

Hebrews Commentary - Sermons of Charles Simeon

HEBREWS

Charles Simeon's Devotional Commentaries

#2268

CHRIST'S ASCENSION TO GLORY

Hebrews 1:3

"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in Heaven."

A revelation of God, by whatever means or instrument it may be communicated, demands our solemn attention. But Christianity requires the highest possible degree of reverence, because the Messenger by whom it was promulgated, as far surpassed all other instruments in excellence, as the truths delivered by him are of deeper and more mysterious import. It is in this view that the Apostle introduces this sublime description of Christ; in which we may notice,

I. The dignity of his person—

We cannot conceive any expressions more grand than these which are here applied to Christ, and which set forth,

1. His essential dignity—

The Father is the fountain, and the archetype of all perfection. Of him Jesus is a perfect copy. As the impression on the wax corresponds with all the marks and lineaments of the seal, so is Jesus "the express image" of the Father in every particular, insomuch that "he who has seen him has seen the Father, John 14:9." But the Father is, in himself, invisible to mortal eyes, 1 Timothy 1:17; 1 Timothy 6:16; it is in Christ only that he is seen: on which account Christ is called "the image of the invisible God, Colossians 1:15." And as all the glory of the sun is seen in the bright effulgence of its rays, so is all the glory of the Godhead seen in the face of Jesus Christ, Colossians 2:9. 2 Corinthians 4:6.

2. His official dignity—

It was Jesus who made the worlds, verse 2 and John 1:3; and he it is who upholds them by the same "powerful word" that first spoke them into existence, Colossians 1:17. By him all things maintain their proper courses, and the order first assigned to them. Nor is there anything that happens either in the kingdom of providence or of grace, which does not proceed from his will, and tend to his glory. There is nothing so small but it occupies his attention, nor is there anything so great but it is under his control, Matthew 10:29-30. Everything that is good owes its existence to his immediate agency, and everything that is evil, to his righteous permission.

Intimately connected with this is,

II. The diversity of his ministrations—

As in the Church there are "diversities of administrations and of operations, 1 Corinthians 12:4-6," under Christ, who is the author of them; so in the work of Christ himself there is a diversity of ministrations.

1. He "purged our sins" by his death on earth—

Sin needed an atonement, and such an atonement as no created being could offer. Jesus therefore, the Creator himself, undertook to make an atonement for us, and such a one as would satisfy divine justice on our behalf, and put honor on that law which we had violated. For this end he assumed that nature which had sinned, and endured the curse due to our iniquities. When he had only to create or to uphold the universe, his word was sufficient: but when he came to redeem the world, nothing would suffice but his own precious blood. Other priests offered the blood of bulls and of goats as typical expiations: but, to make a true and proper atonement, Jesus was forced to offer up "himself." His prayers and tears were insufficient: if he would purge away our sins, he must do it "by himself," by "pouring out his soul unto death."

This is what Jesus undertook to do; nor did he ever draw back until he could say, "It is finished!"

He ascended to complete his work in Heaven—

The high-priest, after offering the sacrifice, entered within the veil, to present it there. Thus Jesus "passed into the heavens," the place where he was to finish his ministrations. In the presence of all his disciples he ascended thither, giving thereby a decisive evidence that nothing further remained for him to do on earth.

A further evidence of this arises from the posture in which he ministers in Heaven. The priests under the law stood, because they needed to repeat the same sacrifices continually: but Jesus having offered one sacrifice once for all, "sat down at the right hand" of God, the place of supreme dignity and power. From this we infer the perfection of his sacrifice on earth, Hebrews 10:11-12; and are assured, that whatever remains to be done by him within the veil, is transacted in an authoritative manner, all power being given to him to "save to the uttermost" those who trust in him.

We may learn from hence,

1. The security of those who believe in Christ—

Who is it that interests himself for them? "Jehovah's Fellow! Zechariah 13:7."

Who bought them with his blood? The God of Heaven and earth! Acts 20:28.

Who has undertaken to keep them? He who "upholds all things by his word, Colossians 1:17-18."

Who is continually engaged in completing their salvation? He who is constituted Head over all things for this very purpose, Ephesians 1:22-23.

What then have they to fear either from their past guilt, or their present weakness? Let them only be strong in faith, and "none shall ever pluck them out of his hand, John 10:28."

2. The danger of those who are yet in unbelief—

In proportion to the dignity of this adorable Savior must be the guilt of rejecting him. This is frequently insisted on in this epistle, Hebrews 2:3-4; Hebrews 10:28-29. Let us lay it to heart. To neglect this Jesus is such a mixture of folly and ingratitude, of impiety and rebellion, as involves in it the highest degree of criminality, and subjects us to the heaviest condemnation, Deuteronomy 18:18-19. Let those who are guilty of this neglect remember that "the enemies of Jesus shall all become his footstool:" and let them kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and they perish without remedy! Psalm 2:6; Psalm 2:9-10; Psalm 2:12.

#2269

CHRIST'S INCARNATION

Hebrews 1:6

"When he brings the First-begotten into the world, he says: Let all the angels of God worship him."

IF God had been pleased to try our faith, he might have required us to believe whatever he would reveal, even though he would mention it but once: but, in condescension to our weakness, he has given us a great variety of testimonies to confirm every fundamental doctrine of our holy religion. The doctrine of the divinity of Christ is as important as any in the whole Bible: and it stands, not on one or two doubtful passages of Scripture, but on the plainest, and almost numberless declarations of the inspired writers.

In the passage before us the Apostle is showing the infinite superiority of Jesus above the highest orders of created beings; and he adduces a whole series, as it were, of testimonies in proof of this point. The one which we have now read is taken from the 97th Psalm, and confessedly relates to Jesus. It speaks of Christ's kingdom, verse 1; and the duty of angels, here called gods, to worship him, verse 7.

In discoursing upon it we are led to observe,

I. That Christ is a proper object of divine worship—

The command contained in the text is itself decisive upon the point—

God is a jealous God, and claims divine worship as his unalienable prerogative, Matthew 4:10; yet he at the same time requires it to be given to his Son. Would he do this, if his Son were not worthy of that high honor? Would he, contrary to his express declaration, give his glory to another, Isaiah 42:8. We are assured that he would not; and therefore his Son must be a proper object of our supreme regard.

The practice of the Christian Church confirms it beyond a doubt—

Stephen, when he was full of the Holy Spirit, and his face shone like that of an angel, at the very instant that he saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, addressed himself, not to the Father, but to Jesus; and that too in terms precisely similar to those in which Jesus in his dying hour had addressed the Father. Compare Acts 7:59-60 with Luke 23:34; Luke 23:46. Can we wish for any plainer example? The Apostle Paul, under the buffetings of Satan, applied to Jesus for relief, and was expressly answered, as he himself tells us, by Jesus; in consequence of which answer, he from that time "gloried in his infirmities, that the power of Christ might rest upon him, 2 Corinthians 12:8-9." The whole Church of God, not only at Corinth, but "in all other places," are described and characterized by this very thing—the worshiping of Christ, 1 Corinthians 1:2. But the Church triumphant no less than the Church militant are incessantly presenting before him their humble and grateful adorations, Revelation 7:9-10.

Surely if worship is not to be paid to Christ, then the Scriptures are not calculated to instruct, but to deceive and ensnare us.

Nor must it be forgotten, that to worship Christ is the highest act of obedience to the Father—

It is the Father who enjoins it in the text; and that, not to men only, but to angels also: "He has committed all judgment to his Son for this very purpose, that all men may honor the Son even as they honor the Father, John 5:22-23;" he even swears that all, at the peril of their souls, shall bow to Jesus! Romans 14:10-11; and, so far from thinking himself dishonored by it, he expressly requires it, in order that he himself may be more abundantly glorified, Philippians 2:10-11.

The text leads us further to observe respecting Christ,

II. That his incarnation affords a special call to all both in Heaven and earth to worship him—

"The bringing in of the First-begotten into the world," may comprehend the whole period of his reign under the Gospel dispensation; in which case the command to worship him is general: but if we confine the expression to the time of his incarnation, the command to worship him will be a special call, arising from the circumstance of his incarnation, and founded on it. To elucidate it in this latter view we may observe that,

1. His incarnation affords the brightest discovery of the Divine perfections—

The angels had doubtless seen much of the Divine glory before: they had seen God's wisdom, power, and goodness in the creation and government of the world. But they never before had such a view of his condescension and grace as when they beheld him lying in the manger, a helpless babe. Now also the design of God to glorify all his perfections in the work of redemption was more clearly unfolded. Hence the whole multitude of the heavenly choir began to sing, "Glory to God in the highest." And if their hosannas increased with their discoveries of the Divine glory, should not ours also? Have not we also abundant reason to magnify our incarnate God; and to exalt our thoughts of him in proportion as he has debased himself for our sakes?

2. It opens a way for our reconciliation with God—

Men were indeed accepted by God before Christ's advent in the flesh; but it was through him who was to come, just as we are accepted through him who has come. But when Christ was manifested in the flesh, his mediatorial work commenced; and that course of sufferings and obedience, which is the meritorious ground of our acceptance, was begun. It may be said, that, though we are bound on this account to adore him, the angels feel no interest in it. But can we suppose that those benevolent spirits, who minister to the heirs of salvation, and bear them on their wings to the realms of glory, feel no delight in our happiness? Doubtless they do; and are themselves made happier by their sympathy with us. If they rejoice over one sinner that repents, they also have reason to adore the Savior for opening both to us and them, such an inexhaustible fountain of blessedness and joy!

