence in Christian lands. Wicked men everywhere make light of this salvation, set at naught atoning blood, and reject the Son of God. Jesus calls and they refuse; he stretches out his hand, and they do not regard him; they set at naught his counsel, and would none of his reproof. Like the citizens in the parable, they hate their gracious Lord, and will not have him to reign over them. Some turn scoffers and infidels; others, more cool and sober, confess his Gospel true, yet will not yield a practical obedience. Others give it a feigned and formal acquiescence, and deny its power. Others profess it, and run well for a time, who turn back to perdition. Multitudes scarcely consider it as worth a serious thought. They pursue the perishing vanities of time and sense through watchfulness and labor, in solicitude and self-denial, but they have no heart for this salvation. He who, from love to our guilty race, left the bosom of his Father, emptied himself of his glory, became a man of sorrows and acquainted with griefs, and sunk under a weight of ignominy and woe that no other being ever endured, and all to take away their shame and empty the cup of trembling which justice has mingled for them to drink, is the object of their cold indifference and neglect. He invites them to the arms of his mercy; he pledges them a

warm and cordial welcome to his Father's house; but nothing convinces them; nothing alarms them; nothing engages their affections, or charms and subdues their obduracy. He knocks, but finds no open, and no unguarded, and no secret avenue to their confidence. Every selfish, and guilty, and suspicious passion stands warder on the citadel, sounds the note of alarm, and forbids his access. Thus they live and thus they die.

And is it wonderful that he should retire aggrieved? Is it any marvel that his soul "should weep in secret places for their pride, and his eye run down with tears?" We compassionate such men, and pray for them; and think you that He who comforted the mourner—who wept with those who wept, and had compassion on the multitude because they were as sheep having no shepherd—has *He* no compassion for those who, as the storm is coming on, are thus straying from the fold? Oh, there is blindness, there is infatuation to weep over here. Explore the universe, and there is no salvation but that which they refuse. Reason is dark, and conscience is guilty, and the works and providence of God are ignorant of all hopes of escape where this is rejected. One would think it were enough to draw tears from adamant, and exclamations of pity from the tongue of fiends, to behold a being born for immortality, and fallen by his iniquity, brought with-

in sight of the cross, and, like the sinners of Jerusalem, proudly stalking by it and wagging their heads in scorn! There is no more mournful spectacle; nor need we wonder that the lamentation was wrung from the Savior's bosom, "O that thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace! But now they are hidden from thine eyes."

III. In the third place, Jerusalem was guilty of the *unyielding perversion and abuse of all the appointed means of grace and salvation.*

The Temple of God had long been erected in that chosen land, and rendered it the glory of all lands; but now a cloud rested upon it, and its glory was departed. The day and the means of grace were there; never were they enjoyed in such richness and purity as in the days of the incarnate Son of God. But the sentence had gone forth against this infatuated people, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate!"

And it was this that so deeply affected the Savior's heart as he stood over that ill-fated city. The time was when the inhabitants of Jerusalem might have been the holiest and most happy people in the earth. They were a religiously educated people, and in privileges were exalted to heaven. They had the Oracles of God in their hands, his covenant and its seals, his prophets, his Sabbaths, and his own divine presence; but they

had abused and perverted all these selected means of grace and salvation, and they were now to be taken away. Divinely commissioned messages had been sent from heaven, and made their first visit to this favored metropolis; but now, slighted and abused, and after great long-suffering grieved away, the angel of mercy was taking her final departure, and with outspread wings, to other lands. The inhabitants of that doomed city had reached the line of demarcation beyond which the day of grace is past, and their opportunity of repentance was come to an end. They were given over to a reprobate mind, and their prospects were as dark as this calamitous abandonment could render them. The Most High God was not only so provoked by their unfaithfulness as to be about to withdraw the protection of his providence, but the light of his truth and influences of his grace. He was about to curse their blessings, and to make those privileges which might have been a savor of life unto life, nothing less than a savor of death unto death.

And what more affecting consideration can address itself to the heart of Infinite Love than the melancholy condition of those who have thus outlived all the salutary influences of the day and means of grace and salvation! This constitutes that curse of judicial blindness which is the last step in the fearful process of forming "the ves-

sels of wrath fitted to destruction." It is for this long-continued abuse of religious privileges that God withdraws his Spirit from men, leaves them to incorrigible obduracy, and pronounces that awful sentence, "So I gave them up to their own hearts' lust!" A moral torpor, a spiritual paralysis is superinduced over the minds of such men, which is the almost unfailing indication of the second death. They can hardly be regarded as among the living, but rather as among the dead and lost. They live on, but it is only to find within them a blinded mind, a seared conscience, a heart senseless and stubborn as adamantine stone. The Sabbaths that once smiled with mercy, and that might have sanctified and fitted them for heaven, are gone; the sermons that once interested them, and almost persuaded them to become Christians, have left them thoughtless and unconcerned as the "horse and the mule, which have no understanding." The goodness which once melted them has now lost its charms, and seeks to win them in vain. The judgments that once agitated them, and that might have appalled and subdued their obduracy, now only irritate and confirm their impenitence. The hopes that once began to dawn upon their minds, and that might have spread a composing light over their eternity, are now turned to presumption or despair. The Spirit of God,

who once filled them with all the bitterness of remorse, and all the restless anxieties of conscious guilt, and that might have made them fit temples for himself to dwell in, has gone out from these chambers of wickedness, and left them empty, swept, and garnished for the repossession of some foul spirit, who has entered in and dwells there. The means best calculated to awaken, convince, and save them, have the most served to harden and destroy them; while, under all these kind and powerful influences, they have gone farther from God, from life, and from heaven.

And who would not weep? What more mournful spectacle this side the world of despair! Opportunities of the highest promise are fled, never to return. All the means and motives in the richest treasury of heaven are exhausted, and this heir of immortality is miserable and poor. His mind is bleak and barren. The soil is worn out, burnt over, never to be reclaimed. And now, when the sun arises upon it and the rains descend, it is fruitless and desolate; it bears only thorns and briers, and is rejected, and nigh unto cursing. I add,

IV. In the fourth place, as a consequence of this accumulated wickedness and judicial abandonment, *Jerusalem was devoted to destruction.*

A fearful doom awaited her, because she had proved herself incorrigible. The destroying an-

gel was already hovering over that once favored people of God, and their history was to be written by the sword of their conquerors, and the flames, and blood, and woes of the fairest city and land that ever saw the light of heaven. Yet these temporal calamities were but premonitory to her more fearful end. She was devoted to the second death. Jesus wept over her, because, like Sodom and Gomorrah, she was to be "set forth an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire."

Yes, an *example*; for such is the doom—the certain and irrevocable doom of all who die in their sins. We do not see how any man, with the Bible in his hands, can call in question this solemn truth. I take up this Book of God, and read such declarations as the following: "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power." "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." With such declarations as these before me, I can not doubt that the

punishment of the wicked in the future world is just; that it is the prerogative of Almighty God to inflict it; and that it will be everlasting. Then I place myself at the bar of the final Judge, mark the process of the judgment, and listen to the *judicial sentence* there pronounced, and in plain and unequivocal terms because it is the judicial sentence, and what is it that I hear? "Then shall he say to those on his left hand, Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Is not all this sufficiently explicit?

I see not how it is possible, under the righteous government of God, that sin should go unpunished. Where is there a righteous and good law that does not punish crime? Conscience itself lights up a steady, though slowly-burning flame, that is destined to consume the wicked. By the laws of their own nature they are bound to endless destruction; their undeviating course is to the chambers of death. God has expressed his purpose thus to punish them, and it is a purpose he will never alter. He has appointed the place, the time, and he has prepared his instruments of death. This is the doom for which they *are fitted*, and it is impossible, with their present character, to make them happy; it is the doom *they deserve*; and, out of Christ, justice must take her unobstructed course, though it be to inflict unmingled wrath.

The wrath of men may be endured, though it is often terrible; but it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. There is a refuge from the wrath and curses of men. "Fear not them," says the Savior, "which kill the body; and after that have no more that they can do." But when God curses, it is a sentence from which there is no refuge. The rocks and the mountains can not shield from it, and when it falls it can not be endured. Mournful sentence, and in mournful accents will it come upon the sinner's ear when those words are uttered, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire!" It is not for a day, nor for a year, nor for a thousand years—no, nor yet for a million of ages. It is for a duration that has no end. It is an abyss that has no bottom, a burning sky that has no horizon, and on all sides a deep, and fathomless, and blazing eternity.

One there is who foresees all this wretchedness. He is acquainted with it all, because he knows what eternity is, and he knows the worth of the soul. He knows what this deathless existence is capable of enjoying or suffering, and what it must enjoy or suffer through interminable ages. He knows how fearful a thing it is to fall under the stroke of justice, for he well remembers the hour when, to turn aside the angry flood of divine indignation from the heads of the guilty, he consented that it should overwhelm.

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his own guiltless soul; and how, when he saw it coming, though he set himself in the "greatness of his strength" to meet it, it bowed him to the earth, and laid low in death the Word Incarnate.

We do not know what those undying sorrows are that come upon the men who perish in their sins. No, we do not know! We can not tell what will be lost by losing heaven and plunging into hell. It is impossible for us to look into those regions of darkness, and form any adequate conception of the miseries of the damned. An immortal soul lost and damned forever! No, we know not what it is. The very thought agitates, perplexes, confounds, and well-nigh distracts our poor minds. The more we try to comprehend it, the more tremendous and incomprehensible does it appear. We have no line that sounds that fathomless abyss. Could we go to the utmost verge of the earth, and look down, though but for one poor hour, into the eternal pit, and then come back and tell you of the sorrows reserved for those who know not God, how would your hearts bleed! Could some poor reprobate steal the respite of a day, and wing his dark way back to this world, scarred with the sword of justice, and pale and wan with despair, and tell you of the worm and the flames, and that angry breath of God, and how deep calleth unto deep as the waves and billows of almighty

wrath go over him, how would you instinctively exclaim, "Who among us can dwell with devouring fire? who among us can inhabit everlasting burnings?"

Yet, wondrous truth, that great and gracious Being who best comprehends, most commiserates it all. It was because he would not be the dispenser and witness of such dreadful destruction that he himself did and suffered so much to arrest it at his cross. And why should it be supposed that he has not the same heart of love and tenderness still? Why should that pure and sensitive mind be accused of cold indifference toward those who are traveling to this heritage of woe? Was he rich, and did he for their sakes become poor? and when they were thirsty, did he offer them water from the rock? did he stand by their bed of languishing, and often commission the angel of his providence to comfort them? and now that want, and famine, and sickness, and chains, and all the pains of the second death are coming upon them, has he no compassions to yearn over them, and no chord of sympathy within his bosom that vibrates to their sorrows? Never did the bosom of a mother throb with tenderness over her dying child as his compassion yearns over perishing men. The tears he shed over Jerusalem were but the true index of that tide of grief that overwhelms his holy soul as he contemplates

the miseries of those who live and die without God and without hope.

Such was the *compassion* of Jesus for perishing men, and such, my Christian hearers, ought to be ours. But how unlike his spirit is this strange apathy of the people of God? Oh for the loving, the pitying heart of him who wept over Jerusalem!

We ought also to imitate his *faithfulness*. He did not conceal from that unhappy city her approaching doom. Nor may we, nor would we, conceal their doom from those who, "after their hardness and impenitent heart," like the Jews of old, "are heaping up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath." It may be that there are those who are incorrigible that have come up here to the house of God, and to whom I am now speaking. Yet I am not about to be so presumptuous as to pretend to lift the veil, and predict who of this assembly will be finally rejected of God. This God alone can or has a right to do. He could disclose to us, as he looks over these seats, and tell us before the time who of all this congregation bear the mark of hell on their foreheads, and will remain unmoved and incorrigible to the last. He could tell us where they sit, and to what families they belong, and what business they follow, and what is their age and name. Beloved hearers, does he not stand in

doubt of some of you, and is he not jealous over you with a godly jealousy? As he is now bending his course through suns and stars to visit this house of prayer, does he perceive no incorrigible impenitence, no impending ruin over which he weeps as he wept over Jerusalem? Are there none in this assembly who are destined to outlive their hopes as they have already outlived their fears, destined to go down to the grave with a lie in their right hand, and ere long to become the tenants of that eternity where no Spirit strives, no prayers ascend, and the voice of mercy is dumb forever?

Over these, and such as these, the Savior weeps. He bends, perhaps even now, to drop the parting tear, to take his last farewell, to retire in grief and say, "O that *thou* hadst known, even *thou*, the things that belong to thy peace!" And yet your day of mercy is not past. The lamp of life continues to burn, and Bibles, and Sabbaths, and sanctuaries, and ministers, and conscience, and the lingering echo of the aggrieved Spirit, and the Bride, the Lamb's wife, oft repulsed and discouraged, all venture once more to repeat and urge the invitation, "Come, take the waters of life freely." Oh, bid far away this guilty insensibility, and "strive to enter in at the strait gate."

And do not forget what encouragement you

have to do this. If such are the compassions of Christ toward guilty men, how promptly and implicitly ought you to believe *his willingness to save all who come to him for salvation*. I love to dwell on such a thought as this, and it may be that some who hear me also feel an interest in it. Some of you are, peradventure, seeking the things that belong to your peace. You are dissatisfied with earth. You are sensible that the fountains of joy within your own bosoms are dried up, and there is little to cheer or refresh you in this sin-ruined world. Every thing around you is putting on a new and saddened aspect. The world retires, and its splendors begin to fade upon your view. Its uncertainty startles, and its treachery depresses you, and you begin in earnest to look toward the things that are unseen and eternal as the only permanent realities. You are oppressed with a sense of your sin and ill desert; you feel your inability and helplessness; you know you are in the hands of that sovereign God who is mighty to save and mighty to destroy, and that nothing but his forbearance and long-suffering keep you, hour after hour, from the perdition you deserve. Yet, strange to say, you are tempted to distrust the Savior's willingness to receive you. Though he came to seek and to save that which is lost; though it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all

acceptation, that he came to save the *chief* of sinners, you are slow to find the warrant to trust in him for your own soul.

This state of mind is indeed one which solicits sympathy, yet is it one which calls for rebuke. You would think it impious to call in question the *ability* of Christ to save you, and is there no impiety in calling in question his *willingness*? Oh, there is no such injustice done to any being in the universe as is done to the compassionate Son of God. Men feel as though he were their enemy, and that, instead of possessing no other emotions toward them than those of kindness and good will, he could take pleasure in their death. But this is at infinite remove from his compassionate nature. He has never given any evidence of such a spirit as this, either in his word or in his conduct, either in his life or in his death. There is an ocean of mercy in his heart. There is, there can be, no greater compassion than his. The whole area of human wickedness does not measure it. Heaven is not so high, its firmament is not so vast, nor its reservoir of waters so full, nor its lights so richly scattered, nor its magnificence so bright, as his compassions for lost and miserable man. If he wept even over degenerate Jerusalem, what gratification and joy does it infuse into his holy mind to see the penitent looking toward his Father's

house, and coming home to the Paradise of God.

Beloved hearers, he opens his heart of love to *you — to all of you*. You are not beyond the compassions of his cross. His voice to you to-day is, "Flee to the strong-hold, ye prisoners of hope!" Nay, his voice to the most hopeless of you all is, "Hearken unto me, ye that are stout-hearted, and far from righteousness; behold, I bring near my righteousness, and my salvation shall not tarry!" He sees the impending storm, and would "gather you as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings." It was to cover *you* from the pelting tempest that he himself sunk under its fury. No longer, then, distrust his willingness to save. *Prove* his faithfulness, and see if he be not both able and willing to "save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him." Go to him; cast yourself into his arms. Go to him freely, and just as you are. Tell him that you have nothing to say but that he died to "justify the ungodly;" and if he frowns, you will be the first of all the sons or daughters of Adam who ever sought his face in vain.

Oh, it were a scene more affecting than Jerusalem's obduracy to see such a suppliant exiled from his presence. It were a novel event in his gracious government for a repenting sinner to be banished from his feet. It would be a new and

unheard-of record in the history of God's universe. Men would tell of it, and sink in despair. Angels would hear of it, and toll the dirge of a world lost but unredeemed; and hell would hear of it, and its caverns of death for the first time be vocal with joy. We preach no such Gospel. No! no! There shall be no such mourning in heaven, no such jubilee in hell. Everlasting thanks to the bleeding Savior! there shall be no such disappointment on the earth. The word has gone out of his lips, and shall not return void, "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in *no wise* cast out."

SERMON VII.

GOD'S CLAIM.

PROVERBS, xxiii., 26,—“*My son, give me thy heart.*”

Love to God is the primordial element of moral virtue in heaven and on earth. A sinless mind acts from no purer, no higher principle than its perfect love of God. A sinful and sinning mind never enters upon the paths of rectitude and truth until it becomes affiliated to that great and good Being from whom it has so wickedly revolted. Every right-minded and right-hearted man gives God the throne. Less he can not claim, and respect himself or be respected by creatures. With all paternal tenderness and authority he says to us, “My son! my daughter! my creature, my child, *give me thy heart!*” Our object, in this discourse, is to enforce this claim. We can not do this intelligibly without directing our thoughts for a few moments,

I. In the first place, to the import of the claim itself.

When we give our hearts to the objects and pursuits of time and sense, we *love* them. And in giving our hearts to God, we love him—we

love him with a true and sincere love. We regard him with affection, because his character pleases us. We think of him, and love to think of him. The more we contemplate his greatness and his goodness, and dwell upon the unblemished loveliness and glory of his character, the more we love to dwell upon them, and contemplate them in their combined radiance and beauty. We have no such partiality for one attribute of his nature above another as renders us indifferent, much less hostile, to any. "The Lord our God is one Lord." He is a spirit, eternal and indivisible. We can not separate his greatness from his goodness, nor his goodness from his greatness; nor can we separate his justice from his mercy, nor his sovereignty from his compassion, and please ourselves with the one, and turn from the other dissatisfied. It is the God of the Bible we delight in; the whole Deity, as he is and for what he is, else we do not delight in him at all. Men may and ought to love him on other accounts; but if they have no complacency in his character, they have no complacency *in him*. To love him *merely* for what we receive from him, and if he frowns to turn our hearts against him, is not love—it is not even gratitude. It is love to his *benefits* and not to *him*. Grateful love does indeed belong to the love of complacency. Every Christian's bosom is full of it.

There is no true love without it. But it is not a mercenary love. It is because God's loving-kindness indicates his true character that a grateful mind appreciates it; nor is it ever duly appreciated but from a consideration of the motives which prompt it, and from some just perception of the very heart of the great Giver.

We *feel an interest* in those we love; it gives us pleasure to promote their well-being and honor, and to see them promoted. If we love God, we shall feel an interest in him, and all that concerns his honor, and cause, and kingdom. The man who gives his heart to God, though he can not make God better, or wiser, or happier, yet may be counted on as God's friend, and one that will stand by his truth and cause, his kingdom and glory to the last. True love to God is a benevolent and self-sacrificing, as well as a complacent and grateful love.

And such love has *great power*. It is more than external homage and reverence; more than the profession of attachment; more than an occasional and fitful emotion; more than a stiff and rigid formalism. It is the habitual bent and temper of the soul. Imperfect and inconstant as it is in the best of men, it is the ruling passion, supreme and controlling. "No man can serve two masters." Two objects of supreme attachment there can not be. Where God has

the heart, all other attachments are subordinate. "He that loveth father or mother more than me," says the Savior, "is not worthy of me." The Lord "is my *portion*, saith my soul." This is giving the heart to God. "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and what is there on the earth that I desire beside thee?" This is giving the heart to God. We may now,

II. In the second place, advert to several considerations by which this claim is enforced.

One would think there were no need of argument or expostulation on a point so plain. Something men love; something they must love; and the simple question is whether or not they ought to give their first and best affections to God? Here we may begin by remarking,

1. In the first instance, that *God requires that they should do so*. The great and glorious Being, who only has the right to give law to the universe, has issued the command, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." This intelligible and comprehensive precept stands at the head of that great code which is the rule of action to all intelligent creatures. Nothing has ever abrogated this law, and nothing can abrogate it. Nothing can suspend its authoritative obligation; nothing supersede it; nothing relax the bond; nothing alter

or modify it; nothing lower down this immutable standard of duty. Angels are bound by it, good and bad men are bound by it, and devils are bound by it. It will be in full force throughout eternity, in whatever world the subjects of God's empire may be placed. The Eternal Lawgiver spake it from the thick darkness. His Son gave utterance to it by the instruction of his lips and by the power of his example. And what is more, he "magnified and made it honorable" by his obedience to the death of the cross. The Holy Spirit, by his convincing and converting energy, writes it upon the conscience and heart. So full and impressive are these combined and harmonious deliverances, that there is no such thing as a compliance with the revealed terms of salvation where love to God has no place in the heart. Men who flatter themselves that they accept the Gospel while the love of God is not in them, and they are at heart his enemies, are unwittingly setting the Gospel in opposition to the law, and making Christ the minister of sin. This great law must read its lessons to the awakened conscience before the Gospel can quiet its agitations. The charm, the glory of the Gospel lies in its power to win back the alienated heart to God. If this is not done, nothing is done. His claim on their hearts is just as absolute under the new dispensation as under the old. Love is

not dissevered from faith, nor faith from love. The call to both is simultaneous. There may be the faith of devils where there is no love. But there is none of that faith which is "of the operation of God." It is fancy, it is presumption; and if persisted in, the self-deceiver will go to the grave with a lie in his right hand. The blessed hope of pardon and acceptance "maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost," and this great precept of the moral law begins to assert its supremacy. We remark, therefore,

2. In the next place, that it is a *right and reasonable claim* that is thus urged. There is nothing in it that is capricious or arbitrary. God wills it because it is right; he requires it because it is right. Giving the heart to him has an independent rightness of its own. It would have been essentially right and reasonable if it had never been legally required. Angels do not need this law to induce them to love God; they love him spontaneously, and it is right they should do so. It is right, not simply because the divine law ordains it; it was so before his law was published, and results from the inherent excellence of his character and from the nature and relations which men sustain toward him.

We say the excellence of the divine character; yet who shall speak of worthiness that is infinite,

and of excellence which eternity itself is unable to explore? For ages the essential attributes of the Infinite One have been studied and scrutinized; and, though the knowledge of them has quickened, and enlarged, and elevated the human mind more than all other intellectual attainments, and though this knowledge has been increasing, and every day and hour has made some new manifestation of his great and glorious nature, and though his works, his providence, his word, and his Spirit have been thus taking of the things which belong to his eternal Godhead, and showing them both to angels and men—every new exhibition of his nature is but new evidence of its attractive loveliness, and makes him appear more worthy of reverence, confidence, and love. If it becomes us to reverence what is venerable, to confide in that which is trustworthy, to love that which is beautiful and amiable, nothing can release the most incorrigible of our race from the obligation of giving his heart to God. If his nature could be changed, and angels in heaven, or men on the earth, or devils in hell could find a blemish in his character, it would no longer be our duty to give him this affectionate confidence; but, so long as he is the Father of Lights, with whom there is no change nor shadow of turning, and so long as men have hearts to give to any thing, they are bound to give them, first of all, to

Him. Shall they give them to the fleeting objects of time, and not give them to God? Let reason speak; let conscience speak. Is not the heart his due? Ye who resist this claim, tell me on what ground you resist it, and what good reason you have for this excited remembrance of other things and this forgetfulness of God—for this idolatrous attachment to self and the world, and this enmity to God? Ye who would argue with God, and who complain that he is a hard Master, reaping where he has not sown, and gathering where he has not strewed; must not the conviction be brought home that God is right and the sinner is wrong, and that it were better for him to be speechless, like the servant in the parable, than thus affirm that there is an unrighteousness with God? The blush of shame may cover the objector's face, and the pang of conscious guilt may shoot through his bosom, if he can take refuge only in his impiety, and urge that as his excuse which is the front of his offending. Oh that this foul stain were obliterated from the recorded history of our race, and that every son and daughter of Adam, abjuring this refuge of lies and repentant for the past, could truly say, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that *I love thee*."

3. We remark, in the third place, this claim is enforced by all the obligations of gratitude. It is
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an interesting fact, that all the obligations which result from the relation which men sustain toward God originate in some expression of the divine goodness. And what pen, what page, what volume, what accumulated treasures of thought can record these expressions? A century ago, and not one of us was in existence. There were the heavens above, and the earth beneath, and suns, and worlds, and past generations of men, but we had not yet started into being; and when, at different epochs, we were called from nothing into a grade of existences but little lower than the angels, and a place was assigned us in this world of beauty and of promise, it was he who made us, and not we ourselves. The inspiration of the Almighty gave us understanding, and we received all our faculties of thought and emotion, of knowledge and love, from his infinite fullness, and all our immortality, and our every capacity of effort and of joy, from him. He proclaims from heaven the great truth, "All souls are mine." We owe not only our existence, but all that belongs to it and all that blesses it, to him. It is his world we live in; his sun that enlightens and warms us; his atmosphere and his luxuriant earth that sustain us. These streams, these floods of life and joy, all issue from the eternal fountain of his goodness. His visitation upholds all, and his care and interposition look

through all, and his overflowing bounty perpetually sheds forth its blessings even upon the evil and the unthankful.

And though men are fallen by their iniquity, the earth they occupy is a world of hope. It might have been the dungeon of despair, stripped of all its beauty and glory, and doomed to sink under its Maker's curse, and find its home in the burning caverns of the bottomless pit. But the God of heaven sent his Son from his throne to Bethlehem's manger, and from Bethlehem's manger to the cross, that we might be rescued from this deserved doom. He passed by angels, and set his heart upon man. And here, on this low earth, he is carrying on his work of mercy—establishing his Church; giving men his word, his Sabbaths, and his ministers; pouring out his Spirit; looking after the lost sheep, and bringing them into his fold.

And is there not here a new view of God, and new and augmented reasons for loving him, above and superadded to the claims of his law, and the rightness and reasonableness of his claim. I say, *a new view of God*; for there are those who look upon him with suspicion, and have a sort of prejudice against him, as though he cared not for them, but only for the authority of his law and throne. Have you found him such a God as this? Is he the Sovereign Lawgiver only? Is

he abstract and cold intelligence only, or is he a Being of intense and celestial emotions? and, instead of being "pruned of his sensibilities," is arrayed in them as his excellency and glory? Away with these unjust and cruel imputations. They are suggestions of the great deceiver, thrown out in order to keep you from giving your hearts to God. No; the God whom we love and worship is no cold, dry, impersonal Deity, but a loving God, a condescending God. He is not shrouded in such distant and unfathomable concealment that he can not be loved. Remote ages of time have given forth their utterances, and in glad tidings of great joy, that God himself dwelt with men, and men saw him, and beheld his glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, radiating this lost world as the Sun of Righteousness with healing in his beams. It is thus that he stands forth to perishing men, and utters the loving request, "*My son, give me thy heart.*"

And is there no such sentiment in the human bosom as grateful love? Shall we not give him our heart? our first and highest love? Is not this the least return for all this divine goodness? Does the great God thus love this guilty world, and shall he not be loved in return? Will it not be the everlasting reproach of any one of us if he refuses to give his heart to God? What will

angels think of him—of that man, that woman—who carries this base ingratitude to the grave? Ay, what will the devils think of him if he withholds his admiring gratitude, his everlasting love from him who left them reprobates and made us men? Devils! Why were we not devils? Devils! bad as they are, I pity them. They can not say, “For he hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” To no other race than ours has such an assurance as this been ever given. The unspeakable gift is only to men. For none has so much been done as for our lost race. To none except to fallen men has the unutterably tender appeal been made, “I beseech you by the *mercies* of God.” Behold, what manner of love is this! And now, by all that is condescending in these mercies and this unexampled love; by all the agonies of that garden and that cross, he says to each of us, “My son, give me thy heart!” Will you hesitate, now that he has set his heart on *you*, to give *your* heart to him? I add,

4. In the fourth place, we urge this claim from a consideration of the blessedness which flows from complying with it. Man was formed to derive his chief happiness from the indulgence and gratification of his *affections*. Of all men he is the most miserable who has nothing to love.

Withered and dry as the heath of the desert, and cold and locked up as the iron-bound iceberg, is the heart that has never found an object on which to fix his best and purest affections. Separate man from his species, where no human form meets his eye, and no kind offices greet him, and no human voice cheers him, but all is vacancy and solitude, and he dies; or, if he lives, he becomes a raving or gloomy maniac. He must have something to love. Shut him up in a dungeon, or cast him upon some desert island, and if he has something there to think of, to care for—something to love, though it be but a caged bird or a cherished flower, it lightens his burden and beguiles his solitude.

We *may* love what is unworthy, inconstant, and changeful; we *may* love what is transient and dying; we *may* love what is wicked and ruinous; but, with all this fickleness, and uncertainty, and wickedness, we derive enjoyment from them, even though our expectations are defeated, and our joys are often turned into grief. We fix our affections on the objects of time and sense; wealth, pleasure, and fame enchant us; and social and domestic joys constitute all the good which not a few ever look for. And if sin had never entered our world, and there were no restless longings, no perplexing care, no throb of envy, no collisions of interest, no pangs of disappointment,

and disease and death had never disturbed these dreams of earthly joy, we might have been happy in giving our hearts to such a world as this, because in all these gifts we should have loved and enjoyed the Giver more. But sin *has* entered it, and it is polluted. The joys it gives can not satisfy, and, if they could, they do not remain; the best of them die and return to the dust.

There is but one object in the universe that *can* fill and gratify the human mind, and it is He who says, "My son, give me thy heart." There is nothing fickle here, nothing false, nothing mortal; all is pure, true, unchanging, and eternal. If the heart is truly fixed on God, it has a guide, a refuge, a portion that never fails. We think of him, and dwell with adoring wonder on what he is; and the more we think of him, the more we find that there is in his fullness not only an infinite and endless variety for the employment of our intellectual powers, but for the gratification of our highest and best affections. We go to him as our exceeding joy. Our reverence strengthens our love, and our love strengthens our reverence. The more we love, the happier are we in that love; and while we lie low before him, the more joyfully do we contemplate him as all our salvation and all our desire. We find him an all-sufficient God. We hear him say to us, "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great

reward." He is our glory, our defense, and the lifter up of our head. We fear no evil, because we dwell under the shadow of the Almighty. We have no wants he will not provide for, or make us happy without them. We may be shut out from every other good, and be deprived of every earthly comforter, and may yet rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of our salvation.

It may be remarked, also, that it is only by giving the heart to him that the soul possesses the true knowledge of God, and enjoys, in some sort, a sympathy with the divine nature. "He that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." And it is thus that he participates in the divine blessedness, as it is written, "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." To enter thus, as it were, into the heart of the Deity, hold communion with the eternal source of life and joy, and drink thus at the fountain-head of living waters, is the highest blessedness the soul is capable of. Cisterns—"broken cisterns that hold no water"—are all other sources of happiness. There is no substitute for the love of God. There is a vacancy, and a feeling of insecurity and unrest until the heart is given to him. You can be happy without wealth, without influence, without power, but you can not be happy without giving your heart to God.

Will you not, then, beloved hearers, from this

hour, give your hearts to the God that made you, who is so worthy of your love, and whom to love would be your highest joy? What hinders? What hinders but those idolatrous attachments which so wickedly usurp the place which belongs to him? You do, in truth, give him nothing until you give him your hearts. I know that you give him an unblemished outward deportment; you give him the respect due to his ordinances and worship; you give him your money; you give him your forms of religious worship, and many of you give him your prayers. This is well as far as it goes. We rejoice that you do so. But you must give him more than this; you must give him your hearts. There is no true religion, no Christian grace, and no true moral virtue without love to God. Love is obedience in the heart; obedience is love in the life. Morality is religion in practice; religion is morality in principle. No matter for its outward actings if it is heartless; a heartless religion is "weighed in the balances and found wanting." Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.

We ask, we claim, on God's behalf, therefore, your hearts for him. You have read his laws; you have read his Gospel; you have read the volume of his providence; you have read the book of nature and of grace, and you who refuse

to give him your hearts can no longer do it ignorantly. Your sin is in proportion to your knowledge. He may never urge this claim in your hearing again; and if you live and die in the neglect of it, he will not hold you guiltless. Oh, mortal men! what strange attractions do you find in this poor, dying, polluted world, to charm away your hearts thus from him whose favors is life, and whose loving-kindness is better than life? Beloved hearers, I plead this day for God. You *must* give your hearts to him. If there were one good reason for not doing so, I would urge his claims no longer. Reason for not loving God! Who ever thought of any reason but in a refuge of lies? Nothing, nothing can justify you in withholding your hearts from God another hour. Give your heart, then, to him to-day—*now*, as he stoops from his holy throne to visit you, to smile upon you, to adopt you as his child, to make that heart his earthly dwelling-place, and *you* the dwellers in the mountain of his holiness, the everlasting heirs of his own holy habitation.

SERMON VIII.

THE WOUNDED SPIRIT.

PROVERBS, xviii., 14.—“*The spirit of a man may sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?*”

WHERE there is a strong will, indomitable courage, and great powers of endurance, men are rarely crushed under the heaviest load of outward calamity. They are as strong to suffer as to accomplish. More especially will *good men* endure trials in a *good cause*, supported by a *good conscience*, and comforted by the consolations of the Divine Spirit. No man need be faint-hearted *then*. He may be bold and undaunted, fearing neither the rage of tyrants nor the fury of persecutors, and standing firm before the lion's den or the burning fiery furnace. Even where “bonds and afflictions abide him,” and he “knows not the things that shall befall him there,” he can say with Paul, “None of these things move me.”

But where the *mind itself* has lost its energy, and the strong will is subdued, and the operative affections move sluggishly, and resolution languishes, and firmness to resist and courage to en-

dure are fled, he becomes either a cowardly deserter from duty or the victim of despair. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity;" but when *the spirit itself* is stricken and cast down, "a WOUNDED SPIRIT who can bear?"

The method of this discourse, therefore, is to speak of the *cause* and *cure* of a wounded spirit. We are,

I. In the first place, to consider the CAUSE of this sad state of mind.

This part of our subject presents a sufficiently gloomy theme. It is a sad state of mind we speak of. We may well feel that it is an unattractive and cheerless desert as we travel over it, and where even the seeds of hope scarcely germinate. Those there are,

1. In the first place, who sink in almost irrecoverable depression under *disheartening trials*. Most, if not all men, know something of these. "Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." There is scarcely a cup of pleasure but its honeyed sweetness is sometimes mingled with bitter tears. This earth is enchanted ground; but, beautiful and enchanting as it is, nature brings its pains, and sin its sorrows. Sickness and suffering, solitude and poverty, wounded affection and disappointed hopes, the ill conduct of those we love and the miscarriage of their enterprises, and then all-conquering death and

the devouring grave—these are scenes we sigh over, and they make the heart bleed.

Even good men, and those from whom better things might be looked for, sometimes bitterly complain of such visitations. Not unfrequently, when their trials are severe, and complicated, and of long continuance, do they give way to despondency, and feel that their griefs are too heavy to be borne. It was when God bereaved him of his earthly possessions, and flocks, and herds, and houses, and lands, and children were all swept away at a stroke, and then, to complete his sufferings, left him in the hands of the merciless enemy, that Job cursed the day in which he was born, and, though he poured forth a torrent of complaint too bitter to be repeated, declared “that his stroke was heavier than his groaning.” The prophet Jeremiah betrayed the same weakness when he uttered those touching lamentations, “I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath. He hath bent his bow, and set me as a mark for the arrow.” God had so shut out his prayer that his only request now was that he “would hide him in the grave.” Many a good man has fallen into the same despondency, and has been constrained to adopt the language, “I remembered God and was troubled; I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Thou holdest my eyes waking; I am

so troubled that I can not speak." There were seasons in the life of the man who uttered this sad complaint when, though he occupied the proudest throne, and possessed the confidence and love of a loyal people, he himself was the most wretched of them all. His soul refused to be comforted, and he seems so far to have given up his hope as to say, "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts; all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me!"

This depression of mind under external calamity is sometimes so deep that it borders on despair. There are seasons when men bear up under their trials, and show the power of a trusting confidence in God; and there are also seasons when their resolution, and fortitude, and faith are gone, and they know the agonies of "a wounded spirit." The discipline of Providence is mysterious; "his way is in the sea, and his path in the mighty waters," and they faint under his rebukes. It is not a vapory sigh that escapes from their lips; they are oppressed, and by the inward and heavy burden of "a wounded spirit."

2. There is a second class of persons who also feel this burden, but they are a very different class from those to whom we have just referred. I mean *the more wicked and abandoned of wicked men*. Even they are not beyond the pangs of a wounded spirit. Obdurate as they are, there

are seasons when they *must* look at their own sinful character, and they do look at it, nor can they bear the mortifying self-inspection. Could you observe all that passes *within their bosoms*, you *would see* tumult, perturbation, distracting terror, sad despondency, and grim despair. There is an obduracy in such men, and an assumed and unnatural cheerfulness, which, with all their dare-devil character, deceives us. The boldest are not strangers to these fears, nor are the vilest strangers to the pangs of a wounded spirit. Conscience lives when virtue dies. Defiled and obtuse as it is, it has not lost its power, even when the last principle of moral virtue is eradicated from the heart. Conscience speaks when all the world is silent as midnight. She tells of the right and the wrong; and not only gives forth her voice with an authority that ought to be obeyed, but she is armed with the power of summary execution where her voice is disregarded. She is every where where the transgressor is; in his toil and in his repose she is there; at home and abroad, by night and by day, she is there, seeing all, hearing all, observing and marking all, ever ready to judge and condemn, and inflict her penalty in all the bondage of conscious guilt. *Men* do not know the deeds of injustice and wrong, of dishonesty and fraud, of pollution and shame, which the transgressor has perpetrated;

but *conscience* knows them. *Men* did not see those works of darkness, but *conscience* saw them. Not one of them is forgotten; not one is recalled in false coloring. The twilight saw them, and the silent stars lent their photographic power to inscribe them on memory's tablet. I have known those, both among young and old, whose vicious habits seemed to have been confirmed beyond recovery, and over whose early religious training vice and wickedness had obtained complete triumph, who, notwithstanding the triumph, were like the troubled sea when it can not rest. Of all the burdens an abandoned wretch can endure, the heaviest is a wounded, lacerated, bleeding, unappeased *conscience*. Conscience is a terrible witness against such a man. Conscience impeaches him, arraigns him, exposes him, condemns him, and will hereafter condemn him at the tribunal of scrutinizing, impartial justice. Her sentence is God's sentence; her utterances are but the prelude to his judicial condemnation. Oh, it is a wretched life the reprobate transgresses or leads who has conscience and God for his enemies! They are dark days and nights that are thus curtained with impenetrable guilt. No man can long endure this impervious gloom. A guilty conscience never fails to create and stimulate a morbid imagination; while imagination, thus stimulated, never fails to awaken distressing, and,

so far as it regards his fellow-men, needless apprehensions. Some unknown voice is ever and anon sounding the alarm, "Be sure your sin will find you out." A passing glance, a scrutinizing look, an incidental word, a heedless paragraph, or a single expression of neglect or coldness, alarms him. He "trembles at the shaking of a leaf. A dreadful sound is in his ears. A fire not blown consumes him." Oh, what a life is this! "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." They "travail with pain all their days, and in the midst of laughter their hearts are sad." There is no more turbid, nor deeper, nor more permanent source of misery than this, this side the pit of perdition. Advert now,

3. In the third place, to one more class of persons—I mean *those whom the truth and Spirit of God have convinced of their guilty character and lost condition as sinners*. They are not the most wicked alone who are the subjects of despondency. Let us suppose that some person in this assembly, who has never been guilty of any atrocious violation of the moral law, and who is justly esteemed by his fellow-men, has made the discovery that he is a sinner—a sinner against the God of heaven, and justly exposed to the wrath of God in this life and in that which is to come. This is no unusual fact, and especially during those seasons when the Spirit of God is being

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poured out from on high. There have been days of Pentecostal power in our world, and there will be days of yet greater power, when the moral as well as the immoral will be convinced of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, and be made to feel that there is a fearful and unsettled account between them and their Maker. The most amiable and moral man in the world is not beyond the reach of this conviction. Open sins and secret sins, recent sins and sins long since forgotten, come up in remembrance before him. Some of them are aggravated by time and circumstance, and all of them by the light and advantages he has enjoyed; by the resolutions and promises of amendment he has violated; by his insensate indifference to God and eternity; by his ingratitude to the Savior and his neglect of the great salvation; by the divine forbearance and long-suffering; and by the obduracy of his own heart in setting at naught the counsels of heavenly love, and despising that goodness of God which leadeth to repentance. What if he does not detect in himself those enormous crimes which shock the moral sense of his fellow-men; is it not enough to rouse his conscience and startle his fears that he has offended that God who is so holy that he can not look on sin, and before whom angels bow and devils tremble? God! Oh, what a word is that? It points us

to the "King eternal, immortal, and invisible." God! Oh, weigh the vast meaning of that amazing, ever-present, and everlasting reality! God your Maker, God your preserver, God your law-giver and judge—God who is able to save and to destroy! This glorious God, of all other beings in the universe, may not be treated with neglect and contempt, his word disregarded, his Sabbaths contemned, his mercy-seat despised; and he whose favor is life, and whose frown is death, mocked and trifled with! Well might the proud Babylonian tremble on his throne when the prophet said to him, "The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, *thou hast not glorified!*"

The time was when the sinner thought little of these things; but that time is gone by. Time was when he would fain excuse and palliate his sinfulness, and contend with his Maker, and dispute his ground inch by inch; but that time is gone by. He lays his hand upon his mouth, or, if he opens his lips, it is only to fill his own bosom with reproach. The reflection oppresses him; it is a painful retrospect as he looks back upon days and years of sin—full of sin—thoughts so sinful—words so sinful—deeds so sinful—the deeds many, the words more, the thoughts more in number than the sand. He can not find one act of his life that comes up to his acknowledged

rule of duty. He would give worlds if he could recall the days that are gone. But oh, the dark deeds of the irrevocable past, and every one of them written in the book of God's remembrance, and not one pardoned! Every thing conspires to condemn such a man. The law condemns him; God condemns him; his own conscience bears witness against him, and fills his mind with sad thoughts and dark forebodings.