3. It reunites men and angels under one Head—

Christ was the Creator and sovereign Lord both of men and angels, Colossians 1:16; but man, by casting off his allegiance to his Lord, lost also his connection with angels. Jesus however, by becoming man, gathers together again, Ephesians 1:10 both men and angels under himself as their common head: yes, he comes, as it were, to the very gates of Hell, that he may take from thence sinners of the human race to fill the thrones once vacated by the apostate angels. It is by no means improbable that the very same humiliation of Jesus that exalts men to glory, is the source of establishment to the angels that retained their innocence. At all events, the restoration of their Lord to the honor of which man by transgression had deprived him, and their communion with man in the benefits conferred upon him, cannot fail of exciting in their bosoms the liveliest emotions of gratitude. Indeed, we see that this is no

fanciful idea, since it is realized in Heaven, where saints and angels join in one general chorus, ascribing "salvation to God and to the Lamb! Revelation 5:9; Revelation 5:13."

To enforce then the injunction we have been considering, we would say:

1. Welcome him—

Let not his advent be regarded with indifference; but welcome him with acclamations and hosannas. The faultfinding Pharisees may indeed condemn you; but if you neglect to honor him thus, the very stones will cry out against you! Luke 19:38-40.

2. Submit to him—

Jesus comes, not merely to save mankind, but to set up his kingdom in the world. Let your hearts then, yes, "the very thoughts of your hearts, be brought into a willing captivity to him." "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish! Psalm 2:12;" and present your offerings before him in token of your allegiance to him, and your unreserved subjection to his will, Matthew 2:11.

3. Depend upon him—

He is that nail in a sure place on which are to be hanged all the vessels of his Father's house, Isaiah 22:23-24. Trust then on him; and let his vicarious sufferings and obedience be the stay and support of your souls.

4. Glory in him—

Since he is the boast of all in Heaven, let him be the boast of all on earth. Let the frame of your hearts be joyous, exulting, and triumphant. See Isaiah 44:23. Thus from worshipping him here below, you shall be brought to worship him for evermore in Heaven above!

#2270

EXCELLENCY OF CHRIST'S PERSON AND GOVERNMENT

Hebrews 1:8

"Unto the Son he says; Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of your kingdom."

IN the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Apostle's main object is to show that the Jewish ritual was completely fulfilled in Christ, and was therefore superseded by the Christian dispensation. But before he comes to the argumentative part, wherein this subject is regularly discussed, he shows how great and glorious a person Christ is: for, as the Jews had a high regard for Moses, and as they had received their law from God, it was necessary that they would be informed who Christ was; that he was greater than Moses, yes, than the very angels in Heaven; and that therefore he had full authority to introduce the religion which was now established among his followers, and which the Jews were everywhere called upon to embrace. This, however, he takes care to ground upon their own Scriptures. He speaks of nothing as now, for the first time, revealed to himself; but appeals to the writings of their own prophets, in proof of everything that he asserts.

The Psalm from whence the text is cited, relates chiefly to the Messiah. Whatever relation it may have to Solomon, it confessedly cannot be altogether applied to him. The ancient Jews understood it as speaking of the Messiah: and of the propriety of applying it to him, there can be no doubt. The words before us are addressed by the Father to the Messiah: and they lead us distinctly to notice two things, namely:

I. The dignity of his person—

Many there are, both Jews and Christians, who deny that the Divinity of Christ is here asserted—

Jews have said, that the word Elohim is applied in Scripture to creatures, and therefore cannot be justly interpreted as importing the proper Deity of the person to whom it is addressed. But to this it may be observed, that though the word Elohim is applied to magistrates officially, as representatives of the Deity, it is no where applied to any individual but to Jehovah himself; and that to apply it to any individual besides Jehovah would be blasphemy.

But Christians also have attempted to invalidate the testimony of the Apostle, as the Jews have of the prophet; and for that purpose would translate the words thus, "God is your throne for ever and ever." But this is to force the words from their plain and obvious meaning: nor will it answer the end which they would endeavor to attain: for the very next quotation from the Psalm asserts the divinity of Christ, as clearly as the text itself does; speaking of him as the Creator of all things, and as continuing immutably "the

same" for ever and ever, verse 10-12; and just before the text, another passage is cited from the Psalm to the same purpose, saying, "Let all the angels of God worship him, verse 6." We may safely therefore affirm, that the Messiah (who is here called "the Son,") is addressed as truly and properly "God."

The doctrine of his proper Deity, while it is asserted here, pervades also the whole Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament—

The very name Emmanuel was assigned him on this account, because he was "God with us!" Yes, truly, he is "Jehovah's fellow, Zechariah 13:7;" even "the mighty God, Isaiah 9:6;" "Jehovah our righteousness, Jeremiah 23:6." Nor does the New Testament leave this in doubt: for it asserts him to be:

"God manifest in the flesh, 1 Timothy 3:16,"

"the great God and our Savior, Titus 2:14,"

"God over all, blessed for ever, Romans 9:5."

This doctrine lies at the root of all our hopes—

The whole scope of this epistle is to show, that what the blood of bulls and goats could not do, the blood of Christ, as shed upon the cross, has effected; namely, that it has made an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. But is it the blood of a mere creature that could effect this? If Christ be a mere creature, what force is there in that argument of the Apostle, "If the blood of bulls, etc. sanctifies to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, etc. purge our conscience from dead works to serve the living God, Hebrews 9:13-14." What sense would there be in this, "If the blood of one creature could effect the smallest thing, how much more shall the blood of another creature effect the greatest?" But if Christ be God as well as man, then the argument is clear, and worthy of an inspired Apostle.

In a word, if Christ be not God, he cannot be the Savior revealed in the Old Testament: for of him it is expressly said, "Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is none else. There is no God else beside me; a just God and a Savior: there is none beside me! Isaiah 45:21-22."

But it is not so much of the essential dignity, as of the mediatorial dignity of Christ, that the text speaks: for it immediately proceeds to mark,

II. The excellency of his kingdom—

Earthly kingdoms are but of a limited duration: and, from the imperfection of all human institutions, there must of necessity be something in them of partiality and of comparative oppression. But Christ's kingdom is perfect in every respect, it is:

1. In its duration, perpetual—

The four great monarchies all found a termination of their power, Daniel 2:37-41; but the kingdom which Christ has established, shall endure forever! Daniel 2:44; Daniel 7:13-14. True it is, that the present mode of administering it will cease, when there are no more subjects to be governed, or enemies to be subdued. When the final judgment is passed, the enemies of the Messiah's kingdom will all be shut up in the prison prepared for their reception; and his subjects be exalted to those regions, where their every need will be supplied. "Then the Son will deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, that God may be all in all! 1 Corinthians 15:24; 1 Corinthians 15:28." Still, however, the kingdom itself will remain: and Christ, as its glorious Head, be acknowledged by all his subjects, as the one source of their happiness, the one author of their salvation, Revelation 5:9-10.

2. In its administration, just—

"His scepter is a scepter of righteousness." Every law that proceeds from him is "holy, and just, and good." Nothing of imperfection is found in any one of them: they are alike incapable of diminution or addition. If any one law appears too strict, it is only through our own ignorance and love of sin. To the renewed soul, not one of his commandments is grievous: the only thing that is grievous to it is, that it is not able to obey them all more perfectly. The very tendency of every law is to make those happy who obey it: and were any man to obey the laws of Christ as perfectly as they do in Heaven, he would already in his own soul possess a Heaven upon earth.

Let anyone who is disposed to complain of the strictness of the Gospel, examine its laws with candor, and see which of them he can reduce: would he love God with less than all his heart; or his neighbor less than himself? Were he to reduce any one law below its present standard, he would so far give a licence for rebellion throughout all the kingdoms of the earth, and reason for murmuring throughout all the regions of Hell, since a lower standard was appointed for others than was ever allowed to them.

But this righteousness is no less visible in the administration of the King, than in the laws by which he governs: for in no one instance is his favor or his frown accorded to any one, but in a strict consistency with equity. On whom did the King ever frown but on

account of his transgressions, or more than in proportion to their enormity? Or on whom did he ever deign to smile, but on those who humbled themselves before him as guilty, and pleaded his perfect righteousness as the ground of all their hopes? Nay, where did he ever pardon one rebel, until that rebel had cast himself entirely on the merit of his sacrifice, whereby Divine justice had been satisfied, and the law of God magnified? In earth, in Hell, in Heaven, the righteousness of his scepter is alike displayed, and to all eternity shall it be acknowledged throughout the whole extent of his dominions.

Keeping in view the general scope of the passage, as well as our own individual benefit, we would observe by way of improvement:

1. How clearly are the great truths of the Gospel founded on the Old Testament!

We find nothing in the New Testament which was not predicted in the Old. Hence our blessed Lord and his Apostles continually refer to the Jewish Scriptures in confirmation of their own word. And it is worthy of particular remark, that we never so much as once hear of their enemies controverting or objecting to the construction which they put upon the Scriptures. The true import of the prophecies was, in many respects, better understood then than now; because the Jews, in order to justify their rejection of Jesus as their Messiah, have labored to find out other interpretations of the Scriptures, different from those which their own forefathers acknowledged and approved. I cannot but regard the very circumstance of the Apostles citing the different prophecies in the way they did, as a strong presumption that the Scriptures were understood at that time in the very sense in which they cited them: for, had they not been so understood by the Jews of that day, the citation of them would have been nugatory. Yes, worse than nugatory; it would have been absurd in the highest degree; and would have produced the directly opposite effect to that which it was intended to produce. Let anyone with this impression upon his mind, read the chapter from whence our text is taken, and he cannot for one moment doubt the divinity of Christ, or the truth of his Messiahship.