There is a world where conscience will not need to be quickened by the Spirit of God in order never to cease from its upbraiding—where there will be no respite from its clamors, and no power to stifle or disregard them. And it is easy for God, even in the present life, to rouse conscience from its stupor, and set the sins of unrepenting men before their eyes; and when he does so, and they can no longer suppress reflection, nor divert their minds from the melancholy subject, they will sink under the burden. They can endure calamity; they can brook losses and disappointments; but a wounded spirit they can not bear. *Unpardoned sin!* oh, it is this that sets the worm of guilt to gnawing, and kindles the devouring fire even before the time. No courage, no resolution can long endure the consciousness of unpardoned sin. It is an awful state of mind when, in view of eternity, the soul is beaten down and crushed under the weight of

unpardoned sin. The divine forbearance seems to the trembling sinner to be well-nigh exhausted; he feels that he has no security for another hour; yet peace comes not to that troubled world within. The waking eye, the blanched cheek, the tossing frame, tell only of sin, regret, and remorse. Clouds overshadow the dark recesses of such a heart, and stern thoughts of apprehension agitate it. The desponding sinner can not throw off the burden; he can not forget it; he can not resist it; he can not bear it. What, then, shall he do?

The answer to this question brings us to,

II. The second topic of our discourse, which is to speak OF THE CURE OF THIS WOUNDED SPIRIT.

“Is there no balm in Gilead, and is there no physician there?” They are, as we premonished you, cheerless deserts we have been traveling over—ground that is cursed for man’s sake; but they are man’s inheritance as a sinner, and he must need travel over them, sometimes less gloomy and dark, but in reality not less blighted. It is God’s own work and way thus to awaken the thoughtless, destroy the foundations on which he rests, and annihilate his vain hopes. And it is his own blessed work to make the wounded spirit whole. His Spirit convinces before he heals; his law slays before his Gospel makes alive; his terrors alarm before his love soothes

and comforts. Self-despair always, and not unfrequently deep and absolute despair, precedes the sinner's hope in God. No man feels his need of healing until he sees that he is lost without the Great Healer. "The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick."

On this part of our subject the following thoughts deserve some consideration. A wounded spirit can not be cured by *making light of it*. Men can not ridicule it nor laugh it away, nor can they lose sight of it in the absorption of worldly pleasure. The excitement of business, the stimulus of the ballroom, the opera, the theatre, or the card-table may chase it away for the hour, but when the excitement is over the miserable victim feels the wound deeper than ever. It is a mistaken notion that this is a burden which may thus be made light of. You might as well "bind the laurel-leaf around the brow of a dying man, and expect it to assuage his aching temples," as to expect that the song and the dance, and all life's alacrity and joy, will calm a wounded spirit. Where the conscience is quickened by the Spirit of God, the only fitting counsels are those which, instead of resisting, *fall in with and follow up these convictions*. Blind guides and miserable comforters are they who tell a man who feels the burden of his sins, and trembles under the apprehensions of God's wrath, that he is as good as

other men, and that there is no occasion for these distressing fears. This is crying "Peace! peace! when God says there is no peace." And if his Spirit is not more faithful to the sinner than such teachers, and if the sinner's conscience is not more faithful, his distress may indeed pass away, but only to be renewed in tenfold agony and infinite despair. No, this is not the cure for a wounded spirit. It is not the remedy fitted to the disease, nor the remedy an enlightened conscience will receive. There is nothing irrational in the fears of such a man. The more he reflects, and the more rational and convinced he becomes, the more is he alarmed and distressed.

Nor, in the next place, can a spirit thus wounded find its cure *in creatures*. "Cursed is the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm." The desponding sinner has tried this refuge, but finds no ground to rest upon. He does not find it in *himself*. He would give all that he hath to relieve himself of the burden. He desires it. He wills it; but his will is impotent. Trouble will not go at his bidding. "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth." No penitence can wash away the stain. Oceans of weeping can not obliterate one dark line of his history; nor can he find relief from his *fellow-men*. It is not in ministers. What are they all to cure a sin-burdened soul? "Plant and water" they may;

but the soil is barren, and not a flower of hope springs up under mere human culture. The solicitude and love of Christians may instruct him; but it may be he knows more than they. His distress is that he knows too much to be guiltless, and too much to hope from instructions he has so often set at naught. They visit him, and sympathize with him, and try to comfort him; but he refuses to be comforted, and they leave him in sullen sadness or bitter tears. Sad is the lot of those who cast themselves upon human helpers.

To what, then, and to whom shall the downcast and helpless spirit repair? He needs consolation out of self, out of creatures; but where shall it be found? Oh, thou disconsolate! whither shall thy dark mind and faltering footsteps be directed? What light from the works of God or from his providence, from nature or from reason, falls upon thy path of gloom? Vast concerns are at stake—vast as the deathless soul and as the coming eternity. Oh, is there no one being in the universe, no one truth, no great principle of the divine government just fitted to be the help, the hope of the helpless and despairing? There *is* such a Being; there *are* such truths; there *are* such principles of the divine government, all of which furnish the relief the sinner needs, and pledge security and peace to the immortal interests committed to their care. That

Being is the God of heaven ; those truths are found in the Gospel of his Son ; those great principles of his government are the purity and justice of his law, illustrated and satisfied by the death of the guiltless in the room and place of the guilty. Let us look a moment at each of these.

When the despairing sinner looks away from himself and creatures to *the God of heaven*, he does not look in vain. His own voice of tenderest compassion has reached this guilty world: "O Israel! thou hast destroyed thyself; but in ME is thy help." What words are these to fall on the ear of one, the "whole weary weight" of whose transgressions sinks him to despair! Creatures can not help him; but his mind may be "staid on God." The world can not satisfy him; there is a famine in the land; it gives but the husks which the swine do eat, and the wretched prodigal perishes with hunger. No man gives to him. Yet, no sooner does he begin to think of the bounty and tenderness of the Father of mercies, than the warm and throbbing heart of Infinite Love goes forth toward him as to a returning child. Scarcely does he look toward his Father's house, when, from the mountain of his holiness, the compassionate One, without one frown on his face, or an angry word on his lips, hastens to greet the prodigal's return. He would gather

the lost sheep into his fold. The *lost* may look to him, without hesitation or reserve, to "restore their soul, and lead them in paths of righteousness for his name's sake." "There is no God like unto *Thee* that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage, and retaineth not his anger forever, because he delighteth in mercy." The desponding *may hope in God*. The door is open for him to cast himself upon God. Sinner as he is, his sins need not exclude him from hope in God. He may have cause for humiliation; he may have cause to be sad; but he has no cause for despair. He may heave the penitent's sigh, but he may not distrust the love, the power, the faithfulness that would "take his feet from the horrible pit and the miry clay, and set them upon a rock."

Nor are these false or imaginary views, but such *as rest on truths revealed in the glorious Gospel*. We do not tell the anxious sinner that there is nothing to fear from a holy and sin-hating God. We do not conceal from him the truth that "the wages of sin is *death*." And a fearful death it is. But we are instructed to tell him that "the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ." And a blessed life it is: the life of reconciliation to the God he has offended—the life of holiness—the life of eternity, because the life of blessedness and joy that are eternal. All

this is the *gift* of God—his gift, unsought by apostate men, unlooked-for, undeserved, uncompensated and free to the soul that is made bankrupt by sin, and ruined and lost. “This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” We know of no other mercy, and no other method of dispensing it, and no other foundation of hope. When the song of angels uttered the “glad tidings of great joy to all people,” it was that “to us is born a *Savior* who is Christ the Lord.” This is just the message the lost sinner needs. It is “to all people.” One as really and as much as another is invited to partake of the blessings it offers. Not a living man is excluded from it who does not persist in excluding himself. The greatest sinners and the most desponding are invited to come and make the God of Jacob their refuge. “Whosoever *will* may take the waters of life freely.” An Infinite Fountain is open here; it is an ocean of mercy. Storms never beat upon it; it is calm and tranquil, and every stream that flows from it, and every exhalation that rises from its unruffled surface is full of peace and gladness:

“There is a fountain fill’d with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel’s veins;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains.”

The abounding all-sufficiency of the great atone-

ment of the Son of God is the comprehensive truth the wounded spirit may rest upon. No matter who he is, he has a divine warrant to make the salvation of the Gospel *his own*. And when he does rest upon it, he will find that the Savior there revealed "is able to save to the uttermost *all* that come unto God by him." And when he has found it, sweet will be his peace and sweet his hopes.

There is a strange fatality in the desponding heart that it is so slow to take hold of this precious truth. The desponding one has long known that Christ Jesus came into the world to *save sinners*, but he does not understand that he came to save *him*. The direct offers of pardon and life to *him* he overlooks. Other sinners may believe; others may hope; others may rejoice; but what is glad tidings to others is no glad tidings to him. His unbelieving and desponding heart suggests that all this is nothing to *him*; it is no more to *him* than if the Son of God had gone to some other world rather than this. Nor is it in the power of man to disabuse the wounded spirit of these unworthy suspicions, nor to remove this wicked unbelief. We can tell him that *that* God who can not lie, and will not deceive, calls heaven and earth to bear witness to the truth, "*Him* that cometh unto Me I will in *no wise* cast out." What can we say more? There is *no sinner* who

thus comes whom he will not receive. From all that is polluting in sin, from all that is terrible in apprehension, from a burdened conscience and a troubled heart, from the stings of guilt and the curse of the law, this Jesus saves.

In order to satisfy the suspicious conscience, God has also distinctly revealed *those great principles of his government which vindicate and justify these dispensations of his love and mercy.* He has a *natural* right to forgive as the Supreme Lawgiver; but a *moral* right he has none, except through an accepted satisfaction to his justice. He could not exercise his absolute authority in pardoning the guilty without an atonement, except to his own dishonor, to the insecurity of his kingdom, and the utter prostration of all rectitude and justice. His justice is satisfied by the death of his Son. There are incomprehensible things in this procedure; it is "the wisdom of God in a mystery." But it is his own arrangement, and we have his assurance that his justice is not only fully vindicated by it, but that great and everlasting honors accumulate around his throne for all the love and mercy to the guilty that flow in channels opened at the cross of his suffering Son. And will the skeptical and desponding hesitate when the God of truth testifies that "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth from all sin?" Will his conscience hesitate

when law and justice do not hesitate? When law and justice point him to the cross, and say, *There is our victim*, it is not the sinner we ask for; who shall condemn when it is Christ that died? Oh, are there not bright beams of hope from that Sufferer's cross which penetrate this dark dungeon of despair? Sin, and want, and woe find relief here. None of us have any thing else:

"In my hands no price I bring;
Simply to thy cross I cling."

We come as beggars only. Nor is it the bruised reed which Jesus breaks. He filleth the hungry with bread, while he sendeth the rich empty away. It is his to hear the groaning of the prisoner, and loose them that are appointed unto death.

If there are those who say their sins and helplessness lie deeper than these truths, because they have found by their own experience that they have no heart to receive them, and *can not* come to Christ that they may have life, we can only say, *it is even so*. You can not without imparted grace. No man can come to Christ unless the Father draws him. But it must not be forgotten that the *all-gracious* God is as able to apply the redemption of his Son by his Spirit as he was to effect it by the blood of the great atonement. This is, therefore, the last resort of the wounded spirit. God takes away the heart of stone and

gives a heart of flesh. His Spirit takes of the things that are Christ's and shows them unto you. Yes, this is all your hope. That great Prince and Savior is exalted to *give repentance* as well as remission of sins. You can look only to him. Set aside his enlightening and converting grace, and we may despair of another sinner ever repairing by faith to atoning blood.

Beloved friends, to some of you the world looks dark. You must have another and a better portion. You are dying men, and must soon appear before God in judgment. It is a solemn crisis in your history, now that the Spirit of God has wounded your own minds with sharp convictions. He has said, "My spirit shall not always strive with man." Take refuge now in the mighty Savior's name. No longer think of *preparing* to go to him, but *go*. Go to him who is a hiding-place from the storm. Go to him as your Prophet, subjecting your understanding to the teachings of his truth. Go to him as your Priest, implicitly and affectionately trusting in his one sacrifice. Go to him as your King, submitting your will to his, and cheerfully consenting to be governed by his laws. Go to him feeling your need of him, and that he is just the Savior you need. Go to him as a complete and all-sufficient Savior, able and willing to save all who come to him. Go to him to save you, not in your sins,

but from your sins. Go to him in his word; go to him in prayer; go to him in his ordinances; go to him in your heart, with a loving and trusting confidence, no longer hesitating, no longer falling out with the method of his grace, but promptly falling in with it, and receiving him who "of God is made to us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." You will find then that there is balm in Gilead for a wounded spirit, and will abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost.

There is much to make you tremble and despond;

"But there's a voice of sovereign grace
Sounds from the sacred word;
Oh, ye despairing sinners, come,
And trust upon the Lord."

Thousands have trusted, and found relief in him who was himself wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities. Millions can say with the weeping poet,

"I was a stricken deer, that left the herd
Long since. With many an arrow deep infix'd
My panting side was charged, when I withdrew
To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.
There was I found by ONE, who had himself
Been hurt by the archers. In his side he bore,
And in his hands and feet, the cruel scars.
With gentle force soliciting the darts,
He drew them forth, and *healed*, and bade me LIVE."

Oh, thou weary and heavy laden, come to him and find rest. Oh, thou disconsolate, repair to

him for the peace that passeth all understanding.
Oh, thou perishing, look to him and live. Even
now Jesus of Nazareth is passing by, and saith
unto thee—**LIVE!**

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SERMON IX.

THE FAITH OF PAUL.

2 TIMOTHY, i., 12.—“*For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day.*”

How that wonderful man *lived* who uttered these words we know; we are interested to know also how he *died*. We would know whether the same counsels of love and wisdom continued to flow from his lips which he was wont to utter with such power and impressiveness in the ordinary course of his ministerial toil; whether the same truths supported him amid his thick-coming sorrows which supported him in his daily conflicts and trials; and whether the same bright smile lighted up his countenance in the dark valley which so often lighted it up during his weary pilgrimage.

It imparts interest to the words of the text that they are among the last whispers that fell from his unfaltering tongue. He had now been in bonds for the cause of Christ for a period of five years, and was a prisoner at Rome. A bitter persecution was going on against the Chris-

tians on the pretense that they had set fire to the city. He was in continual expectation of being summoned before the emperor, and had no reason to doubt what would be the issue. He had been a bold and fearless assailant of wickedness, and an uncompromising advocate of the truth as it is in Jesus. He had challenged the wisdom of this world, and had struck many a blow by which its systems of philosophy had been loosed from their old fastenings. He had set his foot on the neck of pagan idolatry, and from his watchtower as the Apostle of the Gentiles he had denounced and predicted its overthrow. And now he was in the heart of its grim mountains and frowning palaces, where Christian blood flowed freely, and where he well knew the rude account he must soon render to its frenzied princes. And what does he say? Looking forward to his speedy entrance upon the eternal world, and by a severe, bloody path, he is enabled to affirm, not with stoical calmness, but with Christian serenity and triumphant confidence, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that I have committed to him against that day." Precious confidence to a dying man! strong and immovable, because it rested on a strong and immovable foundation. Precious proof of the power of the Gospel to light up the dark night of the grave!

Little thought of as it is by the mass of men in seasons of activity and joy, there are seasons when their immortality is the object of intense solicitude. In the near view of eternity, the agitated and trembling spirit feels the weight of its own undying existence. Though the righteous hath hope in his death, his bed of languishing is no scene of insensate insensibility. The apostle's chamber was a prison. Debility and disease had not invaded his pillow, yet the grim executioner was daily knocking at his door; nor would it be unnatural or unchristian if he were anxiously looking out for some safe-conduct to the unknown regions of his known immortality. He had now nothing else to care for but his immortal spirit. His work was done. For this world he had no anxious and few remaining thoughts. The final struggle did not agitate him; or, if "the herald-shadow flitted pale" across his mind in view of the bloody conflict, it was but a passing phantasm. He was about to pass to the grave through that fiery ordeal, that bloody baptism which awaited so many of the early confessors of the Christian faith, and from the grave to be ushered into those scenes where the Savior Judge will *on that day* be "glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe." No man ever had more vivid conceptions of the certainty, the glory, and the eternal and immutable issues of *that day*.

He had spoken of it before kings, and in his own graphic style had written of it to the churches. But he was now too intensely absorbed in his theme to do more than allude to it. It was no time for gorgeous or even eloquent description; the scene was too near. He speaks of it simply as *that day*; *that day* which closes the centuries of time and begins the cycles of eternity; *that day*, in which the destinies of angels and men will be irreversibly settled; *that day*, in which the mystery of God will be perfected, and this earthly system, with all its scenes and actions, its conflicts, and triumphs, and issues, will be finished; *that day*, when the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the heavens and the earth shall flee away from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne, and no place shall be found for them.

He does not tell us what it was he thus committed to Him whom he believed; but doubtless it was that which most interested him as a dying man, and in the near view of the judgment. He was a fellow-man with the fallen, and a fellow-traveler with the fallen to the bar of God. Not less than the most agitated did he feel the weight of his immortality. And this was the high trust committed to him whom he believed against *that day*. It was an immortal deposit; but he gave it to him. He put it into his hands and power. He made this commitment with no doubting

mind. The faith and hope that had served him under his prolonged ministry were now brightened to full assurance. He must come down from his lofty watch-tower to the scaffold; yet never was he more tranquil. It was not peace and confidence merely that possessed his bosom; it was liberty—it was earnestness. There were intenseness and buoyancy in his spiritual character. Doubting formed no part of his religion. The fair bright sun was pouring his last golden rays upon the battle-field where so many had fallen, and he could exclaim, “I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at *that day*.”

With the conscious safety, scarcely surpassed by the perfected assurance of sainted spirits within the veil, he committed his immortality to his Redeemer's hands. Amid calamities, when human courage sinks into despondency, he had heavenly succor and heavenly hope; an energy which could be crushed by nothing earthly; an enthusiasm of confidence which had nothing more to ask for but God and heaven.

But did this apostle understand what he was about when he made this commitment? Had he any means of knowing that he whom he thus believed would keep that which he had thus com-

mitted to him, or was his confidence a chimera, and his faith a dream? We know something of the character of this remarkable man—something of his history and attainments, and that no one understood the truths of the Gospel better than he, or had greater experience of its transforming power, or had drunk more largely at its rich fountains of consolation. Let us dwell a few moments on each of these three thoughts.

1. In the first place, this commitment was an *intelligent* commitment. This apostle had just views of the *truths of the Gospel*. They are great truths—weighty and strong truths. Paul understood them, and knew that they were worthy of confidence. His faith was strong because it was intelligent. He saw this dark world ruined by sin, but he saw the light of heaven every where irradiating it. He saw heaven's wrath resting upon it, but he saw heaven's love brooding over the sad chaos, and from eternal ages preparing to alleviate its sorrows and reform its wickedness. He saw the delusions and the work of the arch-deceiver, and he saw the unchanging verities of the Gospel. He saw the broad pathway opened by the first Adam to the gates of death, and he saw the "new and living way" between earth and heaven opened by the second Adam, and sprinkled with atoning blood. It was no limited and partial view of Christian truth that lay at the

foundation of his convictions; it was "a whole faith in a whole Gospel." Nor was it any doubtful view. They were not fictions that convinced him; they were not doubtful problems; nor did he receive them because the balance of probabilities is in their favor. They were *certain truths*. The great realities relating to the government of God and man's redemption had become to him the most substantial and interesting realities in the universe. It was a bold avowal from the lips of such a man as Saul of Tarsus when he said, "I *know* whom I have believed;" but it was the result of patient inquiry and deliberate conviction under the guidance of the Holy Ghost. It was bold because it was intelligent. And it was a beautiful avowal, gathered from the varied prefigurations and predictions of the Old Testament Scriptures — gathered from the character and works of the predicted Messiah; it was the truth, the whole truth, in its inmingled coloring, concentrated in the cross of Christ.

He could not express his confidence in fewer or more cogent words than to say "I *know him*." The world did not know him. Jewish doctors and pagan philosophers had employed all their learning and subtlety to stigmatize the Son of God as an impostor, and to subvert the doctrines of his cross. Ancient heretics had already begun to call in question his divinity and sacrifice.

Rome had published her edicts of cruelty, and was sharpening her instruments of death; enemies from every side lay in wait to deceive and destroy; but neither machinations nor menace could induce him to mistrust, much less intimidate him to renounce his divine Lord. Reject him who will, doubt him who will, "I know him" is his sublime language.

Nothing could disturb a faith like this. Sinner as he was, it was enough for him to know Jesus Christ and him crucified. On this great truth this apostle rested his faith and hope. And now to all who doubt the love, the all-sufficiency, the faithfulness of this divine Savior, he says, "*I know him*, and he is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever." The more he knew of Christ, the more he could triumph over despondency, enemies and fears, life and death, principalities and powers, things present and things to come, satisfied that neither "height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate him from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ his Lord."

2. In the second place, this commitment was an *affectionate and devout commitment*. This apostle had *experienced the power of the truth which he thus knew*. It was not enough that his faith was thus intelligent. There is a natural knowledge of the truth, and there is an experi-

mental and spiritual knowledge. This apostle himself teaches us that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." For a long time the truths of the Gospel presented themselves to his mind as subjects of reasoning and abstract speculation. Not until his inquiries were prompted by the workings of his own conscience, and broke forth in the exclamation, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" were his cool and intellectual speculations superseded by his strong and deep-felt necessity as a sinner, and by those new views and new emotions which every man experiences on his transition from the darkness of nature to the marvelous light of the Gospel. We have his own account of these convictions, and we can easily see how they formed the stepping-stone not only to new views of Christian truth, but to strong confidence in him whom he believed. This brief narrative of his early convictions of sin is recorded in the seventh chapter of his Epistle to the Romans. They probably occurred immediately after his vision of the Savior on his way to Damascus, and during the "three days" when he was "without sight, and neither did eat nor drink." They were days and nights of the deepest thought and solemn introspection. "The

commandment came, sin revived, and he died." He was helpless, hopeless. And not until he saw that "the commandment was holy, just, and good;" not until he felt that he was justly condemned, and "consented unto the law," "that it is good," though it was "made death unto him," did he find peace in the atoning Savior. I have ever found, in the course of a prolonged ministry, that this thorough *law work* formed a preparatory and strong element in the conversion of the soul. Conviction must precede conversion, though the degree of it varies in different individuals. "They that be whole need not a physician." Few can say with the confidence of St. Paul, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord," who have not first been taught to say with him, "O wretched man that I am!"

It was a marked period; it was the crisis of his moral history when this infuriate persecutor thus passed from death unto life. It is no marvel that, with his agitating convictions and his habits of thought, he should be looking every where for some great truth, some system of truth, some hallowed and firm foundation where his excited and agitated mind might find repose. He tried in vain to find it in himself; the more he fell back upon his own resources, the more he found that all within was turbulent and tumultuous. He sought it in the law; but Sinai was girt with

flames, and "the law which was ordained to life he found to be unto death." He had profited in the rites and ceremonies of a Pharisaical religion above his fellows; but he did not find it there. He did not find it in men nor means—no, nor in any efforts, or strong purposes, or will of his own. That mighty mind of his was crushed, and that strong will broken and subdued. There was but one hope for him as a lost sinner. He was cut off from all but one refuge, one 'arm of almightiness,' one bosom of infinite love; and there, with a clearness of thought, an honesty of intention, a fervor of love, a simplicity and strength of confidence which, in some good measure, corresponded with the provisions, offers, and claims of that redemption, he rested for eternity. "He saw it aright, and he felt aright toward it." The Spirit of God had given him the discernment to know and the sensibility to feel. It pleased God to reveal his Son in him. He doubted not that he had a valid warrant to appropriate the salvation of the Gospel to his own soul, and he was enabled to appropriate it. He laid hold of the precious doctrine of Jesus Christ and him crucified as the bread of life come down from heaven. He made trial of it, and found that there is a "power in the blood of his satisfying atonement to hush the alarms of offended justice, and still the tumult of remorse and terror."

It was a new species of evidence—something beyond the outward record; it was the authentic record written on the inner man of the heart, and formed the *inward witness* to truths hitherto outwardly announced.

Nor is there any thing which establishes the soul so fully as this, or which gives it such assurance and such conscious safety and peace. "He that believeth hath the witness in himself." There is no misgiving where the truth of God thus produces its counterpart within. As it is the *heart* that the Gospel addresses, so it is with the *heart* that man believes. It is the heart of God uttering its well-known accents to the heart of his redeemed child; it is the heart of his reconciled and affectionate child echoing to the words of his Father who is in heaven; and they are as true to each other as the echo is to the sound.

This ground of confidence in the instance of which we are speaking was unusually strong. It rose and became firm with the apostle's progressive sanctification. He could not doubt his love to Jesus any more than the mother doubts her love to the child that sleeps upon her bosom—any more than the miser doubts his love for gold. His loving heart was the best voucher of its own love. There was a congeniality of feeling between him and his divine Master which could

not be mistaken. His glowing heart had received the baptism of the cross, and it was an unction he never lost. And hence this strength and manliness in his faith, which, while it so sweetly recognized his own unworthiness and weakness, at the same time so sensibly recognized the all-sufficiency and faithfulness of the mighty Savior, that, as he approximated the prize of his high calling, his confidence became more and yet more invigorated to the last, and threw its lustre around his martyr-crown. I add,

3. In the third place, this commitment was as *joyous and triumphant* as it was intelligent and spiritual. St. Paul *drank largely into the rich fountains of consolation which the Gospel discloses.*

To believe the Gospel and to enjoy the Gospel are not always the same thing. There is many a pensive Christian whose faith is too limited to take in an enlarged Gospel, and too weak to have a deep, full sense and intense feeling of the truths it receives. The faith of this apostle was not merely enlarged—it was vivid and strong. It was not merely discernment and impression—it was clear discernment and powerful impression. It was deep, because he drank deep into the unsearchable riches of Christ. He *felt*, he enjoyed the truths of the Gospel as few, if any other, ever felt and enjoyed them. If you carefully

read his writings, you will perceive that he often speaks of these truths as though he was sensible that the power of language was limited, and that he found it inadequate to the expression of the thoughts and emotions which were ever growing more intense; that they had a height, and breadth, and length, and depth that passeth knowledge; and that the more he said of them, the more he felt that he could never reach their true sense and sentiment.

It is here that we find the reason and impulse of that noble avowal in the text. To believe with him was to enjoy. There is a rapture in his faith which I have nowhere else found. It was more than joy; it was triumph; it was transport; it was the joy that was "unspeakable and full of glory."

Nor may the fact be overlooked that he was eminently a man of trial. At the time he penned the text he was such a one as "Paul the aged." The years that had passed away were marked with events too memorable ever to be forgotten, and not a few of which had sent many a bitter pang to his heart. He had outlived the companions of his youth, and had seen them, one after another, sink to the grave. He had lived to see ardently attached friends become lukewarm and cold, Christians of bright promise faltering in their integrity, and some who were fellow-labor-

ers with him in the sacred office, like Demas, forsaking him, "having loved this evil world." The messenger of Satan, too, was sent to buffet him; and he wrestled not only against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places. Not only did he live in the age of unrelenting persecution, but under the reign of one of the coldest villains and butcher-like emperors that ever occupied the throne of the Cæsars. He was the inmate of prisons, and every where bonds awaited him. He was hunted like a beast of prey; men were infuriate against him, and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink until they glutted their malignity with his blood. Poverty, toil, stripes, stoning, and shipwreck—perils of waters, perils of robbers, perils by his own countrymen and by the heathen—perils in the city, in the wilderness, in the sea, and among false brethren—weariness, painfulness, watchings, hunger, thirst, fastings, cold and nakedness, form the narrative of no inconsiderable portion of his life.

Yet had he consolations and a Comforter such as the world knows not of. In the resources of the Gospel he preached, and in the bosom of that Savior whom he trusted, he found wells of consolation which no want nor woe could exhaust. One he knew there was who cared for him, and so tenderly, so incessantly, that, whether in the

solitary dungeon or the far-off sea, the promise would be verified, "My grace is sufficient for thee." So greatly did his consolations abound by Christ, that, strange as the utterance may sound in our ears, he welcomed his trials for the comfort he enjoyed under them, "most gladly glorying in his infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon him." Never was he depressed but his fainting heart was revived by cordials of heavenly love. Never was he alone, because his fellowship was with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. Never, probably, was there a happier man than this same apostle, so cheerfully and so nobly fulfilling life's great objects and attaining life's great end. Unheard-of things were present to his thoughts; enraptured views were before his vision; celestial grace and mercy found access to his heart. His cup of blessedness was filled to the brim. Though the sources of his earthly joy were circumscribed by the walls of his prison, within those walls was a man happier than Nero on his throne, and there was a song of triumph there—"I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand"—such as the emperor's palace never listened to.

Such a man might well say, "*I know* whom I have believed." He had a divine warrant for saying it. He understood himself when he made this immortal commitment. He sought no other

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guaranty for the future than he had already received in the past. A voice audibly uttered from heaven could not have better satisfied him that the risen Savior would keep that he had committed to him "against that day." Men, he knew, would do their worst upon him, and would have done their worst when they killed the body. It was of minor consequence to him when, or where, or how he died. The fangs of Nero's leopards may fasten upon his throbbing heart, the tongue of his lions lap his blood, or the executioner's axe, weary with the slaughter of its victims, leave him a headless corse; it is all the same to him. He has finished his course; he has kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for him a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give him in *that day*.

Yes, beloved hearers, and "not to him only," but "to all them who love his appearing" in whom Paul believed. *We* have an interest in the thoughts suggested by this discourse, because they are the shadowing forth of those great realities in which, as sinners and as dying men, we have as deep a stake as the martyred Paul. The thoughts which cheered the mind of this happy man are just the thoughts that should cheer our own; pacifying our conscience and purifying our hearts, quickening into life and activity all the springs of a new obedience, triumphing over death, and

giving to eternity its song of praise. Shame to the Christian who can not say, "I know whom I have believed." Yes, believers, you know him; and in prostrate adoration look up to-day to Him who sitteth upon the throne. And though we hide our faces, for very shame, from our own wickedness, we will lift up our adoring hands and hearts to heaven and say, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever."

And oh ye who make light of this Gospel, have you ever thought what a wretched world the place of your sojourning would be but for that precious emblem of hope, the cross of Christ? I would not live in it; human life would not be worth its toil, its perplexity, its weariness, its disappointments, its trials, its ten thousand complicated ills, where man's hopes are mocked and his affections cheated, but for the life and immortality illuminated by the Gospel. The time is coming when you too will know the misgivings of conscience. Ministers of terror will yet visit you. Death will ere long knock at your crazed tenement, and point you to the dark valley. In the retrospect of the past you will have fears; while onward to the future—the unseen, the ever-receding future—there will be a fearful looking

for of judgment. Your soul lost and your eternity undone, what a festering thought will this be, when the arrows of the Almighty stick fast within you, the poison whereof is drinking up your spirit! It is the mighty Healer himself who is here inviting you to commit to his keeping your interests for eternity. In a little while these Sabbaths, this voice of heaven's tenderest mercy, this day of grace, will utter their invitations no more. *That day* will then come which will decide the destinies of men for eternity. *That day*, oh "*that day*," when the Redeemer you now refuse will come in his glory, and to all them that love his appearing will award the crown of righteousness.

Tell me, will you not now turn to this one hope of man—Jesus, whom Paul preached and knew? Once more we invite you to commit the keeping of your immortal spirit to him, and never to rest until you lie at his feet, and give him all the glory of your salvation; never to rest until you can say with Paul, "I know whom I have believed, and that he is able to keep that I have committed to him until that day."

SERMON X.

COUNT THE COST.

LUKE, xiv., 28.—“*For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it.*”

It is no uncommon thing for attentive hearers of the Gospel to be conscious of influences strongly urging them to become Christians. To persons in this state of mind the Savior took pains to address instructions both of caution and encouragement. He did not make the way of life either broader or more narrow than it is, nor did he strew it every where with thorns or flowers. He counsels men to repent and believe the Gospel; he urges them to do so without delay. But it is not to pride and egotism that he makes his appeal, nor to ambition and covetousness, nor to the love of ease and pleasure, nor to the self-glorying of the natural heart; it is to the authority and love of God, and to the love of truth and duty for truth and duty's sake.

He might have pursued a different course. Such were the impressions produced by his miracles and preaching, that it required but little relaxation of the more stringent principles of

the Gospel to have induced great multitudes who were not Christians at heart to become his *professed* followers. But he could not lend himself to any collusion of this sort. There was no lowering the standard of piety where he was the preacher, and no accommodation of the Gospel to the corrupted taste of men. He desired they should become Christians; but he would have them survey the inequalities as well as the pleasantness of the way; the difficulties of a life of piety as well as its encouragements; its responsibilities as well as its privileges; its trials as well as its helps, hopes, and joys. He would have them "count the cost" of becoming Christians, and then become Christians in reality. On the one hand he speaks of sin and danger, of labor, watchfulness, and prayer, of enemies and conflict; and, on the other hand, he utters such words of hope, and gives so many pledges of the divine favor, that, with all these considerations before their minds, the disheartened may well "strive to enter in at the strait gate," and the doubting decide for God and heaven.

It is to some enlargement of these thoughts that we devote the present discourse. The subject has two aspects:

The DIFFICULTIES and

The ENCOURAGEMENTS

to be counted on in a life of piety.

I. The first comprises ITS DIFFICULTIES.

These are not arbitrarily thrown in the way; nor are they adventitious and transient; nor are they peculiar to any one age, or any one class of men. They arise,

1. In the first instance, from *the nature of Christian piety itself*. There is a religion which is not only a very easy, but a very convenient thing. Not a few assume the garb of Christianity, and pay it the homage which fashion pays to the show and form of godliness, who are strangers to its power. They speak its language and put on its vestments; they honor its institutions and imitate its bearing, and this satisfies them. The semblance costs them nothing. They have nothing to renounce, nothing to contend with, nothing to protest against, nothing to suffer for.

True piety is a different thing. It consists of principles and affections to which the mind is naturally a stranger, and which, if truly implanted in the soul, exert a transforming power. It is the law of God written on the heart and acted out in the life. Men who are governed by it are different beings from what they once were; they are "new creatures;" "old things are passed away, and all things are become new." They are not thus "translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son," nor do they thus "pass from death unto life"

without a struggle. There is difficulty in becoming a Christian at the outset. "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." It is an embarrassed, and sometimes a dark passage. "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth to life." Men are earth-born, and "that which is born of the flesh is flesh." There are, by nature, no heavenward impulses in their course; nor is it an easy thing to arrest this natural current of the mind and give it an upward direction. They are not Christians by merely *resolving* to become Christians, nor by hoping they are Christians, nor by professing to be Christians. They are not converted in their dreams. There must be an honest, awakened, thoughtful mind, earnest effort, and solemn prayer. There are painful memories to be recalled, humbling scenes to be reviewed, stern realities to be looked at, and heavenly things to be sought after. Nothing short of this upward tendency of the soul can fit it for the service and enjoyment of God in this life or that which is to come. It is as true now as it ever was, that, "except a man be born again, he can not see the kingdom of God." It is a mistaken and unscriptural notion that true religion is an easy matter. It is a groundless and often fatal persuasion—a dream from which men must be disturbed—that in this good fight of *faith* there is no conflict.

2. In the second place, there are *unwelcome truths in Christianity to which it is hard to submit*. It may be called Christianity where these searching truths are denied, but it is "another Gospel." The only means the Spirit makes use of in the conversion and sanctification of the soul is the truth of God. The great test of character is the truth of God. The mind that "falls in with it" possesses the great principles of moral rectitude, while the mind that "falls out with it" retains only its inbred and nourished seeds of wickedness.

Yet men do not naturally love the truth of God. The mournful fact is, that "light is come into the world, and they have *loved darkness rather than light*." There is nothing within the whole circle of God's truth that wicked men love, or that is not a reproach to the unhumbled heart. Seen as these truths are in themselves, and felt as they should be, they never fail to carry shame and abasement to the heart of every unrenewed man. They agitate him, and make him unhappy. They annihilate his false confidences, expose his delusion, and destroy his peace of mind. They crowd his conscience, and give him no respite from anxiety and remorse. They aim a blow at the root of his pride and self-righteousness, and their tendency is to mortify his sin and prostrate him at the feet of sovereign mercy. All the

world over, ungodly men do not love God's truth ; there is no exception to this great fact in the history of the human heart. No matter how ably, or how wisely, or how inoffensively it is exhibited—even where inspired apostles are the preachers—it is “to the Jew a stumbling-block, and to the Greek foolishness.”

Here lies one of the difficulties of becoming a Christian. Many a man has turned away from the Gospel of Christ because he has found it insisting upon unwelcome truths. He had hoped it would have spoken to him “smooth things ;” and because it prophesies to him “right things,” they are “hard sayings,” and he can not bear them. We must settle it in our minds that men can not become Christians and yet make little of God's truth. If we become the disciples of the New Testament, we must count on laying our bosoms bare to the fire and hammer of God's truth.

3. In the third place, if men would become Christians, they must count on *self-denying duties*. Nothing is more deeply imbedded in the natural heart than the supreme love of self and the world. Every man is by nature his own deity. Self is the centre. Radiate as his thoughts and affections may, this is the point in which they all converge.

Christianity demands the heart for another.

It makes the God of heaven the supreme object, and subordinates every personal, and relative, and worldly interest to his paramount claims. Every where it arrays itself against self-indulgence and self-seeking; it requires a self-sacrificing spirit and a self-denying life. "If *any man*," says the Savior, "will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."

Nor is this a mere theological speculation, but a very plain truth, and of easy application. You love, for example, to have your own will and way; but, if you become a Christian, you must give up your own for the will and way of God. You love ease more than duty; but, if you become a Christian, you must love duty more than ease. You are a lover of pleasure more than a lover of God; but, if you become a Christian, you must be a lover of God more than a lover of pleasure. You love money more than you love truth, duty, usefulness; but, if you become a Christian, you must love truth, duty, usefulness, more than money. You seek the honor that cometh from men; this is, peradventure, your idol, and this the fatal snare; but, if you become a Christian, you must seek the honor that cometh from God only. You love self more than God; if you become a Christian, you must love God more than self. In diverse ways you seek your own; but, if you be-

come Christians, you must learn to give up your own, whatever it may be, when it comes in collision with the divine claims. Every idol you love—self, sin, and the world—must all be forsaken for Christ. Trials you never thought of you may be called to encounter; abnegation you little expected, daily crosses, the reproach of friends, and the cold neglect, and, it may be, the hatred of the world. Conflicts with your own cherished tastes and habits will be more frequent and severe than they ever have been before. There will be some indulgence to be given up, some lust to be mortified, some *ruling passion*, wherein the great strength of your wickedness lies, to be subdued. Men would enter the way of life by thousands if the gate were so wide as to be easy to “flesh and blood.” Yet such a religion were nothing more than the spirit of the world baptized by the Christian name. It is not piety. The early Christians could say, “We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God.” Not until men can welcome the self-denial of a heavenly mind, and be happy in the choice of God as their refuge, God as their portion and guide, have they “counted the cost” of becoming Christians.

4. There is one more thought on this part of our subject: *through all these difficulties the Christian must persevere to the end.* “Let not him

that putteth on the armor boast as he that putteth it off." Men do not always comprehend Christianity. It has a length of way they did not think of when they flattered themselves they entered it, and they turn back. But this inconstancy of heart and purpose are not in keeping with the spirit of the Gospel. Unstable Christians there are; but there is no such thing as apostate and renegade Christians. They must not only enter upon the race, but hold on till they reach the goal. Every where snares, and seductions, and unhallowed memories and associations beset them; but with full purpose of heart they must cleave to the Lord. "The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

This is true religion. It has no fickleness which faith does not cure; no discouragements which faith does not surmount. To be all zeal to-day, and to-morrow all indifference, is, at best, a doubtful religion. To be charmed with the spirit and duties of the Gospel to-day, and disgusted with them to-morrow, does not come up to the religion of the New Testament. To be a regenerated man to-day, and to-morrow "dead in trespasses and sins," is not Christianity. To be a child of God to-day, and to-morrow an heir of hell, may be human, but it is not Christian. There is no hope without continued persever-

ance. The promise is "to him that *overcometh*." If any man "draw back, my soul hath no pleasure in him." Difficulties may not discourage nor enemies dishearten; seduction may not fascinate nor terror alarm. You must count the cost, keep the faith, and finish your course. It was the foolish builder who "began to build, and was not able to finish."