2. How safely we may commit ourselves into the Savior's hands!

Were our King a man only, what confidence could we have in his protection? He could not be everywhere: he could not hear and aid all persons at the same moment: consequently we might be overwhelmed before he could come to our aid. But our King is "the Mighty God," who has all things in Heaven, and earth, and Hell under his control; and who has engaged that all his enemies, and ours, shall be put under his feet. Let none then be discouraged because of the number, power, or inveteracy of their enemies: for, if he is for us, none can successfully be against us. Let the consideration therefore which quieted David's mind in all his troubles, compose and quiet our minds also under every trial that can befall us: "the floods have lifted, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice: the floods lift up their waves. The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yes, than the mighty waves of the sea! Psalm 93:3-4;" "The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord's throne is in Heaven! Psalm 11:3-4."

3. How obedient we should be to his holy will!

Were it only that we are the work of his hands, we ought to be altogether obedient to his will: but how much more, when, in addition to being our Creator, he has become our Redeemer; and has assumed our nature, in order that we, through his vicarious sufferings, may be made partakers of his kingdom and glory!

We must not forget that the throne on which he sits is a mediatorial throne; and the kingdom which he governs is a mediatorial kingdom: and that he exercises his dominion not merely over us, but for us. How happy would the fallen angels be, if they could have one more offer of being received into his kingdom! But this privilege belongs to us only; and to us no longer than during the present short period of our existence upon earth. If we cast not down the weapons of our rebellion now, the day of grace will be past, and we shall hear him say, "Bring hither those that were my enemies, who would not that I would reign over them, and slay them before me."

But methinks we should be constrained by love, rather than by fear. Think, my brethren: what it has cost him to establish his kingdom: what conflicts he has endured for us, that we might be made partakers of his triumphs! It was "through his own death that he triumphed over him who had the power of death, and delivered us from his cruel bondage." Give up yourselves to him: and though death would await you for your fidelity to him, fear it not, but rejoice that you are counted worthy to suffer it for his sake. And know assuredly, that, "if you suffer with him, you shall reign with him," and to all eternity "be glorified together" with him!

#2271

CHRIST'S SUPERIORITY TO ANGELS

Hebrews 1:10-12

He also says: "In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed.

But you remain the same, and your years will never end."

THE Old Testament speaks much of Christ: the Psalms in particular, abound with expressions relating to him: and, previous to his coming, the learned Jews, who looked forward to the advent of their Messiah, and longed for his appearance, interpreted them in their true and proper sense. This is clear; because we never find, in any one instance, that the construction put upon these passages by the Apostles of our Lord was controverted, or the application of them to him doubted.

The Jews of later ages, in order to weaken the force of these passages as proving the Messiahship of the Lord Jesus, have invented other explanations of them; determining to put any sense whatever upon their own Scriptures, rather than admit the validity of his claims.

But it is not to be conceived that the Apostle Paul, at the very time that he withheld the signature of his name from this epistle, (lest, by the mention of it, he would excite the prejudices of his countrymen to whom he wrote,) should, in the very outset of his epistle, cite passages in a sense which none of his opponents were ready to admit; and that he would go on to build the whole weight of his arguments on passages so adduced, and so interpreted. Yet we find, that he has applied to Jesus many expressions, which, if his construction of them is true, prove, beyond a doubt, not only the Messiahship of Jesus, but the infinite superiority of his dispensation to that which had been established among the Jews. The Jews gloried in the Mosaic dispensation, as having been given to them, not only by the hands of Moses, but through the instrumentality of angels, Hebrews 2:3. Acts 7:53. Galatians 3:19.

Paul shows them, in the beginning of this epistle, that, however much they might glory in this honor, the Christian had far higher reason to glory; because his religion was revealed by Christ himself, who, both in his nature as God, and in his office as the appointed Mediator between God and man, was infinitely above the angels.

In confirmation of the Apostle's statement, I shall set before you,

I. The majesty of Him by whom the Gospel was revealed—

Great and glorious things are spoken of him in the preceding context. But we shall wave all mention of those things, and confine our attention to the passage before us, and notice:

1. The passage cited by the Apostle—

The words in my text will be found towards the close of the 102nd Psalm. In that psalm, the writer, impersonating the Church, speaks of the afflictions under which he groaned, Psalm 102:1-11, and of the consolations which he derived from contemplating the future glories of the Messiah's kingdom, which would extend over the whole world, and endure for evermore, Psalm 102:12-28. He speaks of "the heathen fearing the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth beholding his glory: and of a people who would be created to praise the Lord" verse 15, 18, 22.

The person of whom he speaks, he calls "his God:" "I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my years:" and then he immediately adds, "Of old have you laid the foundations of the earth," and so on. Now, no one ever doubted but the Person whom the Psalmist there addresses, was the God of Heaven and earth: and the Jews themselves were accustomed to interpret the psalm as referring to the Messiah. Paul confirms that interpretation, by expressly applying the text to the Lord Jesus Christ. As for saying that he applied the passage to Christ in a subordinate sense, there is no intimation given of any such thing: nor would the passage have been at all to his purpose, if it were not understood in its full sense: for the Apostle's object was, to establish the superiority of Christ above all the angels of Heaven: and to have asserted that the Father was superior to them, would have been of no use. It is clear, then, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the true God, even "God over all, blessed for ever."

2. The sublime truths contained in it—

The Person here addressed has two attributes ascribed to him; namely, omnipotence, as the Creator of the universe; and immutability, as being ever the same: and both of these belong to the Lord Jesus Christ; for it was He who created all things, both in Heaven and earth. If an idea be suggested, that he might have merely been an agent deputed to this work, as any angel might have been; and that the execution of it is not sufficient to prove his Godhead; I answer, that though I will not undertake to say what works God might devolve on a creature, there can be no doubt but that he was God who made the worlds: for it is said, "In the beginning was the Word; and the Word was with God; and the Word was God: the same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made, John 1:1-3." And this was no other than the Lord Jesus Christ: for the same Apostle adds, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us John 1:14."

To the same Person, also, is immutability ascribed: as it is said, "They (the works of creation) will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end."

Now this, also, is an incommunicable attribute of the Deity! "I, the Lord, change not." To no creature whatever can this perfection be assigned: the highest archangel, if left to himself, would fail, even as myriads of once holy angels did in Heaven; from whence they were expelled for their transgression, and were doomed to an eternity of misery in Hell. But to Jesus it essentially belongs; because, though a man, as to his human nature, he is "Jehovah's Fellow," "God manifest in the flesh," "Emmanuel, God with us."

The whole scope of the Apostle's argument leads me, from speaking of the Majesty of Christ, to show, in the next place:

II. The excellency of the Gospel as revealed by him—

Why, when the Law was committed to us by the ministry of angels, would the Gospel be spoken to us by God himself? Is there anything in the Gospel that calls for such a distinction? I answer, There is an immense disparity between the two, even such as may well account for the high honor conferred upon the Gospel. Consider what the Gospel is, consider:

1. The depth of the Gospel's mysteries—

The law was not without its mysteries: but they were all veiled from human sight; in token of which, Moses put a veil upon his face. But "in and through the Lord Jesus Christ, that veil is taken away," and we behold his glory with unveiled face, 2 Corinthians 3:14; 2 Corinthians 3:18. We are led even to the council-chamber of the Most High, where the Father and the Son concerted together for the recovery of mankind, even ages before they fell. We hear the Son undertaking to become a man, in order that he might suffer in the stead of his offending creatures, and expiate their guilt by his own obedience unto death. We see this very Savior become incarnate. We behold him sojourning on earth, as the accredited Ambassador of Heaven. We hear his voice; we trace his footsteps; we witness all his sufferings unto death. We see him yet again, raised from the dead, and ascending up to Heaven; and sending down the Holy Spirit, to testify of him, and to establish his kingdom upon earth. We behold his kingdom actually established, and maintaining its pre-eminence on earth, despite of all possible opposition from men and devils. And, finally, we behold in this stupendous mystery every perfection of the Deity, shining in harmonious and united splendor.

Here then was a mystery, which deserved to be marked with all the honor conferred upon it. True, "this treasure" might well, at a subsequent period, be put "into earthen vessels:" but at its first exhibition it was well that it would be displayed by our incarnate God, and that the word which unfolded it would "at first begin to be spoken by the Lord himself, Hebrews 2:3."

2. The richness of the Gospel's provisions—

In this is contained all that man can need, and all that God himself can bestow. We were fallen, even our whole race, like the apostate angels themselves: and being partakers with them in transgression, we were doomed to partake with them also in their punishment. We were sunk even to the very precincts of Hell: yet, behold, from thence are we taken, to be restored to the favor of our God, and to inherit a throne of glory. Could we conceive of the fallen angels, as taken from their sad abodes of misery, and restored to the felicity from which they fell, we might have some idea of the blessings imparted to us by the Gospel of Christ. But who can declare all that is comprehended in pardon, and peace, and holiness, and glory? Eternity itself will not be sufficient to compute and estimate the mighty sum!

3. The duration of the Gospel's benefits—

Eternity! Amazing thought! Eternity! Yes, eternity shall be the duration of blessedness to every believing soul. The benefits of the Mosaic dispensation soon passed away: but not so those which we inherit by the Gospel. As long as the believing soul shall retain its capacity for enjoyment, and the Savior himself exist upon his throne—so long shall He who bought us with his blood, dispense to us all the blessings that he has purchased for us: and the inheritance that shall be granted to us, shall be "incorruptible, and undefiled, and one that fades not away."

Observe, then, from this subject,

1. How worthy of acceptance is the Gospel of Christ!

When we consider who it is that has proclaimed the Gospel to us, even "the true and faithful Witness," the Lord Jesus Christ, we cannot entertain a doubt either of its truth or excellency. Take all the promises and invitations; take them in all their freeness, and in all their fullness; which of them is not worthy to be embraced with our whole hearts, and to be relied upon with our whole souls? Well did Paul say of the Gospel, "It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance." O that we could receive it as we ought! O that we felt our need of it, and that we were duly mindful of the authority and veracity of Him who has revealed it to us! We would not then dare to slight it; nor would we hesitate to rest in it with most implicit confidence.

2. How worthless are all earthly things, in comparison with it!

Let crowns and kingdoms be put into the balance against it, and they will all be found lighter than vanity itself. What is become of all

that the greatest monarchs ever enjoyed? It is vanished away as a dream. And what will soon become of the whole world? It will all pass away, as a morning cloud; and be as though it had never been. Of this we are all sensible; but yet we find it difficult to realize our own principles. In opposition to our better judgment, we are carried away after some worthless objects, which often elude our grasp; or, if enjoyed, are no sooner possessed than they perish. But if we seek for Jesus and his kingdom, all will be secured to us. No one ever sought eternal things in earnest, and was disappointed of his hope. No one ever suffered loss for them, but he found it to be gain in the end. To all then, I say, "Labor not for the food that perishes, but for that food which endures unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you; for him has God the Father sealed."

#2272

THE MINISTRY OF ANGELS

Hebrews 1:14

"Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?"

THE superiority of Christ to angels occupies the mind of the Apostle throughout this chapter. He has illustrated it already in a very convincing way. He has adduced many passages of Holy Writ which confessedly belong to the Messiah; and has shown that they never have been, nor can be, applied to angels, because the things predicated in them, exclusively belong to Jesus. The representations given of the angels necessarily imply a great inferiority to Jesus: for they are commanded to worship him, verse 6, as their Creator; verse 10-12, and their God, verse 8. Nor is it him only whom angels serve: they are the servants of his people also, appointed by him to that very office, and executing it for his honor and glory. This the Apostle mentions as an indisputable fact; and appeals to the Hebrews themselves respecting it: "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?"

The ministry of angels is not only a curious subject as it relates to them, but a very interesting subject as it relates to us; since we, if we are heirs of salvation, are the very persons for whom they minister. We propose therefore to consider the ministry of angels,

I. As evinced in their services for God's people of old—

Angels are called by the Apostle "ministering spirits," which designates at once both their nature and office. In their nature they are not corporeal, but spiritual beings: and they possess both wisdom and strength far beyond any of the sons of men, 2 Samuel 14:20. 2 Peter 2:11. Their number was once far greater than it at present is; for vast multitudes of them "kept not their first estate, but left their first habitation, and are reserved in chains of darkness to the judgment of the great day, Jude verse 6." Those who have held fast their integrity are called "the elect angels;" and of them there are myriads, yes millions without number, Psalm 68:17. Revelation 5:11. Hebrews 12:22. Among them are different ranks and orders, (as there are also among the fallen angels,) under Michael their head, who is therefore called "the archangel," while they are called "his angels, Jude verse 9. Revelation 12:7."

On God they wait, as his servants, with the utmost alacrity and zeal, Psalm 103:20-21; and by him they are employed in executing his holy will.

They were employed by him at the promulgation of his law, Acts 7:53. Deuteronomy 33:2; and they have been rendered useful also in the diffusion of his Gospel, Revelation 14:6.

By him they have been sent forth both as executioners of his vengeance and as dispensers of his mercies. By one angel, he slew in one hour the whole Egyptian first-born both of men and beasts, Exodus 12:23. By the agency of one of those powerful spirits was the pestilence produced, to which, for the punishment of David's sin, seventy thousand Israelites fell victims, 2 Samuel 24:16-17. It was by a sword wielded by a similar messenger from God, that one hundred and eighty-five thousand of the Assyrian host also were slain in one night, Isaiah 37:36. Nor is it in such extensive ravages only that they have been employed: a single individual, whom God has ordained to punish for his iniquity, has been the object of a similar commission, and been made to feel the weight of an angel's avenging arm: an angel smote Herod for his pride, and he was eaten by worms, Acts 12:23.

In like manner they have been frequently made God's ministers for good. In the instances already mentioned they proved signal benefactors, no less than avengers: for, if they smote the enemies of God, they effected thereby a great deliverance for Israel: and if they corrected his people, it was with a view to humble them, and to bring them to repentance. But they have been no less willing to minister to individuals than to a whole nation: nor have they accounted any office beneath their attention.

Was Abraham's steward sent to seek a wife for Isaac? An angel went before him to prepare his way, Genesis 24:7.

Did Hagar flee from the face of her mistress? An angel advised her to return Genesis 16:7-9. And when she was put away by Abraham, and her child was perishing with thirst, an angel directed her to a well, where she might find an immediate supply, Genesis

21:17.

Were Lot and his family in danger of perishing in Sodom? With what affectionate solicitude did angels go to bring them forth, from that devoted place, Genesis 19:1; Genesis 19:11; Genesis 19:15-17.

Does Balaam hasten to curse Israel? An angel obstructs his way, and does not allow him to proceed, until he engages to utter nothing but what the Lord shall put into his mouth, Numbers 22:22-35.

Does the highly-favored Daniel pour out his soul before God in prayer? An angel flies from the highest heavens to give him assured intelligence of the acceptance of his prayers, Daniel 9:21-23.

Under the New Testament dispensation also, we find them alike attentive to the welfare of God's people.

Is the child Jesus in danger of being involved in the common ruin of the infants whom Herod slew? An angel appears to Joseph, and directs him to flee to Egypt with his wife and child, Matthew 2:13.

Is Peter kept in prison to be brought forth the very next day for execution? An angel opens for him the prison doors, and liberates him from his confinement, Acts 12:7.

Is Paul ready to be overwhelmed in the waves of the tempestuous ocean? An angel comes to assure him, that both he, and for his sake all the ship's company also, shall be saved, Acts 27:23.

We might adduce a great many other instances of their friendly interposition for the people of God: but sufficient has been spoken to show, that the office of ministering to the saints has not been assigned to them on one or two occasions only of extraordinary magnitude, but that it has been in every successive age their uniform and willing employment.

By the view we have taken of the ministry of angels in former times, we shall be prepared to contemplate it,

II. As still exercised towards the heirs of salvation—

The vision of Jacob's ladder, with the angels ascending and descending upon it, is still realized throughout the world, even as our blessed Lord has taught us to expect it would be, Genesis 28:12. John 1:51. As soon as we embrace the Gospel, we are brought into actual communion with them, even with that "innumerable company of them" that are before the throne of God, Hebrews 12:22. But, as omnipresence is the prerogative of God alone, there are some who have a special charge of particular saints, and whose office it is to watch over them in a more especial manner, Matthew 18:10 and Acts 12:15.

They have still, as formerly, a great concern for the Gospel, desiring to get a deeper insight into it themselves, 1 Peter 1:12, and longing for a diffusion of it throughout the world. As the first promulgation of it was to them an occasion of joy and triumph, insomuch that they left their bright abodes in Heaven, and came down, a whole multitude of them, to earth on purpose to proclaim it, Luke 2:13-14; so the acceptance of it by any single individual is to them a source of unutterable joy. Not even the glory of the Divine presence so attracts their notice, but they can with pleasure turn away their eyes to behold a mourning penitent. Nor is their felicity in God himself so perfect, but it receives an addition from this blissful sight, Luke 15:10. From the moment that anyone receives the Gospel aright, they become his servants, and wait upon him with unwearied assiduity. "They encamp around him" when he is stationary, Psalm 34:7, and go out with him wherever he goes, in order to "hold him up in their hands, lest he dash his foot against a stone, Psalm 91:11-12."

Nor is it about his corporeal welfare only that they are concerned: they are attentive also to the concerns of his soul, and oftentimes support him in his conflicts, even as they did his Lord and Master, who, we are expressly told, had "an angel sent from Heaven to strengthen him" when agonizing in the garden, Luke 22:43. What was then accomplished in the Head, is doubtless yet daily wrought in the members also: for as "He was tempted in all things like as we are," so shall we be succored in all things like as he was, John 6:57.

In a dying hour, more especially, they redouble their attentions; and wait with tender solicitude the departure of the spirit, that they may bear it on their wings to Heaven into the very presence of their God. Nor do they render this service only to men of higher rank and quality: they minister with equal pleasure to the least and basest of mankind: if there is a Lazarus so poor as to exist only on the crumbs that fall from a rich man's table, and so destitute of friends that the very dogs surround him to lick his sores Luke 16:21-22, they will perform the same office for him as freely as for the greatest monarch upon earth.