This, then, is one aspect of the subject. Perhaps it is sufficiently discouraging; and, in view of it, there may be those who, in the despondency of their hearts, exclaim, *HOW CAN I HOPE EVER TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN?* To this we answer, Difficulty and trial are not the only things the Scriptures speak of in this heavenward pilgrimage. Our subject has another,

II. And second aspect, which presents THE ENCOURAGEMENTS TO BE COUNTED ON IN THE CHRISTIAN COURSE.

Among these, it is not out of place to remark,

1. In the first instance, that *the great barrier to the character and hopes of the Christian has been surmounted by the mediatorial work of the Son of God*. The man who sets out with courage and hope for the celestial city needs first to be assured that there is a way in which he may travel with hope and confidence. So long as the guilt of all the past is upon him, it is an impassable barrier. When Bunyan's Pilgrim set out

from the City of Destruction, he was embarrassed by the burden upon his back; it was unpardoned sin. Evangelist instructed him that this heavy burden would fall off as soon as he came in sight of the cross. And so he found it; for no sooner did he come in sight of the cross than he was relieved of his burden, and went on his way rejoicing. The cross of Christ is the sinner's point of departure. It is, and ever must be, the gloom, and sullenness, and inaction of despair, until he throws off the burden of sin at the foot of the cross. This he may do; this he has a divine warrant for doing. The first step in his reconciliation to God has been taken by God himself, and the first step in the way of life which is taken by the sinner is cordially to fall in with that gracious method of reconciliation. "We are reconciled to God" only in one way, and that is "by the *death of his Son*." Men had broken the divine law, and their legal responsibilities could not be trifled with. There was a price to be paid; a fearful weight to be cast into the scale of even-handed justice, in order that the guilty might be held guiltless. To effect this was the great work of almighty power and love. It was a costly work. The God of love himself "*counted the cost*" of this gracious procedure when he consented to place his own Son in the place and under the responsibilities of the guilty, that the

guilty may leave the burden of his transgressions at the cross of the Great Sufferer, and there be clothed upon with the righteousness of "God manifest in the flesh."

Those who do not receive this truth stumble at the threshold, and know not how to advance a step in the way of life. It is characteristic of man's blindness that, when roused to an honest and anxious effort for his salvation, "he goes about to establish a righteousness of his own by the deeds of the law." What shall we *do* to be saved? what *good thing* shall I *do* that I may inherit eternal life? These are the problems which agitate him. He would like to make his peace with God by his own *doings*. And no marvel that he finds the work difficult. Do? Would he know this? We tell him, then, he must do what the law requires. "Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, that the man who doeth these things shall live in them." If he has done this, he has no sins to be pardoned or punished. The righteous law of the righteous God pronounces him just. But what if he has not done it? What if, in the records of the past or the researches of the present, in the cradle of infancy or the chamber of hoary age, no such sinless being is to be found among all the sons and daughters of Adam? No, not one. Who does not see that for man to be working out his

own righteousness by acts of obedience to the law he has violated is simply an absurdity? The thing is impossible. In every practical effort to do this, the problem which such a man is endeavoring to solve is, *How good* he must become in order to secure a title to the divine favor? This is a most embarrassing problem. Well may he complain of difficulty in craning up his character to this high standard. It is a desperate effort—a hope of all others the most forlorn.

The Gospel of the Son of God relieves from this embarrassment. It is “glad tidings of great joy.” It announces that, “when we were *without strength*, Christ died for the *ungodly*.” Its great and fundamental lesson is, “that a man is justified, not by the deeds of the law, but by the righteousness *of faith*.” When the question was proposed to the Savior, “What shall *we do* that we may work *the work of God*?” his reply was, “THIS is the work of God, that ye BELIEVE on him whom he hath sent.” Men can not work for their own justification; it is too late for them to do this; if they were counting on this they should have never sinned. But, though they can not *work* for it, they may *believe* for it. They have nothing to *give* for it, but they may have it “without money and without price.” It is a full and free salvation. “*Whosoever will* may take of the water of life freely.”

VOL. I.—P

And thus the great barrier to the character and hopes of piety is broken down. Christ, the way, the truth, and the life, is offered to all. He solicits your access to him. He will forgive all and forget all, so that the burden of sins that are past shall be no embarrassment in your future course. If the guilty comes to Jesus, wicked sinner as he is, he may enter upon his heavenly career unencumbered and free. This is his starting-point; and it is ever bright and luminous, and casts its light forward, and reflects it backward, and every where encompasses him, never waning even through the dark valley and to the gates of the celestial city.

And then, of this whole course of faith and duty, we remark,

2. In the second place, that *it is itself a pleasant and delightful service*. This immunity from the penalty of the law, thus purchased and secured, instead of relaxing, gives a superadded force to its precepts. The curse is taken off, and there is peace with God, in order to secure a peculiar and holy people. Though gratuitously justified, they are "not without law to God." Never. We do not "make void through faith; yea, we establish the law." In the language of the apostle, they are emphatically "under law to Christ." Immortal principles, heaven-inspired grace, everlasting gratitude, bind them to do the

will of their Father in heaven. "The *love of Christ* constraineth them to live, not unto themselves, but to him who died for them and rose again."

And this, we affirm, is a pleasant and delightful service. "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments *are not grievous*. The ways of wisdom are ways of *pleasantness*, and all her paths are *peace*. The work of righteousness is *peace*, and the effect of righteousness *quietness and assurance* forever." The graces of the Christian character are bland and sweet graces. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." What is more peaceful than the *submission* that prefers God's will to our own, or more heavenly than the charity that "envieth not, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things?" or more firm and enduring than a trusting confidence in God's truth and promises? or what more secure shelter from stormy doubts and agitating fears than when the soul has found this refuge, and feels herself safe anchored on this Rock of Ages? It was joy such as no man could take from him when one of old sang, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters." It was greater joy when he could

exclaim, "Although my house be not so with God, yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, and this is all my salvation and all my desire." There is something beautifully expressive of the divine wisdom, love, and power in the character that is formed by the truth and grace of the Gospel. It is like the days of heaven upon earth, even though shadows pass over them. It is in unison with all goodness—with patriarchs, and prophets, and apostles, and with the good of every age and name. It is in unison with principalities and powers in higher worlds, and in unison with the heart of the Deity. When their hearts beat, the heart of piety throbs in return. It is the same vibration, because it is in unison with all the holy, and all the holiest and best affections and interests of God's universal kingdom. It is one with them, and bound up in the common sympathies and interests of all virtuous and benevolent minds.

Men are happy as they are rightly employed. There is always pleasure in doing right; pleasure in the device and forethought; pleasure in the deed; pleasure in the reflection and retrospect; pleasure as different from the gloom, and dejection, and self-reproach, and terrible apprehension, and multiform and piercing stings of wickedness, as is the bright and cheerful sunshine

from the dark and angry tempest. Follow the man who is imbued with this spirit into the duties of his high vocation, unreluctantly bearing his part in the burdens and battle of human life, at home and abroad, in the Church and in the world, redeeming the time, aiming to live usefully and honorably, and making the most of human life for the great purposes for which it is given, and Cæsar on his throne was not so happy as he. Or if, from scenes of duty and toil, you follow him to scenes of trial and suffering, you may not call him an unhappy man. Worm, and no man, as he feels himself to be, he enjoys the fatherly care of God his Maker, the sympathizing love of Christ his Savior, and the indwelling witness of the Holy Spirit, his sanctifier. In weakness and despondency they are his comforters; while in the midnight of his adversity, and bereft of every earthly hope, like Paul and Silas, he sings praises from his dungeon. He has sources of tranquillity, of buoyancy even, as unlike those of the men of this world as was the martyr-triumph of Paul when he exclaimed, "I am now ready to be offered;" unlike the frenzied shouts of his unrelenting persecutor over the flames of Rome. Truly "light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." It is a serene sky under which the Christian walks; and though it may not always be the brilliant flash

of joy, it is the mild radiance of his heavenly Father's love. Though his path lies through the wilderness, there are fountains in the desert, and on all their banks are songs of salvation. There is no defilement in their joys, and nothing to poison their springs of consolation, and dash their cup with bitterness. Nay, the very *difficulties of a true and consistent piety commend its claims*, and fit the believer to "endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." Virtuous, and useful, and cheerful piety is not dearly bought even by forbidding experience. We count the cost of such discouragements, nor can we afford to throw off the burden. If the bitter cup, the baptism of suffering, is sometimes essential to our discipleship, much more may it be essential to the highest enjoyment of duty and the sweetest consolation in trial. It is no difficult matter, therefore, to strike the balance, and count the cost of becoming a Christian, when the pleasures of piety are set off against the pleasures of sin. It was well said by the late Robert Hall that "there is more true pleasure in the roughest path to heaven than in the smoothest way to hell."

Nor are these thoughts the less important when we consider,

3. In the third place, that, in view of all the difficulties of his course, *they are not his own re-*

sources on which he relies. No matter what these responsibilities are, so long as he has resources equal to the exigency. And it matters not whether these resources are within or without himself, so long as they are available.

They are *not* within himself. It is the most difficult thing in the world for one whose mind is awake to this great subject to become a Christian. He is "dead in trespasses and sins." His "carnal mind is enmity against God," and unfriendly to the being, the character, and the laws of the Most High. "In him there dwelleth no good thing." He cares nothing for God's pleasure, does nothing for his glory, and is hostile to the Gospel of his Son. He is "in the gall of bitterness and the bonds of iniquity; the curses of God's Book stand recorded against him; he is his own destroyer, and he knows there is "but a step between him and death." Most certainly, nothing short of some extraneous and superior power will ever make such a man a child of God. There must be a quickening energy from above, else will he never become the subject of that radical change without which he can not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Means and motives can not effect it. Precept and penalty can not effect it. A freely-offered salvation can not effect it. His own resolutions can not effect it. With nothing but his own resources, he must be driven to despair.

Yet, great as the work is, he *has* resources that are equal to it. There stands the joyous truth, "O Israel! thou hast destroyed thyself; but IN ME is thy help." It is true these resources are not within himself, but it is not less true that he has the divine warrant to make them his own. "Let him take hold of my strength, and be at peace with me, and he shall be at peace with me." Bankrupt and ruined as he is, he is divinely authorized to draw on that free and exhaustless exchequer, from "whose fullness we all receive, and grace for grace." He has the same resources which have given such hope and courage to thousands, once as weak and desponding as he, who, from the commencement to the close of their career, could only say, "By the grace of God I am what I am." Convinced of sin, and burdened with guilt, and crushed by his own conscious impotence, there is a voice which announces to him, "My grace is sufficient for thee." And when he has learned this truth, and felt its relief, its power, its preciousness, he has entered on the way of life. He throws himself at the footstool of sovereign mercy, looking to Christ alone, "made of God to him wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. He casts himself into his arms. He becomes a Christian. Yet this is but the first step; and the second is like unto it; and so of every stage in the ascending series, until he cross-

es the stream that separates him from the paradise of God. He is no more able, of himself, to take the last step than he was the first. Yet he goes forward, sometimes with "fear and trembling," sometimes hopefully, cheerfully, triumphantly; and can say, with a noble woman of the last century, "Though I am perfect weakness, I have Omnipotence to lean upon."

Men cower before the difficulties of the Christian calling because they can not take hold of these inspiriting truths. I call them *inspiriting* truths. We have read philosophical and discouraging views of them, and we have listened to them, with pain, from the sacred desk. Speculation and discouragement are out of place when contemplating such truths as these. They are as fountains in the desert, and as rivers of water in a dry place. Is it no encouragement to know that "*it is God that worketh in us?*" Oh, what hope comes with the announcement that it is he "who giveth *power* to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength!" When "the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them; I the God of Israel will not forsake them." What words are these! May we not count the cost and meet the responsibility with such wondrous words of truth and grace to encourage us? May we not take the yoke of

Christ upon us, and bear the burden? May we not dare to become Christians, and be eager in the daring, brought thus into alliance with everlasting strength?

4. There is one additional consideration which has great influence with every well-balanced mind in estimating the cost of piety, and *it relates to the final recompense.*

"It is not all of life to live,
Nor all of death to die."

Man sleeps; he swoons; he passes through the organic change by which the immortal and thinking being is separated from the body, survives the transformation, and remains the living, moral, responsible, immortal agent still. "Verily there is a God that judgeth on the earth. Verily there is a *reward* for the righteous, and his expectations shall not be cut off."

We may surely give prominence to this truth when we count the cost of piety. The *issues* of our conduct may not be left out of the account when the great question is what that conduct shall be. They are eternal realities which chiefly act upon the Christian mind. If it belongs to the economy of grace that every man's future destiny shall be determined by the character he forms in the present world, it is madness to throw the future out of his estimate. If "he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption,

and he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting"—if there "is no other name under heaven whereby he must be saved but the name of Christ"—and if "he that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned"—a right-minded man would naturally ask, with the anxious Nettleton, "*Where shall I be a hundred years hence?*"

There is no more affecting proof of the power of sin than that state of mind which sacrifices every thing to the joys of the present moment. It is the rock on which the young make shipwreck of honor and usefulness in the present world, and the young, the middle-aged, and the old make shipwreck of their eternity. It is like Esau selling the hope of Israel for a mess of pottage, or the infatuated prince who exclaimed, "My kingdom for a cup of water!" It is passion, and not principle; it is idiocy; human language can not give a name to the folly, the madness that gives the preference to the phantoms of time over the enduring realities of the everlasting future.

Christianity aims high and makes a wiser estimate. Her disciples lay their account with self-denying toil; but they also count on the "rest that remaineth for the people of God." They count on enemies; but they gird themselves, not for the conflict only, but for the victory. They look for reproach and shame; but they look also

for "glory, honor, immortality, and eternal life." They look for trials, and, it may be, "much tribulation," and always for conflict with indwelling sin; but they are satisfied that the severest of them all shall not be able "to separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus their Lord."

What, then, if there are some items of discouragement, there is an abundant offset to them all; and, sweet thought! these discouragements themselves will not last forever. The years are few and fleeting in which they will have power to dishearten or depress. The heavenly land borders on the desert. At the worst, it is but a little while their harps shall hang upon the willows; for "the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion, and everlasting joy shall be upon their head; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

We say, then, abate nothing from the discouragements of piety; count the cost to the utmost; and is it not right, reasonable, and wise to become Christians? Be it so that the religion of the Gospel is unpopular, and its ever-blessed Author is "despised and rejected of men;" nevertheless, I would be a Christian. "The servant is not greater than his Lord, nor he that is sent greater than he that sent him." Be it so that

toil and self-sacrifice continue to the grave—still would I be a Christian. Let tribulation come, and famine, and nakedness, and peril, and sword—still I would be a Christian. Soon the conflict will be over, and “those who have come out of great tribulation, and washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, shall serve him day and night in his temple.”

Come, then, beloved hearers, “count the cost.” Bring home the question, SHALL I, OR SHALL I NOT, BECOME A CHRISTIAN? Forget not that “he who is not *for* Christ is against him;” and let your decision be formed, not on the impulse of the moment—not under the influence of animal excitement or sympathy—not on principles of worldly policy, and with the view of “making a gain of godliness;” but on conviction, with deliberate thought of the claims of truth and duty, and in view of both sides of this momentous question.

We ask again, therefore, WILL YOU BECOME A CHRISTIAN? What, a *Christian*? Yes, a Christian. A scrupulous, self-denying, laborious Christian? Yes, a scrupulous, self-denying, laborious Christian. What, a *sad, and melancholy, and sanctimonious Christian*? No, a Christian—an humble, active, cheerful Christian. What say you? I see you “halting between two opinions.” But why hesitate? Do you say No?

And *why* do you say No to such a question as this? And why hesitate to say, GOD HELPING ME, I WILL BECOME A CHRISTIAN. If you still hesitate to adopt this resolve, and to carry it into faithful execution, are you sure you will be the gainer by it? Allow me to remind you that there are two sides to this great question. There is good lost, and hopes abandoned, and crushing despair, and accumulated sorrows in the career of unrelenting impenitence. Are you sure it will cost you nothing to remain the enemy of God, and a stranger to the Gospel of his Son? Will the service of sin bring with it no reproach, no gloom, no dejection, no separation from the living whom you love and the departed you mourn over—no everlasting shame and infinite despair? You were born to die. You would fain enjoy the light of hope in the dark valley instead of being driven away in your wickedness. Sin is costly to a man who must “say to corruption, thou art my father, and to the worm, thou art my mother and my sister.” And when you are numbered with the dead, will the flowers of a blissful immortality be found upon your tomb, or send up their fragrance from the sepulchre where you sleep? And when you have passed through the night of the grave, and stand before God in judgment; when, “of those who sleep in the dust of the earth, some shall awake to ever-

lasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt;" when the gracious words shall be uttered by those lips of love, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;" and when that fearful sentence shall fall upon the ear of those on his left hand, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels," will you not suspect that you never **COUNTED THE COST** of neglecting the "great salvation?" And when that whirlwind wrath of almighty vengeance shall sweep over your dark abode; and when, as ages upon ages have rolled away, it sweeps on still, and still sweeps on, and the burning lava of that "lake of fire," and the opening caverns of the "bottomless pit" engulf you, will you not wonder, with unutterable wonder, that you never **COUNTED THE COST**, nor once seriously thought of the problem, "**WHAT SHALL IT PROFIT A MAN IF HE GAIN THE WHOLE WORLD AND LOSE HIS OWN SOUL; OR WHAT SHALL A MAN GIVE IN EXCHANGE FOR HIS SOUL?**"

SERMON XI.

THE CHRISTIAN'S RETROSPECT.

DEUTERONOMY, viii., 2.—“*And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, and to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldst keep his commandments or no.*”

FROM whatever sources the future blessedness of the people of God flows, there can be no doubt that it will be augmented by their remembrance of his dispensations toward them in the present world. This world is to them what the Arabian desert was to the children of Israel: the place of their education for eternity—the theatre for their intellectual and moral training for another and higher state of existence. They are wondrous dealings toward them which the providence of God thus comprises; and so full of instruction are they, and so impressive and memorable, that, whatever their present views may be, they will one day look back upon “the way in which he led them” with humble and grateful admiration. We propose in the present discourse, therefore, to speak of the way in which God leads his peo-

ple, and to show why he leads them in such a way.

I. We are, in the first place, to speak of *the way itself* in which God leads his people.

It has peculiarities. No Christian ever anticipated just such a way. It can never be fully described until it is surveyed and inspected, from stage to stage, in the records of the past. "The way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." Human dependence is perfect and absolute. There are no laws of the natural, intellectual, or moral world, and no analogies by which even the wisest and best can tell beforehand what will be even their own arrangements. They may be formed definitely, and, it may be, with great wisdom and decision of purpose, yet there may be events little thought of, which shall give to their counsels and their course a new and altogether different and unlooked-for direction. When God called Abram to go into a strange land, he "went out, *not knowing* whither he went." When Joseph was sold as a slave and carried into Egypt, little did he anticipate the destiny that awaited him. When the Hebrews were first delivered from their four hundred years' bondage to the Pharaoh's, and when, after their journey through the wilderness, they reached the borders of their promised inheritance, there was not one among

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them all but must have looked back with *surprise* upon the way in which they had been conducted. When David was tending his father's flocks in the wilderness, and when Saul of Tarsus was on his way to Damascus, how many unexpected events would have been disclosed to their view could they have lifted the veil of futurity! How little did the fishermen of Galilee, or the Reformers of the seventeenth century, or our Puritan forefathers, know what God was preparing for them until the events of his providence revealed their high destiny! It would be no easy matter to conjecture the anticipations of John Bunyan, or Oliver Cromwell, or Blaise Pascal, or John Howard, before they realized the wondrous scenes so emphatically foretold by the promise, "I will lead the blind by a way that they *knew not*, and in paths that they have not known."

"Man appoints, but God disappoints." Let any child of God, whose history and experience have become matured by time, look back, and, if we mistake not, he will be convinced that the dark and the bright side were alike concealed. When, on the one hand, rugged mountains, and barren sands, and venomous reptiles, and malignant foes beset him, and, on the other, rich valleys and refreshing streams skirt his path, and powerful and faithful friends encamp around

him, he is constrained to confess that these are things which he looked not for. "Man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps." Few either suffer or enjoy what they expected to suffer or enjoy; or reside where they expected to reside; or accomplish what they expected to accomplish; or *are* what they expected to be. Their society, their employments, their opportunities for religious instruction, their spheres of usefulness, and their responsibilities, have all been hidden from them by a veil of ignorance.

Their whole history is not unfrequently one either of painful or agreeable *disappointments*. Sometimes they are thwarted in well-nigh every thing they put their hands to do; their wisest and best-selected measures suffer defeat, and their fondest hopes perish. God's providence toward them is sometimes exceedingly dark; it is full of mystery; "his way is in the sea, and his path in the mighty waters." With the depressed and embarrassed patriarch of old, they are ready to say, "All these things are against me." Look where they will, they see nothing but clouds and darkness about God's throne. It seems to them that they are placed in circumstances in which no others have ever been placed. One combination of events after another crushes every earth-born hope. If they have labored for wealth, they have put it into "a bag with holes," and God "has

blown upon it." If they have been encircled with those they love, "lover and friend are put far from them, and their acquaintance into darkness." And not unfrequently when, by enterprise and good conduct, they were expecting to exert influence in the world and be advanced to honor, they are cast down. "They look for light, and behold darkness." They learn by experience that "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." Disaster follows disaster; "woes come in clusters;" nor can they be eluded by obscurity, nor escaped by flight, nor are they always endured with patience and fortitude. They find that the designs of God are inconsistent with their own desires; the course which he has marked out for them is very different from the one which they would fain mark out for themselves. For the most part, it is a way that is greatly diversified, not only in regard to different persons, but in regard to the same persons and the same community. It was so toward the Israelites in the wilderness; it has been so to all the people of God in every age of the world, and it is so now. Though "the Breaker of Israel goes up before them," he makes them trace and retrace their steps, and many a time leads them back by the "way which they came," changing and diversifying their pilgrimage by mercies and by judgments, by joy and sorrow, by triumph and defeat.

From the first dawns of light and conviction to the last radiance of hope and victory, no Christian travels the same equable path. Sometimes he is beset with difficulty, and despairs of ever reaching his heavenly home; and then, again, when difficulty besets him on every side, and he knows not where to look, God "sends out his light and his truth that they may guide him;" and, though shut in by mountains on either side, and by enemies in the rear, a passage is made for him through the sea. Not unfrequently, at the very crisis when his fears are most excited, and his hopes most depressed, and his "flesh trembleth at God's judgments," not only are his apprehensions quieted, but his courage invigorated.

And thus it is that clouds and sunshine, storm and calm, friend and foe, sickness and health, the vale and the mountain-top, are here and there scattered throughout all the way in which God leads his people. Sometimes they are regaled by fruits brought from the heavenly land, and then they tread the leafless desert. Sometimes they wander under scorching skies and where there are no fountains of water, and then, again, they find "rivers of waters in a dry place." Sometimes they drink the wormwood and the gall, and sometimes "suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock." Sometimes God "bends his bow, and sets them as a mark for the

arrow," and sometimes he holds them up before the world as the people on whom he has set his love. This diversity and these inmingled providences continue from the cradle to the grave. None escape them. Where the morning is bright and the noon unclouded, clouds and gloom will be very apt to hover in the evening sky. For the most part, they bear the yoke in their youth or in the heigh-day of their pilgrimage. More usually, as they draw toward its close, their path is marked by fewer and less observable inequalities; clouds withdraw, and the prospect brightens. The air is calm, and the mild light of the setting sun gilds the hills, not unfrequently resting on some Nebo eminence, and in full view of the promised land. From the hither to the outer verge of their pilgrimage, it is a strangely diversified course. This wilderness world, in all its vicissitudes, must be traveled over before their weary feet tread the promised inheritance, and they erect their pillar and raise their song on the long-wished-for shore.

Such is the way itself in which God leads his people. We are interested to inquire,

II. In the second place, *Why he leads them in such a way?*

It is not because he could not lead them in a more plain, less varied, and shorter path. It is not because he does not love them, and does not

mean to make all things "work together for good." It is the method of his *wisdom and grace*, in order to teach them lessons which they need to learn, and subject them to a discipline which shall best prepare them for their final inheritance. This is the great and comprehensive reason, and may be regarded in several distinct aspects.

1. The first of these is, that it is greatly desirable that his people should understand that it is *God himself who leads them, and not another*.

"Thou shalt remember all the way in which *the Lord thy God* led thee." There was no more important and no more difficult lesson for the children of Israel to learn than this. Such was the practical atheism of their hearts, and such their proneness to idolatry, that even under the terrors of Sinai, and within hearing of that voice which they entreated might not be spoken to them any more, they made themselves gods of gold, and said, "These be thy gods which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." It required no small pains and no ordinary procedure to arrest their attention to the fact, and to fix the great thought in their minds, that "*the Lord alone* did lead them, and there was no strange God with them." Those memorable scenes at the Red Sea—at the destruction of Achan—at the giving of the manna and the quails—at the rock in Horeb

—at the destruction of the people by the fiery serpents—at the stoning of the Sabbath-breaker—at the rebellion of Korah—at Baal-Peor and on the plains of Moab, were singularly fitted to bring the God of heaven before their minds. He led them from one place to another, and from one assemblage of events to another, in order to arrest their attention to the reality of his existence, the greatness and purity of his nature, the reasonableness of his claims, the efficacy of his government, and the graciousness of his designs.

This is one of the objects God has in view in all his dealings with his people. They “may not have any other gods before him.” Whoever else they forget, they may not forget *him*, be the discipline what it may that brings *him* to remembrance. There is no being in the universe who feels so deep an interest in *them* as God, or who so cares for them; and there is none in whom *they* ought to feel so deep an interest, and think of, and care for, *as God*, their own God. There is none with whom they have so much to do, and of whom it is so important that they should have just views, and deep and abiding impressions.

Yet, strange to say, there is none whom they are so prone to forget; nor is there any one fact in their history and experience more humiliating than that no ordinary procedure is sufficient to wake up their forgetful minds to deep and per-

manent views of him by whose outstretched arm they have been rescued from the destroyer and conducted on their way. So long as they glide along the calm unruffled surface, they lose that high and intense interest in the divine character and government which is their true glory. There must be the strong wind, and the earthquake, and the fire, before the still small voice is heard and made welcome. His people must be tossed upon the billows, or they must be led through a strange land into the pathless desert. Hunger and thirst, disease and death must desolate them; and there, amid the inequalities of a tedious and perilous pilgrimage, and amid those contrasted scenes and agitating occurrences which, in defiance of their stupidity, bring God into view, be taught to acquaint themselves with him.

This is a lesson which will be better understood when their pilgrimage is over. Whoever gets to heaven will see more clearly than he ever saw before how little he himself had to do in getting there, and that from first to last the gracious work was all of God.

2. Another reason why God leads his people in such a way is to give them *abasing views of themselves*. "Thou shalt remember all the way the Lord thy God led thee in the wilderness, to *humble thee*." His object, by all his conduct toward them, is to cultivate, and bring out, and burnish

the highest graces of the Christian character. The spirit of the Gospel is that of "a little child." That which, in no small degree, makes heaven so joyous, is that it is as humble as it is holy. There are no notions of human merit there; no arrogant self-sufficiency; no vain self-confidence; no stiff and stubborn self-will. There is no vain-glory; no self-aggrandizement; no ambition for fame. Pride, that deep root of evil, is all eradicated; there has not been one emotion of it there since Satan and his angels were cast down to hell. It is not splendor they seek after; the thirst for distinction, the sickly craving for applause, all died out in the grave. The most eminent saints, and those who live nearest to God, have the most humbling views of themselves.

It is not surprising, therefore, that, in order to fit them for heaven, infinite wisdom and love should lead them in a way to *humble* them. It is the invariable law of his spiritual kingdom, that "he that humbleth himself shall be exalted, and he that exalteth himself shall be abased." In view of those repeatedly recurring miracles of judgment and mercy before which the thousands of Israel so often alternately rejoiced and trembled, the stoutest of them and the meekest of them were made to lie on their faces. What a humbling lesson was it to Aaron, and to the assembled people, when, for a single sin, he went up

to Mount Hor, was stripped of his priestly garments, and "died there in the mount!" And when Moses, their distinguished leader, was told, at the close of his wanderings, that, for the same sin, he could not be permitted to go over Jordan and possess the land, what a lesson of self-abasement was it, not only to him, but to all Israel! And what marvel if the discipline be various and severe by which God's people are still taught their own abjectness! There are truths which are never so strongly reflected as from the mirror of a searching providence and our own actual history. They are heart-rending and soul-humbling *facts* which we are then called to look upon, nor can we inspect them without being ashamed and confounded for our own ways. There is a lowliness of mind which nothing enforces but *experience*, and great experience of God's peculiar dealings with his people. These dealings and the reasons of them will be brought fully into view hereafter, but it is a humbling retrospect even in the present world. Yet is it a welcome retrospect. Sweet recollections are they that make us truly humble—blessed retrospect that thus prostrates the soul in the dust, and makes us fall down at the feet of Jesus and weep!

3. A third reason for God's leading his people in such a way is that *he may thereby prove them, and know what is in their hearts.* The Scriptures

teach us that the "heart of man is full of evil, deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." It is not easy to conceive of a description of greater wickedness than this; yet nothing is more true; while, at the same time, nothing is less truly believed and felt. It may well be supposed that the experiment would be no ordinary one by which the God of heaven would *prove and know what is in such a heart*. Its wickedness is *thus proved* only as it is *brought out and acted out*; and it is thus acted out only as it is brought to the test by events in God's providence. Other views of it are speculative and cold; while those that are forced upon us by facts, and burnt in upon our minds by our own history and the history of others, are *convictions*—the deep convictions of bitter consciousness.

Of all the melancholy proofs of deep-seated wickedness in the human heart, the *indwelling sin* of the *people of God* is perhaps the most impressive. We could not be persuaded to believe, after all that God has done for them and in them, and after all their own professions and hopes, that they could sin as they have sinned and do sin, did we not read it in their biography, and did we not know it by experience. Some unlooked-for change in their condition, some new and unexpected associations, or some new impulses, sometimes make strange discoveries of character.

Let no one be too confident that he is impervious to the darts of the Fowler. It may be that by some unexpected and unwonted storm of malignant, or covetous, or envious, or proud, or sensual passion, or some other violent assault of the powers of darkness, the fountains of this great deep of human depravity within him may be broken up, to his own confusion and shame. When the children of Israel came out of Egypt, they were more ignorant of themselves even than of God. But in their progress through the wilderness there were proofs and expressions of wickedness which they could never forget, which can never be forgotten by others, and which are "written for *our* instruction on whom the ends of the world are come." At the Red Sea, where they should have been confiding, they proved themselves distrustful. At the waters of Marah and Rephidim, where they should have been thankful, they murmured against God, and contended with Moses. And even when on the plains of Moab, and just within sight of Canaan, they turned to the idolatry and low vices of their enemies. They proved themselves a stiff-necked people, a fickle and rebellious people, and more than once gave utterance to the thought, "Would to God we had died in the land of Egypt!" God proved them, and showed them what was in their hearts.

When they first enter upon their heavenward career, the people of God feel much as the Hebrews felt when they sang their song of triumph on the banks of the Red Sea. They little suspect that the conflict with a rebellious and unholy mind is not over, and that there may yet arise within them unsanctified affections and unhallowed lusts, which may disturb their serenity, embarrass their progress, shut out the light of God's countenance, and throw them into the hands of the enemy. They indulge the fond hope that the bondage of sin is destroyed, that the bitterness of death is past, and that nothing will ever again interrupt their peace with God, or obstruct them in their heavenward pilgrimage. But when God proves and tries them as silver is tried; when his providence smiles upon them, and it is seen how they conduct themselves under its smiles; when it frowns, and it is seen how they conduct themselves under its frowns; when he who gives also takes away; when riches, and friends, and influence, and worldly advancement, instead of proving their thankfulness and their augmented sense of responsibility, only prove their worldliness and self-indulgence; and when poverty, and losses, and reproach, instead of proving their integrity and cheerful submission, prove their subtlety, their prevarication, and their dissatisfaction with God and the world

around them, they find it a fiery furnace through which they are passing; and though in the end they shall come out as gold seven times purified, it is only in wonder that there was so much dross to be purged away.

The key which unlocks many a dark and mysterious providence is the clew it gives to a man's own character, and the opening to those secret avenues which discover the dark chambers within. It is no unusual thing for good men to pray that God would show them their own hearts, and make them acquainted with themselves. We may not say that they ought not to do so; but this we say, that the way in which this request is usually answered is not always present to their minds. We should not be surprised to learn that there are not a few who hesitate at such a prayer, because sad experience has taught them that, in answering it, God has so instructed them that they have learned what they hoped never to have known. With the devout poet they can say,

“’Twas he who taught me thus to pray,
And he I trust has answered prayer;
But it has been in such a way
As almost drove me to despair.”

Oh, those disclosures of corruption, those hidden evils of the heart, those memorable expressions of wickedness which are thus brought to view by the way in which he leads them! There is yet a fourth

4. Reason for this varied and trying procedure—it constitutes a test of their obedience, and ascertains whether or not they will keep God's commandments. It is an easy thing to obey when the precept involves no self-sacrifice, and falls in with our own wishes and interests. The Hebrews promised fair; they listened devoutly to the rehearsal of God's covenant, and promptly said, "All these things will we do, and be obedient." God suspected their sincerity, and, in reply to this solemn promise, uttered the words, "O that *there were* such a heart in them to *do* according to all they have said!" When he put their obedience to the test, the issue was that multitudes proved themselves unfaithful, and their carcasses fell in the wilderness.

"He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them," saith the Savior, "he it is that loveth me." Excited emotions, and strong and confident professions, are not always proof of an obedient heart. Yet the King of Zion would rule over an obedient and loyal empire. It was for this he died, and for this he lives and reigns.

Among those who profess their allegiance to him there are some who are traitors at heart—deceivers and deceived; and it is God's purpose sooner or later to detect and expose their perfidy. Very often he does this by the dispensations of his providence in the present world, and

by such exposures, such demands upon them, and under such circumstances as show their disloyalty. There are others who, while they have nothing to boast of, have an honest and habitual respect to all God's commandments, and whose character is brought to the test by the way in which he leads them. It was thus that he tried Enoch and Noah, Abraham, and Job, and Paul, and multitudes spoken of and not spoken of in the Scriptures, of whom the world was not worthy, who proved their integrity, and evinced before earth and heaven that, come what will, they would hearken to the voice of God. And thus, though in different ways, he proves all his professed children; and the result is, that his nominal followers "go back, and walk no more with him;" while among the true and faithful, some slide and falter, and others abide the severest trial, and fall not from their steadfastness. The lights of a picture are created by its shadows, and the lustre of a diamond is increased by the intervention of the dark bodies that surround it. "There must be heresies, that the truth may be *manifest*." No man is known till he is tried; tried attachment to truth and duty is like a brilliant star in a murky atmosphere. All need the trial for their own sake, for Zion's sake, and for the sake of her honored and glorious head. The Christianity that has encountered no dan-

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gers, the obedience which has surmounted no obstacles, the integrity that is assailed by no temptations, is at best but gold that has never passed through the fire, and the true value of which can not be assigned. It is rather the fitting theme of romantic story than true and sober narrative. There are no conquests where there is no adversary, and the promise is "to him that overcometh." Christians may expect that God will thus try them; and if they escape the trial, they can hardly fail to escape the fear that "they are bastards, and not sons."

And what a review does this single consideration furnish to God's people! Through infinite and unchanging grace they will ere long have finished their course, and how will they then sing with the Psalmist, "Who, O Lord, is a strong Lord like unto thee, or to thy faithfulness round about thee!" With what new emotions will they honor his faithful and unchanging love, and how welcome and transporting then will be the sentence, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!"

In our conclusion of this discourse we remark,

1. That the way in which God leads his people deserves to be *remembered*. "Thou shalt *remember* all the way the Lord thy God led thee." The time will come when reminiscences like these

will be grateful and delightful. Such a retrospect will enhance their enjoyment, and give emphasis to their song when from the celestial city they look back upon their pilgrimage. It is no unwelcome and no unprofitable employment even now to recount the incidents that lie in our past history, and that lead us to dwell with adoring gratitude upon the divine goodness and mercy. A Christian man, writing memoirs of himself, would often wet his page with tears; they would be tears of joy, and they would be tears of penitence — of penitence, because they would be little else than his own *confession*; of joy, because he would be so constantly called on to “remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.” When we come at last to look back upon the way in which the Lord hath led us, we shall be satisfied that it was the right way. It may *now* seem the wrong way; but we “see through a glass darkly.” Hereafter we shall see that God has led us as no other could have led us. The heavenly rest will be the sweeter for all these dark passages of the wilderness. Soon they will have been traveled over; and though never forgotten because so full of God, will terminate where every sanctified trial, every discouragement, every enemy overcome, every unexplored path, every false step restored, and all the gloomy length of the way itself, shall be to the

praise of the glory of his grace who has made us accepted in the Beloved.

2. In the second place, we say to every Christian, "Be thou strong and of good courage." In such a world as this, it must be by the eye of *faith*, and not of *sense*, if our course is courageous and joyful. The saints of other days could not see, but they could believe; and they could endure, because "they endured *as seeing* him who is invisible." The power of faith, what wonders has it wrought, and what wonders is it destined yet to work out in this desert world! My brother, my sister, cast not away your confidence "which hath great recompense of reward." Courage, Christian! go on your way, and rejoice as you go. "The promise is surely sealed. All the suggestions of thy great adversary—all the doubts which he has awakened in thy mind as to the issue of the conflict—all the suspicions which he has excited in regard to the wisdom and goodness of thy heavenly Father's dealings with thee—all the accusations by which he has harassed thy conscience and sought to drive thee to despair—all will be found *liars*. Christ shall bruise Satan under thy feet shortly." With some of us human life is a short story; and if it tell of trials, and sorrow, and sighing, they are "light afflictions, which are but for a moment," and which "work out for us a far more exceeding and eter-

nal weight of glory." John saw, amid assembled millions before the throne, some who were "clothed with white robes, and with palms in their hands;" and they were those who came "out of great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Faith sees in all these things a divine hand, and a divine Guide and Comforter. "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." What peace, what confidence, what courage should not these truths impart and sustain, even though the desert frown!

Nor may we close without,

3. In the third and last place, inviting those who are not the *people of God to join them in their pilgrimage to the promised land.*

We are traveling, beloved hearers, to the land of which the Lord our God has said, "I will give it you." "Come go with us, and we will do you good, for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." We would not have you strangers to Israel's God, Israel's trials, Israel's hopes, Israel's inheritance. Consent, we beseech you, to be led by Him who alone can lead you in the right way. If his providence smiles upon you, let his goodness lead you to repentance. If it frowns, learn from it that its severest frowns, if you seek that they be sanctified, will be remembered with thankfulness when the wilderness is traveled over. It

is no flowery path to which we can invite you, yet it is one where God spreads a table in the wilderness. It is a thorny path, but the atmosphere is salubrity and sweetness. It is a hostile country, but Judah's Lion guards the way, and the "God of Jeshurun rides in the heavens for thy help, and in his excellency on the sky." It were, indeed, a dry and barren land but for the water from the Rock, and that Rock is Christ. It has no shades of indolence where you may sleep, and no bowers of pleasure where you may trifle; but it has a hiding-place from the storm, and a covert from the tempest, and many a deep shadow to cheer you in your toil. Strait, and narrow, and rugged as it is, it is the only tract of earth that leads to the heavenly city; and, though often intricate and circuitous, it is marked out by the pillar and the cloud, by which He that sitteth on the throne shall lead you to the habitation of his holiness.

SERMON XII.

GOOD HOPE.

2 THESSALONIANS, ii., 16.—“*Good hope, through grace.*”

THE superiority of man to the irrational creation, of childhood to infancy, of manhood to youth, is discernible, not merely in the extent of their capacity and their progress in knowledge, but in their different powers and habits of forethought and anticipation. So the difference between one man and another, between a ripe and thinking mind and a heedless, unobservant intellect, consists, in no small degree, in their different habits of forethought and calculation. The animal creation acts from mere instinct; how, it knows not, and why, it knows not. So the newborn infant, for the most part, acts from the mere impulses of nature, from an exclusive regard to its present wants, and without thinking of the future. The full-grown child, and often the sturdy youth, is governed only by blind impulses, and without deliberation, and very often without any conception of the consequences of his conduct. A wise man never does this. He deliberates; he looks about him; he forms his plans, not for

the present merely, but for the future. He is wide awake; and such are his habits of observation, that he is governed not so much by what he sees as by what he foresees—by his calculations, his apprehensions, and his *hopes*.

This distinguishing characteristic of true wisdom belongs, pre-eminently to the Christian. He lives, not for the present, but for the future; he is governed by his apprehensions, and still more constantly and imperatively by his *hopes*. His hopes encourage and stimulate him. He quits the strong-hold of the present, and carries his designs into the future; he acts for eternity. He is the creature of presentiment. Of all other men, he acts under the influence of the highest and strongest *hopes*—hopes that are genuine and heaven-imparted. Such a man can appreciate the words of the apostle when he says, “Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and *good hope through grace*, comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work!” “Good hope through grace”—this is our subject. “A good hope, what is it? How is it through grace?” These two inquiries furnish the method of our discourse.

I. In the first place, WHAT IS A GOOD HOPE?

There are vain hopes, presumptuous hopes,

hopes that are built upon the sand, bad and wicked hopes, and hopes that at last end in bitter disappointment. A *good* hope,

1. In the first place, has a *good object*.

There are hopes that stimulate, but perplex and derange the mind, pollute the heart, degrade the character, and shut up and enchain the soul in this prison-house of clay. It is the great sin of man, and his consequent wretchedness, that he thus sets his affections on things that are on the earth, and not on things that are above. They are trifles on which such a hope is fixed. It is very uncertain whether they can be attained; if they should be attained, they are easily lost; if not lost, they do not satisfy the mind; and where they are the most and the longest enjoyed, death sweeps them away, while the blow that strikes *them* makes *death* itself more dreaded and painful.