Beyond this life too will they afford us their kind services: for, when our bodies, after having moldered into dust, shall again be raised in the last day, these benevolent agents will employ themselves in gathering together the dispersed saints from every quarter of the globe, and in bearing them into the presence of their Lord and Savior, Matthew 24:30-31.

The separation of the tares from the wheat will be effected by them: and, while the tares are bound up by them in bundles, and cast

into the fire that never shall be quenched, the wheat shall be gathered by them, and carried into the granary of Heaven! Matthew 13:30. O fearful thought to the ungodly, to find those benevolent spirits the instruments of their destruction, when they might, but for their own fault, have secured them as agents for their welfare! But to the saints how joyful the contemplation, that those elder brethren who never fell, will so exult in, and contribute to, the recovery of our apostate race!

Their services will now be ended, because we shall then no longer have any occasion for their aid. But the expressions of their love will never end: for, having seen with joy our fruition of redeeming love, they will unite with us in songs of praise to our redeeming God for ever and ever! Revelation 5:9-13.

Improvement—

1. How desirable is it to be found among "the heirs of salvation!"

To be heirs of great estates we all account desirable; but to be "heirs of salvation," how few of us regard as an object worthy of any serious attention! The very character of an heir of salvation, so far from being estimable in the eyes of the generality, is despised; and the names by which such a person is designated in Scripture, are made terms of reproach. "The elect," "the saints," "the godly," are names in the estimation of the world, equivalent to hypocrites and fanatics. Such, however, is not the opinion of the holy angels. When once we are brought into that family of which Christ is the head, they love us, they honor us, they serve us; yes, they account it their highest honor to minister unto us. Let me then exhort all of you, my brethren, to defer to the judgment of those who must confessedly be so much better judges than yourselves: for it is not the angels only who thus express their opinions, but God also, who assigns to them this very office, and sends them forth for the execution of it. And, if men treat us with contempt because we prefer an invisible and eternal inheritance before one that is visible and temporal, "let us not be ashamed, but let us glorify God on this behalf, 1 Peter 4:16."

Does any one ask: How shall I become an heir of salvation? I answer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ," and "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart;" for then shall you be children of the living God! John 1:12. Galatians 4:26; Galatians 4:29; and, "if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ Romans 8:17;" who, if he is "the Savior of all men, is especially the Savior of those who believe, 1 Timothy 4:10."

2. How awful will it be to be found among the opposers of God's people!

Little did the persecuting Saul think whom he opposed, when he labored to destroy the followers of Christ. He imagined that his efforts were directed only against a number of wild enthusiasts: but, when he heard the Lord Jesus Christ himself expostulating with him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" he saw his error, and learned, that "whoever touches God's people, touches the apple of his eye Zechariah 2:8." Nor are the angels indifferent about the treatment which is shown to the objects of their care. Of this we are assured expressly by our Lord himself: and we desire your particular attention to this point.

Our Lord, in order to inculcate the great doctrine of humility, exhorted his disciples to imitate a little child, which, for the more effectually impressing of the lesson upon their minds, he had set in the midst of them. He then declared, that whoever would offend one of the little ones who believed in him, it would be better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. And the reason which he assigns is very remarkable: "Take heed that you despise not one of these little ones: for I say unto you, that in Heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father who is in Heaven, Matthew 18:6; Matthew 18:10."

What is the meaning of this? and what is the force of this menace? The foregoing subject will explain it. The meaning is this. The least and basest of God's people have one or more angels peculiarly interested about them in Heaven: and, when they see the injuries done to the objects of their care, they cry to God in their behalf for vengeance, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, do you not judge and avenge their cause? Revelation 6:10." And then, as "they do continually his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word," they wait for the first intimation of the Divine will, and are ready to execute without delay, the judgment which God assigns: and, if there were a hundred and eighty-five thousand of those enemies, they would all be "eaten up with worms," as Herod was, or be cut off, like the Assyrian host, in one single night.

Let us mark particularly the extent of this admonition. It is not said, Take heed that you do not destroy my people; but, that you do not "despise" them; that you despise not "one" of them; not one of "these little ones who believe," however mean and despicable he may appear; for he has an avenger in Heaven: and the vengeance he will inflict is far more terrible than being drowned in the depths of the sea; for into the depths of Hell shall he cast your soul, the very instant he has inflicted the fatal stroke upon your body.

Ah! brethren, will you not tremble at this threat? Will you still account it a light matter either outwardly to deride, or inwardly to despise, a child of God? Beware, I beg you, of your impending danger: and, if you will not seek to become heirs of salvation yourselves, at your peril do not lift up your finger against one that is. If this be man's threatening, disregard it; but, if it is God's threatening, know that you cannot hope for success in fighting against God.

3. How excellent a work is that of ministering to the saints!

It has been shown that this is an office which even the angels themselves desire. And that they do perform it, is not merely asserted in our text, but assumed as a fact that is undoubted and unquestionable: "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" Is there so much as one among them all who accounts himself too high to wait upon the least and lowest of the human race? If then such be their employment, see what an honorable office those among ourselves sustain who are laboring in any way for the good of souls! They are fellow-workers with angels, yes, and fellow-workers with God also! Engage then in this good work, all of you, according to your ability; knowing that, "if you are to do good unto all men, you are especially to do it unto those who are of the household of faith, Galatians 6:10." The more you resemble the angels here, the more richly shall you participate in their felicity in the eternal world!

#2273

GREATNESS OF THE GOSPEL SALVATION

Hebrews 2:3

"How shall we escape, if we neglect such a great salvation?"

TO estimate our privileges aright, we would compare them, not with those of the heathen world, but with those enjoyed by God's ancient people the Jews. These were favored with a revelation from Heaven, and with ordinances of divine appointment, whereby they were to obtain acceptance with God. But their dispensation was burdensome beyond measure; their laws were executed with a rigor that was extreme; insomuch, that a man was stoned to death for only gathering a few sticks upon the Sabbath-day, Numbers 15:32. In fact, any presumptuous violation of the law, attested by two or three witnesses, brought with it the punishment of death, Numbers 15:30.

Now, when it is considered how very different a dispensation we live under, it may well be asked, "How shall we escape, if we neglect such a great salvation?" For surely, if a dispensation introduced by angels only required such strict attention, and was so inexorably enforced, much more must the Gospel dispensation, introduced as it has been by God's only dear Son, and attested by the Holy Spirit, demand attention and observance from all to whom it is revealed.

The words which I have read, will lead me to show you,

I. The greatness of the Gospel dispensation—

To learn what the Gospel salvation is, we are referred to the preaching of our blessed Lord and his Apostles—

Our blessed Lord did not systematically lay down the whole nature of the Gospel salvation; but he opened it with a sufficient clearness, that those who paid due attention to his word might easily comprehend it. What, for instance, could be plainer than the instruction given to Nicodemus, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life! John 3:14-15." Here the perishing condition of the whole world is declared, along with the means of their deliverance; namely, through the death of Christ as an atonement for sin, and by the simple exercise of faith in him. See also, verse 16, 18, 36. The same truth was repeatedly declared to others John 6:51; John 11:25-26; John 12:32-33 and Matthew 26:2,7-28; and it was fully announced, that, as he completed in himself the whole of the Mosaic ritual, he was the only medium of access to God, the only Savior of the world, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes unto the Father but by me, John 14:6."

His Apostles after him preached the very same doctrine; and to it, as preached by them, the Holy Spirit set his seal. When Peter opened the Gospel to the Jews, he bade them believe in Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins; and in like manner when he opened it to the Gentiles: and on each occasion the Holy Spirit bore witness to it, by a visible descent from Heaven, Acts 2:38-39; Acts 10:43-44. Just so, Paul also preached, and with the same effect, to the people at Antioch, and to the Jailor at Philippi, Acts 13:38-39; Acts 16:30-31. In a word, this was the Gospel which they all preached; and by this they prevailed to establish the kingdom of Christ throughout the greater part of the known world, Mark 16:15-16.

But how shall I declare the greatness of this salvation?

Consider it as imparted to us; who shall estimate the blessings of it? Take it either separately or collectively; and tell me if you, or an angel from Heaven, can ever calculate the value of pardon, and peace, and holiness, and glory? Eternity would be too short to count the mighty sum.

But consider it as purchased for us; there all efforts to estimate it aright are altogether vain. What shall I say of the incarnation of God's only dear Son, and of his substitution in the place of sinners? What shall I say of his obedience unto death: and of his working out a righteousness, wherein every sinner in the universe, if only he believed in Jesus, might stand accepted before God? It is evident that the theme is too vast either for men or angels; and that "the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of this love can never be fully comprehended," or adequately explored, Ephesians 3:18-19.

Well, then, may we now be prepared to hear of,

II. The danger of neglecting it—

Here an appeal is made to every living man; and sinners are made judges in their own cause. Only consider what is included in a neglect of the Gospel salvation:

1. What ingratitude!

Did Almighty God so compassionate our fallen state as to give his only-begotten Son to stand in our place and stead, and by his own obedience unto death to rescue us from all the miseries we have deserved? What shall be said of those on whom this stupendous act of grace makes no impression? If but a man, a fellow-sinner, had substituted himself in our place, and died for us by the hands of a public executioner, what would be thought of us if we felt no obligation to him?