Man is fitted for better hopes than this transient, withering, and doomed earth can give. His calculations may not be thus bounded by time, nor disturbed by the fear of disappointment. He can not be satisfied by feeding on ashes, and drinking at fountains where bitter streams inundate and make the world a vale of tears. They are immortal shores toward which he is traveling. If a good man, his hope terminates in the land of everlasting purity and joy, in the world of light,

and the rest that remaineth for the people of God. *God himself*, who fills and enriches the universe—God himself, the One Being the soul must seek after, and the only good it can safely enjoy—it is to *Him* that the expectant soul lifts her eye, and says to every disquieted thought, “Why art thou cast down, O my soul! and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him who is the health of my countenance and my God!” His favor, which is life, and his loving-kindness, which is better than life—his pardoning love, so free, so sweet—his will, so perfectly wise and good, that we can confide all our interests to his care—his watchful and paternal providence, that numbers the hairs of our head, and encircles us with its care and bounty—his unchanging truth and covenant faithfulness—these are the hiding-place and the refuge which a good hope lays hold upon. What matters this present life, with its gleam, its spark of hope, struck out from the splendid delusions of time, if time is to be the end? “My soul, wait thou *only* upon God, for my expectation is from *him*.” This elevates, purifies, satisfies; it is a “good hope.”

2. In the next place, a good hope has *a good foundation*.

Those there are whose hope has nothing to rest upon. The more you inspect it, the more

clearly you see it is not well founded. A cold doubt crosses your mind that, after all, it is the "hope of the hypocrite that perisheth when God taketh away his soul."

Some hope because, in their own view, they do not deserve to perish. Others hope because they think that, if they do deserve it, God is too good to punish any of his creatures with everlasting destruction. Some hope because they are not so great sinners as some others; and some because they have done so many good deeds as to make satisfaction for those that are evil. All these hopes are delusive. We may cling to and lean on them while we live; we may desperately grasp them; we may try to persuade ourselves that they will stand in the evil day; but the bubble must burst. When the winds blow and the rain descends, the proud edifice will fall, because it is not built upon the rock.

The world is not left in darkness as to the foundation and ground of hope. This great truth is, of all others, the subject matter of an expressed revelation. The conjectures of human reason here are vain; they furnish no knowledge, no hint of the way in which the guilty can become pardoned, and the enemies of God reconciled to their offended Judge. The more we think of our own wickedness, and of his pure and holy character and law, the more reason must we see for fear

rather than hope. Our teaching here is exclusively from the glorious Gospel of the blessed God. In his amazing mercy the God of heaven gave his well-beloved Son to suffer and die for the guilty, the just instead of the unjust, that he might bring them to God. The mediatorial character and work of Christ alone constitute the foundation of the sinner's hope. His obedience unto death—the innocent substituted and accepted for the guilty, so meets the demands of justice, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. A satisfying atonement offered by the eternal Son, through the eternal Spirit, to the eternal Father—offered in our behalf, accepted by God, and confided in by us—this is hope that maketh not ashamed. Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. "The wages of sin is death," and this death the transgressor deserves and must have endured but for the vicarious sufferings of God manifest in the flesh. The soul, therefore, that rests on Christ rests its hope on a basis solid in itself, and made sure by the word of him who can not lie. And this gives rise to a *good hope*—one that reposes on the corner-stone, the sure foundation.

3. In the third place, a good hope is supported by *good evidence*. Although the *foundation* and the *evidence* of a Christian's hope are distinct

things, and ought ever to be so regarded, yet it is true that the faith which unites the soul to Jesus Christ, and by which he dwells in the heart of his people, and which is proof that their hopes are not spurious, can not be severed from the foundation on which it rests. While the foundation is the work of *Jesus Christ without us*, the evidence of a good hope is the work of *Christ within us*. It is not Christ in the manger, nor Christ in the garden, nor Christ on the cross—it is Christ within the soul. Christ, the wisdom of God and the power of God—"Christ in you the hope of glory."

Here our thoughts, therefore, are, for the moment, transferred from the foundation of a good hope without us to the evidences of a good hope within us. And they are all comprised in the varied illustrations of this one truth, that "if any man *be in Christ* he is a new creature; old things are done away, behold, all things are become new." Would it be any marvel if a man, whose mind and heart were imbued with these blessed and transforming truths, should possess and exhibit to himself and others a renovated and transformed character? Would he not feel and act as he never felt and acted before? Would not the change be obvious? Would not other matters sink into insignificance compared with Christ and his salvation? Would not every

thing else seem unworthy of regard compared with his redemption and claims? Where Christ takes possession of the heart, and the soul becomes his temple, it is a wonder-working power which he exerts in turning it from darkness to light. The best affections are then fixed on God; and his "hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost." And as the forthgoing of this love, when he looks back upon his own life, and looks within upon his own heart, he abhors himself, and repents in dust and ashes, and the more that God is pacified toward him. His sins are his greatest grief and burden; and he feels the happiest when, as an ill-deserving sinner, he goes to God through Christ, to commune with him in prayer, and to consecrate all he has and is to him. He loves to lie low in the dust, and there look up and rejoice to see God on the throne. He loves to submit to him, and to depend on him for all things, and trust him for all, and serve and honor him, and commend and promote the interests of his kingdom. The "love of Christ constrains him" to "live not to himself, but to him who died for him and rose again." He is indeed a new creature;" he has new tastes and preferences, new pleasures and pursuits, new views, new motives of conduct, and new ends to live for. He is "alive unto God." He lives by the Spirit, he

walks by the Spirit, he is led by the Spirit. It is a new heart that God has given him, a new life that he lives. "The life that he now lives in the flesh, he lives by the faith of the Son of God, who loved him and gave himself for him." And this is what we mean when we say that a good hope is one that is supported and vindicated by good evidence.

4. In the fourth place, a good hope *at last realizes the good it hopes for*. They are pitiable hopes that prove "like the spider's web." They afford no comfort in trouble or sorrow; and, at the last, they only verify the truth that the "wicked is driven away in his wickedness;" that "a deceived heart hath turned him aside;" that, instead of hearing the welcome, "Well done, good and faithful servant," he retires from the judgment under the denunciation, "I never knew you; depart from me, all ye that work iniquity." His own heart, deceitful above all things and desperately wicked,

While "he looked for joys above,
Has plunged him down to hell."

Far different is the hope that realizes the good it hopes for. Such a hope is born for adversity, and lives and blooms alike under the burning sky and the raging tempest. Pursuing troubles and the whelming storm find the believer hid in the secret of the divine presence, and in perfect peace,

because his hopes are staid on God. Oh the blessedness of such a hope! It is as an anchor both "sure and steadfast," and keeps the soul, and guards it in the everlasting arms. If sorrows invade this hiding-place, and enemies assault it, and the plague comes nigh, and chilling death rears his ghastly form, hope looks beyond them all, and reposes where sin no more perplexes, and sorrow weeps no more, and death never enters. It lives above, and beyond the reach even of the cold damps that settle down upon the night of the grave, and diffuses its brightest radiance when the lights of earth are fading. It realizes the promise, "Because I live, ye shall live also." It hears the song; it casts its crown at the foot of the throne, ascribing all glory to him who liveth and was dead, and is alive for evermore.

And is not this a *good* hope? Range this broad earth, and find, if you can, any other good to be compared with this. I would not barter it for the banker's gold nor for the crown of princes. Sceptres, rubies can not purchase it; yet is it gift, free gift to impoverished, bankrupt man. And this the text teaches us when it affirms,

II. In the second place, that it is a good hope
THROUGH GRACE.

Grace and justice, though they may harmonize, are, in their own nature, different and opposite attributes. Grace freely gives where justice

would withhold; justice has claims, and claims which must be enforced. If we advert to the sinful character of men, we must be convinced that they are both unworthy and ill-deserving, and that the spring and source of all the benefits they receive from God is his unmerited favor. His law condemns them, and condemns them justly. There is no room for grace to save where justice does not condemn. In the application of these remarks to the position that every good hope is through grace, it is obvious,

1. In the first place, that the *objects of hope* are revealed only by the grace of God. Divine justice did not require that they should ever be known. Apostate man had no goodness that could claim such a revelation; no merit that entitled him to it; no sanctity that would have been disregarded if it had been withheld. Pure grace is the only source from which the knowledge of a good hope proceeds. “The *grace of God* that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that *blessed hope* and the glorious appearing of the great God, even our Savior Jesus Christ.” It is equally obvious,

2. In the second place, that the *only foundation of a good hope* is from his eternal and sover-

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eign grace. We have seen what that foundation is, and that there is no other. This wondrous procedure in all its parts lay in the *divine mind*, complete and entire, from before the foundation of the world. It was his own arrangement, and it was altogether optional with him. Justice did not bind him to devise or execute this method of salvation. He was at perfect liberty to destroy the race of man, as he did the apostate angels; but in the exercise of his sovereign will, and "according to his own purpose and grace, which was *given us* in Christ Jesus before the world began," he was pleased to lay this foundation of a good hope in the sufferings and death of his dear Son. Men did not deserve the gift; they would have had no right to complain if the gift had been withheld, and the law they had broken had taken its course. "The *gift* of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ." "We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that he, *by the grace of God*, should taste death for every man." To speak of any other hope than this of pure grace is another Gospel. To speak of it as something we have done, and earned, and deserve, is subversive of the whole design and spirit of the Gospel from beginning to end. It is a vain-glorying and a vain-glorious hope, but not a good hope through grace. Every

good hope that has exulted in life and triumphed in death, is his reward who died; to him of justice, to us of grace. We owe all our hopes to him; to him our everlasting praise. Nor is it less obvious,

3. In the third place, that *the scriptural evidences* of a good hope are all of grace. These evidences, we have seen, are comprised in that new, spiritual creation without which all are dead in trespasses and sins. And whence is this? Listen, while the great Teacher declares that those who receive him "are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God;" while he declares that "God, who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ;" and while also he teaches that "it is not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy that he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost." If you advert to the varied pulsations and actings of this new and spiritual life—to its love, its penitence, its faith—these, too, are possessed and acted out as the Lord gives to every man, and "all these worketh that selfsame Spirit." And whence is it, and how is it, that those who have a good hope through grace never apostatize and perish? Why do not "tribulation, or distress, or persecu-

tion, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword," or "an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God," never "separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?" Simply because they "are kept by the mighty power of God, through faith to salvation." Simply because his eye is upon them as the children of his grace, and he will not suffer them to draw back. Simply because "whom he did predestinate, them he also calls; and whom he calls, them he also justifies; and whom he justifies, them he also glorifies." Grace claims them as its own, and cares for them, and bears them on its bosom through this strange land to the Mount Zion above. It is a wonderful expression of amazing grace which thus makes a willing people in the day of God's power—that subdues their obduracy, conquers their foes, preserves them to his heavenly kingdom, and gives them the evidence of their adoption, his "Spirit bearing witness with their spirit that they are the children of God." We may add to these remarks,

4. In the fourth place, that it is the grace of God that *gives and sustains a good hope itself*. It is true that a good hope is usually the result of a clear discovery of the evidences of true piety in the heart and life; but whence this discovery unless God gives it? There are those whose minds are so dark and pensive that, while they

perceive these evidences, they are slow to admit the cheering and bright rays of hope. They rather repel them, and, like the dejected Psalmist, they "refuse to be comforted." Christian biography furnishes many examples of persons of a delightfully Christian spirit and character who "walk in darkness." Such is the intellectual and moral constitution of some of the best of Christians, that, by the touching of some chord within, their songs are often turned to sighing. They are sad days then, and days and nights of gloom. They sigh with those of old, "Where is God my Maker, that giveth songs in the night?" The soul pants for God, but his smiling face is overshadowed with a cloud. The bitter complaint is,

"I dwell in darkness and unseen;
My heart is desolate within;
I stretch my hands to God again,
And thirst like parched lands for rain."

Nor can we but have observed how little men and means can do in relieving this depression. It is God's work to do this, and in every instance "to give everlasting consolation and good hope." We "abound in hope *through the power of the Holy Ghost*." That triumphant hope of the early Christians, which enabled them to say, "For we *know* that if our earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, we have a building of God, an house

not made with hands, eternal in the heavens," whence was it? The apostle answers in the emphatic words, "Now *he that hath wrought us* for this self-same thing *is God*, who hath also given to us the earnest of the Spirit." There is such a blessing in the experience of God's people as "the earnest of the Spirit," the "witnessing of the Spirit," and the "sealing of the Spirit." St. Paul, in writing to the Ephesians, says, "In whom also, after that ye believed, ye were *sealed* with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession." Nor can we be too sensible of our dependence on the grace of God for the hopes and consolations of religion as well as its graces. And when he lifts upon the soul the light of his countenance, and

"Shows it some promise in his book
Where its salvation stands,"

its joys are like the spring-tide which overflows all its banks. The loving Spirit restores his love; the day breaks, and the shadows flee away. The light of heaven dawns like the outspreading wings of the morning; there are songs for sighing—"a new song, even praise to our God." Then the revived and comforted can sing,

"The opening heavens around me shine
With beams of sacred bliss;
While Jesus shows his heart is mine,
And whispers *I am his*."

Well, therefore, does the apostle say, "a good hope *through grace*." And this great truth is one that every Christian understands. There is nothing incompatible between the believer's redemption by a complete satisfaction to justice and his justification by grace. The grace consists in providing this redemption, and in accepting it in behalf of the guilty; in bestowing it without regard to the comparative goodness of men, that they who glory may glory only in the Lord; and, more than all, in accepting those who are not only unworthy and destitute of merit, but utterly and forever *ill-deserving*. We know there are those who teach that the death of Christ removes the sinner's *criminality* and *ill desert*; but they either use words in an abnormal sense, or contradict the whole scope of the sacred writings, the whole history of religious experience as expressed in the prayers of God's people, as well as the *consciousness* of all good men. No Christian man ever goes to the throne of grace without confessing that he is a sinner, unworthy and *ill-deserving*. Nothing does or ever can remove his *ill desert*. The redemption that is in Christ Jesus absolves him from *punishment*; his *ill desert* remains, and his obligations to grace remain, and forever will remain, the theme of his everlasting song.

When, therefore, we advert to the objects, and

foundation, and evidences of a good hope, we have only to ask, Are these what an ill-deserving sinner can claim? If "every sin deserves God's wrath and curse," the sinner himself deserves to die, and as truly after as before he became a believer. Neither his forgiveness nor his hopes are of his own procuring or his own deserving. He has given no equivalent for them; they are the gift of God, munificent and free, all through grace — rich, sovereign, immeasurable grace. What an endless song of grace will hereafter be resounded from the golden harps of the redeemed! Why should they not begin to sound it here, all uniting in one grand concert of praise to God and the Lamb!

Be you, then, my Christian brethren, "strong in hope, giving glory to God." I would not have you presumptuous, nor would I have you unbelieving. It is well, indeed, that you should sit in severe judgment upon your own character; examine yourselves and see if ye be in the faith; but it is not well that you should "cast away your confidence which hath great recompense of reward." There are pious persons not a few who persuade themselves that it is their duty to be ever skeptical of their hopes; that in nothing is the *humility* of the Gospel more apparent than in hanging their heads like a bulrush; in being in perpetual doubt as to their own good estate;

and that they may well look with jealousy on that state of mind which "rejoices in hope of the glory of God." But tell me, is it a *sin* to hope in God? If your hopes are the fruit of God's Spirit, if they are "good hopes through grace," why should they not be cheerful hopes, and why should they not be nurtured and cherished? Have we yet to learn that the "Lord is *well pleased* with them that fear him, and them that *hope in his mercy*;" that his Word charges us "not to be moved away from the *hope* of the Gospel;" that the "helmet" of our spiritual armor is "the hope of salvation;" and that one of the conditions of his indwelling Spirit is that "we hold fast the confidence, and the *rejoicing of the hope* firm unto the end?" In a world like this, where pangs of disappointment hang around all earthly good; where there are so many temptations to idolize the creature; where there is a perpetual conflict with self and sin; where "moth corrupts, and thieves break through and steal;" and where man "cometh forth as a flower and is cut down," it is surely "good that a man *should* both "*hope* and quietly wait for the salvation of God." Happy is the man who, when every thing else disappoints him, can lift his buoyant heart and streaming eyes beyond the everlasting hills, and say, "Lord, what wait I for; my hope is in thee!" Well does the prophet say, "Blessed is

the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is, for he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh; but her leaf shall be green, and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit." Be of good courage, therefore, all ye that hope in the Lord. Be ye sober, and hope to the end. Go, lay your hands on the head of that bleeding Victim, and say, with the triumphant apostle, "Nothing shall separate us from the love of Christ."

"Low at thy feet my soul would lie;
Here safety dwells, and peace divine.
Still let me live beneath thine eye,
For life, eternal life is thine."

I may not close this discourse without a few thoughts to those who have "no hope," and are "without God in the world." Beloved, have you yet to learn that it is impossible to have a "good hope" where the soul departs from God? You yourselves can see that such a man has no object of hope worthy of a creature born for immortality. He has no foundation of hope, because he turns away from him who came to seek and save that which is lost. He has no evidence of hope, because he is dead in trespasses and sins. And if he has hopes of any kind, they are not the fruit of God's Spirit, but the offspring of error and de-

lusion. And what are *such* hopes good for? "The hope of unjust men perisheth;" all such hopes shall be "as the giving up of the ghost." The day is coming when these confidences will forsake you, and you will sink in despair, because "the harvest is past, and the summer is ended, and you are not saved." Fearful thoughts will agitate you then, and overshadow the coming eternity with a cloud. Everlasting and infinite *despair* will agitate you then, and you will begin to think of "the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched." Oh ye unhappy men! that we could prevail with you to stretch your hopes forward to a higher and happier world, where the purest and largest hopes are gratified in fullness of joy and pleasures for evermore. You are yet in this world of forbearing mercy, and the voice of heaven's tender love to you is, "Flee to the Strong-hold, ye prisoners of hope!" You, too, may lift your eye to that bleeding Victim, and lay your hand upon that suffering Lamb of God. It is thus, and only thus, that *you*, also, may enjoy a "good hope through grace." God will not disappoint the hope that rests upon his "dear Son." Guilt may embarrass, and fear alarm you; but you need not be afraid of resting your hopes on him who is "everlasting strength." You have but to go to him, and rely on him, and commit your guilty soul and your eternal inter-

ests to his hands, and his power, his matchless grace will never fail you. Oh, lift your eyes and your heart to him! You are the very persons for whom he bled and died, to whom he bids us offer pardon, and hope, and heaven in his name. Do not say there is no hope *for you*. If you are a sinner, there *is* hope *for you*. If you are lost, there is hope *for you*. Yes, there is hope, a "good hope through grace," unless you trample on a Savior's blood, and choose terror, despair, and hell rather than peace, and hope, and heaven.

SERMON XIII.

PAUL BEFORE FELIX.

ACTS, xxiv., 24, 25.—“*And after certain days, when Felix came, with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season I will call for thee.*”

ON the death of Herod Agrippa, Judea relapsed into a mere Roman province, and was under the presidency of *governors* appointed by Rome. At the time referred to in the text, this office was held by *Claudius Felix*, the freed slave and powerful favorite of the Emperor Claudius. All the historical notices we have of this man agree in representing him as a man of unbounded avarice, relentless cruelty, and magnificent, voluptuous profligacy. No treasure was safe from his roving marauders; no peaceful citizen, no sacred office was secure from the conspiracy or the dagger of his assassins; no sanctuary of domestic affection and purity, even though guarded by royalty, was a sure protection against his seductive licentiousness. His interview with Paul was

of his own seeking, and the motive shows his baseness. He forgot his office in the indulgence of his ruling passion. He lost sight of all self-respect. He took advantage of this eminent Christian prisoner, who had fallen into his hands, "hoping that *money* would be given him" for his ransom.

There he sat as the appointed guardian of the sanctuary of justice. Beside him sat a *woman* who was scarcely less profligate than himself. She was a king's daughter, renowned for her beauty, whom her father, Herod Agrippa, had given in marriage to the king of a neighboring province in Syria, and whom Felix had seduced from her husband. She was a Jewess by birth, and, by the laws of Moses, had no right to have been espoused to this pagan, much less to be living in the violated faith of her former husband, and as a notorious adulteress. And this last trait of her character gives the finishing stroke to the character of Felix, and shows with what sort of persons Paul had to do, and what sort of tribunal it was before which he was called to appear. These are they before whom he was called in the providence of God to preach the Gospel of that *Jesus* who "came to save his people from their sins." They "heard him concerning *the faith in Christ*. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trem-

bled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season I will call for thee." Several affecting lessons are taught in this short narrative,

I. The first of which is, that no faithful minister of the Gospel will accommodate his preaching to the tastes and wishes of his hearers at the expense of God's truth.

The ministers of the Gospel are ambassadors for God and the servants of Jesus Christ. They receive their commission from *Him*, and are set apart for his special service. With his commission in their hands, and in the presence of him before whom the Seraphim cover their faces, their object should ever be to "please, not men, but God." A straight course is before them; and if, instead of discharging their duty uprightly, they observe the wind and yield to every popular breeze, God and man may well pour contempt upon them and their preaching.

Paul was a prisoner, bound in chains, unjustly accused of sedition by his countrymen, and before the tribunal of the Roman procurator at Cæsarea. Had he sought the favor of men, and preferred his own interests to the interests of truth and righteousness, it had been an easy matter for him so to have discoursed before Felix as to have insinuated himself into the good graces of his princely auditors. He might have left them

only to admire and extol the preacher, and without one introverted thought or suspicion that he regarded them as of doubtful virtue. But this apostle of the Son of God was the last man thus to connive at wickedness. He uses no words of flattery, no concealment; nor does he "handle the word of God deceitfully." He gladly discourses with him "concerning the faith in Christ;" but he is careful not to speak to him "smooth things and prophesy deceits." He preaches to Felix and Drusilla the same Gospel and the same holy salvation which he preaches to the sinful and polluted population of Cæsarea. He was faithful to his trust. He was faithful to the opportunity which was unexpectedly put in his power. Prisoner as he was, he forgot his chains, and "counted not his own life dear to him so that he might finish his course with joy, and the ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God." He appreciated the dangers of his condition; but minor interests vanished from his view, and he so preached that the blood of those who heard him should not be found on his skirts.

Who will say that this is not the true path of a Christian minister, or who will open his lips to entice him from pursuing it? What has he to do with pointing out some way in which men may continue in their sins without jeopardizing

their souls? Woe be to that man who cries "Peace! peace!" when God says "there is no peace to the wicked;" and whose false tongue and siren song thus rock the sinner to sleep on the brink of the eternal pit! Better for him that he had never been born. Every page of the Bible must flash conviction on the conscience that such preaching is "another Gospel," and that those who preach and those who hear it will find it answers no purpose in the day of trial. The plain path of duty for Christ's ministers is to declare the whole counsel of God. This or that consequence we may not look at. The pleasure or displeasure of this or that man, whether high or low, we may not look at. When we have done our duty, we are to leave the event with our Maker. And this is the only path of *safety* for ministers and people in time and in eternity.

II. We remark from this narrative, in the second place, that it is the part of a faithful minister to address the understanding and conscience.

Christian ministers, and those who preach God's truth, often preach it in such a way as to leave the understanding unenlightened and the conscience unpenetrated. They make a great flourish of trumpets, but they give so uncertain a sound that none can prepare himself for the battle. Paul did not preach thus. He was no declaimer. He was an *argumentative* preacher.

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He *discussed* his subject. He *reasoned*, even though it were upon the plainest moral truths and duties. It is a remark of the late Dr. Chalmers, that "St. Paul was by far the most argumentative of all the apostles, and the most successful of them all." His preaching "proves that argument is both a legitimate and powerful weapon in the work of making Christians." No man was farther from loose and desultory habits of religious instruction. He would have men Christians; but Christians on conviction, and able to "give a reason of the hope that is in them with meekness and fear." The great source of his arguments, in every question of faith and duty, was the Bible. His reason was employed, among Jews and Gentiles, in ascertaining what the Bible teaches. He "reasoned out of the Scriptures;" not unskillfully and at random, but so wisely and forcibly that those who heard him felt that he was speaking by the authority of God.

The religion revealed from heaven is not an irrational thing. There is no part of it, from "the law given by Moses to the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ"—from the deep things of God to the simple duty of repentance and faith—but challenges investigation as "the words of truth and soberness." If men are ever convinced of sin, and turned from the error of their ways to

the wisdom of the just, it is through the instrumentality of truth. "I have begotten you," says this apostle to the Corinthians, "*through the Gospel.*" The Savior's prayer for his disciples was, "Sanctify them through *thy truth*; thy word is truth." True religion consists in the conformity of the heart and life to the truth of God. Truth must be perceived by the understanding if it is recognized by the conscience; nor is there any other way in which it reaches the heart. It may, indeed, be disarmed of its power by the dull, dry, and frigid manner in which it is exhibited, but this is not the fault of the truth. There is nothing in the universe so stirring as God's truth—so intensely interesting to men as creatures of thought, emotion, and accountableness. If instructive preaching does not move them, and lead them to think, to feel, to act, nothing will move them. The truth has this great advantage, that, where the conscience is enlightened, it always falls in with it. Men may be hostile to it—they may raise against it a thousand subtle objections—they may resort to refuges of lies in order to rob it of its sting, but it does its work. It is impossible to parry the application of it, or to throw off the burden of guilt, which it lays upon the conscience. Where the bosom is laid bare, and the guilty passions are alarmed, and men are constrained to look at themselves in the light of

God's word, conscience always takes the side of the preacher. And this should be the preacher's aim. He can not convert his audience; this belongs to a higher power. But, if he does not enlighten the understanding and penetrate the conscience, he does nothing for the salvation of men. He might as well preach the philosophy of Plato, or the Koran of Mohammed, or the poetry of Byron, as the Gospel of Christ, if he does not so preach it as to direct its truths to the understanding and conscience. If instructive and faithful preaching gives inquietude to his hearers, so much the better; the very fact that it does so is the very reason why he ought so to preach. It is his business to make wicked men dissatisfied with themselves.

III. In the third place, this narrative instructs us that a Christian minister may often find it necessary to insist on *moral duties* as well as *Gospel truths*.

There is a class of men who are clamorous for moral preaching in distinction from that which is evangelical, and in so doing they express desires which no ambassador of the cross has any right to gratify. The morality they ask for is nothing more, and in many instances not so much as was demanded by the heathen. It is a morality whose only concern is to regulate their intercourse with their fellow-creatures, without regard

to their infinitely important obligations to God. The Bible is no advocate of such preaching. It is not enough to tell men they must be honest and upright in their dealings; sober and peaceable; temperate and pure; industrious and economical; charitable to the poor, and regular and punctual to the church. They may do these things and fail of getting to heaven. They must repent and believe the Gospel, or they must perish. They are not saved by their morality.

On the other hand, there is a class of men who who are clamorous for evangelical preaching, not merely in distinction from moral preaching, but to the neglect and exclusion of all moral duties. When you unfold and urge the doctrine of moral obligation, and insist upon moral duties, and moral character, and personal holiness as indispensable to true religion; when you insist upon an imparted righteousness as the only preparation for heaven, as well as an imputed righteousness as the only ground of legal justification, you are told that this is *legal* preaching, and not evangelical; that it is not preaching the doctrines of the cross; it is not Christ and him crucified. This also is an error. Morality—real, genuine morality—constitutes an essential part of the Gospel. No man has any claim to the character of a Christian, or will ever enter to the kingdom of heaven, who is not a moral man.

We have no right to condemn all legal preaching, for there is no Gospel where there is no law. The law must be preached as well as the Gospel, and in subserviency to the Gospel. Without seeing the law as it is, it is impossible to see the Gospel as it is. "Though the Gospel be distinct from the law, yet it presupposes the law, and is inseparably connected with it. Those who preach the law without the Gospel, or the Gospel as mere law, may be properly called legal preachers; but those who preach the law as the foundation of the Gospel, and the Gospel as built upon the law, are properly Gospel preachers."^{*} While true religion begins with our duty to God, it comprises our duty to man. If ministers would lead sinners to repentance, they will often find it necessary to aim blow after blow at their besetting sins and darling lusts. To do this faithfully is often the most effective way of preaching the Gospel. With a large class of men there is usually *some one sin* which prevents their accepting Christ. With the young man in the Gospel it was his supreme love of the world; and therefore the Savior said to him, "Go, sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor." It is recorded of Herod that, when he heard John, "he did many things, and heard him gladly;" but he was not willing to give up his besetting sin. Yet, what-

* Dr. Emmons.

ever it be, the sinner must renounce it, and forsake all for Christ, or he can not enter into life.

On this principle of ministerial duty Paul conducted himself in his preaching before Felix. He knew he was in bondage to his guilty lusts; he was anxious for his soul, and would fain pluck him as a brand out of the fire. This guilty man would be more likely to be convinced of sin, and feel the need of a Savior, by being made acquainted with his own vile character than in any other way.

And *how* does this Christian apostle preach to him? We are told that "he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ." It was a new theme—a strange subject in the ears of the proud Roman. It was "Christ and him crucified"—a "stumbling-block to the Jew, and to the Greek foolishness." Paul knew of no other way of salvation, and magnified no other system of belief. But he did not stop here. Nor, if he had stopped here, would he have left an arrow rankling in the bosom of his guilty hearers. He had gained the ear of his distinguished auditors, and, if possible, he would excite their remorse, and lead them to repentance. Although the resolution to "know nothing save Jesus Christ and him crucified" is one he never lost sight of, yet, with all his characteristic boldness

and courtesy, he "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." He disclosed the criminality of these licentious hearers and the enormity of their sins, and uttered in their hearing the thunders of that law which convinces, condemns, and would accuse them at the tribunal of their Judge. They were peculiarly accessible to appeals like these. Felix was unrighteous and avaricious, and he reasoned to him of *righteousness*. Adulterous and voluptuous as they both were, he reasoned of *continence and temperance*. He reasoned of the *judgment to come* to a man who made use of his power only to oppress and destroy. He "reasoned out of the Scriptures." God carried the reasoning home, and no wonder the culprits trembled, and were half resolved to become Christians.

This was moral preaching, this was legal preaching, and it was *Gospel* preaching. It was not making the way to heaven more strait, or narrower than it is, nor teaching men that they can enter it without holiness on the one hand, nor without an interest in Christ on the other. It is the morality which is built on the Gospel, and which draws its motives, its sanctions, and its circle of influence from God's Word. It is such morality as Jesus came down from heaven to preach; such morality as he came to vindicate by the blood of his cross; and such morality as

all his ministers must preach if they will be his servants.

IV. This narrative also teaches us, in the fourth place, that where the Gospel is thus faithfully preached, *it will produce anxiety and alarm in the bosoms of wicked men.*

Conscience is not a vain word. It was implanted in the human bosom to speak for God. Though its power is greatly impaired by sin, and its voice is often silenced, there are seasons when it does its office, and there is no escape from its reproaches. The time is coming when it will not cease to upbraid the ungodly, and they will have no respite from its clamors. It will be like the worm that never dies, writhing amid the flames that shall never be quenched. That God who knows the hearts of men, and is the witness of all their wickedness, is able at any time to rouse it from its torpor, and commission it to torment the guilty sinner before the time. It is a terrible state of mind when he thus sets the sins of men before them; when the memory is quickened to recall them, and to dwell upon their aggravations; and when the weary and heavy heart, without any relief from the blood of sprinkling, is constrained to bear its own burden. Nothing can be more burdensome, nothing more miserable than a conscience awakened, terrified by the law of God, in full view of the evil of sin. "The

spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?"

Conscience was awake in the bosom of Felix. The apprehensions and forebodings of his own mind gave power to the faithfulness of the preacher; and as "Paul reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix *trembled*." It was a singular but a beautiful spectacle: the guilty *judge* convicted by his innocent *prisoner*, and trembling at the rebuke of one whose life was in his hands, and *who stood before him in chains*! Neither his rank, nor power, nor the badges of his judicial authority were any refuge from the reproaches of conscience. His baseness and his obduracy were no refuge. He knew there was just cause for this rebuke. Others knew it. The world could bear testimony to it. The blood of his murdered victims cried out against him. The devil knew it. The evil spirits, who were his tempters, knew it; and, though they had often palliated and varnished his wickedness, now unmercifully aggravated it. Holy angels had been witnesses of it; and God, the Judge of all, had seen it, and had come to "mark iniquity;" and the guilty culprit himself knew it, and this was enough to excite his fears. It was a fearful hour to this miserable man. Felix trembled; he was startled at the recollection of his impiety and crimes. Paul told him of a "judg-

ment to come," and his own conscience bound him over and held him responsible to the decisions and retribution of that great day.

Daniel Webster, in conducting a criminal prosecution against a murderer, once said, "He has done the murder. No eye has seen him; no ear has heard him. Ah! that was a dreadful mistake. Such a secret can be safe nowhere. The whole creation of God has neither nook nor corner where the guilty can bestow it and say it is safe. Discovery must come, and will come sooner or later. The guilty soul can not keep its own secret. It is false to itself, or, rather, it feels an irresistible impulse of conscience to be true to itself. It labors under its guilty possession, and knows not what to do with it. The human heart was not made for such an inhabitant. A vulture is devouring it. He thinks the whole world sees the secret in his face, reads it in his eyes, and almost hears its working in the very silence of his thoughts. It has become his master. It betrays his discretion, breaks down his courage, breaks down his prudence; it must be confessed."

Oh ye who forget God, the time is coming when the anguish of your own minds will betray you. There is a chord within your bosoms which, sooner or later, will vibrate to the charge of guilt. There is a coming judgment, and there is "no secret place where the workers of iniquity

may hide themselves." Your secret sins may then be your greatest tormentors; and even now, are there not moments when the remembrance of them comes charged with terrific forebodings? It is possible, indeed, that you may never tremble in the present world. Faithful preaching may not alarm you. Terrific providences may not alarm you. Sickness may not alarm you. And such may be the inexorable bondage of your sins that there may be "no bonds in your death," and you may be consigned to the perdition which you never feared. Yet how much wiser, how much safer to allow conscience to call you to an account *now*, while you are prisoners of hope, while God's mercy-seat is accessible to you, and the blood of sprinkling speaks pardon and peace. It is kind, unutterably kind in God to send his Holy Spirit to awaken the slumbering conscience, and plant within the bosom of the careless sinner the arrows of conviction. His own thoughts become the most powerful preachers to him then. In the silence and solitude of his own reflections, he becomes alarmed and anxious for his soul. There is much to hope from the man whose remembered sinfulness makes him dissatisfied with himself, and whose fears of the wrath to come make him tremble. When the truth of God assails him where conscience tells him he is most vulnerable, true wisdom leads him not to

parry the assault nor repel the charge. The gracious Spirit of God has then come to him on his kind errand of love and mercy. He wounds that he may heal; and by this solicitude, this inward agitation, these sharp convictions and these fears, would lead him to repentance. This very state of mind may prove the last step which the sinner takes in the broad way that leads to death, and be found to border closely on his first entrance upon the way of life.

V. The fifth and last lesson, therefore, which is taught us by this narrative, is *the folly and danger of procrastination in the concerns of the soul when the sinner is thus awakened to a sense of his sin and danger.*

God's Spirit will not always strive with man. Men in this state of mind rarely continue long thus agitated. It is too painful a state to be long continued.

One of two courses they almost always pursue. They very often yield themselves to these wholesome convictions, repent of their wickedness, and, by the grace of God that bringeth salvation, take refuge in that Gospel which Paul preached when he instructed Felix "in the faith of Jesus." This is their first and most important duty; it is their privilege and only hope; and the path is as plain as "the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ" can make it. This was just the course

which Felix did *not* pursue. He was not willing to *leave his sins*. He quenched the light which was just lifted upon his benighted and guilty soul; resisted the truth and grace of the great salvation; became impatient of the preacher's faithfulness; and, in his eagerness to stifle his convictions, dismissed Paul with those memorable words, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season I will call for thee." And this is the *other* course which is ultimately left to men in this anxious state of mind. Nor may it be denied that there is a strong tendency in the human heart to this latter expedient. Men are not disposed to leave their minds open to the power of conviction. They can not bear to be oppressed and agitated by a view of their guilt; they are not prepared to condemn themselves, and take a low place before God's throne. They go along with their convictions up to a certain point, and there they stop, because their convictions are insupportable, and they find no relief. They foolishly and wickedly drop the subject, go back to the world, and content themselves with the delusive thought of waiting for "a more convenient season." If the true state of the case were known, it would be found to be that they have at heart resolved to "neglect the great salvation." But they are not prepared to make this avowal. They are not willing that ministers

should know, and that the people of God should know, how strongly they are attached to their courses of sinning, and how deeply reluctant they are to forsake all and follow Christ. Nay, *they are not willing to believe it of themselves*, and their only refuge from this overwhelming condemnation is to *procrastinate to a more convenient season*.

Such, my hearers, is the human heart; and, must I not honestly say, *such are some of you*. It is thus that you suppress many a solemn conviction of God's truth, grieve his Holy Spirit, and estrange yourselves from those means which God is using to bring you to the footstool of his sovereign mercy. We are instructed that "a price is put into the hands of a fool to get wisdom, and he has no heart to it." God has touched your conscience and made you tremble under your guilt. He has visited you with judgments; and you have been almost persuaded to become Christians. He has touched you with a sense of his goodness, "made you to know your transgression and your sin," and pointed you to the cross of his Son as your only hope; while all you have to say is, "Go thy way for *this time*."

Look at this. What is it but aversion to the Gospel itself? And what does it secure *but time* for your serious impressions to wear off, and opportunity for new and more subtle devices of the

adversary? What does it secure but *time—time* for still greater self-deception—*time* to provoke God still more—*time* to harden your heart, make your conversion less probable, and your salvation more difficult? What does it secure but the hiding from your eyes the things which belong to your peace, the filling up of the measure of your iniquity, and the sealing you as a vessel of wrath fitted to destruction?

But no, it may not secure even time. Have you weighed well your words when you speak of “more convenient season?” Will it come? Are you sure that your hearts will not be the more hardened the longer God permits you to enjoy these offers of mercy? Or are you sure that he will allow you to enjoy them long? Your Sabbaths are numbered. The sermons you are to hear are all numbered. The last one is already fixed upon. Your days are all numbered. The last is already fixed upon. How long, think you, before the places which now know you will know you no more? How long before man after man, and woman after woman in this assembly, who now seem near the kingdom of heaven, but who will not enter into it, will have been followed to the grave? If we inquire for one and another who were once your companions, and ask, Where are they? the answer is, They are gone! We look around us, and as name after name is called

over, the living can only say, *He is dead! she is dead!* Yes, dear hearers, the time is short. These offers of mercy will not reach you in the grave. Soon, very soon, the lips of God's ministers will no longer be heard on this watch-tower. The preacher's duty toward you will be ended. Preaching, praying, hearing, and all these awakening and solemn Sabbaths will be over, and, if you die out of Christ, will be remembered only to add fuel to the unquenchable flame. No more will God's sanctuary open its doors to you, nor the light of his sweet Sabbaths ever again shine upon your path.

"In that lone land of deep despair
No Sabbath's heavenly light shall rise;
No God regard your bitter prayer,
Nor Savior call you to the skies."

And, if you have no time for delay, be you assured of this, that God gives you none thus to abuse. Take warning by Felix, and break off your iniquities by righteousness and your transgressions by turning to God. We charge upon you no scandalous sins; but we do charge upon you sins which, if "marked against you," leave you without hope. We charge upon you the friendship of the world, which is enmity against God. We charge upon you the neglect of Christ and his salvation, and this soul-destroying purpose of delaying to accept them, which, if perse-

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vered in, will seal your doom. We speak to you of "the faith in Christ," and in his name preach to you that repentance which is unto life. We reason with you of "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." By that man whom God has ordained, and of which he hath given assurance in that he hath "raised him from the dead," he will soon judge the world in righteousness. "Repent, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." Before yonder sun goes down, you may find peace with God through Jesus' blood. The guiltiest, the vilest sinner of you all may now repent and believe the Gospel. If there be one among you who finds that he is lost and helpless, the gracious Savior offers to that man a free and full salvation. Why look for a more convenient season, when now is his time? Oh, look for no other time, search for no other Savior, than this day of salvation, this hope of a lost world.

SERMON XIV.

THE IMMUTABILITY OF TRUTH.

PSALM cxix., 89.—“*Forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven.*”

THE foundations of true religion are laid deep. It rests on an immovable basis, and, like the truth on which it rests, is itself immovable. “Concerning thy testimonies,” says the Psalmist, “I have known that thou hast founded them forever. Thy word is true from the beginning, and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth forever.” Just before he left the world, the Savior said to his disciples, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.” We need not multiply passages of the same import, while we may profitably illustrate and enforce them. In what does the immutability of truth consist, and how does it appear that it is immutable? It is to these two inquiries that our thoughts are directed in this discourse.

I. In the first place, In what does the immutability of God’s truth consist?

What is true to-day was always true; it will be true to-morrow, and through interminable

ages. Whatever change may take place in other things, the truth of God remains the same. Nations have come into existence and have passed away; knowledge and civilization have supplanted ignorance and barbarism; the lights of science have been kindled where once reigned unrelieved darkness; improvement has followed in the march of improvement, and the intellect and condition of men have been meliorated by time; but there has been no change in God's truth. The views which men entertain of it may have become more clear and distinct, more impressive and enlarged, but the truth itself, however richly illustrated, remains the same. There will be greater revolutions in human affairs in time to come; while, through all the physical, intellectual, social, and moral revolutions hereafter to pass over the earth, there will be no revolution in God's truth. It is false to history and false in principle that his truth must clothe itself with new and more gorgeous realities in order to stand in honored competition with the progress of the human mind.

Whatever, also, may be the means of propagating or resisting it, the truth itself remains unaltered. These means may be wise or unwise, ingenuous or subtle, considerate or rash, powerful or powerless; but, whatever the character and efforts of its friends or its foes, it is the same unmodified, uncompromising truth. At one time,

a bold and unblushing infidelity has assailed it; at another, it has had to contend with a subtle rationalism and a corrupted Christianity; now the battle has been on the field of science; now on the arena of metaphysical speculation; and then it has been transferred to the rigid laws of exegesis; and then to the labyrinths of pagan mythology; and then to the department of taste and imagination. Sometimes it has been driven into corners, and seemed well-nigh prostrate by the bloody sword of persecution. Sometimes it has been defended with unhallowed weapons; while its very existence seems not unfrequently to have been jeopardized by the wrangling and bitterness of contending sects and schools. Sometimes men have lost sight of it in the ambiguity of language, and have aimed to involve it in mysticism and obscurity, and venturing to question if it can be expressed in language sufficiently definite to be understood; yet, amid all this variety of representation, defense, and attack, this alternate illumination and obscurization, order and jargon, piety and impiety, sense and nonsense, the truth has not altered.