I put it then to you: What must God think of us, if we feel no desire to requite his unmerited and unbounded kindness to us, in giving his only dear Son to die for us? I appeal to all: May we not well expect to lose this salvation, if we are so indifferent about it, as to treat both it, and the means used to effect it, with neglect? I cannot doubt what is the testimony which the conscience of every one before me is constrained to give.

2. What unreasonableness!

Whoever thinks of attaining the means without the end? You cannot obtain anything in this life without some effort suited to the occasion. How can you hope, therefore, that Heaven, and all its glory, shall ever be attained without some effort? If I had to require all the exertions that poor heathen devotees employ to secure the favor of their gods, it were highly reasonable that you would engage day and night in all the most self-denying services that could be prescribed. But when I have only to say, "Believe in Christ, and be saved," your neglect is unreasonable in the highest degree.

Suppose, when Moses erected the brazen serpent that all who looked to it might be healed, any had been so perverse as to say, 'No, I will not turn my head to look to it!' Would you not say that such a one justly merited the death that must have ensued? Such then is the desert of you who neglect the Savior: and I will leave you to judge, whether your unreasonable obstinacy, in refusing to comply with such easy means, does not justly cut you off from all hope of that salvation which he offers to you?

3. What horrible impiety!

I am afraid of putting this in its true point of view, lest you would think that I wish to aggravate your guilt beyond all due bounds. But the Apostle himself represents it as "a trampling under foot the Son of God, and putting him to an open shame, and doing despite unto the Spirit of grace."

Now, suppose you could see this matter as God sees it. Suppose you could see the Lord Jesus Christ coming in person to a man, and that man turning upon him and trampling him under his feet! Then suppose you saw the Holy Spirit also importuning and entreating him to accept of mercy, and the man turning his back upon him, and doing all manner of despite to him: would you think that man had any just ground to expect a salvation which he treated with such contempt?

This, then, is the very light in which God places it, and in which you also ought to view it, Hebrews 10:28-29. You, in fact, say to God, 'It was needless to send your Son for me. I did not want him; nor will I receive him: and if I am not to be saved but by him, I am determined to abide by the alternative: for I will rather perish in my sins, than be at the trouble of seeking salvation through him.'

I think I need not put it to you, whether the damnation of such an obstinate sinner be just or not! I feel persuaded that the appeal made to you in my text has made its way to all your hearts; and that you see how vain it must be for any to hope to escape the displeasure of God, if they continue to treat with such neglect and contempt, the wonderful salvation provided for them.

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have neglected this salvation—

I wish it to be particularly remembered, that while I address you, I do not lay to your charge any sin except that which is expressly specified in my text. I will grant, that, as far as any flagrant act of sin, you have been as innocent as you yourselves can affirm. But

have you therefore committed no damning sin? Ask yourselves whether you have not neglected the Gospel salvation. Ask whether, if any man had thought as little of his earthly business as you have thought of that, and had entered into his temporal concerns with as little ardor as you have into the concerns of your soul—he could reasonably have hoped for success? Yes, tell me, whether you yourselves would not have been ready to ascribe his failure to his neglect of business? You would not consider an occasional thought about his concerns sufficient, while yet he paid no just attention to them: and so, if you now and then, in a formal way, perform what you call your religious duties, while the concerns of eternity do not really occupy your souls, you must not imagine that you are free from the charge which my text imputes to you.

Consider, I beg you, what salvation is; and how greatly you need it; and how it is to be sought; and what an entire devotion of soul is required in order to a due performance of that duty. Tell me: Have you, with deep contrition of heart, mourned and lamented your sins? Have you cried to the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy, as if you felt really your perishing condition? Have you utterly renounced all hope in yourselves, and cast yourselves altogether upon him as your only hope? And is this still, at this very time, the daily habit of your mind? Nothing less than this is what the Gospel requires of you; nor without this can you ever enjoy the salvation which it has provided for you. I beg you, consider this well: and provide, if you can, an answer to the appeal, the solemn appeal, which God himself here makes to you.

2. Those who are really seeking after salvation—

If you are seeking salvation altogether in and through Christ, then will I alter the words of my text, and ask, How shall you not escape, if you are seeking this great salvation? Be assured of this: the salvation is great enough to answer all your wants, and to satisfy all your desires. There is in Christ an inexhaustible fullness of all that you stand in need of; and out of that fullness you shall receive to the utmost extent of your necessities. If a doubt or fear arises in your minds, know that none ever perished looking unto Jesus. "To those who are in him, there never was, nor ever shall be, any condemnation! Romans 8:1."

Every promise in the Bible secures to you the possession of that salvation. Are you blind, and guilty, and polluted, and enslaved? Behold, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and complete redemption, are given to you in Christ Jesus, and shall be imparted in the measure that your necessities require. Enjoy then your liberty; and let the salvation thus accorded to you fill you with unutterable joy. I grant that your enemies are mighty, and your corruptions great, and your temptations manifold—but still I boldly adopt the appeal in my text, and ask, How shall you not escape, if you seek this salvation? Look at others, and see how they have escaped. See in those who crucified the Lord of glory, how speedy and effectual was the change wrought on them. See what has been already done for that multitude whom no man can number, and who are already enjoying that salvation around the throne of God. Soon shall you be of that happy number. Only let the Gospel salvation be sought by you as the one thing needful, and you shall never feel the lack of it in time or eternity. Give yourselves thoroughly to the attainment of it; and "your labor shall not be in vain in the Lord."

#2274

CHRIST'S SUPERIORITY TO ANGELS

Hebrews 2:6-8

"But there is a place where someone has testified: What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor and put everything under his feet." In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him."

OUR blessed Lord has said, "Search the Scriptures; for they testify of me." Hence it appears, that the Jews were highly privileged; because, if they would only look up to God for the illumination of their minds, they had within their reach an infallible directory for their way to Heaven. But we are still more highly privileged, in that we have a multitude of passages pointed out to us by men, who were themselves inspired of God to discern and to explain the meaning of them. If we had been left to ourselves, we might have doubted whether our interpretations of the Scripture were just: but, when holy men of God are moved by the Holy Spirit, to open and apply those very words to Christ, which the prophets, under the influence of the same Spirit, spoke of him, we proceed without any fear of error or delusion.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the types and prophecies of the Old Testament are more fully opened to us, than in any other part of the apostolic writings. That epistle was evidently written on purpose to point out the connection between the Jewish and Christian dispensations; to show their perfect correspondence with each other, and the completion of Judaism in Christianity. It would be profitable to trace this through the whole epistle: but we must content ourselves with noticing only the passage before us.

Let us then consider,

I. The testimony here adduced—

The manner in which the Apostle speaks of this passage of Holy Writ is somewhat remarkable: at first it appears as if he himself did not recollect the author, or the part of Scripture where the passage occurred; but the fact is, that the Jews were so conversant with their Scriptures, as not to need anything more than the mere citation of the words: the writer of them, and the place, were sufficiently known to all. What its import is, we can be at no loss to determine.

David, contemplating the starry heavens, and the perfections of God as displayed in them, breaks out into a devout acknowledgment of the condescension of God, in noticing so poor and abject a creature as man; and his goodness in having subjected to man the whole animal creation, Psalm 8:3-8. This is the primary meaning of the text: and, if we had not been instructed by God himself to look for anything further, we would have rested in that as its full and only import.

But we know on infallible authority, that there was a prophetic meaning in the psalm; and that it referred to the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Having this clue given to us, we find, that the mystical sense of the passage is, if we may so speak, by far the most literal. The words, in fact, are inexplicable, as referred to man, whether in his innocent or fallen state: for Adam was not reduced from a higher state in order to be made lower than the angels conveys this idea: nor is man, in his fallen state, "a little lower than they, but a great deal lower. Moreover, fallen man was not "crowned with glory and honor," nor are all the creatures in a state of subjection to him. The very words themselves therefore lead our thoughts to Christ, in whom alone they ever received their accomplishment: and the manner in which the Apostle quotes them, shows that the Jews themselves had interpreted them in that very sense in which he quoted them: for he is arguing with the Jews, to show them the superiority of Christ to Moses, their great lawgiver, and to the angels, by whose ministry their law was given: and, if he had quoted passages from their writings which did not bear directly on his point, or had put a construction upon them which had not been generally received, they would have denied his interpretation of the passages he adduced: and consequently his whole argument would have immediately fallen to the ground.

If anything further were needed to show that the testimony is here properly adduced, we might observe, that our blessed Lord himself quotes the very words before the text as applicable to himself, and as being generally understood to refer to the Messiah, Psalm 2:2 with Matthew 21:15-16.

Having ascertained the meaning of the testimony, let us consider:

II. The points established by it—

Some interpreters understand the text as quoted only in an accommodated sense: but the words themselves, and the scope of the Apostle's argument, prove that we must understand it as a prophecy that has been strictly and literally fulfilled. In this view it contains much respecting the Lord Jesus. It proves:

1. The dignity of his person—

The scope of the Apostle's argument in the two first chapters of this epistle is, to show that Christ is superior to the heavenly hosts, and "has by inheritance a more excellent name than they." Him the Father acknowledges as his only-begotten Son, Hebrews 1:5; and commands all the angels to adore him, Hebrews 1:6. Him he addresses as the Creator and Governor of all things, the eternal, immutable Jehovah, Hebrews 1:8-12, to whom all adverse powers shall assuredly be subjected, Hebrews 1:13; to whom also the Christian dispensation ("of which Paul speaks," and which he designated as the "world to come,") is altogether committed, that he may order everything relating to it according to his sovereign will and pleasure, Hebrews 2:5.

As for angels, he has never spoken such things concerning them, or committed such power to them, Hebrews 2:5. They are the fellow-servants of the saints, Revelation 19:10; Revelation 22:9, and appointed to minister unto them in the capacity of servants, Hebrews 1:14. However venerable therefore they are in themselves, and whatever honor God put upon them in the giving of the law, they are infinitely below the Lord Jesus, who is their Creator, their Governor, and their God. In his human nature he was "made a little lower than they;" but in his pre-existent nature he was infinitely above them. O that we may have worthy conceptions of his Divine Majesty, and ever be ready to address him in the words of Thomas, "My Lord, and my God!"

2. The truth of his Messiahship—

Here is a prophecy that must receive an accomplishment: there must be a person superior to the angels in his own nature, and made lower than them by the assumption of our nature. He must submit to this humiliation "for the purpose of suffering death," as the penalty due to the sins of men. Having "tasted death for every man," he must be raised, and "crowned with glory and honor," and must "have all things in Heaven, earth, and Hell, put under his feet." Now then we ask: In whom has this, or any part of it, been fulfilled? Who has experienced either the humiliation or the exaltation which are here predicted? That Jesus has fulfilled the prophecy, we know, for, "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he

humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in Heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father!

Philippians 2:6-11." Is there any one else of whom these things, or any one of them, can be spoken? Assuredly not: "But we see Jesus" thus humbled, and thus exalted, verse 9; and, consequently, Jesus is, beyond all doubt, "the Christ, the Savior of the world!"

3. The certainty of his triumphs—

When he was on earth "he was crucified through weakness; but now he lives by the power of God." He is not only "crowned with glory and honor," as his followers will be, but is "set far above all principality and power, and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and being constituted Head over all things to the Church, he fills all in all," supplying every member of it with light and life, even as the sun does in the material world, Ephesians 1:20-23. The Apostle indeed justly observes, "We see not yet all things put under him, verse 8." But we see enough to assure us, that all things shall in due time be put under him.

See to what a state he himself was reduced, when he lay sealed up, and guarded in the silent tomb! but he rose triumphant, and ascended up to Heaven, and "sits as King upon God's holy hill of Zion."

See how quickly he triumphed over all the lusts and prejudices of mankind, and subdued millions to the obedience of faith; and this through the instrumentality of a few poor fishermen!

See how he carries on his victories yet daily through the world! Indeed every saint is a living witness for him, and a pledge to the world that nothing in the universe shall finally withstand his power.

Surely this subject is full:

1. Of consolation to the godly—

You are weak, and your enemies are mighty—but is this any ground for despondency. If an angel had been set at the head of the Church, you might well be afraid. See Exodus 32:34; Exodus 33:2-3. But under the care of Jesus you have nothing to fear. Think with yourselves, is not the Lord Jesus possessed of "all power, both in Heaven and earth?" Is there not "a fullness treasured up in him," on purpose that "you may receive out of it, even grace upon grace?" Does not "all the fullness of the Godhead dwell in him bodily?" Has he not said, "My grace is sufficient for you?" Fear not, then; but "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." Adopt the triumphant language which the prophet has put into your mouth; and "say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength!" Fear not, I say; for "through His strength you shall be enabled to do all things," and "be more than conquerors through him who loved you."

2. Of terror to the ungodly—

Because you behold not many signal interpositions of his power, you think that you may rebel against him with impunity. But see whether this prophecy has not been so far fulfilled already, as to give you reason to expect its full accomplishment! God has even "sworn that every knee shall bow to Jesus, Isaiah 45:23 with Romans 14:11." If you will not submit to the scepter of his grace, he will "break you in pieces with a rod of iron, Psalm 2:9." Nor is it a mere nominal submission that will suffice—you must put yourselves willingly and unreservedly "under his feet," as conscious of your ill desert, and as ready to justify him, if he would "execute upon you the fierceness of his anger." You must be wholly and altogether his, in every member of your body, and in every faculty of your soul. O deceive not yourselves by a feigned or partial submission! But "kiss the Son!" kiss him in token of the ardor of your affection, and of the delight you take in living to his glory.

This is your true "wisdom, even though you are kings and judges of the earth Psalm 2:10-12." He is that "stone which the builders refused, and which is become the cornerstone." If you build upon him, you will find him "a sure foundation;" but if you reject him, "he will fall upon you, and crush you to powder! Luke 20:17-18."

#2275

SUFFERINGS OF THE MESSIAH NECESSARY

Hebrews 2:10

"In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering."

THE Jews expected, that, at the coming of their Messiah, "all things would be subjected to him." But what kind of a dominion his would be, or how it would be obtained, they knew not. They pleased themselves with the idea of a triumphing Messiah; but quite overlooked what the prophets had foretold respecting the sufferings by which those triumphs would be accomplished. In a word, they neither knew how great he would be, nor to what a state of degradation he would be reduced. But Paul informed them, that, though he was, in his own nature, superior to angels, he would be brought into a condition inferior to them, for the purpose of expiating our guilt, and redeeming a ruined world. And this he declared to be such a dispensation as befit the Most High God: "In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering"

From these words I shall take occasion to show:

I. The grand peculiarity of the Christian dispensation—

God had determined to bring an innumerable multitude of sons to glory—

He had not dealt so with the fallen angels. Of them, not so much as one had been saved: but of men, it was God's purpose to restore many to the relation which they had forfeited as his "sons:" and to the inheritance of "glory," which they had lost.

This he had ordained to accomplish through the intervention of his dear Son—

Man could not effect it for himself; nor could all the holy angels in Heaven have effected it. But Christ, being God equal with the Father, was appointed to be "the Captain of our salvation," and to obtain for us what could never be wrought by any other means.

It was, however, to be effected solely "through the sufferings" of his Son—

It was not by any exercise of his power that salvation was to be wrought; nor by instructing men how they might save themselves. He must become their Surety and Substitute, and must die in their place and stead. This is the grand peculiarity of the Gospel: and, if we view not the Gospel in this light, as a redemption wrought by blood, even by the blood of God's only dear Son, we have no just conception of it at all.

Not content with a bare assertion, the Apostle states,

II. The special reason for this appointment—

God being the One Author and end of all, ("by whom, and for whom, are all things,") might be expected to accomplish this work by a mere arbitrary appointment of his own. But a very different line of conduct "befit him." If he would save men at all, it was expedient that it would be through the sufferings of his Son. This, I say, befit him:

1. For the honoring of his law—

The law had been violated: and if its sanctions were not enforced, both it and the Lawgiver himself would be dishonored. But that could not be: God would not allow it: and rather than such a stain would be brought on his moral government, he would exact from his only dear Son, the debt that was due from us; and inflict on him the curse which our sins had merited. In this way the authority of his law would be fully vindicated, at the time that the transgressors of it were forgiven: yes, by the sufferings of our incarnate God it would be more honored than if all its penalties had been inflicted on the whole human race. Seeing, then, that such honor would accrue to the law from this marvelous device, it "befit" the Almighty Lawgiver to arrange his dispensations with a view to this great result.

2. For the displaying of his own perfections—

If man had been forgiven without any atonement made for sin, what would we have known either of the justice or the holiness of God? Holiness imports a hatred of sin; and justice, the dealing with men according to their deserts. But not a trace of these would have been found, if men had not suffered, either in their own persons or their Surety, the penalty due to sin. Even truth itself would have failed; and God's most solemn threatenings been falsified. But no such consequences flow from the exercise of mercy through a suffering Savior. On the contrary, every perfection of the Deity is the more honored, because, what it derives not from us, it receives from the Lord Jesus Christ, who, as our Surety, endured all that justice, or holiness, or truth could possibly require.

3. For the magnifying of his own grace—

Doubtless it would have been a stupendous act of grace, if man had been forgiven without any atonement made for sin. But, as glorious as such a favor would have been, it would have had no glory, by reason of the infinitely richer display of mercy which we have in the Gospel of his Son. Such a mercy, if I may so speak, would have been attended with no sacrifice on the part of God: but by giving his own Son out of his bosom, he has made a sacrifice which no finite intelligence can ever duly appreciate.

Hence this is represented as exhibiting, above all other things, "the exceeding riches of his grace;" and as commending to us, with unrivaled evidence, the wonders of his love: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and gave his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins, 1 John 4:9-10." But to display this grace was worthy of the Deity; and though, with a view to it, the sacrifice that he must make was great, yet, on the whole, was it such a sacrifice as well "befit him."

4. For the enabling of his Son to execute every part of his mediatorial office—

There are parts of that office which he could not execute without suffering. As he could not atone for sin without suffering, so neither could he yield obedience to all that the law required of us without suffering. Patience and resignation can only be exercised under suffering: and therefore, "though he was a Son—yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered Hebrews 5:8-9." He must also sympathize with his afflicted people: and this also he would have been unable to do, if he had not been experimentally acquainted with sufferings in his own person: but "having suffered through temptations, he is now able to support those who are tempted, Hebrews 2:17-18;" and we, knowing that "we have One who can be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, are encouraged to come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help us in the time of need, Hebrews 4:15-16."

II. Let me now ask, if such a dispensation "befit God," then what befits us?

Does God seek to "bring us, as his sons, to glory?"