Still farther: God's truth is not affected by the belief or the rejection of it. Error appears and reappears, under different forms and names, in every age and land. Men "call evil good, and good evil, and put darkness for light, and

light for darkness." It is difficult to account for this delusion, but that error is natural to man, and that he "loves darkness rather than light." Multitudes satisfy themselves with their own views of truth, without regard to the views of its Author. It is a sad mistake to conclude that our views are necessarily right because we believe them so, or are ever so sincere in our belief. They may be true and they may be false. God's truth is the same whether we believe it or not. It is not the creation of man's intellect; it is not the creation of man's faith. Man's belief in it does not make it true, nor does his unbelief make it false. It was true before any man believed it, and it will still remain true though disbelieved, and though, amid the revolutions of human opinion, men alternately admit and deny, and readmit it a thousand times. There would be no such thing as truth if it were dependent upon the caprice of men. Truth has no new light, except that which exhibits it in stronger coloring. It has no mistakes to acknowledge, no false steps to retrace, no wrong conclusions to be renounced. It is not charmed with one thing to-day and another to-morrow; now satisfied with its decisions, and then tired and disgusted with them; now like the tranquil lake, and then like the troubled sea; now swelling with insolence, and then sunk in dejection; now floating on the tide of agita-

ting and turbulent passions, and then restrained and confirmed by rectitude; now projecting, and then projecting anew, and bringing nothing to perfection. This is error. Error is one great moving scene of inconsistency, a passing figure of diverse forms and colors that varies every instant. This is man's character, "ever learning, and never coming to the knowledge of the truth." But it is not the character of God's truth. That is the same, whatever views men entertain of it. Thousands have no knowledge of it; and when it is proclaimed to them, will not listen to it; and when they listen to it, will not understand it; and when they understand it, will not believe it, but pervert and abuse it to their soul's undoing. Yet it is still true; forever true; forever settled in heaven.

This is what is meant by the immutability of truth. Nothing alters it. Nothing relaxes its obligations, or subverts the foundation on which it stands.

Nor have we so far anticipated our discussion as to supersede,

II. Our second inquiry, which is, How does it appear that God's truth is thus immutable?

This position is established,

1. In the first place, *by the nature of truth itself*. Truth sometimes denotes the actual state of facts, sometimes the conformity of the thoughts

to the facts themselves, and sometimes the conformity of the words to the thoughts. We mean by it *the representation that accords with the reality*. When we speak of God's truth, we mean the perfect correspondence between the revealed conceptions of the infinite Mind and the realities it thus conceives; it is God's statement of facts.

The nature of truth, therefore, proves its immutability. It includes what God is and what men are; their dependence upon him, and their obligations to him; their relations and their obligations to one another; the method of procuring his favor, and their eternal destiny. The conceptions of the divine Mind of these great realities, as well as all the subordinate realities that are inwoven with them, must be perfect; and because perfect, and founded upon the facts themselves, must always be the same. Truth is not created even by the sovereign will of God. His will decides the facts of which truth is the veritable representation, while the representation grows out of the facts themselves. God does not find out truth as men find it out; he knows the facts as they are. His conceptions are not the result of reasoning or research, but of consciousness and intuition. He neither creates truth nor discovers it; he sees it intuitively. The revelation he has made of his own views, therefore, must, from their very nature, be unchanging.

They are but the type, the counterpart of the realities as they lie in his own mind. Nothing in them needs to be given up or modified, in order to be in perfect harmony with the facts themselves. His truth can not alter, any more than the facts and principles it attests can be both true and untrue. It contemplates the realities just as they are, and can not be altered without the destruction of its character. It would cease to be truth did it contain the element of mutability. Until what is ceases to be, or is changed, truth must remain unaltered. There it stands in all the dignity of its claims, and in all the permanence of its immutability. It is as simple and as mysterious, as sublime and as beautiful as the realities it unfolds.

2. We remark, in the next place, the immutability of truth is also apparent *from the infinite and unchangeable perfection of its divine Author*. It would be loose reasoning to say that every thing which proceeds from God is unchangeable, because he himself is unchangeable. He has made mutable things, and things that are destined to decay; "as a vesture shall he change them, and they shall be changed." But his *truth* can not alter, unless God himself alters. While we have said that truth does not depend upon the *will* of God, we may not be unmindful of the fact that it does ultimately depend upon his *nature*.

His sublime deliverance to Moses was, "I am, that I am." His nature can not be altered, because it is eternally, fully, and absolutely perfect; because he did not originate it; because it is independent of all other beings, and because it is self-existent and eternal. "I am the Lord; I change not. From everlasting to everlasting, I am God."

This eternal, unchangeable Being gives utterance to his word as an unchangeable thing. It can not be altered without impugning his knowledge, which is intuitive and infinite; his power, which can do all things; his goodness, which is pure, permanent, universal, and perfect; his rectitude, which can not err; his justice, which is the foundation of his throne; his perfected excellence, which can not deceive nor be deceived. What he once loves, he loves always; what he once hates, he always hates. He never departs from what he has once purposed; he never professes what he does not feel; he never promises what he does not perform. "The Strength of Israel is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent." He has nothing new to learn, nothing old to unlearn. What depends on man is liable to change; with God, all is fixed and permanent. His truth rests on a more secure foundation than the strength or discoveries of human reason. It embodies the high

conceptions of the infinite and unerring Mind, themselves the standard of all reason. Human reason had been smothered in its cradle, and had expired in the bandages of its own imbecility, but for the culture and training of God's immutable truth; and though it contains disclosures that mortify man's reasoning pride, they are the imprint of thoughts that are as far above the thoughts of men as the heavens are above the earth. They are the necessary result of God's unchangeable perfections. They may be viewed from different stand-points, but they are all truth. Like the rays of light, though reflected from and refracted through different media, they are still light—all truth, unchangeable truth.

3. In the third place, *there is in the truth of God a perfect adaptation to the character and wants of men.* We all need but sober convictions in order to have the painful consciousness that we are degraded and ruined by sin. We are brought into existence without our own consent or choice, the "degenerate plants of a strange vine," the creatures of weakness and want, conscious of desires which this world can not satisfy, wandering through life as through a wilderness, grasping at shadows, subject to disappointment, disease, suffering and death, while the heaven-implanted thought of our immortality awakens alternately doubtful hopes and agonizing fears.

God's truth comes to men in this guilty and wretched condition. It addresses itself to the race, for "the Scripture hath concluded all under sin." The sum and substance of it is embodied in the *Gospel of the Son of God*, which, while it publishes anew, and under stronger sanctions, the everlasting law of righteousness, at the same time reveals that wondrous method of mercy by which the alienated heart of man is brought back to God by the constraining power of redeeming love.

If this system of truth and grace is revealed to all and adapted to all—if the same truth meets the sins, and wants, and woes of all, of every period of time, every character and condition, it can not be a changeable thing. It must be truth which touches a chord to which humanity, in all its varieties, can vibrate. It must be truth which is always old and always young—truth that endures the severities of every zone, and survives the desolations of all that makes desolate, and proves the same imperishable treasure to patriarchs and prophets, to apostles, confessors, and martyrs, to reformers and reformed, to Greek and Jew, male and female, Scythian and barbarian, bond and free, the presumptuous and the desponding, living men and dying men.

And such is the truth of God. Every where and always, it is the element of life and the ali-

ment of hope. Wherever we mark its progress and influence we see its unchanging reality, alike on the day of Pentecost, and in every instance of true conversion narrated in the history of the Church. The song of the polished European, the renovated islander, and the long-neglected Ethiopian, is but the echo of the songs which three thousand years ago went forth from Mount Zion. Show me a Christian any where, and I will show you Christianity, and in its unchanging harmony with the wants of men. It is the same Christianity every where; and, if like effects indicate like causes, it is the same truth and will so continue, "as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end." I add,

4. In the fourth place, *truth would fail of its object if it were not immutable*. Its great object is to instruct men how they may glorify God and enjoy him forever. In order to accomplish this, it must have the confidence of those to whom it is addressed. Man floats on the tide of incessant fears and hopes until his heart rests on God, and that unchanging word that "is settled in heaven." He has no greater want than an infallible rule of faith and duty. If, with all its authority and loveliness, God's truth changes not by time and circumstance, he has something to rest upon. Change what will, and come what will, truth never changes. Oh, it is a delightful

thought! It comes like the fresh breeze of the ocean over the parched desert, or like the breath of morning, cooling the atmosphere heated by the fiery collisions of some great battle-field.

Is it so, then, that the gracious One has left the wakeful and anxious mind without this relief, with no answer to its inquiries, with no resolver of its doubts, and nothing on which the heart may rest? or is his truth firm as the Rock of Ages? Men have been comforted and happy, and built up on their most holy faith through the truth, but, if it be not immutable, they have been feeding on ashes. What a refuge of lies is the blessed Bible if the views of some would-be reformers of modern times were any thing more than an idiot dream? No, no; there is permanence and stability in Christian faith and hope, because there is unchanging permanence and stability in the teachings of God's Word. They are not built on the sand who build on this eternal rock, that the truth of God abideth forever.

Such is the immutability of truth; a principle important in itself, and not less important from the deductions that flow from it. Among these we specify,

1. In the first place, *the assurance it furnishes of the stability and permanence of the Church of God.* It is a remarkable fact that, amid all the changes in this inferior world, and all the inci-

dental varieties of her outward condition and polity, the Church of the living God has survived these shocks of time, and maintained her essential character. And the reason is, she is built on God's immutable truth. With all the overshadowings that have eclipsed the brightness of her character, and all the phases of doctrine that have marked her history, her progress has been indicated by substantial conformity to the truth of God. Separations from the true Church began even in the apostolic age; and the line of distinction between the true and the false was the adherence of the true to the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel—"doctrines according to godliness." The enemies of the Church have employed their authority, their learning, their cruelty to crush her, but it has been the unavailing struggle of darkness with light. Truth shines even through the darkest periods of her history. The ages of her suffering and conflict have been ages of triumph for the truth. The great symbols of her faith are essentially the same in every land and age. She has been a "living epistle, known and read;" a stream of light from heaven has been shining through her from the first promise in Eden to the present hour. What she was in the days of Noah, Seth, and Abraham; what she was from the days of Moses to the days of Malachi; what she was from the coming of John

the Baptist to the ascension of our adorable Lord; what she was under the persecutions of pagan Rome, and under the teachings of Ignatius and Polycarp; what she was when instructed by such men as Tertullian and Irenæus, Clement and Justin, Athanasius and Chrysostom, and by such councils as the Councils of Nice and Carthage, that she is now. Even during the "Dark Ages," so appropriately called the age of scholastic theology, there were the same bright traces of unchanging truth. The schoolmen of these ages did indeed differ, but they agreed in those great doctrines which are essential to true piety; and though they originated the corruptions of the Church of Rome and "disfigured Christian truth, they strengthened the Christian system." History shows nothing more clearly than that, from the days of St. Paul to the days of Athanasius and Augustine; from the days of Augustine to those of Anselm and Abelard; from Anselm and Abelard to Wicliffe and Waldo, to Luther and Melancthon, to Flavel, and Knox, and Edwards, successive generations of the Church have preserved the truth as it is in Jesus, and have been preserved by it.

In the days in which we live, the foundations of the earth seem to be out of course. Yet, so long as God's truth remains, the Church is safe. There the promise stands, "On this rock will I

build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." God's truth clothes her with strength and salvation, and invests her with a conservative power. If there is nothing among the associations of men so stable as the Christian Church, it is because there is nothing so stable as the Christian faith. High above all earthly changes, and beyond the rage of the prince of darkness, the King of truth sits on his holy hill of Zion, himself the foundation and the Head of that spiritual community which is to endure forever.

2. We learn from our subject, in the next place, *the intrinsic value of truth*. All truth is valuable, but none is so valuable as that which relates to religious subjects. It can not be matter of indifference whether we have right views of it or not. We thank God there is a standard by which it may be distinguished from error, and to which we may always make our appeal. "To the law and the testimony;" this is our last resort. It was a proverb in Israel, "Buy the truth, and sell it not." Buy it at any price. Give up every thing for the truth's sake. False opinions, erroneous teachers, evil biases, vain reasonings, pride and self, sloth and indolence, all must be given up for this hidden treasure; and, while you buy it at any price, sell it not at any rate. Not for the love of ease or the favor of men; not for

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worldly gain, promotion, liberty, or life; no, even though you give your body to the flames. "All is not gold that glitters;" but when you have found this imperishable treasure, "hold fast that thou hast; let no man take thy crown." The knowledge of God's truth is worth retaining, because it is the knowledge of unchangeable things. Learning and science will die; God's truth lives. It is worth searching for; it is worth defending; it is worth receiving. It is a safe and sure resting-place, when, amid the conflicts of time and the controversies of men, you fall back upon God's truth. Once recede from the truth of God, and you never know where to stop. We must live in the truth, and die in the truth, if we are Christians. The inner life of Christianity, in the meanest of its disciples, is pledged to nothing more certainly than its inviolable attachment to truth.

3. In the third place, our subject may assist us *in estimating the value of all alleged discoveries in religion*. We have no faith in them simply because God's truth is unchangeable. There is no room for the discoveries and inventions of men where God has spoken. There may be progress in other departments of human knowledge, but these advances extend not to the field of religious inquiry. Religious truth is not of scientific discovery, but of divine revelation; it is not by progress in human science that men become

acquainted with it, but by the instructions of holy men of old, moved as they were by the Holy Ghost. It is of human acquisition only as it is acquired by the diligent and prayerful study of God's Word. What has God revealed in his Word? Beyond this single inquiry human learning may not go, unless human wisdom would improve upon the divine, and the finite be wiser than the Infinite. The Bible is the last book with which the mind of man may venture to tamper. "Forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven." Here is the field of inquiry, and the only field. It is a vast field, and well may it be explored. Travel over it; ascend its heights and dive into its depths; traverse its hills and vales, and, the more earnestly and humbly you do so, the more richly will you be compensated. But bear in mind that it is a finished record, and that the last line has been written, and the last word uttered. Beyond this, improvement is revolution; progress is going backward; invention is agitation and unrest. A new religion is a new absurdity. The ancient faith is the true faith; the old charity is the true charity. The more we improve upon them, the farther are we from the truth as it is in Jesus. We rejoice in the researches by which *the well-known truths* of the Gospel are illustrated and adorned; the more the better; but when you come to the invention of

new truths, or such modifications of the old as destroy their identity, we say with the prophet, "He that hath a *dream*, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully; what is the chaff to the wheat?" I remark,

4. In view of the thoughts suggested in this discourse, it is not difficult to perceive *why the Scriptures represent the state both of the righteous and the wicked, in the future world, as unalterable*. Their character and condition are the result of their views and affections toward the truth of God; if the truth of God never alters, their character and condition never alter. The character of the righteous essentially consists in their conformity to God's truth, in their love to it, and their cordial acquiescence in its spirit and claims. It is now "the joy and rejoicing of their heart." The truth is so written on and within their hearts, so inwrought with their personal experience, that it forms the great element of their blessedness; and, because it is immutable, their delight in it is, and ever will be, the perennial fountain of joy, springing up into everlasting life. So long as God and his truth remain the same, their strong tower is unshaken; the same light ever shines above them and around them in all its unsullied lustre. They breathe the same pure and heavenly atmosphere, ever cheering them, and never

chilled by the cold and damp clouds of error which hang over the dark regions of despair. They have seen the stars grow pale, the sun turned into darkness, and the moon into blood; but the splendor of truth shall never fade. The living thoughts which truth has awakened in their bosoms are living thoughts still, more clear, more enlarged, more constant, and more intense, producing living emotions and joys, a bright inheritance that fadeth not away.

From the same premises may the assurance be deduced that there will be no change in the future world in the character and state of the wicked. Those who pass from the boundaries of time to the regions of eternity, carrying with them their hostility to the truth of God, will have the same truth to contend with forever—with this difference, that it will there utter itself in keener vibrations. They will carry with them all their intellectual powers and faculties, all their acquired knowledge, all their wicked dispositions and affections, and in augmented vigor and activity. The truth of God will appear very different to them then from what it did before they entered into the world of spirits. They can no longer be indifferent to it, can no longer forget it, but it will sink down into their bosoms, and form a part of their wretched and eternal existence. If the truth could change, and the light of eternity be-

come darkness, there might be elements of enjoyment more homogeneous with their depraved character, and they would breathe a more congenial atmosphere. But there will be no change in truth, and therefore their hostility to it will be perpetuated. They never loved it in the present world, and they will never love it in the world to come. In the present world they were hostile to it, and they will be hostile to it in the world to come. There the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. Such is the decree of law and justice. Such is the decree of Gospel truth, as well as legal retribution; for, "if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall they escape who neglect so great salvation?" This great principle of the divine government is inwoven in the constitution of the human mind, inlaid in the irreconcilable character of truth and falsehood, holiness and sin, neither of which ever alter.

Consider these things, oh ye that forget God! Hell is not an idea, a phantom, any more than heaven. It is a fearful, because an immutable reality. There God's truth agitates; there it enchains; there it binds with relentless severity. That sad and dismal world needs nothing more than *truth* to fan its quenchless flames. There is nothing there to interpose between the truth and

the mind that hates it. It is the naked truth, and the naked, disembodied spirit coming into perpetual collision; truth in all its energy acting upon the soul, and the soul in all its energy maintaining the conflict, and sinking in sadness and despair.

Human life—it is but a sunbeam that lights us to a happy or a miserable eternity. It is but a great drama, where the pageantry of time dies away in everlasting realities. Yet is it the great battle-field of two contending armies, one under the banner of truth and the God of truth, the other led on by the prince of darkness. Well may you feel concerned about the issues of this controversy. Within this short term are crowded the momentous interests of an unalterable eternity. Truth will not alter. Eternity will not alter. It is the sinner who must alter, and become reconciled to God and his truth on the terms of life and peace through the Gospel of his Son. It is as easy to comply with these terms now as it ever will be. They will never be greater and never be less; they will never change. Time changes. You know not what a day may bring forth. Here, on these passing days of the Son of man, the problem is to be solved which well might make an angel tremble. Do not go to your grave contending with the truth of God. It is a glorious life the righteous

attain, a fearful death the wicked must die. Oh, it is a thought which agitates us, that all beyond is an unalterable eternity! It is an oppressive thought, and almost confounds us. Unalterable truth and an unalterable eternity! What realities are these! If there be but these two thoughts you carry from this house of prayer, let them be, God's UNALTERABLE TRUTH and that UNALTERABLE ETERNITY.

SERMON XV.

THE CHURCH IN THE WILDERNESS.

SOLOMON'S SONG, viii., 5. — "*Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?*"

THERE is not a little of the language of excited imagination and feeling in the sacred Writings. They abound in poetical compositions. In order to interest, and give vividness and beauty to the truths they utter, they contain many a beautiful paragraph in which the writers go beyond simple narrative and sober argument. The evil passions must be strong and turbulent that are not calmed by such melodious accents as are echoed from the divine oracles. David was a poet. The Evil Spirit must long have held his throne that can not be dispossessed by the harp of the son of Jesse. The prophets were poets ; they wrote in poetical numbers, and poured forth their thoughts in the rhythm, and measure, and imagery which belong to the sacred muses. Such is emphatically the character of that portion of the word of God which contains the text. It is called "The Song of Songs" on account of its peculiar excellence. The text has reference to a distinguished

female personage seen in the distance—in the far-off wilderness; while the undefined beholders inquire, “Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?”

Let us analyze this weighty inquiry, and, in so doing, we shall take a view of this complex personage—of the wilderness where she was seen—of her coming up from it, and of the interest which is felt by those who observe her progress.

I. In the first place, WHO IS THIS THAT IS THUS SEEN COMING UP FROM THE WILDERNESS?

Commentators have widely differed in their views of the nature and design of this “Song of Songs.” With few exceptions, King Solomon is regarded as its author; and those exceptions are found only among the more modern Gentile writers. Ezra placed it in the same volume with the “Law and the Prophets;” the voice of antiquity unanimously pronounced it a sacred book; it was recognized by the Jews as belonging to their Holy Writings; it was comprised in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint, which is uniformly ascribed to Jewish authors. It is enumerated by Josephus in his catalogue of the Jewish books. From the Jewish Synagogue it was introduced into the Christian Church, without any doubt of its authenticity; it was cited by the Christian Fathers, by what are called the “apostolical constitutions,” and by the

apostolical canons, and has been almost universally received as one of the inspired books of the Old Testament. Some writers there are who consider it a dissolute love-song; some who consider it as designed to indicate the divine approbation of marriage; and some who regard it as a mere *epithalamium*, or nuptial song in celebration of the marriage of Solomon and the royal daughter of the King of Egypt.

For ourselves, we are free to confess that, if either of these was the object of this Song, we can not divine how it should have found its way into the sacred Canon of the Jews. We fall in with the views adopted by most commentators, both Jewish and Christian, that it is a sublime and mystical allegory, delineating the bridal union between Christ and his pure and uncorrupted Church. In very many passages of the Scriptures, Christ is represented as the Husband of the Church, and the Church as his betrothed and covenanted bride. "Thy Maker is thy Husband, the Lord of Hosts is his name." John the Baptist represents Christ as the Bridegroom; our Lord himself adopts the same title; and it is no unusual thing for the sacred writers to speak of the Church as "the bride, the Lamb's wife."

There is internal evidence in the Song itself that it is designed to set forth the union between Christ and his Church; the uncreated glories of

the celestial Bridegroom, and the imparted loveliness of his earthly Bride. You will mark one strong peculiarity in this Song, and that is, that the Bridegroom, in addressing the Bride, uses the remarkable terms, "*My sister, my spouse.*" It was no daughter of Pharaoh, it was no fair one of Palestine, to whom these appellations are applicable. Nor was it an *incestuous* alliance that was the theme, where the Spirit of God is the author. The Church of the living God, and she alone, is both the *sister* and the *spouse*: the *sister*, because she is human, and of the same family with her divine Lord, who is himself the elder brother of the redeemed; the *spouse*, because they are allied by covenant, and one in law, in character, and destiny. And this remark, if we mistake not, is the *key* to the entire poem; and if the love of the Church to Christ were as pure and intense as his love to the Church, the highly-wrought imagery of this exquisite poem would be better understood and more duly appreciated.

"All are not Israel that are called Israel, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh." There is a religious community on the earth which, in its external and visible organization, consists of all those, together with their children, who make a public profession of the religion of Christ and of submission to his laws. There is within this visible community, and some

also who are not within it, a community which comprises the regenerated people of God. They are the holy of all lands and every name; the fruit of the divine Spirit; his justified and sanctified ones, to whom the promises are given, and who shall at last be advanced to the kingdom where he reigns. The distinctive features of their character are their confidence in his truth, their attachment to his person, their fidelity to his laws and throne, and their self-sacrificing devotement to his cause and glory. Wherever these are found, there are the elements of this complex personage. Known, indeed, by different names, collected in different organizations, and, like the multitude seen and heard by the favored apostle, gathered from all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues.

This child of truth and grace, and with such celestial comeliness upon her brow, is here represented as a wanderer. Men mistake her character. It is not the desire of superiority or distinction that governs her. She does not court applause. She seeks not the eye of the world, nor does she seek to take part in its bustle and confusion. She delights rather in the shade and stillness of some beloved retreat, where she may find the footsteps of the flock, and where He whom her soul loveth maketh them to rest at noon. She is known by nothing more than this

humble and retiring spirit. Many a time has she been heard to say, "Look not upon me, for I am black, because the sun has looked upon me." Many a time does she lay her hand upon her mouth, and exclaim, "Behold, I am vile!"

Such is this complex personage. The time was when she was cast out into the open "field, to the loathing of her person in the day that she was born." But she is not now what she once was. Once "poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked," she is now clothed with "embroidered work, girded about with fine linen, covered with silk, and decked with ornaments." She is "comely through the comeliness put upon her." Though "her birth and her nativity were of the land of Canaan, and her father a Hittite and her mother an Amorite," yet is she allied to a family that partakes the riches and royalty of a nobler world, and "her renown is gone forth among the nations for her beauty." Though the youngest and the most truant, she is the favored daughter of the King of heaven; and though she has no unborrowed splendor, yet is she "covered with righteousness as with a garment," and prepared "as a bride adorned for her husband." Soiled and blemished as she has been, yet is she now "as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold." Even her royal husband has been heard to say of her, "Behold,

thou art fair, my love ; behold, thou art fair, thou art all fair, my love ; there is no spot in thee ! ”

“ Who is this,” so depraved in her nativity and so exalted in her adoption—so impure in her original, and in her transformation so pure—so heaven-born, and so endeared to higher worlds, and in her own view so vile ? There can be but one answer to this question. It is the believer as he was by nature and as he is by grace. It is the Church of the First-born personified by the daughter of Zion.

II. Let us, then, in the second place, advert to THE WILDERNESS WHERE SHE WAS SEEN.

Where was she ? Our text answers, “ Who is this that cometh up from the *wilderness* ? ” She was far from the abodes of men, and in the waste wilderness. She had come out from the world, and walked with God. She was traveling to the holy land, but it was through the desert. She could say with many who went before her, and more who came after her, “ We have here no continuing city. I am a stranger with thee and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.” To the Church of God this earth is a solitary path. It is a great wilderness ; the world dwells in it. She is a “ little flock ” alone in the vast desert. It is a fading, dying world. Her continuance here is but as “ a shadow,” an “ hand-breadth,” a “ vapor that appeareth for a little while and then

vanisheth away." It is "as a dream when one awaketh." The fathers, where are they? And those who are now on the earth, how soon will they have passed these mortal shores, and entered upon their final rest? There is nothing in this dying world that can satisfy the cravings even of an unholy mind, much less a mind that "seeks those things that are above, where Jesus Christ sitteth at the right hand of God." Give it all this earth contains, and it still is a wilderness. There are restless longings of the soul which this world can not reach, and there are perplexing cares it can not relieve, and pangs of disappointment it can not soothe. The "tragedy of Eden" has turned this garden of God into a wilderness; it is withered by the curse, and its streams are bitter. Sin has entered it. Its fairest scenery is marred by sin. Its most vivid coloring is obscured and stained by sin. A good man's affections may linger about it; he may love it too much; and when it comes to hold a high place in his heart, God is very apt to stir up his nest, break in upon his earthly joys, and whisper in his ear, "Arise ye, and depart hence, for this is not your rest, because it is polluted." The spiritual and best interests of the Church are always jeopardized by her sympathy with a world that lieth in wickedness. "The friendship of the world is enmity with God." Here "moth and

rust corrupt, and thieves break through and steal." Such a world as this is not her home. The cry is ever and anon sounding in her ears, "Come out and be separate." The monition is repeated, "Whosoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." Scarcely a day passes in which she does not meet with delays, hinderances, and vexations. It is a selfish, hard-hearted, wilderness-world in which she dwells. Her passage through it has been often marked with tears and blood; and many a time has she taken refuge from its fury in its deep recesses, and under its barren cliffs and frowning promontories; and there her songs and her sighs have often ascended together in mingled agony and triumph.

"She lived unknown
Till persecution dragged her into fame,
And chased her up to heaven."

It was from such scenes that the woman is described in the Apocalypse as fleeing into the wilderness, "where she had a place prepared of God, and where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time from the face of the serpent." Here she dwells, amid monuments indicative alike of the faith and constancy of the victim, and the fury of her persecutors. By the unsleeping care of Israel's Shepherd she has been upheld and defended, that she might shine the

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brighter by all her tribulations, and preserve the purity of her faith through centuries of conflict and darkness. Here she dwells still—still maintaining her integrity, still destined to survive the changes of earth, and travel down the descent of time.

Most emphatically, she is the Church in the *wilderness*. Even where these “fiery trials” are not assigned to her, she is the child of sorrow, often “afflicted, tossed with the tempest, and not comforted.” It is appointed her “through much tribulation to enter into the kingdom of God.” And, sad as the confession is, her heaviest trials often originate in her own imperfections, and are augmented by her folly in forsaking her first love. Besides this, very often, when she herself enjoys the divine favor, she trembles for the ark of God. Her anxious mind broods over the dark signs of the times. Perhaps she makes them darker than they are. The ways of Zion mourn because few come to her solemn feasts. The streams of mercy which have so often refreshed her heritage seem to be dried up. Her harp hangs upon the willows, and her pensive thought is, “How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?” Many a time has she been heard to say, “How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger, and cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of

Israel, and remembered not his footstool in the day of his anger!"

It is the *wilderness* she is passing through. It is an enemy's land. "Without are fightings, and within are fears." Sometimes she strays up and down, as though God had hid his face from her, and sometimes she sits and weeps with abundant sorrow, as though her heart were overwhelmed, and she were despoiled of every earth-born hope.

But look at her again. It is not all depression, and trial, and conflict that we see. We observe,

III. In the third place, her *upward progress*. The sacred poet describes her as *coming up from the wilderness*.

She is *coming up*, "faint, yet pursuing." Depressed and embarrassed as she is, and though she scarcely knows how to explore her path, she is still pressing onward. She can not remain in the gloom and darkness of the desert. Sometimes with a bold, and sometimes with a doubtful step, she "forgets the things that are behind, and presses on to those that are before." She has an upward aim, and is looking toward the better country, even a heavenly. There is her treasure; there her heart; there her home; her conversation is there. Her ardent desires, her highest good are there. Even her very sorrows and griefs indicate her upward aspirations and

tendencies. Like the magnetic needle, amid the variations of a transient conflict or passing storm, her heart exhibits a trembling agitation till it reposes in this one unchanging rest. It is, indeed, an unequal and diversified path that she travels. Sometimes her prospect is gilded by all the varied tints of the new-born year, and all the glow of summer, and the rich maturity of autumn; and sometimes the snows of winter sweep along her path, and night enshrouds it with its gloom. At times, the skies above her are soft and serene; at times, they are black and heavy, and lowering with tempest. Now her path lies through "beds of spices," and along the fruits of the valley, and the rich foliage of the forest, where light breezes and murmuring streams refresh her, and wild flowers waft their fragrance. Then she pursues her way amid rough precipices and the roar of the tempest, along "the lions' dens and the mountains of the leopards." The circuities and vicissitudes of her path seem sometimes to bewilder her. The grandeur of the scenery, or its softness and beauty, sometimes allure her, and for the moment fascinate her imagination. But her aim is fixed; her object is single. She is on her way to the heavenly city, and she can not turn back. It is the only way, and she can not forego the imperishable inheritance. A faith that realizes the unseen world, and a hope

full of immortality, sheds its fragrance over her spirits, and she "*comes up from the wilderness.*"

We perceive, too, that she is *not alone*. "She cometh up from the wilderness *leaning upon her Beloved.*" "We love him because he first loved us." "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." The love of God to lost and guilty men, and the love of men gratefully responding to this wondrous love of God, constitutes the teaching and the piety of the Bible. The Savior's love to his Church is love that "*passeth knowledge.*" He says of her, "*As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.*" What the Church is to him, he is to the Church. The love is mutual. The Song of Solomon is an exquisitely fine-wrought ode celebrating this mutual love. "I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine." We have had the key before, and this is the key-note of this wonderful poem! Nothing so dissipates her darkness as the light of his countenance; nothing so cheers her sadness, and so raises her from her depression, as his well-known voice. They are emotions of surprise and joy when he speaks to her, and, as she listens, she exclaims, "It is the voice of my Beloved, saying to me, Rise up, my fair one, and come away." Many waters can not quench, nor floods drown his love. He plunged into the unquench-

able flames that he might pluck her as a brand out of the fire. He penetrated the mountains when she was lost, and brought her home rejoicing. He gathered her children like lambs in his arms, and carried them in his bosom. He extended the shield of his protection over her, to take care of all her interests, and to supply her with every comfort. He supports her when weary, cheers her when faint, wipes the tears from her eyes, and, with a tenderness which another never felt, pledges his faithfulness never to leave her nor forsake her. He is her Savior, her God, her kinsman, Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. He is her Lord and Husband, identifying himself with her; not only bearing her griefs and carrying her sorrows, but even making her sins his own, and challenging the universe to lay any thing to her charge. She owes her pardon, her righteousness, her sanctification, her heaven to him. He "gave himself for her," and with himself "freely gives her all things;" and her heart goes out to him as "the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely." "As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, so is my Beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste."

Hence it is that she is represented not only as "coming up from the wilderness," but as "*lean-*

ing upon her Beloved." Love, where it is concentrated in a worthy object, secures confidence. Distrust of self, and unreserved trust in Christ, is the acting of a heart that selects Him as guardian and friend. She *stays* herself upon him, and commits all her interests to the disposal and keeping of his infinite wisdom, love, and power. She knows that they are safe in his hands, and therefore she does not fear, though "the earth be removed, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." Though the way is long and the wilderness dark, and subtle and venomous foes lurk near her path, she is not afraid of evil tidings, because her heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. Perplexing straits and severe trials are what she looks for. And thus she comes up all the way from the wilderness *leaning upon her Beloved*. Not upon something else, but simply on him. Though she is perfect weakness, she has Omnipotence to lean upon. Here is the secret of her courage: "her life is hid with Christ in God." He who "liveth and was dead, and is alive for evermore," lives to succor and bless her when all the nations die.

There is much that is instructive as well as interesting in this emblematical representation. The Gordian knot in theology, man's *perfect dependence* and his *perfect activity*, is here practically untied. The Church does not stand still,

and if she does, she stands alone. She does not wait in sluggish inaction for him to lead her, but goes forward leaning upon him. She does not move a step without him, yet, leaning upon him, she takes none that is false and none that is retrograde. This is the sweet experience of all the Church of the first-born. Thus she pursues her way, wakeful, active, persevering, yet leaning upon him. The influence under which she goes forward is a charm upon her *will*; he "draws her with the cords of love as with the bands of a man." Without him she can do nothing; with him she can do all things. Her dependence is her joy as well as her strength. His faithfulness gives buoyancy to her hopes, and inspirits the confidence that she shall be kept from falling, and borne safely through. She is depressed and weary only when she loses sight of him. And what marvel that she is? Guilt, confusion, unbelief, doubt, and fear, always come upon the soul that does not lean on Jesus. We sink deeper and deeper into sin and despondency every step we take away from him. We plunge into the terrible wilderness alone. And, strange to say, the long-suffering and gracious One often meets her in her depression, "allures her, speaks comfortably to her, and gives her the valley of Achor for a door of hope, and she sings there as in the days of her youth." And, wondrous condescen-

sion! in her deepest sorrows, he himself takes her in his arms, wipes the tears from her cheeks, and carries her like a lamb in his bosom. He loves "thus to revive the spirit of the humble, and revive the heart of the contrite ones." He seeks her then, though "in the clefts of the rock." With his own hands he spreads a table for her. She feeds on angels' food, and eats the bread of heaven. He has no employment so delightful to his heart as to care for *her*. Nor has she any other confidence. She "sleeps in the woods" because she sleeps upon his bosom. She "sits down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit is sweet to her taste;" or she goes forth, her arm locked in his, "to see if the vine flourish and the tender grape appear." Then the wilderness smiles. "Instead of the thorn comes up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier the myrtle-tree."

Her path is not uniform, but checkered and variable, like the path of human life. Now it lies over hill and through valley; now where the light of heaven scarcely penetrates; and now to some Pisgah eminence, where she has a glimpse of the promised inheritance. And thus the dangers and trials of the wilderness are left behind her, and remembered only to enhance her gratitude and perpetuate her praise.

What a beautiful, what a glorious object is the Church of God, thus traveling through this wilderness-world!

IV. The fourth and last thought, therefore, which the sacred poet suggests, is *the interest this complex personage excites in other minds.*

"Who is this?" Voices from above and around us, from the present and the past, repeat the demand, "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?" She occupies an eminence that forbids concealment. The relation she sustains to the divine Savior gives her a position in the earth that can not be disregarded. He claims her as his own, and has put upon her his own name. There is no other for whom he has done and suffered so much. Every chapter in the Bible is either a record or a prediction of his mercy to her, while every volume of this world's history proclaims his care for her. He has not only "reproved kings for her sake," but "given men for her, and people for her life." States and empires have been overturned for her; thousands of her enemies have fallen by an unseen hand, and victory has perched upon her banners when no human arm has fought her battles. Unobtrusive as she is, her own professions also forbid that she should remain unnoticed. She avouches the Lord Jehovah to be her God, confesses to her union with him, and to an honest purpose to make it the great end of her life to glorify and enjoy him forever. Her character and conduct, notwithstanding her im-

perfections, justify and honor these professions. She is inseparably associated with his purposes of mercy to our fallen world. She is the depository of his word and ordinances, and the dispenser of his truth and grace. He spares the ungodly for her sake, lest, in rooting up the tares, the wheat should be rooted up also. He blesses the world for her sake, just as he blessed the house of Obed-Edom and all that he had because the ark of God was there. She stands forth as his witness through all the generations of time. She was called into being, and is preserved and beautified, in order to show forth his praise who called her out of darkness into his marvelous light. Various classes and orders of beings, therefore, feel a deep interest in the condition and progress of this daughter of Zion.

She is the object of attention to *the children of men*. She always has been so to men of learning and research, and to meaner men—to rulers and ruled, to rich and poor. Men inspect and scrutinize her character and claims. Called out from the world, differing from the world, the world has its eye upon her. She disclaims the authority of its maxims and usages. She declines its sinful pleasures, and all participation in its unhallowed aims and pursuits. She challenges immunities which the world knows nothing of, and is the expectant of an inheritance in

which the men of the world have no part. It is perfectly natural for them to exclaim, "Who is this? What is thy Beloved more than another beloved?" Bad men behold her, sometimes to wonder at the peculiarity of her character and condition, and scoff at her. Sometimes they are constrained to confess and admire her beauty, for she is "comely as Jerusalem," and the "fairest among women." Sometimes it is to acknowledge her influence and power, for she is "terrible as an army with banners." Sometimes it is to feel the reproach of her example; for, though shining in borrowed splendor, yet is she "the light of the world," and a standing rebuke to its wickedness. Sometimes it is to be envious at her allotment, for the smile of heaven plays upon her countenance, and the "solitary place is glad for her." Sometimes it is to complain of the grace that makes her to differ from them, for it is the sovereignty of that grace that makes the difference. And sometimes it is to hate her with perfect hatred, to vex and injure her, to persecute, and, if possible, destroy her. *Good men* behold her to admire and honor her, and the grace which shines in her. They look upon her as identifying their own character and destiny with hers, as embodying and impersonating the best interests of mankind in the present world and that which is to come. Though now depressed, they anticipate

her future exaltation; and, though now the Church militant, ere long to be the Church triumphant, with her "sons coming from far, and her daughters from the end of the world." They feel an interest in her, as such, which they feel in no other association of men. Though lingering badges of her servitude still hang about her, they well know that she is yet to share the kingdoms of this world with her exalted Prince, and wear a diadem of gold.

Nor is it less true that she attracts the attention and solicitude *of the angelic hosts*. Living and loving spirits from other and higher worlds hover over her path and near her person—"are they not *all* ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them that shall be heirs of salvation?" They come forth from the heavenly presence to watch her progress, and to express their interest in all her toils and trials, her conflicts and victories. The wonders of redemption are the great theme that interests them, and the objects of that redemption the favored ones whom they are commissioned to serve. It was a new era in the history of the heaven where they dwell when the announcement was first made that one of woman born should take upon him man's nature, and die for man's redemption; and when they were instructed to make it known to earth it was in songs of joy. And ever since, and now, and in

all future time, such is the interest they take in the Church that "there is joy among the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." Evil angels as well as good also watch all her progress. Dark spirits, irritated with envy, and scarred by God's indignation, alight about her in great wrath, as though they knew their time was short. The devil, that old serpent, pursues her, and, like the Dragon in the Apocalypse, would fain swallow her up. There have been strife and warfare in the wilderness where she dwells, stirred up by the great Deceiver of the nations, the object of which has been to embarrass her progress and effect her overthrow. There is now, while I am speaking, the clashing of arms and the rushing of battle on her behalf; and there will be hereafter tumultuous conflict and fiend-like rage and despair, all indicating her final triumph, and the interest which other worlds feel in her destiny.

And, what is more than all, there is a deep and lasting interest felt for her *by God her Maker*. There is nothing in this inferior world he looks upon with so much interest as his Church. "The Lord's portion is his people; Israel is the lot of his inheritance." He "laid the foundations of the earth, and stretched abroad the heavens, that he might say unto Zion, Thy God reigneth." He has "graven her on the palms of his

hands, and her walls are continually before him." As "a bridegroom rejoiceth over his bride, so does her God rejoice over her." Her heart is his dwelling-place and temple. He is her shelter, her shade, her glory, and the lifter up of her head. "He that toucheth her toucheth the apple of his eye." More than all created things, this pilgrim of the desert is the object of interest to her glorious Lord."

Such is the complex personage represented in this divine poem; such is her condition; such her progress through this wilderness world, and such the interest she excites in other minds. We deduce from this illustration the following remarks:

I. In the first place, we are instructed by it to *identify our own interests and destiny with the Church of God*. We do not mean simply the nominal Church, nor any one tribe or family of those who arrogate to themselves the immunities of *the Church*, to the exclusion of all others. All Christian principle and all history show that, the more of exclusiveness there is in any community of professed Christians, there is less of the truth and grace of the Gospel. Our maxim is, "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." There are good and holy men of all names. Names are little things compared with the reality. "In Christ Jesus, neither cir-

cumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a *new creature*." It is the true Israel of God that commends itself to our love, our confidence, our solicitude, our prayers, our devotement. "They shall prosper that love thee." We would seek no other allotment than that which belongs to Zion. "Where thou goest I will go; where thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." God is with her; and, though she may be hunted like a partridge upon the mountains, "no weapon that is formed against her shall prosper." In a little while her conflicts shall be over, and she shall "return and come to Mount Zion with songs and everlasting joy." Who will not say with the Psalmist, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning; let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy!"

II. This illustration, in the second place, should *confirm our confidence in the ultimate triumphs of the Church of God on the earth*. Her path through this wilderness world will not always be one of languor, depression, enemies, and darkness. She shall yet enlarge the place of her habitation, and break forth on the right hand and on the left. He who has cared for her will not only care for her still, but shall so clothe her with beauty that her "head shall be like Carmel, and

the hair of her head like Lebanon." Marvelous changes shall ere long take place in our world, that shall give the Church of God her true and destined position in the earth. She shall yet "be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." The way she travels shall be "a highway, and it shall be the way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it." Every thing in nature and in grace shall beautify it. "Waters shall break out in the wilderness, and streams in the desert." It shall be no tedious, nor intricate, nor militant, nor embarrassed pilgrimage. "No lion shall be there, neither any ravenous beast shall go up thereon; it shall not be found there." She shall put off her veil, throw aside her weeds, put on her splendid attire, and arise and shine, for her light shall come, and the glory of the Lord shall have risen upon her." Kings and princes shall be allured by her brightness, and wondering people shall come bending unto her. "The kings of Tarshish and the isles shall bring her presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts." Every false system of religion shall be arrested by her progress. Darkness and error, tyranny and oppression, misery and shame, shall flee before her. Wonderful is the transformation in human affairs that shall attend and follow her brilliant career. Streams of light and love shall flow around her,

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and send their blessings to every land. "The Spirit shall be poured from on high," and the "nations shall be turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God."

"Oh, scenes surpassing fable, and yet true ;
Scenes of accomplished bliss, which who can see,
Though but in distant prospect, and not feel
His soul refreshed with foretastes of the joy !"

"The mountains and the hills shall break forth before her into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands."

III. In the third and last place, this view of the Church in the wilderness *points us to the glorious termination of her pilgrimage in the appointed city of her everlasting habitation.* She is traveling to "the mountain of God's holiness." Multitudes have already reached their heavenly home; multitudes are now crossing the stream which separates them from the promised land, and ere long the assembled tribes will all enter the gates of the New Jerusalem. What an object of contemplation will the "ransomed Church of God" present when the last heir of glory shall have crossed the flood, and been welcomed to the holiness and the joys of the "multitude which no man can number!" What a glorious scene will that be when he "who loved the Church and gave himself for it;" he who set her "as a seal upon his heart, and a seal upon his arm,"

and has conducted her safe through the wilderness, "presents her to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing!" How will *he* then be "glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe;" and how will *she* look forth, "clothed with the sun, and having the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars!" Then shall be realized the exquisite imagery of this divine poem—too exquisite for flesh and sense now to appreciate, and written rather for the millennium than for the ordinary ages of time, and realized in heaven rather than on the earth. Then the announcement will be made that the marriage "of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready!" Go forth, oh ye daughters of Zion, and behold the King in his beauty, and the crown with which he is crowned in the day of his espousals. "Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to these mountains of myrrh and these hills of frankincense." Not a cloud is there seen. Brown autumn has fled; winter is chased away by the softness and beauty of the new-born year. It is the unclouded sky of a purer hemisphere that there stretches itself over us. They are the balmy breezes of the spirit-land, its flowers of Paradise, and its unwasting joy. Immortal songs greet our ears; and that banquet of love, and the "new wine" in our heavenly Father's

kingdom, and the river of life flowing, and the bow of promise pledging a still brighter and immortal day—all tell us that the wilderness is past, and that we are come to the city of our God. Is it to this city of habitation, my beloved brethren, that you are traveling? And are you thus leaning upon your Beloved? Go on your way, then, and rejoice as you go.

“There your seats are now prepared,
There your kingdom and reward;
Jesus Christ, your Father's Son,
Bids you undismayed *Go on.*”

SERMON XVI.

COUNSELS TO THE YOUNG.

ECCLESIASTES, xii., 1.—*“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.”*

THIS timely counsel is from the lips of a man who became pious when young, and was eminently favored of God. But in the high day of human life, and while the bright sun of human grandeur shone upon him, his spiritual horizon was obscured. As he advanced in years, the clouds were scattered, and his prospects grew brighter. Yet even now, and at this distance of time, while we have no sympathy with those who have expressed their doubts of the genuineness of his religion, we are constrained to confess that the light is dim which flickers upon his grave.

The text, from the lips of such a man as Solomon, is the language of touching tenderness. He thought of the young as aged Christians are very apt to do. He foresaw their responsibilities, and was desirous they should meet them manfully. He foresaw the snares that would beset them,

and was desirous they should escape them. He had just told them that human life is not all sunshine, and that, amid its dazzling joys, it may not be forgotten that there would be "days of darkness." And when, as he anticipated, this chilling thought was laughed to scorn, he addresses the disdainful youth in that keen and scorching irony, "*Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth.*" Drain the goblet of earthly pleasure to its dregs. Youth is the time for gayety and joy. "Walk in the ways of thine heart and in the sight of thine eyes." Yet this *one thought* carry along with thee in thy ardent and reckless career. Youth vanishes, and that bounding heart will soon beat sluggishly with age, and become still in death, and after death is retribution. "*Know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment!*" And then, by a reaction by no means unnatural, his own mind becomes tenderly affected with this all-subduing thought. He drops his sarcasm, and his tone of feeling is changed to the affectionate expostulation, "Remember *now* thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, and the years draw nigh in which thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them."

It is melancholy to see how universally, and to what extent, men have become alienated from God. In every age and place, throughout all the

borders of the earth, and in every individual of the human family, from the loveliest and most accomplished to the most abandoned and abject, the uniform characteristic of our race is its indifference to God, its forgetfulness of God. Its great moral delinquency, its great master sin, is its neglect of God. Men may not be immoral, but honest, and truthful, and pure; yet are they unmindful of God. They may be neither unkind nor ungenerous, nor unobservant of any of the decencies which give order and beauty to the social relations; but they are *without God in the world*. They may hold forth to their fellow-men not a little that is amiable and praiseworthy, and be among the respected and honored of the earth; yet there may be no fear of God before their eyes, no love of God in their hearts. They are lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. God is not in all their thoughts. They have *forgotten* the God that made them, and lightly esteemed the Rock of their salvation.

There is force and emphasis, therefore, in the precept, "*Remember thy Creator*," because the initial step in the process of reform is the sinner's return to that God from whom he has so wickedly revolted. Nothing is done until the axe is laid at the root of this prolific source of evil, and the salt of divine grace cast into this polluted fountain. The instructions and coun-

sels of the Bible all proceed upon this recognized principle; and therefore the message has gone forth, and sounds in the ears of young and old, and even of those who are the farthest off in this exile and alienation—a blessed message of recall and welcome from the mercy-seat, “Remember thy Creator.” This precept bids every thoughtless, prayerless man enter upon the business of meditating upon God, holding converse with God, and acquainting himself with God. It says to him, no longer suffer other things so to interest you as that the thoughts of God shall be distasteful, and the language of your heart be, Depart from us, “for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.” God can not be *remembered* where he is not thought of, nor where, when he is thought of, these thoughts are eagerly banished. A devout mind cherishes its thoughts of God. They are absorbing thoughts by their sovereign influence. To the man who truly remembers God, all things are but the dust of the balance compared with him.

Nor is this all. There is the *tenderness of love* in these thoughts of God. They are affectionate remembrances. When the foul Tempter stole the heart of man from God, and thankless man became an exile from his heavenly Father's house, rather than abandon him to his exile and his woe, the God of love so set his heart upon him

that he commanded his own Son to the agonies of the cross in order to restore the fallen and save the lost. And now, as though all the affections of the renewed nature were thrown into this act of hallowed memory, he says, "*Remember thy Creator. My son, give me thy heart.*" That great and glorious Being, who is God over all and blessed forever, would be remembered, not in the "cold thoughts of a steady contemplation only," but in the delights of a complacent affection, the gratitude of a heart warm with love toward him for his thoughts of love to us.

Nor is it a powerless and sentimental remembrance of the heart any more than it is a cold remembrance of the thoughts. Where God has the thoughts and the heart, he has all the rest. These are the principles of all moral action. The whole man obeys them. It is a *practical* remembrance. It restrains from sin, and urges to sensitiveness of conscience, to watchfulness, and prayer, and honest, earnest, self-denying, and persevering efforts in works of obedience. To forget God in our conduct is not to remember him at all. That remembrance is of little worth which "in works denies him."

Such is the *duty*, "*Remember thy Creator.*"

There are considerations urging this remembrance upon different classes of men. The middle-aged are appealed to by the precariousness

of the strength on which they rely, the wisdom in which they trust, the exposures of their elevated position, and the illusive prospects by which they are ensnared. The aged are appealed to by considerations drawn from the debility and cheerlessness of the days of darkness, the gloom of the grave, the solemn reckoning which is just before them, and the sovereignty of that grace which is sometimes extended to the eleventh hour of human life. The considerations addressed to the young are in some respects peculiar. They are in every view attractive, full of beauty and of hope. They are some of the noblest and most disinterested that can be addressed to the human mind. They appeal to its ingenuousness, its truthfulness, its purity, its honor, its finest sensibilities, and to all that is lovely and of good report. It is with this class of considerations that we are now concerned.

It is an interesting truth that the great Creator *himself has special claims upon the young.*

His eye and his heart are upon them. Whether he will be honored or dishonored in the world which he has made, and whether or not his kingdom will be here advanced, depends not so much upon the risen as the rising generation. In this, as well as other particulars, the arrangements of nature and providence do but herald the higher methods of redeeming mercy. One of the marked

features of the economy of grace is that its provisions and its claims meet the children of men at the very threshold of their existence, and that infant apostasy finds its counterpart in infant redemption. The first promise was to an embryo race. The first prefiguration, by purely material things, of the promised Deliverer, was set forth in the memorable words, "Come thou, *and all thy house*, into the ark." The first visible seal of God's covenanted faithfulness gave the Church the welcome assurance that he would be a God to them, and to their seed after them. Every instance of circumcision under the old, and of holy baptism under the new dispensation, proclaims that his mercy is coeval with man's want and woe, and with unutterable tenderness urges the divine claims upon the love, the confidence, the hopes of the young.

When the God of Israel entered into covenant with the assembled tribes, he was careful not to exclude "their *children* and little ones." They were the *children* of those whose carcasses fell in the wilderness which he engaged to bring to the land forfeited by their fathers. It was because they caused their *children* to pass through the fire unto Moloch that he drove out and extirpated the ancient nations of Palestine. "Lo," says he, "*children* are the heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is his reward"—the

heritage he gives, and the heritage he claims. And it is in enforcing this claim that the Savior now says, "Suffer the *little children* to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." What a joyous day was that, when the children in the Temple sang "Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!" The Temple above is rich in the fruits of early piety. Praise is *perfected* from the mouths of babes and sucklings.

God urges his claims upon the young with great frequency and tenderness. He would "give subtlety to the simple, and to the *young man* knowledge and discretion." He tells him how "he may cleanse his way." His paternal language ever and anon is, "*My son*, receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee. *My son*, forget not my law, but let thine heart keep my commandments. *My son*, attend unto my wisdom, and bow thine ear to my understanding." The great mass of the young, more especially if they have been religiously educated, are not so thoughtless as they appear. There is a deep sea of troubled feeling in the youthful mind, which is often stirred up, and which, if not cared for, is apt to subside in the imperturbable stupidity of sin and death. There are few, if any, in Christian lands, with whom God's Spirit does not strive—into whose minds he does not pour some

rays of light, and to whose awakened sensibilities he has not access. In the midst of all their joy and buoyancy, earthly pleasures pall upon their taste. They lose their interests in the concerns of time, and in the multitude of their thoughts within them they would fain be looking toward the things that are not seen and eternal. This solicitude may be lost, and this sobriety of thought chased away. Temptations every where, and every where snares beset them. They *may* take their swing in the world; they may slumber on, and awake only to learn that "the harvest is past, and the summer is ended, and they are not saved." But the God of Zion has other thoughts toward them and other claims upon them. They were born under the mediatorial reign of his redeeming Son, and to the sweet hopes and winning expostulations of heavenly wisdom. He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, even when the blow falls upon "the hairy scalp of him that goeth on still in his trespasses," much less in the overthrow of the child of prayer, and the desolated hopes of the youth in whose character and destiny he feels such an interest, and on whom his love has such and so many rightful and gracious claims.

Youthful piety is also specially beloved of God.

Wherever it is found, true piety receives no equivocal tokens of his love. Yet is there em-

phasis in the promise, "I love them that love me, and they that seek me *early* shall find me." Most emphatically is piety beloved and cherished by him when it takes root in the young heart, and combines the unsophisticated impulses of nature with the purer impulses of heavenly truth and grace. It is a beautiful view when the graces of the Spirit are thus ingrafted on the green, fresh stock before it has been scorched by the summer's sun, or riven or withered by the blasts of winter. It is as when the "fig-tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines, with the tender grapes, give a good smell." It is budding, blossoming, fragrant piety. It was of the Church, espoused to her heavenly Head and Husband in the days of her *youth*, that the inspired poet exclaims, "Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the powders of the merchant?" In describing the triumphs of the Gospel in the last days, the Psalmist utters the beautiful prediction, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power. In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning thou hast the dew of *thy youth*." Just as the opening morning discloses to the delighted eye the sparkles of the early dew, so does youthful piety sparkle in all brightness and purity. They may not be the richest and most splendid robes with

which it is adorned, but they are the most unsullied by contact with the world, and the least saddened by subsequent, and, it may be, bitter experience. There may be more of the appendages of a self-righteous spirit in the wearer, but there is a sweeter consciousness of moral transformation, and a more gladdened confession of the change, as men exclaim, "Behold, what hath God wrought!"

The God of Israel is not unmindful of this early attachment to him, even in the subsequent years of a tardy and more doubtful pilgrimage. It was of his backsliding people of other times that he said, "Behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably to her. And I will give her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope, and she shall sing *there as in the days of her youth*." How often have I seen this sweet promise verified when at the bedside of God's dying people, who, though they became early pious, wandered from him in after life, and who I feared would be called to the last struggle in darkness. These fears were groundless. "God's ways are not as our ways." He remembered that early consecration to him which they themselves had almost forgotten. There are sacrifices made by the young in turning to God that are not made by the old. It is at some cost that they relinquish the joys

of earth and youthful companionships, and take up the cross. They are sacrifices which, while they have no claim of merit, God takes notice of. "Go," says he, "go, cry in the ears of Jerusalem, thus saith the Lord, I REMEMBER thee; the kindness of thy *youth*, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in *the wilderness, in a land that was not sown*." Israel was "holiness to the Lord, and the first fruits of his increase." He never forgot that youthful generation. He took it kindly that they loved him. Long afterward he mentions it to their praise, and never ceased to be their Guardian and Guide, and to defend them in all their course through the desert, over the Jordan, and to the promised land. And what he thus remembered in them, and did for them, he remembers and virtually does for all who early seek him. A pious youth has the all-sufficient God for his permanent and everlasting friend. "Whom he loves, he loves to the end." Promises he once makes he never alters: "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." God hides the youthful Christian in the secret of his presence, and keeps him safely in his pavilion. He would not be half so safe were his tabernacle guarded by a legion of angels, as he now is, guarded on every side by the everlasting arms. Amid all his inexperience and exposures, in all his conflicts, in all his conscious infirmities, fol-

lies, and sins, that God, whom his young heart chose as his portion and refuge, keeps him "as the apple of his eye." He "will cover him with his feathers; under his wings shall he trust; his truth shall be his shield and buckler." There is no safety to the youthful mind like this, and no repose so sweet. The Shepherd of Israel maketh him to lie down in green pastures, and leadeth him beside the still waters. His journey may be prolonged in this desert land, and it may not always be the straightforward and rectilinear course, but his divine Shepherd restoreth his soul, and leadeth him in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Wanderer he may have been, but he shall come to his end in peace. Jesus shall meet him on the banks of the cold river; he shall pass over unhurt; and, as from Jordan's farther verge he looks back on all the way the Lord has led him, shall give him praise that he was enabled to remember his Creator in the days of his youth.

In addition to this, early piety is *the most useful piety*.

Every youth lives to be a blessing or a curse to his fellow-men. He exerts an influence that makes them better or worse, more happy, or more miserable forever. He may become a Christian in middle life, and have much to weep over, and much to undo of evils which an earlier consecra-

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tion to God would have prevented. There is a vast difference between the growing brightness of that Christian career which is early entered upon, and the flickering light which is enkindled in a dusky old age. Among the reasons why the most of persons who become pious at all become so in their youth, is the fact that youthful piety has time to grow and bear fruit. Its light *shines brighter* and more bright to the last. It is true that God sometimes arrests the youth in his thoughtless career for no purpose so ostensible as to fit him for an early grave, and it is a beautiful expression of his love when he thus calls the pious young from the conflicts and storms of earth to their heavenly home. These flowers of hope bloom sweetly in the heavenly paradise. Death is the messenger of heavenly love, sent down by the great Husbandman to his garden below to gather these young fruits of righteousness, and transplant them to purer skies. It is but "another lily gathered" when the youthful Christian dies.

Yet we are to remember that this is not the ordinary procedure of a wise providence. God more usually spares the pious young, as living exemplifications of the truth and grace on which he has caused them to hope. They occupy spheres of responsibility and usefulness which can not be occupied by the ungodly. God had

his eye upon them from the first for this end. He watched over them for this purpose, and trained them up for it, and early introduced them into his kingdom that they might become the guardians and promoters of these high and sacred interests.

The thought is not always present to the minds even of the most attentive observers of the work of God's Spirit, that comparatively few become the disciples of Christ beyond the period of youth. He does not ordinarily wait to convert men until their habits of sinning and processes of thought have become matured by time—until their religious sensibilities are palsied, their heart as hard as a millstone, and the world, the flesh, and the devil have made them captives. It would be a melancholy table of statistics that should exhibit the conversion only of those who were brought to the saving knowledge of Christ after they had become forty years of age. If we would see a richer and brighter record, we must turn to an earlier page of man's history. I was induced, several years ago, to examine the biography of nearly *sixty* Christian men and women, who were greatly distinguished for their piety and usefulness, and I find the following notice at the close of this inspection: "With *four* exceptions, all these became the subjects of divine grace *between ten and five-and-twenty years of age.*" This re-

mark is emphatically true of almost all the *ministers of the Gospel* I have ever known or read of. Is it not also true of *pious mothers*? We do not say that piety is matured at this early age; nor do all the subjects of it, at this early age, express the strongest hopes, nor at this early period do they all become professed Christians. In some instances these early impressions gradually wear away, and are apparently lost amid the follies of childhood and youth. There is, indeed, not a little in their history that has the semblance of backsliding, if not of apostasy; but in God's own time the light comes out full and clear, and, with now and then a brief eclipse, sweeps its bright course to the western sky.

If there is no force in this consideration in favor of early piety, it is because the selfish heart of man is dead to the noblest of motives. It is not the most worthy incentive to godliness when we seek to obtain religion early enough simply to save us from hell. Nor do we mean by this remark to utter a thought that is discouraging to the aged; the eleventh hour forbids despair; but are there not brighter hopes for the young? Is it so that God our Maker asks only for the poor remnant of a life jaded with pleasure, and worn out with sin? Have you no honest desires to *serve God*? or is it only that he may *serve you* that you would fain delay seeking him as long as

you can? Away with this base thought, and “remember *now* thy Creator in the days of thy youth!” Think of the privilege, the honor, the blessedness of serving him. Think more of *him*, and of his goodness and long-suffering mercy. You can never pay the debt of love you owe him, were you to serve him faithfully from your cradle to your grave. You may honor *him* who bore shame *for you*. You may honor him who died that you might not die, but live to him. Glory, honor, immortality, this is the prize of your high calling. Worm and sinner as you are, you can honor him, and in no way so effectively as in loving, reverencing, obeying him in these days of your youth.

Nor may we suppress the thought that *early piety is the happiest piety*.

The lessons which true piety teaches are not learned in a day. Those just and clear perceptions of God's truth, which are so essential to the tranquillity and vigor of Christian hope, demand early and long-continued teaching. It is no marvel that those who enter the school of Christ at a late period of life understand and apply them so imperfectly. If now and then you find a strong and vigorous Christian whose conversion was delayed until late in life, he forms an exception, and not the rule of Christian experience. Rich and varied experience of the divine mercy and good-

ness—of the way in which God leads his people — of the discipline by which they are weaned from the world and fitted for heaven—of the unchanging faithfulness of his promises, and the consolations of his everlasting covenant, in order to be fully enjoyed, must be enjoyed early. They can not be crowded into a short compass. The mind can not at once grasp them. Nor can they be so vividly felt as when they grow with its growth and strengthen with its strength.

Youthful piety alone gives full proof of the declaration, "The ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." It is the only piety which truly credits a declaration which is so generally discredited by the gay and giddy world. Youthful piety not only credits, but prizes and exemplifies it, and at an early age, when, of all others, it is least likely to be so exemplified and prized. When the sons and daughters of pleasure look upon religion as beneath their notice, and treat it with contempt, or stigmatize it as a morose and gloomy thing, the youthful Christian rescues it from this reproach, and makes it his joy. It is his relaxation from toil, his comfort in trial; amid storms it is his tranquillity, his refuge in temptation, and in joy it is his song. He is gloomy and depressed only when he does not enjoy it. There are wayward hours when he forgets God, but he has no peace

until he returns to his first love. There may also be seasons when his pleasures become forbidden pleasures, and are followed by the stings of remorse, and then none is so restive as he; nor can he find rest until, like the wearied dove sent forth by Noah, who found no rest for the sole of her foot, he goes back to the ark.

There is one thought in relation to the blessedness of early piety which may not be duly appreciated. The dispensations of grace are, with few exceptions, in perfect keeping with the laws of the human mind; they do not contradict, but honor the work of God in man's intellectual constitution. When we look at men as they are, we shall find this observable peculiarity in the piety that begins beyond the midday of human life—that it has few of “the pleasures of memory.” Men are formed to look backward as well as to look forward, to remember as well as to anticipate. No small part of their enjoyments arises from the visions of the past. Hence it is that the piety that dates from the later periods of life almost always wears a sombre aspect. All experience and observation teach us that the events and scenes most distinctly remembered by the aged are those of by-gone and far-distant years. The proximate past is forgotten; the events of the past year and the past day are lost sight of in earlier memories. Their thoughts are with

the "days of their youth." But what if these were days of forbidden and sensual joy—it may be of infidel or atheistical worldliness? What if the seed-time of human life was suffered to run to waste, and its summer was uncheered and barren? What if it was not until autumn or winter that the fallow ground was broken up and the seed was planted? Is it any marvel that the neglected and frozen soil yields but a scanty harvest of joy? How can it be otherwise without a violation of all the laws of their intellectual and moral nature? With one who becomes a Christian in old age, memory runs back upon what? the sins of youth, time and opportunity lost, the best of counsels neglected, and the Spirit of God grieved away. Painful thoughts rush upon the mind of such a man. Dark waters flow back upon his soul. The early past does not furnish one refreshing retrospect. Memory rests upon little else than scenes that are more remote, and therefore mournful. And if the Sun of righteousness now and then breaks in upon his frozen heart, it makes a sweep low down in the southern sky. He travels amid arctic snows and overhanging icebergs; his joys are wintry joys, and have none of the freshness of the new-born year.

Just the reverse of this sad picture is the piety that began in early life, and is continued to a

good old age. There is, indeed, enough in the retrospect of those who remembered their Creator in the days of their youth to fill them with self-abasement and humiliation. But there is something else to look back upon. There are solemn Sabbaths and the awakening power of God's truth. There are deep convictions and the begun work of the Holy Spirit. There is the life-giving influence of his unsearchable grace. There is the dawn of light and hope, and the joys of the new-born soul, when she first put on her garments of gladness and salvation. There are "songs in the night;" and there are the frequently recurring and well-remembered scenes of cheered fellowship with God and his youthful people, of concerted effort, and prayer, and praise. And these are precious memories. When, in the more advanced periods of their history, as their heart becomes heavy and cold, and the seared leaves of autumn begin to fall, and the winter of life sets in, memory throws her thoughts backward and is cheered. The immediate past may be dark, but it is almost a chasm; the mind looks over and beyond it, and takes little interest in it compared with those earlier days and more vivid scenes that were made glad by the light of God's countenance. They are balmy breezes, and sweet sounds, and the lingering echo of early songs, that come across these intervening years.

This is one of the rewards of early piety. Not only does it relieve the natural imperfections of age, but comforts its despondency and sorrows, and cheers its loneliness. It is a precious truth that the man who becomes pious in advanced life is safe. His hope is in the Rock, Christ. His "hoary head is a crown of glory," because, though late, "it is found in the way of righteousness." Yet it is not the piety that blossoms, like Aaron's rod, from the hither to the outer verge of the wilderness.

The young are slow to learn that the winter of life is coming on. Age has evils enough of its own, without adding to them the burden and bitterness of youthful wickedness. The very "strength" of the years of an old man is "labor and sorrow." When "the strong men bow themselves," and those "that look out of the windows are darkened," there is need of other lights than the waning light of time. An old man without piety is a miserable man. Oh, it were wisdom to sow in the spring, and gather in summer, and while "the sun, or the moon, or the stars be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain!"

This is the affecting lesson so impressively enforced in the text. "Remember *now* thy Creator in the days of thy youth, *while the evil* days come not, and the years draw nigh in which thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." When

"the almond flourishes, and the grasshopper is a burden;" when "the silver cord is loosed, and the golden bowl is broken, and the pitcher is broken at the fountain, and the wheel is broken at the cistern;" when "the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit to the God who gave it," it will be no grief of heart to you that you remembered your Creator in the days of your youth. You will not regret it when God shall bring you into judgment. Not a son, not a daughter of Adam will on that day be heard to say, I wish I had taken my swing in the world a little longer. I was pious too early. God loved me too soon!

If I know any thing of my own heart, I have prepared this discourse from an earnest desire to influence the beloved youth of my pastoral charge. I have reached the outer verge of life's wilderness, and if there is any one blessing I have more reason to be thankful for than another, it is that. I was led by God's infinite and sovereign mercy to give my heart to him in the days of my youth. With the strong impulsiveness of my nature, it seems to me that I should have been among the most daring of the presumptuous, and long ago in the bottomless pit, had not his matchless grace snatched me as a brand out of the fire while I was young. I am anxious for you, my beloved young friends, and "jealous over you with a godly jealousy." I wish to see you a chosen genera-

tion, protected from the contagion of the world you are just entering, and early acknowledging your father's God to be your God. Oh, be not ye followers of the multitude to do evil. It is not the world that is to guide you; it is God's will and law. Search his Word; frequent his sanctuary; and wherever else, and in whatever else you may be wanting, see to it that you have "a name and a nail in his holy place." Never forsake the house of God. Most sacred are the duties which the pulpit owes to the young. It is the pledge of better things when you heed its counsels. Do not carry to your dying bed the painful thought that you have been the despiser of the Sabbath. It is the presage of ruin. Would you remember *him*, ask him to remember *you*. "Acknowledge God in all thy ways, and he shall direct thy paths." Be reconciled to him through faith in his Son, and delay not that reconciliation to a more convenient season. Your time may be another day; his time is *now*. *Your* time may be when your heart is hardened, and his Spirit grieved away. It may be the time he has appointed for you to contend with the king of terrors—to die without God and without hope. I look around upon this assembly, and do not see a young person present that was not born to die. The next Sabbath may not dawn upon you. Oh, how many of the young who have attended upon

these ministrations now slumber with the dead. You know not what it is to die. None of us know. The scene will be new, the reality new, and, when you meet them, you will feel as you never felt before. What a scene would this house present were a single youth it contains now in the agonies of death! What a sermon would the grim messenger preach should he look in at your window this night, and steal behind the curtain where you slumber! Oh, thoughtless and profane youth! the world does not record greater folly than thine. I may not say that the voice has not already gone forth, "*Thou fool! this night thy soul shall be required of thee!*" Before the night of death shall shut in, therefore, when this bloom and vigor will decay—when these eyes shall be suffused with tears—before that evil day come, and while yet the morning of life is bright upon you, *remember your Creator*. Delay not, for the hours are short and few. Raise an earnest look to heaven, and remember your Creator in the days of your youth!

SERMON XVII.

A PLAIN QUESTION.

JOHN, ix., 25.—“*Dost thou believe on the Son of God?*”

THIS is a grave question, and one which it were well for every man to think of. It is a beautiful exhibition of the Savior's character that, under the circumstances here narrated, he proposed it. It was to the young “man who was born blind,” and who had been restored to sight by Christ himself. The Pharisees saw the miracle, but, instead of being convinced by it, were only the more incensed. Not satisfied with their indignation against the divine Healer, “they reviled and cast out” the young man. But, though cast out by men, he was sought and found by Christ. “Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, *DOST THOU BELIEVE ON THE SON OF GOD?*”

This is the question. We ask your attention to several distinct observations both in illustrating and enforcing it.

I. In the first place, *it is an intelligible question.*

It was originally put to a plain man, and one

whom the Pharisees derided for his ignorance. He *was* ignorant, but he could appreciate the instructions of heavenly wisdom. When the Savior told him who he was, he understood him, and replied, "Lord, I believe ; and he worshiped him."

In looking at the import of this question, not a little depends upon the state of mind with which it is considered. "The Son of Man came to seek and save that which was *lost*." It is a "faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save *sinners*." To believe in him is to have just conceptions of his character, and to place confidence in him for the purposes for which he came into the world. We never have just views of these purposes without some just impression of our own character as *sinners*, nor without a full and honest conviction of the truth that, as transgressors of God's holy law, we are justly condemned. Send the conviction through the soul of the most ignorant and most thoughtless person in this assembly that he is *such a sinner* as to deserve to be forever exiled from the divine presence and denied the divine favor, and with the Bible in his hands, and under the faithful ministrations of the Gospel, he will not be long in finding out *what it is to believe on the Son of God*. Spread out before him the record which God has given of his Son ; tell him of the heart of Jesus, of the work

of Jesus, of the atoning sacrifice and justifying righteousness of Jesus, of the power of Jesus, and the grace of Jesus; and if he feels his need of him, and that there is no way of escape from the wrath to come without him, he will be "shut up to the faith," and be very apt to understand what it is to believe in him. This sense of sin, and these apprehensions of the coming wrath, lie at the foundation of all true faith in the Son of God. The man who feels his need of a Savior, and has learned that Christ Jesus is the Savior he himself needs, and the Savior every way adapted to his sinful character and guilty condition, understands what the Bible means when it urges him to receive Christ Jesus the Lord, and rest upon him alone for salvation; to appropriate him to the wants of his own soul; to venture all his hopes upon him; to commit to him every part of his salvation; to cleave to him, and rest upon him for time and eternity.

To see thus, and feel thus, and act thus, is to believe on the Son of God. To a man who feels an interest in understanding this question, therefore, and who wishes to understand it, it is an intelligible question. Just as Noah *believed God*, and entered into the ark—just as Abraham *believed God*, and went forth at his bidding—just as the Israelites *believed God*, and sprinkled the blood of the paschal lamb on their door-posts,

so does the sinner *believe God* when he receives the testimony of him who can not lie that "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth from all sin." He takes him at his word; and when he does so, there is no dark suspicion, no cold doubt upon his mind. It is a soothing and delightful truth to his own soul. He is satisfied. It is more than a willing—it is a joyful, hearty confidence, which moves the soul to its deep foundations, and opens all the springs of its repentant and grateful love. It is the confidence of a guilty sinner, who has nothing else to wash his sins from his bloodstained conscience and bring peace to his troubled heart. He just credits God's word, and stakes his eternity upon the redemption of his Son.

Such is the import of this question. The language is, Do you know him whom the only living and true God hath sent, and whom to know is life eternal? Do you renounce all other refuges, and flee to him as the strong-hold? Do you confide in him for your own soul, because you are satisfied that, when all else is vanity and a lie, and when flesh and heart fail, he "is able to keep that you have committed to him?" If so, you are not unbelievers. You stand on the Rock, and that Rock is Christ. Every saint on earth worships him thus; every redeemed spirit in heaven thus confides, and is thus bound to his throne.

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II. Our second remark is, that *this question is one of vital importance.*

"What think ye of Christ?" is the great question which the God of heaven has sent forth upon this guilty world. From the first promise of a Savior to the sinning progenitors of our race in the Garden of Eden, down to the last of the Jewish prophets who spoke of the consolation of Israel, as well as from the last prophecy to the ancient Church down to the wondrous disclosures of the Apocalypse, there was a progressive revelation of Christ as the Savior. His person and work are the most momentous realities ever made known to angels or men. The great mystery of godliness, "God manifest in the flesh," is that alone which makes a plenary illustration of the great principles of the divine government. It fully explains the great truth, that, even on a throne of mercy, God can and does maintain the integrity of his law; and that the all-sufficiency and tenderness of his grace, instead of relaxing its precept or neutralizing its penalty, serve to assert and maintain them, and enforce the indispensable necessity of personal holiness.

This great truth, therefore, while it lies at the foundation of the believer's hope and confidence, shows the importance of a living faith in the living Redeemer. When the Savior was on the earth, some of his hearers put the question to

him, "What shall we do, that we might work *the works of God*?" the work God requires and approves. His answer was, "*This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.*" This is the great duty urged in the sacred Scriptures, by the authority of the everlasting God, and the boundless love of the eternal Son. Faith in Christ, therefore, holds a very conspicuous place in the Christian character. The Christian's warfare is "the fight of faith;" his shield of defense is "the shield of faith;" his effectual prayer is "the prayer of faith;" and it is this faith which gives him the victory over the world. By faith he stands; he walks by faith; he lives by faith in the Son of God. Faith is a grace which springs up and grows only in a regenerated heart, dwelling there with all the graces of the Spirit, itself the expression of them, and with them forming the great principle of holy obedience.

The Scriptures and all observation and experience show that there is no such development of the human character as that made by the truths of the Gospel. The child Jesus was "set for the fall and rising again of many, that the *thoughts of many hearts* might be revealed." His Gospel is every way fitted to make a thorough experiment upon the human heart. Wherever it is preached, the character of men is infallibly determined by their reception or their rejection of

its claims. There are but two classes of men in the world, the righteous and the wicked, and the line of distinction is drawn by their belief or their disbelief in the Son of God. Just so many individuals in this assembly as believe in him are good men, converted men, and friends of God; just so many as do not believe in him are God's enemies, and dead in trespasses and sins. As faith in him comprises the elements of Christian character, so unbelief is the germ of all wickedness. Faith loves him, confides in him, honors him, and in honoring him honors his Father; unbelief makes light of him, despises and rejects him, would fain prove that he died in vain, would rob him of his reward, and make God a liar. There is no exception to this great law of the divine kingdom, that men are good or bad as they receive or reject the Son of God.

And because their views of Christ and their temper of heart toward him decide their character, they decide their *relations to God and eternity*. As they receive or reject him, they are pardoned sinners or unpardoned; justified or condemned; reconciled to God or in a state of revolt; adopted into the divine family or outcasts; entitled to all the promises, or heirs to all the curses written in God's Book. There the sentence stands, never to be blotted out or altered, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting

life; and he that believeth not on the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."

Thus important is this question. Eternal mercy and eternal justice shall reveal the momentous issues that hang upon it when they reveal his coming who shall judge the living and the dead. The trump of God shall proclaim them, and they shall be announced by the final Arbiter. This "law of faith" shall sound its demands on every conscience when the final and irreversible sentence shall separate the descendants of Adam from one another, as they have believed or not believed on the Son of God.

III. Our third remark is, that it is *a direct and personal question*.

Nobody ever considered and answered it without its being distinctly brought before his mind. It was kind in the Savior to propose it to the young man who was born blind. He had spoken well for Christ, and raised his solitary voice in his favor when "he was despised and rejected of men." He was moreover suffering for him at the time, and not only subjected to disgusting arrogance and bitter animosity on his account, he was oppressed by the strong arm of power. It was in perfect keeping with the Savior's character as the sinner's friend to put this question to him personally, and the event shows that it was not unseasonable.

Dost *thou* believe on the Son of God? The question is addressed to *me*—to *you*—to *every one* of you. Religion is a personal thing. "If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for *thyself*; and if thou scornest, *thou alone* shall bear it." The character of men is formed, as we have already seen, by their treatment of Christ, and character is always personal. A man's religion is his own; his wickedness is his own; the consequences of both are his own; the eternal gain or the eternal loss are his own. If he is wise, he is wise for his soul; and the soul is the man. If he is a scorner, he must thank himself for it; the blame and the suffering lie at his own door; he is the author of his own wickedness and of his own destruction. He may do great good or great harm to others, but the most harm or good will accrue to himself. Such is the language of the Bible from beginning to end, and such are the teachings of the divine government from the law of Paradise to the sentence of the last judgment. The precept and the penalty of the law are personal, and addressed to *every man in particular*. So it is with the Gospel. In offering Christ to a lost and perishing world, God makes the offer to men as individual sinners; to every man personally; to "him that heareth;" to "whosoever will;" to "every creature." No unworthiness, no multitude, and no enormity of his transgressions

excludes him from the proffered salvation. God has made it the duty of every one who hears the Gospel to accept it that he may be saved; he has made it his personal condemnation if he rejects it. "*He* that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned." When, as a lost sinner, any one falls in with this method of salvation, he believes *for his own soul*, and receives this salvation as his own; it becomes his in personal possession.

So every man finds it by his own experience. When he awakes from the senseless torpor of indifference to attend to the things that belong to his peace, it is himself individually—his own mind, his own thoughts, his own emotions that are roused and moved toward the great realities of eternity. When the Holy Ghost convinces him of sin, they are his own sins which lie as a heavy burden upon his heart. "*Thou art the man*," says the offended Deity. *I AM the man*, replies his awakened conscience; mine iniquities are gone over my head; they are a burden too heavy for me. And when he finds peace and safety in the blood of the cross, his faith is his own, the promises are his own, the blessings of the New Covenant are his own, nor can they be separated from himself.

It may not be regarded as an unimportant truth, therefore, that the question in the text is a

direct and personal question. It is not enough that a man believes in the abstract that the Christian religion is true—the devils believe this. It is not enough that he believes in general that Christ died for sinners, and that he is able to save all that come unto God by him. The question is, Has he any complacency or interest in the salvation which this general truth reveals. Does he fall in with it, or does he fall out with it? “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?”

We respectfully ask you, beloved hearers, to look at this question. It will do you no harm to consider it. Nor ought you to complain when we urge it home upon your own business and bosoms. When the Savior preached, he brought the truth into such direct contact with their thoughts, their conscience, their passions, their character, that the impression upon the minds of those that heard him was that he *meant them*. We may preach to men in general; we may preach abstractly, biographically, historically, scientifically. Our discourses may be chiefly scholastic exercises, prepared with pains, but fitted rather to amuse than impress. We expect to do little good by presenting this question, unless it is well-timed, and so appropriate that the hearers make an application of it *to themselves*. It is when we make a difference between the precious and the vile by classifying our hearers, by calling men

and things by their right names, and by so "rightly dividing the word of truth," that we in some sort *individualize* those who listen to us, so that their own consciences bear witness that they are the persons to whom God's truth is specially directed. There are those who hear for others rather than themselves, and I know too well how little profit such hearers derive from a preached Gospel. With few exceptions, no man has any concern with preaching any farther than it respects *him*. The most effective preachers are those who constrain their hearers to go quietly from the house of God with the unuttered thought, God's ambassador has been preaching *to me*. We say to you, therefore, the question in our text is intended *for you—for each of you*—old and young, saint and sinner. The eye of God is upon you; his heart is upon you; you are the very persons to whom he is now saying, Dost *thou* believe on the Son of God? Under his omniscient eye we ask you again, Dost *thou* believe on the Son of God? Do not dream over such a question as this. Do not be embarrassed by doctrines you do not understand, nor by difficulties you may not be able to remove. Decrees and election, human dependence and helplessness, and human responsibility, revealed truths as they are, have nothing to do with a fair and honest view of this great question. Give them their proper place;

but away with them here, where He who walketh in the midst of the golden candlesticks proposes to you such a question as this. Above all, away with earth; away with thoughtlessness; away with procrastination; away with the Tempter's snares; away with all excuses, and give admission to this single thought. There is no living man to whom this question is of deeper interest than to every one of you. Worlds should not tempt you to rest an hour until this question is answered. You may repel it now, but the day is coming when it will force itself upon your thoughts. Oh, it is one of the mysteries which human blindness and wickedness alone can solve, how a man who is born for immortality, and is so soon to enter upon his immortality of joy or woe, can "scatter so many thousand thoughts upon the world," without once and in earnest bringing home the question, Do I believe on the Son of God? And to aid you in answering this question, I remark,

IV. In the fourth place, that *it is a question which it is not difficult to answer.*

It is a very easy thing not to believe on the Son of God; all the tendencies of the natural heart are here on the wrong side of the question. And it is no impossible thing to believe on him. Millions have believed on him. The question is not a difficult one to answer. Millions have an-

swered it, and thousands will answer it to-day, and not one of them have greater advantages for answering it than you yourselves. You have the Word of God in your hands, every where instructing you in the difference between receiving Christ and rejecting him. You have the actings of a living faith distinctly portrayed in the experience and the conduct of the Church of God from the beginning to the present hour. You have a throne of grace to go to, where, if any man lack wisdom, he may ask of God, who giveth liberally and without upbraiding. If you deal honestly with God, he will not leave you in doubt and darkness. If you deal honestly with your own souls, your own hearts, deceitful as they are, will not mislead you. The Savior himself declares, "He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad." You must be *for* Christ, and *for* the great redemption he came to accomplish for our lost world, or you must be *against* them. Neutrality here is impossible. When Christ and his salvation are brought distinctly before your minds, you can not be indifferent toward them. You may imagine that you are neither believers nor unbelievers; but the mere fact that you are not believers proves that you are unbelievers. You may flatter yourselves that you are no enemy to the Gospel, and only desire to let it alone; but

when you come to understand that the Gospel will *not let you alone*, you will find the seeds of hostility to it in your own bosoms. You have no right to deceive yourselves in this matter, and to look either on the dark side or on the bright side without good and scriptural reasons. You have no right to pry into the secret counsels of God in order to decide this question. You have only to look into your own hearts and lives, and see whether you yourselves possess an affectionate, lasting, obedient confidence in Christ as the Son of God and the sinner's friend. If you doubt whether he will receive and accept *you*, you have only to examine your own heart and see whether you have received *him*. St. Paul says to the Corinthians, "Know ye not your own selves how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" Are you reprobates, beloved hearers, or have you received Christ Jesus the Lord? Faith in the Son of God is a very different thing from rejecting him. It certainly is not impossible for you to decide whether or not you love to lie at the feet of Jesus, and, as a lost sinner, look up to him, and rest on him, and on him alone, as your only hope. It certainly is not impossible for you to decide whether or not you have any love to him, any love to his truth, any love to his authority, any love to his people, any interest in his cause, and in the blessed kingdom he came to establish,

and for which he poured out his blood. These things decide the question whether or not you believe on him. The difficulty lies in the inconstancy and weakness of these gracious affections. Were they perfect, the difficulty would cease. The most sanctified possess the most self-knowledge, and can most easily decide this question. Yet the least sanctified, the veriest babe in Christ, possesses *some* gracious affections; and, full of labyrinths as his unenlightened mind may be, he may trace the faint and miniature lineaments of the Savior's image within his own soul. It is not all darkness; there are rays of heavenly light there which are destined to shine more and more unto the perfect day. There is the still, small voice of affectionate and humble confidence whispering within, "None but Christ; none but Christ." Faith is its own evidence; and the stronger the faith the stronger the evidence. Let a man cast himself as a lost sinner upon the Savior's bosom, and rest upon "that pillar of hope," and his anxiety on this great question will be relieved. He will become "an habitation of God through the Spirit." He will go on his way with "a good hope through grace," and rejoice as he goes. And these thoughts render it reasonable for me to say,

V. In the fifth place, that *even in such an assembly as this there is reason to believe that very different answers are given to this question.*

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“Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” This single question divides the multitude that are now in this house of God, and, it may be, will divide them when, after a few circling years, they meet in a greater and more solemn assembly than this. Consider the infinite interests at stake, and then, in the spirit of sincerity and candor, tell me, is there no reason to fear that there are some among you who *do not believe the testimony that God has given concerning his Son?* Is it not so? Are there not some in this sanctuary who esteem and love, and confide in other things more than Christ? Look, then, at this mournful fact. Though born in a Christian land, where Bibles and Sabbaths, sanctuaries and ordinances, and all the rich variety of God’s truth have been scattered broadcast over your path; though nurtured in the cradle of piety, and amid the sweet voices of prayer and praise; though cared for by the Father of mercies, and a thousand times urged to take refuge in the hope set before you; though you have witnessed the deeds of a wonder-working providence, and the greater deeds of wonder-working grace; though the Spirit of God has been shining within you, and held your minds agitated and your eyes waking in view of the coming eternity; though yourselves have more than once resolved that you would set about it in earnest and become Christians; and though noth-

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ing now separates you from the world of everlasting retribution but the breath of your nostrils, yet have you, to the present hour, resisted the light of God's truth, repelled the motives urging you to break off your iniquity by righteousness and your transgressions by turning to God, dishonored and contemned the God of love, rejected his mercy, grieved his Spirit, abused his forbearance, and, from the mere love of sin and the world, outlived your own convictions, and still remain unbelievers in the Son of God. "Be astonished, oh ye heavens, at this, and thou, earth, be horribly afraid!" The book of God's remembrance registers against you no greater crime than this. All other sins he will freely forgive; but for this sin, so comprehensive and complicated, and in the face of such a blaze of light—for this sin, *persevered in*, there is no atonement, no forgiveness either in this world or that which is to come. No matter what you are in your own view or in the view of your fellow-men, you have broken God's holy law, and not a single sin of all your lives is pardoned. "Ye will not come unto Christ that ye might have life;" and, as God is true, the life you reject, and *persevere* in rejecting, you shall never enjoy. The question is settled—if you will not believe on the Son of God—as truly and irrevocably settled as if you were *now* in the world of mourn-

ing. There is no hope out of Christ, no salvation away from the cross of God's bleeding Son. Again, therefore, we ask, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" When shall it once be? Oh, how long ere you will believe his testimony who can not lie, and go and lie down with a broken heart at the foot of his cross?

There are those also in this assembly who *do believe* on the Son of God. It is recorded of the blind man in Jerusalem that, on the first revelation of Jesus to him as the predicted Messiah, "he said, Lord, I believe; and he worshiped him." The ground on which all true believers rest their confidence is one and the same—it is simply *the testimony of God*. He has distinctly revealed the method of his grace, and they take him at his word. **THEY BELIEVE GOD.** They repose on this everlasting Rock. If proud reason demurs at this procedure; if they can not see how the sufferings of *another* can deliver *them* from deserved wrath, and the righteousness of another render them just in the eye of the divine law, they can *believe God*. They have his word and oath for it, and they are satisfied. They come to this result, not by a process of reasoning, but by faith. Speculation is of no account here; to believe God is every thing. To those of you who thus believe, we may say as the Savior said to Peter, "Blessed art thou, Simon-Barjonas, for

flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." How sweet this pledge of eternal life, and how strong this assurance! Come what will of duty and labor—of trial and suffering—of conflict and darkness—of earthly prospects obscured and earthly hopes defeated—of debility and languishing—of grim death and the lonely grave, God's covenant and the word of his oath for it, the believer is safe. "The mouth of Jehovah hath spoken it.

"His very word of grace is strong
As that which built the skies;
The voice that rolls the stars along
Speaks all the promises."

The believer is safe because God is true.

VI. There is a sixth and final remark suggested by this question, and that is *its special appropriateness to awakened and anxious minds.*

Suppose the Savior were personally present, and should put the question to *you* as he did to the man born blind, what would be your answer? What if his Spirit, the heavenly Comforter, should now be in the midst of this assembly, knocking at these thousand hearts, and whispering to every ear, and, in accents of love and winning tenderness, repeating the words, "Dost *thou* believe on the Son of God?" would you respond, with the ingenuousness and solicitude of the blind young man, "Who is he, Lord, that I might

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believe on him?" *Would you?* Then listen, while one sufficiently unworthy attempts to answer this inquiry. This my office requires of me as his ambassador to guilty men. This my recorded vows require of me. And this my own heart requires of me. I love to speak of the Son of God; "my heart is inditing a good matter; I speak of the things touching **THE KING.**"

Who is he? Ask the ages that are past who he is. Penetrate the immeasurable and untrodden recesses of eternity, and the response will reach you from the excellent glory, "I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, and no fountains of water; before the mountains were settled, while as yet he had not made the earth, and the highest part of the dust of the world, was I brought forth. When he prepared the heavens, I was there; when he set a compass upon the face of the deep; when he gave to the sea the decree that the waters should not pass his commandment; when he appointed the foundations of the earth, then I was by him as one brought up with him, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; rejoicing in the habitable parts of his earth, and my delights were with the sons of men." This is he; God's self-existent and eternal Son, now glorified with the Father with the glory he had with him before the world began.

WHO IS HE? Strange question from the lips of his own creature! Is it so still that "he is in the world, and the world was *made* by him, and the world *knows him not*?" Ask the outspread firmament, and the spacious earth, and the unfathomed ocean who he is, and, from the splendor of the sunbeam to the fading twilight—from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop on the wall—from the proud leviathan to the animalculæ of the coral rock, they answer, "All things were made by him and for him." Never was the *Creator* revealed as in the Person of the "Word made flesh."

WHO IS HE? Go to the volume of his providence, and there read his wondrous name. Look: he guides Arcturus with his sons, and numbers the hairs of our head. He prepareth rain for the earth; he giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry. In his hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind. We may not be able to penetrate and comprehend his deep designs; but from the clouds and darkness that are round about his throne we hear a voice, "This is my *beloved Son*, in whom I am well pleased."

WHO IS HE? Open the heaven-inspired revelations of his truth and grace, and there learn that "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God;"

that he is "Emmanuel, God with us;" and that "in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." There learn that he is the Seed of the woman, and was to bruise the head of the serpent; that the bleeding flocks of Palestine, which for two thousand years came to the altar, did but prefigure the Great Sacrifice that was to swallow up all other sacrifices; and that, though the heaven of heavens could not contain him, yet he clothed himself in human form, and, though the Wonderful, the Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, he was cradled in a manger, that the song might be proclaimed, "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and good-will to men." Thence you may mark his progress, and, as this Son of God meekly treads this wicked earth, see him on the mountain-top, by the lakes and in the Temple, in the marriage circle and in the house of mourning, amid the busy multitude and in the chambers of pestilence and death, speaking as never man spake, rebuking the reviler, weeping over the reprobate, and to every troubled heart and burdened conscience saying, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." Then track his wondrous way as he sets his face to go to Jerusalem, to finish the work which was given him to do, and learn who he is that was mocked by Herod, adjured by Pilate, and spit upon by Jews because he was in the form of a servant.

WHO IS HE? Ay, who is he? Let Calvary

answer, from within the veil of the Temple, rent from the top to the bottom—from the darkness that quenched the sun because it would not witness its Maker's agonies—and even from pagan lips, as all, with one voice, exclaim, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

Need I repeat the question? If so, accompany me to his empty sepulchre; then to the places of prayer in Jerusalem; then to Mount Tabor, and learn the lesson of his finished and effective propitiation, and how the mighty Sufferer triumphed, and still lives and reigns. Then mingle with the thousands on the day of Pentecost as he fulfills his engagement, and sends upon them "the promise of his Father." Then go and imbue your minds with those thoughts and emotions which glowed on the lips of holy men of old, when they spake *of Him* who is "a covert from the storm and a shadow from the heat"—who is "able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him," and compared with whom, "what things were gain to them they counted loss for Christ"—*of Him* whose "grace is sufficient for them, and whose strength is made perfect in their weakness"—*of Him* whom "they looked for from heaven, and shall change their vile bodies, and make it like unto his glorious body"—*of Him* who will "come in the glory of his Father and of all the holy angels" to judge the living and the dead—*of Him* to whom is the

ascription, "Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power be unto Him who is seated on the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever;" and who, when "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat," shall be "glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe."

THIS IS HE of whom we speak when we say, "Dost thou believe *on the Son of God*? What is your reply? Oh, ye awakened, ye inquiring, ye anxious! affectionately, solemnly we ask, What is your reply? God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, coming, now in the secrecy of your solitude and now in the assembly of his people, now on the wings of the morning and now on the night air, demand your answer. Tell us, oh tell us! Do not halt any longer between two opinions. Tell us, and let attending angels bear witness whether or not you welcome the Son of God as your Deliverer from everlasting burnings, infuriate wickedness, and absolute despair. Here, at the altar of burnt-offering, and so near his cross—here, so near "the place where the Lord lay," and on the day which has, for eighteen centuries, stood forth as the witness of his resurrection—here, where he has so often made the appeal to the print of the nails and the scar of the soldier's spear, will you not, "no more faithless, but believing," exclaim with Thomas, "MY LORD AND MY GOD!"

SERMON XVII.

THE GLORY OF THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT.

PSALM cxlv., 11, 12.—*“They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power, to make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom.”*

CREATURES are not the source of our blessings or our hopes. Nor are they the refuge from our sorrows or our fears. Dominion is with the Most High. The more we “acquaint ourselves with him,” the more thorough will be our convictions of his excellence, the more solid our own peace of mind, and the more grateful our praise. We propose, therefore, in the present discourse, to “speak of the glory of his kingdom, and talk of his power, to make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom.”

I. The first feature of the divine empire which interests us is *the eternal forethought by which it is so definitely arranged.*

Men often govern carelessly and without design; God never. Men govern at random, and draw their bow at a venture; God appoints, and

governs "after the counsel of his own will." His government is uniformly administered *in accordance with his eternal purpose or determination*. The divine mind does not act like the minds of creatures. There are no processes of thought, no successive investigations by which it comes to its conclusions gradually. His infinite and eternal intellect perceives every thing by absolute intuition, and at once. What he knows now he always knew, and what he now purposes he always purposed. The entire arrangements of his government, without division and without confusion, lay perfected within his own mind from eternity. The results of it were known to him beforehand, and these results formed the reason why he governs as he does. As a wise master-builder, he laid the foundation before he began to build. The procedures of his providence ever have been, are now, and ever will be, parts of a perfected plan. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." "The counsel of the Lord standeth forever; the thoughts of his heart to all generations." It is this which gives a fixed and permanent character to the divine government. The countless occurrences which so often disturb the minds of men were all thought of in season and provided for. They excite no surprise; they produce no disappointment in the divine mind, no instability in his administration.

Human governments change. One revolution pushes on another, and the whole circle of the nations is held in agitation. There is no indissoluble tie that binds them, no sacred bond that is the sure warrant of their confidence. They are changeable in their nature because they are human, and because they partake of the weakness, the restlessness, the selfishness, the pride, the fickleness of man's fallen nature. It is an ebb and flow of inconstancy; like the heart of man, a troubled sea that can not rest. Precious is the confidence that looks away, and above all this, to the calm, and tranquil, and settled purposes of the eternal mind! There is no doubtful project, no unsettled plan there. There is something to rest upon, and it is a repose the agitated mind sighs after. It is enough for creatures to know that "God is a Rock, and his work is perfect." Every thing here is firm and solid. No law is changed, no maxim or principle altered; there is no oscillating truth, no work unfinished, no end lost sight of. Thus his vast empire ever has been, and thus it shall continue; assaulted in vain, and in vain complained of. Tempests in vain beat upon it; it is calm and unmoved as a sea of glass, because "the Lord of Hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; as I have purposed, so shall it stand."

II. In the second place, the government of God *extends to every thing*. God is infinite as well as eternal. There is no distance so remote, and no space so extended, but he fills it. His government, like himself, is directly or indirectly concerned with the past, the present, and the future.

If we look to the kingdom of nature, the heavens above us, and the deep below us, the thick darkness and the clear sunlight alike discover his universal dominion. "He causes the dayspring from on high to know his place, and to take hold on the uttermost parts of the earth." "He maketh lightning with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures. He giveth snow like wool, and scattereth his hoar-frost like ashes. He ruleth the raging of the sea; when the waves thereof arise, he stilleth them." Then, if we look at the animal creation, it is full of God. "Ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this?" Man is God's noblest work, and "man's goings are of the Lord." "The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life." "Thou hidest thy face, and they are troubled; thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to the dust." If, from isolated man, we look to com-

munities of men; we learn that "the Lord is governor among the nations;" that "he increaseth the nations, and destroyeth them; that he enlargeth the nations, and straiteneth them again; that by him kings reign, and princes decree justice; and that the heart of the king is in the hands of the Lord." Do we dwell on the prosperous condition of men: "Every good gift and every perfect gift cometh down from the Father of lights. Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it; except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." Or, if we advert to their conditions of adversity: "Affliction cometh not from the dust, nor doth trouble spring out of the ground. Shall there be evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?"

There is no truth the Scriptures more abundantly assert than this: "Not a sparrow falls to the ground" without his notice; "the very hairs of our head are numbered; and even the lot-cast into the lap has its whole disposal from him." Every thing would be thrown into chaos but for God. His government would be a failure; the gentlest zephyr might blast it. There would be no security against its perfect defeat if his dominion did not reach all laws, all secondary causes, all motives and influences, *all things*. All this is beyond the power of creatures. Not

combination of creatures, no forms of human government, can reach every subject, every occurrence, every *thing*. Their sphere is limited, and within that sphere a multitude of things are never governed at all. It is not so with the government of the Most High. "All things are naked, and open to the eye of him with whom we have to do." Nothing that he sees, nothing that he has created, is above or beneath his control. Every event that takes place throughout the earth on which we dwell—every change that time and nature are making in the physical, intellectual, and moral world—every battle, every victory, every defeat, is seen by him, is watched by him, is controlled by him. His all-comprehensive government stands abreast with his all-comprehensive purposes. It is in every view an effective government, inexhaustible in its resources and in the means it has in store for the attainment of its ends. They are alike the treasures of prudence and of power that enrich his universal dominion. Amid all our propensity to stop at second causes, and amid all the noise and hurry of this busy world, let us learn to listen to a voice above these many waters, and eye the hand that worketh, as well as the presence that counsels. Men are insensibly led to destruction by their forgetfulness of God. To see him in every thing—to acknowledge him in every thing—to enjoy

him in every thing, is the joy of the unfaUen; and it will be our joy as our characters and our religion approximate theirs.

III. In the third place, the government of God is, in every view, *perfectly righteous*.

It recognizes, from beginning to end, always and every where, the immutable and indestructible difference between right and wrong. This is the basis of all it requires and forbids, and of all its procedures in the present world and its everlasting retributions in the world to come. It recognizes no doctrine of expediency in opposition to law; *utility* is not the basis of it, but *rectitude*. This discernment of the divine Mind between the good and the bad is as much more extended and intuitive than that of creatures, as his knowledge and rectitude are superior to theirs. The perfect rectitude of his government consists in his always acting up to this high and unerring standard. Be the consequences what they may, it never varies from this rectilinear course. The "righteous Lord loveth righteousness." There is nothing he values so highly as moral rectitude, and nothing he hates so intensely as wickedness. Throughout all the instructions of his Word, he carefully distinguishes between the righteous and the wicked. Whatever be the inequality in his distribution of rewards and punishments in the present world, time and eternity will eventually

show that he is the friend of the righteous and the enemy of the wicked. The day is coming, even in the present world, when "the kingdom, and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High." And when this world shall have passed away, and the universe shall be assembled at his bar, the irrevocable sentence and the impassable gulf shall bear everlasting testimony to his unstained rectitude. There is no injustice in his government now, and there will be none hereafter. The retributions of eternity will run parallel with the essential difference between holiness and sin, and will be just as enduring as the immutable rectitude of the divine character. They will be suited to the character of the righteous and the wicked, and will show forth the perfect equity of his government. We are sure of this, because we know that God is God. We ask no other guaranty than his perfect character. "Doth God pervert judgment, or doth the Almighty pervert justice?" "Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; *just and true* are thy ways, thou King of saints." Every enlightened conscience must respond to such ascriptions as these. There is not a being in the universe, no, not in hell itself, who can utter a sentence of complaint against the rectitude of the divine conduct, and

who will not at last have the rational conviction of the divine righteousness. Clouds and darkness may be round about him, but justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne. In the view of higher intelligences than our own, his providence speaks the same language with his word, and imparts that overawing sense of his greatness and rectitude which makes even the holiest veil their faces before him, and exclaim, "True and righteous are thy judgments, Lord God Almighty!"

And let not the truth be forgotten that, even where he forgives the sins of men, this gracious procedure itself is based upon the principles of immutable rectitude and virtue. He does not forgive arbitrarily; nor from a false and effeminate tenderness; nor indiscriminately; nor without an accepted *satisfaction* to his punitive justice. It is a glorious truth that in this apostate world grace reigns. This is the theatre of its conflicts and triumphs. But it "reigns through *righteousness*." Moral rectitude is the highest created good; nor may the truth ever be lost sight of that the great principle and impulse of the divine government is that there is no unrighteousness with God; and we may well repose in it our joyful confidence.

IV. In the fourth place, the divine government comprises *all the rights of supreme and uncontrol-*

table sovereignty. God governs for the universe, and he governs for eternity. In conducting the affairs of an empire so comprehensive, so complicated and enduring, there must be *prerogative*—a special pre-eminence in right of his throne. The Scriptures speak of this prerogative, not so much as one of the attributes of the Deity as the royal splendor of all his attributes. “Whatsoever *the Lord pleased*, that did he in heaven, and on the earth, and in all deep places.” This is divine sovereignty. It has no feudal basis; it rests on no favored aristocracy; there is no democracy in it. It is vested in *a single head*, and exercised by God alone. It is his original, uncreated, inalienable prerogative to “do what he will.” And he does it. He does it in the universe of nature, and he does it in the universe of mind. All depend on him; he is dependent on none. All are responsible to him; he is responsible to none. It is no arbitrary supremacy that he exercises; there is no capriciousness about it. Its primary determinations and its consequent acts are the result of the essential and all-comprehending perfection of his nature. It is his one supreme intelligence and will that controls all. And it is a delightful thought that the whole procedure of his providence, in all its vast and complex dispensations, is “of him, and through him, and to him.” His unseen hand

controls the nicely-adjusted machinery of human affairs, and they are safe only with him.

There is but one thing that lies out of the sphere of this divine prerogative—but one thing which God, as a sovereign, can not do. He can not, because he may not, *do that which is wrong*. His equity and his sovereignty are always harmonious. They occupy different departments of his government, but they never come in collision. Sovereignty never interferes with equity; what *ought* to be upon the principles of rectitude and equity belongs not to the province of sovereignty to decide or to alter. But who does not see that, beyond the province of equity, there is a wide margin for the exercise of *discretionary* power; a range of conduct on God's part which, without countervailing the perfect rectitude of his government, can not be defined by creatures, and of which they can only say, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight!" The reasons for it are known only to God himself. What, within this vast range of his sovereign discretion, he sees wisest and best to be done, that he does, without giving an account of any of his matters. They are "secret things" which belong to the Lord our God. No man may pry into them.

"Not Gabriel asks the reason why,
Nor God the reason gives."

"He doeth according to *his will* in the armies
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of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? None may dispute this prerogative, none share, none restrict, none complain of it. No time, no place limits it. We see it in his works of creation, providence, and grace, dispensing his favors as he will, and making one to differ from another by "giving to one five talents, to another two, and to another one;" having mercy "on whom he will have mercy."

These are sovereign rights, and not judicial; and in no hands can they be so safely intrusted as his. God is his own reason and his own law. We might be suspicious of a sovereign like this if we did not know so much of God; but, knowing him as we do, we ought to be satisfied that he should direct the affairs of this unworthy and ill-deserving world in his own way, thankful that he does not abandon it, and adoring the wisdom that so governs it as to extort even from reluctant lips the acknowledgment that "he hath done all things well."

V. In the fifth place, the government of God is *inscrutable*. There are mysteries in his providence, as well as in his works and word. The reasons for innumerable events, and the ends they accomplish, are concealed from human view. Their relations and dependencies to one another, and to the great re-

sult they are working out, can not be discovered. Our minds are dark; and, although we may be satisfied that in all that he does he has selected the wisest ends and the fittest means to accomplish them, we may not be able, from our own short-sightedness, to reconcile them with his wisdom and goodness. Why he suffered sin and misery to enter into the world, and why he allows such a prevalence of these evils up to the present hour, it is impossible for us to tell. Why he provided a Savior for fallen men and not for fallen angels—why the knowledge of this redemption, and the means of grace and salvation, should be for so long a time confined to so small a portion of the earth—why the character and destiny of the race should have been suspended on the conduct of a single individual, and the sins of the fathers should be visited upon the children, and one generation should suffer for the sins of another—why the sword of persecution should have been permitted to pass over the fairest and purest portions of the Church of God, and men of whom the world was not worthy have been cut off in their prime, while the wicked and cumberers of the ground are spared to extend and perpetuate their wickedness—why such multitudes sink to the grave before they have, to human view, accomplished the ends for which human life is given—why the fondest hopes and the ter-

derest affections are so often blighted in the bud and bloom, and sudden calamity so often makes shipwreck of reasonable expectations—why thousands upon thousands should be mustered on the field of battle, and states and nations are allowed to dash against one another, and blood flow to the horse bridles—all these, and others like them, are unsearchable things, and the reasons of them will never be fully known before that great day when the complex drama is finished. They are dark shadows, nor will they be dissipated but by the strong and steady light of eternity. What we know not now we shall know hereafter. There never was a more presumptuous or more hopeless effort of the human mind than that which would fain bring the divine government to the standard of its own conceptions. “Who, by searching, can find out God? Who can find out the Almighty unto perfection?” His “way is in the sea, and his path in the mighty waters, and his footsteps are not known.” We may speculate upon such features of his government, and perhaps with self-complacency in our own reasoning pride, but after all we find them attended with mystery. “His judgments are a great deep;” they are “the deep things of God;” and when we try to fathom them, we demonstrate nothing so certainly as our own weakness and presumption. “O Lord, I have heard thy speech,”

says the prophet, "and was afraid. When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice; rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself that I might find rest in the day of trouble." He had been inspecting symbols of the divine presence in which there was a mixture of splendor with darkness and obscurity—where were the hiding of his power and the splendor of his glory—and they were indicative of events too fearful to be sublime. And who does not perceive that the world in which we dwell would become to the last degree presumptuous and reckless if it were not held in check by God's insufferable greatness? It requires just such teaching as this; and the nearest we can come to the solution of these dark problems is, that "God is infinitely above all creatures;" that "he is known by the judgments which he executeth;" that he will have men "know that he is the Lord in the midst of the earth;" and that the paramount consideration which controls the measure of his inscrutable government is "the glory of his great name." "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" It is his prerogative to "destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." "Hear ye and give ear, every one that is

proud. Enter into the rock and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord and for the glory of his majesty!"

VI. We remark, in the sixth place, that, in addition to these characteristics, the government of God is a *perfectly good and benevolent government*.

We should just as soon think of becoming atheists as of denying that God is good. "God is light;" whatever darkness there may be in our minds, whatever obscurity may darken his dispensations, "*in him* there is no darkness at all." "God is love;" whatever semblance of indifference or unkindness may exist in the procedures of his government, there is no unkind emotion, no feeling of cold indifference that finds a dwelling within his paternal and affectionate bosom. There is no being in the universe except himself who can be safely trusted with such a dominion as he exercises, because he not only "*is good*" and *does* good, but has the heart of gratuitous, overflowing kindness.

Were we left to the mere lights of reason and nature, we see not how we could be conducted to any other conclusion than this: If his existence is from everlasting to everlasting; if his knowledge is infinite and his power almighty; and if he possesses independence and self-sufficiency that place him beyond the reach of creatures, why

should there be any ingredient of malevolence or varying passion in his government? I can not help believing that, unbiased by theory, a plain and ingenuous heathen, who should go abroad amid this beautiful earth, and see its riches and bounty, and mark how it is made soft with showers, and verdant with herbage, and rich in fruits; and see with what beauty and regularity the seasons revolve, and what unnumbered existences are rejoicing in this unsurpassed bounty, and the benevolent design and tendency of those laws of the natural world of which God is the author, would instinctively feel that he who ruleth among the children of men is a benevolent Ruler. "The earth is *full* of his goodness;" and so "is the great and wide sea;" and so is the history of his government in every age of time. In the darkest night of time, and in its severest storms, "There is a rainbow round about his *throne*;" and the darker the night, and the more terrific the retiring cloud, the brighter and the more significant is this, his own appointed emblem of peace and faithfulness. He is "kind to the evil and the unthankful." He is never tired of giving, though man is so thankless. It alters not the benevolence of his administrations that there is suffering in the world. We wonder there is not more. Suffering is man's desert; it is of his own procuring. It is not God's work, but man's;

and it constitutes an ingredient of God's government only as it is extorted from him as a righteous, moral Governor, in vindication of his throne, and in safety to his empire. We should have confidence in God in such a world as this, where bounty flows in such endless streams, and heaven's love gives forth its utterances in notes of mourning as well as songs of praise; in the paleness and debility of disease, as well as in the vigor and sprightliness of health; and smiles alike in life and in death, and leaves its sweet impress even on the cold and teeming grave. The *channel* through which his government conveys these blessings is nothing short of the mediation and sacrifice of his only and well-beloved Son. It is costly goodness; it is the highest form of goodness—goodness to the guilty—grace, free, rich, immeasurable grace, pouring its royal bounty upon this abject world, and at the feet of lost and guilty man. This is emphatically the beauty, the surpassing tenderness and glory of the divine government. It is a *mediatorial* government, administered by “God manifest in the flesh”—by Him “for whom are all things, and by whom are all things,” and who is “Head over all things to his Church.” This great characteristic of the divine empire solves mysteries which nothing else can solve, and illumines the clouds and darkness which are around the divine throne.

The sun unveils his splendor, and the moon walks in her brightness, and the stars twinkle in their spheres, to light up the path of this Prince of Peace. All the changes and revolutions of earth and time—the dispersion of their inhabitants—the confusion of their tongues—the rise and fall of nations—Sinai and Calvary—the Spirit of God descending upon men, securing to the Great Sufferer the safety, enlargement, and triumphs of his kingdom—all these, and all things else, are subservient to his claims as the destined Conqueror. When we *now* look over the earth, and see what wonderful events are taking place in this and in other lands—what simultaneous increase of light here, and darkness there—here of sin, and there of holiness—and what a contrast and continuity of providences in order to bring out to the view of angels and men this highest expression of the divine goodness, we can not but rejoice that his is the dominion, and the power, and the glory forever.

I have no time left for an extended application of these remarks. We are the subjects of this government, and the inquiry forces itself upon us, Are we true and loyal subjects, or are we in a state of revolt against the throne and monarchy of God? Enmity and rebellion against it began in heaven, and with the angels who kept not their first estate. Through their subtle in-

fluence our first parents fell; we have inherited the spirit of revolt from them, and are ourselves fallen by their iniquity and our own. The front of our offending is, that we are by nature and by practice alienated at heart from the adorable and ever-blessed King of heaven, and rebels against the glorious majesty of his kingdom. We criminate and brand with infamy the treachery, the injustice, the hate, the open war that severs bonds and breaks up institutions venerable for age and consecrated by religion; but what is this compared with the arrogance, and pride, and ambition, and absorbing selfishness that have induced us to throw to the winds the obligations of allegiance to the Most High, and, in the infatuation of the carnal mind, to rush upon the thick bosses of Jehovah's buckler? Sin is enmity against God; it is revolt; it is crime for which nothing can atone but the blood of the great Propitiation, or the inflicted penalty upon the person of the rebel. This burden God will lay upon those of you, my beloved hearers, who live and die negligent of this great Sacrifice, in rebellion against your Maker. Oh, how does it become you to abase yourselves before God in view of your disloyalty to his throne! Peace and comfort you can nowhere find except in a cordial reconciliation to that law, and order, and wise administration of the Most High which are the admiration

of all holy and virtuous minds. His throne, high and glorious as it is, is a throne of grace; Jesus, the Mediator, is there, and the blood of sprinkling is there, and there the rebellious may approach with hope in a God reconciled through the blood of his Son. There is no reason for this prolonged revolt. Wickedness, and wickedness alone, lies at the foundation of it. God has a right to reign, and he always reigns right. "Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name, for thou only art holy!"

To those of you who know what it is to be reconciled to the divine counsels and the divine rule, this government of the Most High may well be matter of rejoicing. So long as you have confidence in God, there is nothing to diminish or disturb this joy. Amid all the darkness, and sin, and conflicts, and miseries, and apprehensions that agitate us, it ought to tranquillize our minds that God is on the throne. "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth, and let the earth rejoice!" Light and darkness, holiness and sin, good and evil, events that are small and events that are great, things that are wise and things that are unwise, shall be directed and overruled to wise and benevolent ends. Only let not your confidence be withdrawn from God, and, as certain as he lives and reigns, all things shall work together for the accomplishment of his gracious

designs, and these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, shall work out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

These truths we have often uttered, but they are specially appropriate and emphatic in this dark day of our country's conflict and trial. God of our fathers! God of the armies of Israel! our hope is in thee. We deserve this rebuke; but we trust in thy mercy and thy almighty arm. Let rulers and subjects bow with uncovered head before his throne! Let the mighty man and the mean man—let those who sow beside all waters, and those who go down to the sea in ships, and those who climb the mountain-tops, and those who are marshaled on the field of war—let young men and maidens, old men and children, in this day of rebuke, give glory to the Lord our God; for his name alone is excellent, his glory is above the earth and the heavens.

SERMON XIX.

SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS DEMOLISHED BY THE LAW.

PSALM CXXIX., 3.—*"If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity,
O Lord, who shall stand?"*

LITTLE must that man know of God, or of his own heart, who hopes for acceptance with the great Lawgiver on the score of his own personal merit. Such a hope is the mere delirium of ignorance and pride. The holiest man since the apostasy needs only to be awake to the claims of the divine law, and a just view of his own character, in order to abandon all such delusions, and cast himself at the footstool of sovereign mercy. The language of piety on this subject is, and ever has been, uniform and strong. It is the language of the patriarch when he said, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies thou hast showed to thy servant." It is the language of the prophet when he exclaimed, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed." It is the language of the publican when, "standing afar off, he would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner!" It is the language

of the text, "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand?" A sinner's approach is not to the throne of justice, but to the throne of mercy. The Psalmist had no good works to plead. He had been a great sinner, and was now made sensible of it. His eyes were opened to see the number and enormity of his sins, and the authority and holiness of the great and dreadful God he had offended. Out "of the depths have I called unto thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice; let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication. If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" Upon the footing of justice, his own condition was hopeless, and the condition of others is as hopeless. There is no exemption in favor of a living man.

There is a volume of instruction in this single deliverance of our text, of which we can give but a brief outline in this discourse. What is it for God to *mark iniquity*? If he mark iniquity, *who shall stand*?

I. Our first inquiry is, WHAT IS IT FOR GOD TO MARK INIQUITY?

There is no obscurity in the phrase "mark iniquity." One invariable standard there is of human conduct, and only one; and that is, the eternal and immutable law of God. It is a holy law, a just and good law. It is the breathing of God's

pure and holy mind. It is, "exceeding broad," extending to the outward conduct, and the secret thoughts and emotions of the heart. It never alters; though heaven and earth should pass away, not one jot or one tittle of the law shall pass away. It never will require more, and it will never require less. It binds heaven, earth, and hell by the same precepts, the same prohibitions, and the same penalties. It will never be repealed, because its Author never changes; it will never expire by its own limitations, because he never dies. Whatever endures the scrutiny of this unerring standard is right, and that which God approves; whatever shrinks from it is wrong, and that which God condemns. Disregarding all other standards of character, whether sanctioned by the laws of men, or the maxims of the world, or the conventionalities of society, or a blinded conscience, this law of God is the only line of demarkation between the holy and the profane. Its painful province is to mark, expose, and punish every violation of its authority in proportion to its ill desert.

In doing this, God "marks iniquity." He enforces the claims of law and justice. To do less would be injustice to the law; to do more would be injustice to the transgressor. Justice requires that the sins of men be observed, and numbered, and weighed in an even balance, and kept in cus-

tody to the day of retribution. When this direful work is performed impartially, nothing is extenuated, and naught set down in malice; but nothing is overlooked, or covered, or forgotten. "God doth not pervert judgment, nor the Almighty pervert justice." He has no ill will to gratify on the one hand, and no private partialities on the other. He has no sinister and no narrow views, but is bound by unerring rectitude, in every instance in which he marks iniquity, to do so with a strict regard to what is right, to preserve it in long remembrance, and to punish it as it deserves. Well might the Psalmist exclaim, well may we all exclaim, "If *thou*, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, *who* shall stand?" Let us, then,

II. In the second place, consider the inquiry, WHO SHALL STAND if God thus mark iniquity?

It is a grave question to every subject of the divine government whether or not he has satisfied the claims of the divine law, or can satisfy them, and how he shall stand before a just and sin-hating God. The angels who never fell can meet these claims, and stand the scrutinizing of rigid justice. Our first parents, while they walked with God, and communed with him in their native innocence, and enjoyed his unclouded favor, had nothing to fear from the flaming sword. But when they sinned and fell, they could not

retrace their pathway. Go where they would, and which way they would, the flaming sword of justice turned *every way* to guard the tree of life. Nor are any of their descendants better off than they. Enoch, Abraham, Samuel, David, Isaiah, Daniel, the disciple whom Jesus loved, the sainted Paul, rapt to the third heavens, and now in glory there, the best of the repenting, and the best and the worst of the unrepenting—not one among them all shall stand if the Lord and Law-giver of earth and heaven mark iniquity. Yet is it no easy matter to give a lodgment to this truth in the human heart. If there be any ground of hope, upon the naked principles of law and justice, it must be either that we can plead not guilty to the charge of violating the law of God; or that we can allege some valid excuse for our transgressions; or that we can make some adequate amends for our wickedness; or that we can contend with God, or escape or endure his just indignation. Let us look at these vain confidences, and see if they will *stand* when God marks iniquity.

1. Who can plead *Not guilty to the charge of violating the law of God.* Men have an overweening confidence in their own goodness, but we much doubt whether there is a living man who would hazard the issue of his trial at the bar of God on the plea of untainted innocence.

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Who can say, "I have made my heart clean; I am free from my sin?" The Scriptures inform us when men begin to be holy, but they indicate no period when they begin to sin except the very commencement of their being, and from the moment they belong to the family of Adam. "Behold," says the Psalmist, "I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Man's very nature is morally depraved. With this sinful nature he begins his active career, and, unless he becomes a converted man, year after year of dark rebellion has been rolling over his head. There has been no cessation, nor the least interruption in his course by any one act or emotion of obedience to God's holy law. "Whatsoever things the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may become guilty before God." Men have but to look into their hearts, and look over their life, in order to find abundant testimony that they have no sinless perfection. If a man were as holy as Isaiah, he would feel as Isaiah felt when he exclaimed, "Woe is me, for I am undone, for I am a man of unclean lips!" If an unrepenting man, he will see that his whole life has been a life of sin, and that every year, month, week, and day has seen him a wanderer from God. Men do not know themselves. They shrink from the glaring light

of God's truth. They "love darkness rather than light, *because* their deeds are evil." When the light of God's holy law shines before their eyes, they start back into their own darkness. Their indifference to the glorious and ever-blessed God—their neglect of his word—their profanation of his holy day—their supreme worldliness—their bold dishonesty and covert fraud—their thoughtless, backbiting, and lying tongue—and, with not a few, their evil and immoral habits, all proclaim that there are depths of iniquity in the hearts of men that have never been fathomed. If we could see all the sins of our past life concentrated, and all those sins from which a kind providence has prevented us from falling into, and which we ourselves have been inclined to commit, we should recoil from the view as though it were a mass of offensive corruption. Oh, this plague of the heart! this fountain of bitterness! these secret chambers of imagery within! these deep, unfathomed caverns of wickedness! Who knows their deadly influence, their ruinous treachery, their amazing power? It is in vain for any man to allege his innocence or conceal his sin. The charge of ungodliness can be substantiated against every member of the human family, and not unfrequently in fearful aggravation and enormity—aggravated by the knowledge of his duty, by resisted motives to repent-

ance, by fear and by hope, by the authority of law, a rejected Gospel, and the aggrieved Spirit of God. In spite of every illusion, conscience tells every man that he is an offender. He can not get rid of the thought. He can not lay his hand upon his heart and say there is nothing there that condemns him. He can not get rid of the feeling that there is an unsettled controversy between him and his Maker—that he can not stand the reckoning of a holy God, and that, if he mark iniquity, the coming judgment and the coming eternity will turn out to be fearful realities.

2. Who, then, in the second place, *can allege any valid excuse for his iniquity?* It is affecting proof of the folly of sin, and of the strange infatuation it has superinduced, that men so universally, and many of them so ingeniously, devise so many palliations for their want of subordination to the will of God. Disobedience to the rightful call of a rightful Superior admits of no excuse. Every excuse does but aggravate the criminality and enhance the guilt of the man who feels the necessity of urging it, and who, by the very act of palliating his wickedness, only shows that he would commit it with impunity. And what are these excuses? You say your mind was blinded, and you were sunk in stupidity, or you would never have ventured on ground fenced

about by the prohibitions of the divine law. And what is this blindness and stupidity but the cherished languor of conscience, and the hardened insensibility of audacious rebellion? You say you were sorely tempted; but why did you not resist the tempter when your Maker gave you reason, and conscience, and his holy word to detect his devices; when you might have sought his aid, and he would have given you strength according to your day; and when, in the incipient movement to evil, you were conscious of a struggle within you between the powers of light and the powers of darkness? You say you were born a sinner, and that it is your nature to go astray. True; and so much the worse. This does but aggravate your wickedness, and is one of the reasons why God condemns you. You say you can not help sinning, and that you have no power to turn from sin to holiness. So much the worse again. Fearfully vile and hard-hearted is the man who can not help sinning. Is a liar less guilty because he has always been a liar, and can not help lying; or a thief less guilty because he has always been a thief, and can not help stealing? You say you have no time to attend to better things; but what has God given you time for but to fear him and keep his commandments? And why is every seventh part of human life a Sabbath but to wake up your

worldly mind, and give you time to attend to the call of truth and duty? You say you are ensnared by wicked associates; well, then, break them off: "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but the companion of fools shall be destroyed." And if you may not and can not break them off, strive mightily to convert them from the error of their ways. You say that good men ensnare you, and often so conduct themselves that you are tempted to believe there is no religion in the world, no God, and no hereafter. All the worse for *them*, but none the better for you. It is no part of our business to justify or palliate the sins of good men; but it will be a grievous disappointment if you flatter yourselves that God will not mark iniquity because you are partakers in other men's sins.

When he draws righteousness to the line and judgment to the plummet, the waters will overflow these hiding-places, and the hail sweep these refuges of lies away. Men may allege these excuses, and others not a few; but every movement of conscience, every pang of self-reproach, is a witness against them. Excuses do not satisfy the sinner on a dying bed; they do not satisfy him now. I never knew a man with an enlightened conscience cleave to them. They will be poor advocates when he stands at the last tribunal. It is unspeakably foolish to indulge

ourselves in framing excuses *now* which will not stand *then*. It is dangerous to make them, and dangerous to listen to them. Which of us would be satisfied that God should mark iniquity, and consent to be condemned for all those sins which these excuses, and such as these, can not justify? We inquire, then,

3. In the third place, whether the offender *can make any adequate amends for his transgression?* It is conceded that he is a transgressor, and without excuse, and amenable to the law. The law demands obedience or penalty. Obedience he has none; and what has he to justify the Law-giver in remitting the penalty of his law? Does the law admit of any equivalent; is there any such thing as making any amends or any atonement for his sins under a purely legal administration; and, if there be any such expedient, can the transgressor find out this path of life? God comes to mark iniquity, and, however he may commiserate the transgressor, he can not connive at sin. This would be to proclaim impunity to crime, and nothing less than the utter prostration of law and justice.

The point to be decided, therefore, is a very simple one when the transgressor and the eternal judge are at issue on the unchanging principles of law. And, believe me, there is a chilling hopelessness when the transgressor contemplates that

stern and repulsive sentence, "The soul that sinneth *it shall die*." Can he hope? Can he hope from the goodness of God, without any regard to his severity? Is he sure there is any such easy and good-natured connivance at sin in all the varied perfections of the divine character? Can conscience be lulled by these vague and ill-defined compromises between heaven's indulgence and earth's rebellion? Is the high authority of the almighty Ruler to be thus tampered with, by thus severing a revolted world from the restraints of heaven's law, and setting it adrift from all responsibility? You tell me the transgressor is a penitent, and now a reformed and loyal subject. Be it so; this is what he ought to be. But the penalty of the law is not *repentance*, but *death*. What would be thought of a human government whose legislative enactment punishes the murderer with *death*, should it regard the *repentance* of the blood-shedder as an adequate atonement for the shedding of blood? Suppose, then, the sinner does more than this, and sets about establishing a righteousness of his own by a rigid conformity to the law he has so presumptuously broken. Will his vigils, and his prayers, and his almsgiving, and his multiplied self-sacrifices make his account good with the law, and, by thus endeavoring to balance his good deeds against his evil ones, can he claim a legal title to pardon and

life? Conceding that his good works are perfectly good, and have no imperfections about them, they are no more than what is due to the law for the current day, or month, or year, and have no retrospective influence. Who does not see that he is a bankrupt still, and is only attempting to pay the law what he borrows from the law, and thus to defraud it of its just claims? This was ancient Judaism; this is the Romanism of later days; this is the self-righteousness of every age and clime, attempting to establish its right to pardon and life by its own meritorious services. But it is in the face of all law and justice. There is a flaw in the title of such a man: when law and justice sit in judgment upon his claims.

But, you may ask, May he not in some way *propitiate* the divine displeasure, and turn away the wrath he deserves? Thus the heathen of ancient times thought, and thus modern heathen dream. Their religion is a religion of *terror*, because they can not banish the thought that sin deserves and must receive its just retribution. Their religious rites and institutions have their origin in a guilty conscience. History shows that the religion of conscience is a self-condemning, a terrible religion, and that its altars are altars of *blood*; and for the reason before adverted to, because conscience requires obedience or pen-

alty. I know of nothing more painfully instructive than the religion of paganism. Men have no natural instincts to gratify by offering either animal or human sacrifices; it is a moral instinct that leads them to it, and because it is clamorous for reparation, and God and conscience enforce the claim. But of what avail are they all, and what do they accomplish, but add iniquity to iniquity? Well may the awakened soul inquire, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the Most High God? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my *first-born* for my transgression—the *fruit of my body* for the sin of my soul?" Ah no! there is nothing here that looses the wrathful bond. There is nothing in any, or all these expedients of self-righteousness or self-infliction that cancels the authority of law, or obliterates the record of guilt. "The bed is shorter than a man can stretch himself upon it, and the covering narrower than that he wrap himself in it." Men may despair of meeting a just God in this way. They may give it up forever. We demand, therefore,

4. In the fourth place, Can the sinner *flee out of the hands of God, or contend with him, or endure his wrath?*

Flee out of his hands! There is not the remotest spot in the universe he does not occupy.

Go to the lonesome desert, the deep cavern, the hidden recess, and he is there. Climb the heavens; compass the earth; traverse the ocean; plunge into the bottomless abyss, and he is there. Vain is the thought to fly from the face of the omniscient Deity. Neither land, nor sea, nor heaven, nor hell has any retreat where the guilty can lurk unseen by that eye to whom the thickest darkness is as the light of day.

And who is he that *contendeth* with that infinite and mighty Being whose arm upholds and controls the universe, and who is never weak and never weary? "If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin *against God*, who shall plead for him?" It will be no equal contest when worms of the dust, even in conspired and combined rebellion, rise to resist the sentence that scatters them like the chaff of the summer threshing-floor. "The strong shall be as tow, and the maker of it as a spark, and they shall both burn together, and none shall quench them." Omnipotence is pledged to support his law, and it shall never be trampled on. As the great Lawgiver, he will never submit to insult; nor will he stand silent by, when his high throne, guarded and upheld by all the energies of infinite power and a rightful and firm empire, is assaulted and resisted. "He shall break them as with a rod of iron; he shall dash them in pieces as a potter's vessel."

Can the sinner, then, as a last resort, *endure God's displeasure*? When the Avenger comes to make inquisition for blood—when he comes to magnify his justice and exact the uttermost farthing—when he comes to vindicate his majesty on all who have trampled it in the dust—when he comes to make his glory known on the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction, they will find “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the *living God*.” I know there are stout-hearted and dare-devil offenders who say that, when the worst comes to the worst, they have made up their minds to throw their armor about them and patiently bear the blow—to fortify themselves against the coming storm, and with fiend-like courage and resolution *endure* the wrath of an angry God. Is it so? *Is it so?* “*Can* thine heart endure and can thine hands be strong in the day the Lord shall deal with thee?” Poor presumptuous worm! whose heart faints, whose strength withers, whose courage dies away, and whose resolution becomes like wax before the fire under the agony of a single hour in the present world! little dost thou know what it will be to endure the everlasting displeasure of a holy God. Think of the fallen angels; think of Sodom; think of Babylon; think of the multitudes who have lived and died in sin, and have gone to receive their unalterable doom—who have been for

centuries in hell, still the enemies of God and bitterly contending with their Maker, and as bitterly suffering his indescribable wrath, and then tell me, are you ready for such a conflict? are you prepared to contend eternally with your Maker? and can thine heart endure or thy hands be strong in the day that he shall deal with thee? Ah! dear hearers, if any of you are numbered with these reprobate millions, so far from being able to endure it, Omnipotence alone can sustain you under its burning fury. No, no, you can not endure; you will have no refuge; the rocks and the mountains will not be there to cover you. None can come to the rescue; for all the holy are on the side of God and justice, and all the unholy are receiving the same unalterable doom with yourselves. You will have nothing to do but bow in anger and blasphemy to the powers above you—nothing to do but sink to the bottomless pit—nothing to do but weep, and wail, and gnash your teeth—nothing to do but make your bed in hell and die. *Die!* no, never. The immortal soul, the resurgent body never dies. It is dying—dying—dying; and the fear, the woe, the despair, the death-struggle, will be prolonged to a deathless eternity. And as ages roll on, and the miserable sufferers, one after another, inquire, How long—oh, how long must we endure the heat of this great anger? the melancholy answer re-

verberates from their adamantine walls, Forever! forever and forever! And all this to show who and what God is, and that he is the everlasting friend of justice and the everlasting enemy of sin. Which of us, then, will not exclaim with the Psalmist, "IF THOU, LORD, SHOULDEST MARK INIQUITY, O LORD, WHO SHALL STAND?"

In our practical retrospect of the preceding thoughts, we remark,

1. In the first place, if such are the consequences of God's marking iniquity, *what is to become of us?* We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. Not one of the human family can stand before the scrutinizing eye of impartial justice. We are transgressors of God's holy law; and greater transgressors than thousands of others because we have sinned so long, and in the face of so much light, and warnings and reproofs so solemn and oft-repeated. Every individual in this assembly, who is out of Christ, may well examine the ground on which he stands, and ask himself, before some sudden providence calls him to his unalterable doom, what account he shall render when inflexible justice comes to mark iniquity. On what ground, beloved hearers, do you stand? On what is your confidence built? What title have you to eternal life, when the author of your being, your great Lawgiver and Judge, declares, "The soul that sinneth shall

die?" You are not innocent; your heart and life have not been such as God can approve. You can not allege any valid excuse for your sins, nor make satisfaction for them, nor contend with God, nor endure his wrath. We ask again, On what ground do you stand? You live in a dying world, and before the next Lord's day may be called to the judgment, and what must your account be? The question will be decided then, and from that decision there will be no appeal.

Do I hear any of you reply, I am not careful to answer such a question? If there is a God, he is a God of mercy; if there is a future state, I shall know more about it when it comes. If there is a God! If there is a future state! You will not go to your dying bed under such a delusion as this. Is there no God—no God of *justice*? no heaven, no hell? My dear dying people, do not plunge into eternity with such idiot dreams as these. Perhaps you are saying God will *not* mark iniquity! But be you assured of this one thing, that reason and revelation stand up together as witnesses for God, and bear testimony that as there is no peace to the wicked in this world, so there is no salvation in wickedness. We press the question then, If death arrest you before another Sabbath, are you ready to give up your last account? Child of death and sin, are you prepared to stand the scrutiny of omniscient

purity and almighty justice? When omniscient purity, with its sunlight beams, and almighty justice, with its pen of iron, shall mark iniquity, the Helper will be far away, and every hope fled.

2. In the next place, our subject *justifies the anxiety and distress felt by those who are convinced of their lost estate as sinners.* For the most part, men are indifferent to the claims of God's holy law. They disregard the precepts which bind them and the penalty which condemns them. They sleep over them; and, though they read them in God's Word, and hear them from his ministers, they close the Bible as thoughtlessly as they opened it, and go away from the sanctuary as stupid as they came. Thus it was with Saul of Tarsus, and thus it is at the present hour with multitudes who live in the neglect of God and the Gospel of his Son. They are "alive without the law." They may live a moral life, but they have no true knowledge of their own hearts, and are totally ignorant of the spirituality and extent of that great moral code which "marks iniquity."

But it is not always thus. There are seasons when the most thoughtless are led to reflection, and the most stupid are roused from their listlessness. Their solicitude is sometimes intense, and their convictions deep and distressing. They see their sins as they never saw them before, and

are sensible that they are in danger of being lost forever. Like the multitudes on the day of Pentecost, "they are pricked in their heart, and cry out, Men and brethren, what shall we do to be saved?"

Yet nothing is more common than to hear such a state of mind charged to the wildness of enthusiasm, or ignorance and weakness, or madness and folly. Let us look at this a moment. To say nothing of other considerations, the solemn and weighty thought suggested by the Psalmist in our text is enough to account for all this anxiety, and vindicate it from all imputation of weakness and extravagance. Men who have not the least care about their souls may make a jest of such convictions; but which acts the more wise and rational part, the stupid or the awakened sinner; the unconcerned and thoughtless, or the convinced and the anxious? Is it any marvel that a man just awaking from the slumbers of spiritual death, and the dreams of carnal security, and led by the Spirit of God to dwell on the thought, "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity," should be thrown into embarrassment? With such a thorn in his pillow, is it any marvel that he can no longer slumber? Is it any marvel that, with such an arrow piercing him, his bosom should bleed? How can any rational and right-minded man, with the certainty that, continuing

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in his present state, God *must* mark iniquity, remain unconcerned an hour? The sober, far-reaching mind of him who said, "I was alive without the law once," also said, "But when the commandment came, sin revived, *and I died!*" A view of his own character and of the law of God was death to all his hopes. And wherever there is a clear view of the sinner's character and God's law, there must be "a certain fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation." And it will be more than the stoutest heart can bear. It is not now as in days that are past. The imaginations of innocence are gone. That self-complacent spirit, so long cherished, has received a rebuke from which it can not recover. That high sense of personal merit is not only felt to be vanity, but the swelling conceit of a proud heart. The sins of the once thoughtless awake against them strong as death and cruel as the grave. They remember God and are troubled, and cry out with the Psalmist, "Thy wrath lieth hard upon me."

We are far from saying that this is the uniform procedure of the Spirit of God in leading men to the obedience of faith. Some are less severely and more gently dealt by; their convictions and their distress are neither so intense nor so long continued. Yet, with few exceptions, the first stages of a spiritual experience are hours

and days of darkness. There are clouds of guilt that come rolling down upon the soul, and that sometimes extinguish the light of hope. But, however varied these dealings of the Spirit of God may be, they are all in harmony with his own gracious designs, and fitted to the character, and condition, and future course of the subjects of his grace.

The convinced and anxious are not mad, but rather do they just begin to understand the words of truth and soberness. Who acts the irrational part, such a man, or the one who is intrenched in his own stupidity, and sees not, feels not, fears not, while the arrows of the Almighty are flying around him, and the sting of death is piercing him through? Which acts the more rational part, the man who feels the weight of his iniquity, and, prostrate in the dust, cries out, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight no man living can be justified," or the man who, though the law condemns him, and not one of his sins is pardoned—though he has no security of a single day, and justice may cut him down at any moment—yet stifles these solemn admonitions, plunges into the whirl of business and pleasure, thinks no more of God, and lives and dies thoughtless as the horse or the mule that hath no understanding? What a phenomenon is this! what moral frenzy! what madness! and

how can it be accounted for in the operations of a rational mind? We remark,

3. In the third place, the train of thought suggested in this discourse *magnifies the Gospel of the grace of God, and urges the sinner to Jesus Christ as his only refuge*. I rejoice to add this closing thought. Indeed, I could not have given utterance to those you have already listened to had they not led me the more to glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity." That little word *if* is a significant and blessed word in this emphatic sentence. It suggests the hope that God *may not* mark iniquity, and makes the transgressor bold to ask if there is no way in which man can be just even with a sin-hating and sin-punishing God. The problem is, indeed, a grave one. We know the clemency of the divine nature, and that he is long-suffering and gracious. We know, too, his equal and unchanging justice, and that it lies at the basis and forms the habitation of his throne. Yet, much as the procedure mocked the wisdom of creatures, Infinite Wisdom has devised a method by which "God can be just, and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus." Early he made the promise, and in the fullness of time he redeemed it, and sent his Son to take man's nature and man's sins. Himself became the voluntary victim against whom even-handed justice

marked iniquity, and who, though he knew no sin, was "made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." There is this one way. "All we, like sheep, had gone astray, but the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." It is the glory of God, the glory of the Gospel, and the sinner's hope, that the righteous Lawgiver thus "justifies the ungodly."

We say, then, in God's name and by God's authority, to those who know that, should he mark iniquity, they must perish, that there is this city of refuge to flee to. We show them the path of life, not by urging them to rush rudely into the presence of a just and sin-hating God—not by escaping the vigilance of the flaming sword which turns every way, but by pointing them to the Lamb of God, from whose side the glittering blade was not withdrawn until he poured out his soul unto death. We say to them, That path into the holiest of all you may tread, for the veil is rent from the top to the bottom. We say to them, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Behold that Lamb of God. Look back to him on the cross; look up to him on the throne. This is he who declares before God, angels, and men, that he is "able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him." If our subject announces that you need a Savior, it

at the same time demands whether or not you will confide in him as all-sufficient and mighty to save. It invites to trust in him. It assures you that of all the millions who have repaired to him there is not one who was ever cast out—not one who is not and will not forever be the trophy of his faithfulness and saving grace. You have nothing to fear from a holy God and a holy law, because the vials of wrath were poured on *his* head that not a drop might fall on *you*. It is only away from the City of refuge and out of Christ that the avenger of blood will overtake you.

But, beloved friends, he is bound to overtake you if death finds you on the open plain. Salvation is by his cross alone. Of all the spirits of just men made perfect, there is not one who was not brought to see himself lost and helpless, or who entered the kingdom of God in any other way than by his atoning blood. Oh, dear hearers, if you would but listen to the language of our text, and let conscience do its office, and make known to you how unrelenting the law of God is, then might you awake to the dread reality that you are in the hands of an angry God, and learn to appreciate the perfected redemption of his Son.

SERMON XX.

THE ESSENTIAL EXCELLENCE OF GOD NOT ALL DISCLOSED.

HABAKKUK, iii., 4.—“*His brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand, and there was the hiding of his power.*”

THE prophecy of Habakkuk is a short and condensed prophecy, celebrating the wonders which God had wrought for Israel, and directing their confidence to him as their refuge and strength. It will be difficult to find nobler thoughts, greater splendor of imagery, or grandeur and sublimity of description, all so admirably in unison with the object of the inspired writer, than are found in this short prophecy. The sphere of the writer's vision is filled with one grand and overwhelming thought. The awful name, the solemn reality, the GREAT, INFINITE, ETERNAL ONE absorbed his mind, till his bosom thrilled with wonder, and his lips trembled with adoring praise. Wakened as his thoughts were to intense contemplation, and soaring as they did on the wings of a sanctified imagination, and dipped, as his pencil was, in unearthly colors, the light was too strong,

there were lines too bright and dazzling to be drawn even by the heaven-taught artist. He summoned to his aid the symbols of the divine presence as he came from Edom to Sinai; he looked back to Israel's wanderings in the wilderness of Paran, and from the rocky towers of its lofty mountain, under the rich beams of the rising or setting sun; and in this mingling of the sublime and the beautiful, of awful grandeur and subduing goodness, he sees the reflected Deity. And then he says, "God came from Teman, and the holy One from Mount Paran. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. His brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand, and there was the hiding of his power." He saw much, but much there was he could not see. Clouds and darkness were there; but, like the moon walking in her brightness, and scattering the clouds that obscured her pathway, there was overpowering brightness that shone through them. The description is poetic and glowing; stripped of its metaphorical garb, it presents the thought that, HOWEVER THEY MAY BE WRAPPED IN CONCEALMENT AND OBSCURITY, THE PERFECTIONS OF THE DEITY ARE BRIGHT AND GLORIOUS.

I. They *are wrapped in concealment and obscurity*; and this is the first thought we shall attempt to illustrate.

As we observe their effects by the eye of sense, the *natural* attributes of God are the most obvious and prominent. We behold the wonders he has wrought, and they proclaim his "*eternal power and godhead.*" In the language of the prophet, "He stood, and measured the earth; he beheld, and drove asunder the nations. And the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow, his ways are everlasting." Yet are these but "the hiding of his power." It is imperfectly seen; there is an obscuration of its glory, even in such striking manifestations as these. And if this is true of those attributes that are manifested to the senses, more emphatically may it be affirmed of those moral perfections which constitute his true glory, but which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man."

There is a reason for this in the nature of the case. God only knows himself, and he only can make himself known. What is finite is lost in that which is infinite. The brightest illuminations are of the infinite, and from the infinite to the finite. "We see through a glass darkly," in an obscure manner, not only because the uncreated glory is obscured by the dense medium through which it passes, but because, when it reaches us, it dazzles by its excessive brightness. "It is the highest attainment of reason to know

that there is an infinity of knowledge beyond its limits."

There is wisdom in the divine arrangement of progressive revelations. "I have many things to say unto you," is the remark of the Savior to his disciples, "but ye can not bear them *now*." Such an arrangement is well fitted to the character of the human mind and the moral history of the race. The throne of the Eternal is a remote region; the ascent is gradual, and the revealed path to it was early overhung with clouds and darkness. The Scriptures are full of this teaching. When Moses besought the Lord to "show him his glory," God replied, "Thou *canst not see my face*. Behold, there is a *place by me*, and thou shalt stand upon a rock; and it shall come to pass that when my glory passeth by that, I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover thee with my hand while I pass by. And I will take away my hand, and thou shalt see my *back*, but my *face* shall not be seen." With unsurpassed sublimity, Job affirms, "He holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth a cloud upon it." The familiar phrase, "the hidings of his face," is one which every devout man understands. "How long," exclaims the Psalmist, "wilt thou hide thyself?" "Verily," says the Prophet Isaiah, "thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel the Savior!" Elsewhere it

is written, "His pavilion are dark waters and thick clouds of the sky." And there it stands, unerascd from the old record, "The Lord hath said that he would dwell in the thick darkness."

There is *mystery resting upon the very existence of the Deity*. Though the primary article in natural and revealed religion, and though the denial of it involves a tissue of the most palpable absurdities, yet shadows rest upon it, and there are things about it which elude the grasp of the human understanding. Why he exists, and why he continues to exist; what is the ground or reason of his existence; if his existence is necessary, and it could not be otherwise than that he should exist, what it is that renders it necessary—these things are hidden from us. All human philosophy and metaphysical speculation is at fault here.

His *eternity* is alike above our comprehension. He is the "alpha and omega, the beginning and the ending;" a thousand years are with him as one day, and one day as a thousand years." Time—what is it? We measure it by the revolutions of the lights in the firmament of heaven, set there "for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and for years." We measure it by succession, either *in* or *out* of the mind. But what is it? If you answer it is a part of duration, what is duration? Is it the past, is it the present, or is it

that which is to come—the immeasurable future? And what is the eternal past and the eternal future? Who has seen it? who has touched it? Who dwells there? Whose home is it? Whose home has it been and will it be? Whose home is it *now—to-day*? Who? where? what is that wonderful Being, in relation to whom there is no succession, either within or without his eternal mind, who is no older to-day than he was from eternity?

The same mystery also covers God's *immensity*—his *unlimited greatness*. It has no lines of demarkation, no distinction and no diffusion of parts; it is every where and forever a whole and complete Deity. There are works of God that are great and marvelous. Science has never measured them; imagination can not grasp them, nor climb their height, nor sound their depth, nor weigh their density. You stand and look at *the ocean*; you go out upon it till you lose sight of every thing but the skies above and the unfathomed abyss beneath. Day after day, night after night, month after month, you traverse it, but it is the same world of unmeasured waters still. You ascend some mountain eminence, and look abroad upon the undefined *extension of space* which contains all the works of God. Nor is it without embarrassment that you attempt to define it. Is it matter? Is it a

created substance? Is it mere locality, or is it nothing? You can measure the distance of the fixed stars; but this immense distance, so great that light, though it travels twelve millions of miles in a minute, does not reach the earth from the Milky Way in less than one hundred and twenty years—this is not space. It is but a point in the unmeasured line. Space is beyond it. It lies back of all created worlds. It has no bounds. Thought can not limit it. Yet God is there. It is an incomprehensible existence we ourselves possess, an incomprehensible world we live in, yet is there an immensity of Being more incomprehensible. It is he who is a God at hand and a God afar off—the great All-in-all—the HIGH AND LOFTY ONE THAT FILLS IMMENSITY, THAT INHABITETH ÉTERNITY. Oh, “who by searching can find out God, who can find out the Almighty to perfection!”

Look where we will, there is the same *hiding* of his glory. The spirituality of his nature—his immutability, his knowledge, his wisdom, his goodness, his rectitude, his mercy, his sovereignty, are all incomprehensible by creatures. Who comprehends trinity in unity, or can reconcile a plurality of persons with unity of essence! “To whom will ye liken God? or to what likeness will ye compare unto him?” The perfections of his nature do indeed enlighten us; they are the

source of all knowledge and the foundation of all truth. They fill us with solemn awe, and, if our hearts are right, with delighted admiration; but they confound us—they are infinite and eternal.

If from this distant glance at his nature we take a nearer view, and advert to *what God has done*, there is the same concealment, the same veiling of his glory. "Nature," says Pascal, "has many perfections, to show that it is an image of the Deity; it has defects, to show that it is but an image." The *work of creation* is a wondrous work, and full of God; but when he called it into being, he was alone. No eye but his beheld it arise from the deep and vacant abyss. Neither man nor angel were witnesses of it. It was amid the silence, the retirement, the solitude, the secrecy of eternity that "he stretched out the heavens as a pavilion, and laid the foundations of the earth." The creative Spirit is even now every where present and every where active, while he himself is unseen. He works, yet so hides himself behind the veil of second causes that he alone seems not to work at all. His hand moves the world of matter and of thought, but so quietly that it is unseen. The physical and the intellectual seem to exist, and move independently of him, and by their own fixed laws.

When he had created the world, and placed

upon it generations of men, he gave them his law to govern them; but he uttered it in a way that all the people who heard it were afraid. It was "the voice of words" from the fire and the darkness. There was concealment. The full-orbed glory of the godhead was not there. Compassion for the guilty has no place in a purely legal dispensation. It is justice, impartial, unbending justice. It is a consuming fire. Were there no other manifestation of the Deity, we perish—we all perish. "The Lord descended upon Mount Sinai, and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace; and the whole mountain quaked greatly; and all the people that were in the camp trembled, and they removed and stood afar off." It was a fearful view of God's hatred of moral evil, the dark background of brighter and unrevealed glories.

And, even in these brighter glories, in the *revealed redemption* of his beloved Son, luminous and effulgent as it is, there is no want of concealment. The apostle says of it, "We speak the *wisdom* of God in a *mystery*." There are things about it that are unperceived, and which the mind of man can not comprehend. How the divine law admitted of a substitute when its precept and penalty had to do only with the principal—how justice, which seeks not suffering in the abstract, but only the punishment of the transgress-

or, could allow the innocent to stand in the place and suffer the punishment of the guilty—how, in carrying into effect this arrangement, there could be such an inexplicable union of immortal Deity and expiring humanity—how the eternal Father, who loved the eternal Son so well, could abandon him to the agonies of the cross, from love to such vile sinners as we are—all these are problems which Infinite Wisdom alone has solved, and the solution is for faith to rest upon, and not for reason to comprehend. Such wisdom, such love, such justice “passeth knowledge.” Some things we know about this redemption, and they are great and precious things; some we know, because God has revealed them, and we receive them on his testimony; but when we go beyond this, and would fain penetrate the regions of mystery, we find ourselves in darkness. Nor does mystery stop with these features of the great redemption. How, in applying it, the Holy Spirit operates on the human mind—where the line is drawn between his operations and the operations of the mind itself—why it is given to some and not to others—and why, since the sacrifice of God manifest in the flesh is an all-sufficient atonement and possesses infinite merit, and since the Spirit of God possesses unlimited power, so many are permitted to live and die without hope—these are problems the mind of man can not solve. And

it was in the steady and unembarrassed contemplation of some of these dark sayings that the mind even of the inspired apostle was constrained to exclaim, "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counselor?"

Turn your thoughts now to some of the dark things in the *dispensations of his providence*. A superficial philosophy would have us believe that his care and agency ended with the work of creation; that he has resigned the interests of the world to intermediate agents, and that now he has nothing to do but to be the watchful observer. But such is not the teaching of the Bible. "My Father worketh hitherto," says the Savior, "and I work." "He worketh all things," says the apostle, "after the counsel of his own will." The flame that consumed Sodom and Gomorrah was as truly the appointment of a superior power as the flame that burned steadily on the altar of sacrifice. He who presides over the raging and sweeping pestilence, and walks through the sea when it makes shipwreck of life and fortune, and human pride and power, also unsheaths the warrior's sword, and directs and drives the thunderbolt of war. "Shall there be evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?"

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"Of him, and to him, and through him are all things." The providence of God extends to every thing, and unites his complicated designs and works into one great whole; yet, incessantly employed as it is, the divine wisdom and agency are concealed. It embosoms secrets which the human mind can not explore. "Clouds and darkness are round about him. His way is in the sea, and his path in the mighty waters, and his footsteps are not known." There are anomalies in his government which we can not account for. They are "the deep things of God." Ages of darkness roll over the earth; the kingdom of anti-Christ, that masterpiece of the devil, that "mystery of iniquity," is commissioned to go forth and deceive the nations; the False Prophet, with his subtle craft and fair promises, overruns and lays waste the fair portions of that which was once God's heritage; paganism had free course throughout the Roman empire; and, to the present day, these three powers hold untold millions of our race in bondage. Even now the nations of the earth are convulsed. Wars and rumors of wars echo and re-echo through the earth, and fair portions of it have been and are turned into a vast Aceldama, and our own fair land has become a field of blood. In view of these and such like things, forming as they do no small part of the world's history, a mind wont to

be cheered by brighter views gives way to depression and unbelief. The past is mysterious, the present is inscrutable, and the future is dark. It seems as if "the Lord seeth not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth;" and because we can not understand the reasons and motives of his conduct, and "he giveth not account of any of his matters," we fear and tremble, and for no other reason than that, "as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts."

But the prophet teaches us that these fears are groundless. He who is God over all and blessed for evermore is worthy of confidence in all that he does. He never appears greater, wiser, and better, and his character never shines brighter, than when he thus makes foolish the wisdom of this world. It is then that, amid all the concealment of his glory, "his brightness is as the light," and a brightness that shines through all the clouds and darkness that are round about him. And this is the

II. Second thought suggested by the text, that, NOTWITHSTANDING THIS OBSCURATION OF HIS GLORY, HIS PERFECTIONS ARE BRIGHT AND GLORIOUS.

There is no finer emblem of the divine attributes than that here selected by the inspired penman. They are pure, transparent, brilliant, diffusive, searching as the light of heaven. Good

and great men there are, and have been, who were the adornment of their race; but it was borrowed, reflected brightness, and mixed with many a shade. Bright seraphim there are, whose bright character, pure and serene as it is, is but the pale adumbration of that eternal, underived, infinite, unchanging, unshadowed excellence which essentially belongs to the GREAT I AM. Created perfection is but a point, a mere ray from his effluent brightness. His perfections flow from no other source than himself; they constitute his essential nature; they are God himself. The fountain is full, and the streams are ever flowing bright and clear. There is no limit to his being, and none to his intrinsic or manifested excellence. The universe of matter and of mind, in all its richness, variety, and combinations, attests the bright character of him who dwells in light that is inaccessible and full of glory.

Yet our highest and most enlightened contemplations of this Infinite One leave us ignorant of what he is. Our thoughts are like shadows; they are almost the vacancy of thought when thinking of him. Just try to contemplate this bright Deity. *Contemplate*, did I say? From what stand-point shall we contemplate him? "When we wish to contemplate the ocean, we take our stand upon its shore; but this infinite ocean of being and perfection has no shore. There

is no place where we can stand to look at him; for he is in us, around us, above us, below us. Yet, in another sense, there is no place where we may not look at him, for he is every where. He is all, and in all, and above all, 'God over all, blessed forever.' "* Imagination itself becomes wearied in its efforts to conceive of him who maketh the clouds his chariot, and walks upon the wings of the wind. The prophet could only say, "his brightness was as the light"—pure, unmingled light, separated, like the colors of the rainbow, into various attributes, radiating in different modifications, yet pure, unmingled light. No matter what the manifestations are; be they holiness, goodness, justice, mercy, truth, wisdom, power, they are all manifestations of his nature who "is light, and in whom is no darkness at all." No, no darkness at all; no two things are more unlike than imperfection and the immaculate Deity.

The partial concealment of the divine nature, the obscuration of which we spake just now, so far from being a labyrinth to lead the mind astray, while it furnishes high impulses to acquaint ourselves with God, fills us with profound veneration and confidence. "The purpose of God was more to rectify the will than the understanding of man. An unclouded brightness

* Payson's Select Thoughts.

would have satisfied the understanding, and left the will unreformed. Had there been no obscurity, man would not have been sensible of his corruption; had there been no light, he would have despaired of a remedy. It is profitable for us that God should be partly hidden and partly revealed." It is enough for a sinful worm of the dust, looking upward to the Father of lights, the eternal Sun of the universe, to know that Infinite Wisdom and Goodness are on the throne, and from that high and holy place condescends to visit, and govern, and smile upon this apostate, dark, and agitated world. He was able to devise a wise and benevolent plan for the government of the world he has made, and has adopted it because it is wisest and best, and his heart is set upon it for the same reason; nor, much as it has been canvassed, and scrutinized, and opposed, has any defect ever been found in it.

The most enlightened and holy minds in the universe, the more they have contemplated, the more have they admired it, and exclaimed with the apostle, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honor, and praise, for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they do exist and were created." Holy minds are gratified by elevated and hallowed views of God. Men have a place on this earth, and angels have a place in the upper sanctuary, for nothing so much as glo-

rifying and enjoying him. They may not aim at a lower end; they can not aim at a higher. However rich and fertile the regions of thought they may travel over, every thing is impoverished and dark compared with God. When angelic hosts look up to him, they cover their faces with their wings, and "cry one to another, 'Holy, holy, holy!'" When good men on earth think of him, they say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none on earth that I desire beside thee!" Such is the brightness of his glory, that those who are the nearest his throne are the most happy, and those who are far from him are miserable and perish. Give a pure mind clear views and intimate communion with God, and nothing can make such a mind miserable. When God hides his face they are troubled. This one thing they have desired of the Lord, that they may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of their life, that they *may behold the beauty of the Lord* and inquire in his temple. The man who cares not, and seeks not some such views of God, must, to say the least, be a very lukewarm and dubious Christian. If he can think of God without loving him, he must be a wicked sinner. If he can contemplate these resplendent and adorable attributes, and take no interest in them—if he can thus look upon him whose "brightness is as the light," it is because his way is as darkness, and he knows not at what he stumbles.

Amid all that is inscrutable in the character and conduct of the Most High, it is enough for us to know that he will accomplish his ultimate designs, and make use of the most wisely selected means in accomplishing them. The bright glory of the divine character is not a fitting subject for human speculation; it is a subject of solemn and practical importance. We must be slow in arraigning the arrangements of Unerring Wisdom at the bar of human reason. Unenlightened from above, the most that human reason can do is to find men blind and leave them so. The history of the pagan world demonstrates that the most logical and most eloquent of its advocates have altogether failed to enlighten or reform. What if the divine glory is obscured by a veil? What if there are mysteries human reason can not comprehend? Are you sure the world would be better or happier if there were no clouds and darkness? Can it be proved that the divine procedure is not wisest and best? We see for ourselves that darkness lies back of light, and light comes out of darkness. If we have reason to confide in God at all, the dark dispensations of his providence are those which make that confidence the most necessary for us and the most honorable to him. He does not conceal from us more than is desirable should be concealed. If our minds acted more in harmony with the eternal

mind, it would be no grief of heart to us that he sometimes answers from "the place of thunder."

Some such views of the mingled light and shade which mark the manifestations of his unfathomable nature to our sinning and dark world naturally suggest the following remarks:

1. They indicate, in the first place, *the spirit and temper of mind with which we ought to pursue our inquiries after revealed truth.* Nothing is more evident than that the Bible is not a book of man's devising. The mere fact that it reveals truths that are above and beyond the comprehension of men, clearly shows that it originated with no human intelligence. While there is an obvious insufficiency in the religion of nature and reason which nothing can supply but a supernatural revelation—and while that revelation commends itself to the conscience, and proud Reason herself, after the most rigid scrutiny, is constrained to honor it—yet there is so much in it that is above and beyond reason, that it is to "the Jew a stumbling-block, and to the Greek foolishness." It unfolds truths that are unwelcome to the proud and selfish heart. The philosophy of the schools is baffled and confounded before "the deep things of God." Human reason is not willing to be thus convicted of imbecility, and human pride can not bear to lie low. Instead of submitting to the boundaries which God has prescribed to

them, they rashly plunge into the dark abyss of mystery, and, like

"Fools, rush where angels fear to tread."

Yet you can not go from the region of mystery until you go from the works of God. The more we know of them, the more we see remains to be known; so that, with every addition to our knowledge, we find a more sensible increase of our ignorance. The truths of the Bible are wonderful and mysterious, because they are lofty and sublime. They are like high mountains: the higher they are, they cast the deeper shadows.

That which is most wanted, therefore, in our inquiries after the truth of God, is a docile and humble mind. Men of knowledge and ignorant men must alike possess the spirit of a little child; in order to receive and appreciate the instructions of God's Word. The ignorance of the one and the knowledge of the other alike fit them to be alike docile under the same teaching. Men are wise as they are humble; they are learned as they are willing to learn; they grow in knowledge as they grow in grace and in the knowledge of God. They are mighty themes with which the human mind comes in contact when it tries to grasp the great truths of revelation. The student of the Bible stands on a lofty eminence; and though, when he looks down, the world is all beneath him, when once he looks up he feels that

he "is a worm and no man." If he desires to know the will of God, and sincerely and devoutly prays for this knowledge—if his spirit is that of the Psalmist when he said, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wonderful things out of thy law," God himself will become his teacher. He will see with new eyes, because he sees with a new heart; and the things of the Spirit of God are no longer foolishness with him, but spiritually discerned. He is satisfied with what God has revealed. There he stops; not at doctrines that are simply "hard to be understood," but at doctrines which no human mind in the present world can fully explore. It is enough for him that, "as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are God's ways higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts." Human reason stands aside here, and is satisfied—satisfied, because faith reposes in "the demonstration of the Spirit."

2. In the second place, our subject reproves us for *all our inward murmurings and outward complaints against the providence of the Most High*. Men often thus murmur and complain. Yet his "brightness is as the light." All that God is, and all that he does, is bright and beautiful. The darkness is in us. The fault is not in him that we are so blind to his ineffable glory. We should behold his beauty every where were our minds

less vitiated. Even under the darkest dispensations, were our views rectified, and our habits of thought not so demoralized by sin and limited by the things that are seen, we should look upon his whole character and conduct as bright and glorious.

The thoughts suggested in this discourse are fitted to reprove us. We have but to look up, and see who God is—to look abroad, and see where he is—to look within, and see the impress of the Deity on our own minds, and, it may be, on our hearts also; and we shall see enough of brightness to silence all our murmuring. Oh the greatness, the majesty, the wisdom, the rectitude, the love, the grace, the long-suffering, the power, the faithfulness, which bear such abundant testimony to his resplendent glory! What if he hides his face from us, and enrobes himself in darkness—do we not know that there is ineffable brightness behind the cloud? Dark providences lose their perplexing obscurity—the tumult of vexatious thoughts subsides—when he looks through the cloud, and his voice of love whispers to these stormy elements, and says to the troubled heart, Peace; be still! Our faith may fail, but his love and faithfulness never. Rather “hope against hope,” and give glory to God in the midst of the fires, than grope in darkness, and be ever trembling, like a reed shaken by the

wind. "Remember your blessings in the day of your sorrow, and in the day of prosperity remember your afflictions." There never was so dark a scene as that where the Savior of men hung upon the cross. It was darkness over all the earth from the sixth to the ninth hour. But a light from heaven shone there which reflected the glories of that redemption into which angels desire to look, and it was the pledge that all things should work together for good to them that love God. They are great moral results which the God only wise is thus working out. It is a dark day in this once favored land, and a dark day in the earth on which we dwell; but we have the perfect assurance that there is a brightness which is as the light that leads through the whole labyrinth of the divine dispensations, and that order and beauty will be restored to this chaos world. Lift up, therefore, the hands that hang down, and confirm the feeble knees. "The Lord is with you while ye be with him." God does not profess to give reasons for every thing he does. The earth may be removed, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; but God is our refuge and strength. Come, my people, enter into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee; hide thee for a little season, until these calamities be overpast. There you will rest beneath the shadow of the Almighty, and dwell safely in the secret of his tabernacle.

I add a

3d remark, which is, that the combined brightness and incomprehensibleness of the Deity *indicate the progressive blessedness of the heavenly world*. There are glories in the divine character, the manifestation of which will never be completed. "God! how much this title implies, no tongue, human or angelic, can ever express—no mind conceive. It is a volume of an infinite number of leaves, and every leaf is full of meaning. It will be read by saints and angels through the ages of eternity; but they will never reach the last leaf, nor fully comprehend the meaning of a single page. Even he himself can not tell us fully what he is, for our minds can not take it in. He can only say to us, I AM THAT I AM."* Ever since he called the angelic hosts into existence, he has been making some new manifestations of his glory; he is making them now, and he will be unfolding that glory down to the last great day, and beyond it, and to interminable ages. This earth, its inhabitants, and its history unfold it in a countless variety of forms; and it will be hereafter, and in brighter worlds, unfolded in scenes, and objects, and events so new, so wonderful, that holy intelligences, as they behold it, will deeply feel that it is "past finding out." All true and permanent blessedness must, from

* Payson's Select Thoughts.

the character of its source and object, be progressive. It exists, it lives, it grows, because God exists and lives, and his augmented and growing loveliness and beauty are limited only by the infinity and eternity of his nature. The human mind can not grasp them here; but as its capacities become enlarged, it will be eagerly grasping them for evermore. At their first entrance into that glorious world, they could not endure the blazing glories that will burst upon them in the successive ages of their everlasting career. It was not so much the present vision of his glory that satisfied the early Christians, as that prospective glory, and the desire and expectation of rejoicing in *hope* of his glory. There is "no need of the sun to enlighten the celestial city, nor of the moon to shine in it; for the *glory of God* doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." The largest heart grows larger there, and heavenly blessedness becomes more intense, both augmented by perpetually augmented manifestations of the godhead.

It doth not appear, my Christian hearers, what we shall be. If here on this low earth, "beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord," how transporting the view and the transformation when the brilliancy of the uncreated glory shines bright-

er and brighter, as the Sun of righteousness sweeps its everlasting circle through that unclouded, bright eternity, and in endless progress pours its dazzling beams upon "the great multitude which no man can number." Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face. Wonderful to tell, such is the high destiny of all the children of God. They have been called out of darkness into his marvelous light; and in his light they shall see light. It will be good for them to be there on that Mount of Transfiguration. They will resemble the glory they are eternally contemplating. They will be holy as God is holy. It will be new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness, and where, in endless succession and in full chorus, countless voices, like the voice of many waters, shall break forth in new songs to God and the Lamb.

END OF VOL. I.