Let us seek to obtain this great benefit—

Can it be right that Almighty God would take such an interest in us, and we remain indifferent about our own state? Can we by any possibility be advanced to such honor as "sonship" with God, and such happiness as the possession of his "glory"—and shall we not exert ourselves to the utmost of our power? Shall any earthly distinctions stand for a moment in competition with these?

Has God appointed his own Son to be "the Author of our salvation?"

Let us seek salvation through Him alone—

Through Christ alone it can ever be attained. He is the sole "Author" of it; and from him, as the purchase of his blood, and the effect of his grace, it must be received. Let us not, for a moment, cherish a thought of obtaining salvation from any other source: but let our reliance on him be simple and entire. Let "him be our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and our complete redemption."

Has God seen fit to "perfect his own Son through sufferings?"

Let us be content to be perfected by him in the same way—

He has "predestined his people to be conformed to the image of his Son, Romans 8:29;" and this conformity must be in holiness, in sufferings, and in glory. Our blessed Lord has told us, that we must "take up our cross daily, and follow him:" that "the servant cannot expect to be above his Lord:" and that "we must suffer with him, if ever we would reign with him, Romans 8:17." Let us be content, then, to fill up the measure of sufferings which he has allotted to us; and, if it must be so, "through much tribulation to enter into his kingdom." Let us be content, do I say? Rather, let us "rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer for his sake," and account it an honor to be "partakers of his sufferings."

The Israelites, under Joshua, did not gain possession of Canaan without encountering a foe: nor can we, under "the Author of our salvation," become victors without a conflict. But let us "war a good warfare," and "endure unto the end." So shall we be not sons only, but heirs also, of our heavenly Father, and be made partakers of his glory for evermore!

#2276

THE ENDS OF CHRIST'S INCARNATION

Hebrews 2:14-15

"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death."

IS it so indeed, that He who was the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person; that He who created and upholds all things by the word of his power; that He whom all the angels in Heaven adore, became a man, and was made in all things like unto us, sin only excepted? Yes, "He, who was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, emptied himself of all his glory, and took upon him the form of a servant:" "the mighty God himself was a child born, and a Son

given."

And shall God be manifest in the flesh, and we not inquire into the reasons of such a stupendous mystery? Shall we profess to believe this truth; and yet pay no more attention to it, than if it was a cunningly-devised fable? Let us inquire what occasion there was for it, and what ends God designed to accomplish by it. These are stated in the words before us.

The children, whom he designed to redeem from death and Hell, were in such a state, that nothing short of this would avail for their final happiness: they were subjected to death, and could be delivered from it only by one dying in their stead: they were in bondage to Satan, and could only be rescued from his dominion by one who would overcome this great adversary, in their nature, and in their behalf; in a word, by one who would both suffer what they merited, and gain the victories which they needed.

These are the ends of our Savior's incarnation, as specified in the text.

I. The more immediate end was to suffer—

Suffer he must, even unto death, if he would effect the deliverance of his chosen people.

1. The necessities of his own people required it—

They were reduced by sin to the lowest ebb of misery. Doomed to participate in the lot of the fallen angels, they were as incapable as they of effecting their own deliverance. What then must be done? Must they be left to perish for ever? Or shall an atonement be made for them? But who can offer an atonement that shall be of sufficient value to expiate their offenses? The blood of bulls and of goats will not suffice: nor if the highest angel in Heaven could offer himself, would that be adequate to the occasion; seeing that his merits, whatever they might be, could never extend to all the millions of our guilty race. The sacrifice, to answer that end, must be of infinite value: it must be offered by a person of infinite value: it must be offered by a person of infinite dignity: he must be God as well as man. He must be man, that he may suffer; he must be God, that his sufferings may be available for the desired end. Hence the necessity for our blessed Lord to become incarnate; and hence the necessity for him to die. Supposing him to come from Heaven, and to teach us both by precept and example: that would not answer the necessities of man. Divine justice must be satisfied for the sins of men: the holiness of the Deity must be displayed in the punishment of sin: the truth of God, which denounced a curse against every transgression of his law, must be kept inviolate. In a word, a sentence of death was gone forth against sinners; and it must be inflicted either on them—or on a surety in their stead. Hence, if Jesus would ever bring us back to God, "he must suffer, the just in the place of us the unjust, 1 Peter 3:18." If he would redeem our souls, he must "give his own life a ransom for us."

2. His own covenant engagements required it—

From all eternity did the Son of God engage to repair the evils which it was foreseen would in time be introduced by sin. A council of peace was held between the Father and the Son, Zechariah 6:13. The terms which were then agreed upon, are expressly mentioned by the Prophet Isaiah, "When you shall make your soul an offering for sin, you shall see a seed, who shall prolong their days; and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in your hand, Isaiah 53:10." These terms being acceded to on the Son's part, "a body was prepared him, Hebrews 10:5," and "he came in due season, made of a woman, and under the law, that he might redeem those who were under the law, Galatians 4:4-5." His incarnation alone would not have fulfilled his engagements. He must suffer: and hence, when his sufferings came upon him to the uttermost, and he felt, as a man, disposed to avoid them, he especially called to his remembrance the engagements he had entered into, and submitted to drink the cup which was put into his hands: "Now is my soul troubled: and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? But for this cause I came unto this hour. Father, glorify your name! John 12:27-28."

3. All the predictions concerning him required it—

The very first promise clearly pointed it out: he, as "the seed of the woman, was to bruise the serpent's head:" but in the conflict "his own heel was to be bruised, Genesis 3:15." To what an extent he was to suffer is fully declared: "his visage was to be so marred, more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men: and so was he to sprinkle many nations, Isaiah 52:13-15. See also 53:4-12." Standing in the place of us who deserved utter excision, he must suffer it, Daniel 9:26. All the sacrifices of the Mosaic law shadowed forth this awful event. He was to be a priest; but what sacrifice could he offer? He was not of the tribe to which alone the offering of animal sacrifices belonged. He had no offering but his own body: which therefore he did present; and "with his own blood he entered within the veil, there to carry on and perfect the work he had begun on earth, Hebrews 8:3-4; Hebrews 9:11-12."

Looking forward to his death, he often referred to it as that which would speedily be accomplished, as the appointed means of saving a ruined world, John 12:31-33. And, when his disciples were stumbled at his death, and regarded it as an event by which all their hopes and expectations were frustrated, he reproved them for their ignorance and unbelief, and showed them, that it had been the great subject of prophecy from the beginning of the world; and that it was necessary to the accomplishment of the work he had

undertaken, Luke 24:21; Luke 24:25-27; Luke 24:44-46.

Such was the more immediate end of Christ's incarnation!

II. The ultimate end of it was to reign and triumph—

In overlooking the previous humiliation of their Messiah, the Jews greatly err: but in their expectation of a triumphing Messiah, they are right. He was indeed "to drink of the brook in the way;" but he was then "to lift up his head." His sufferings were to precede: but the whole Scripture attests, that a glory was to follow, 1 Peter 1:11; and by the very sufferings which he sustained, his triumphs were secured to him. He was to triumph,

1. In the destruction of Satan's empire—

Satan, that "murderer," had introduced sin and death into the world: and by his continual agency he is carrying forward the work of death among the sinners of mankind; and exulting in the multitudes which are daily subjected to his tyrannic sway. But Jesus, we are assured, came to weaken and destroy his empire: "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil, 1 John 3:8."

But the point particularly to be noticed is, that Jesus was to accomplish this victory by means of his own death: "By death he was to destroy him who had the power of death." By reason of sin, all the human race was subjected to everlasting chains of darkness in the regions of despair. But Jesus, nailing to the cross the hand-writing that was against us, has cancelled it forever. Satan thought, that, when he had so far prevailed as to secure the death of the Lord Jesus, he had gained his cause: but it was that very event which gave the death-blow to all Satan's power, in that it removed the only ground on which Satan could maintain his stand against the children of men. It was by that event that Jesus satisfied the demands of law and justice, and discharged the debt which had been contracted by mankind. And, that once discharged by our Surety, we can claim our release from all obligation to pay it ourselves. Hence we are told, that Jesus, while upon the cross, "spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them openly in it, Colossians 2:14-15." Yes, if Jesus had, as some have feigned, gone down himself to Hell, and opened the prison-doors to those who were already there, he would not have more signally displayed his power, than he did in his death and resurrection, whereby he vanquished Satan and "led captivity itself captive."

2. In the deliverance of his own people—

Death being inflicted as the penalty of sin, and being a prelude to an unknown state, all men by nature dread it. Though many, through pride and thoughtlessness, may brave it on a field of battle, no man can behold its gradual approaches without a solemn apprehension of its terrors.

But the Lord Jesus would not suffer that his people would remain in such bondage; and by his death he has effectually freed them from it. The sting of death is sin: but he by his death has cancelled sin, and blotted it out as a morning cloud. The offering which has satisfied the justice of the Deity, satisfies the sinner's conscience, and brings perfect peace into the soul. And it was one end of our Lord's death to effect this; that his people might be brought into perfect liberty, and enjoy a very Heaven upon earth. To them death is now become a friend, for whose arrival to look forward with eager desire, 2 Peter 3:12; it is numbered among their treasures also, 1 Corinthians 3:22; and all fear, either of its present terrors, or future consequences, is removed. "The Son has made them free; and they are free indeed."

ADDRESS—

1. The captive sinner—

How lamentable is it that the effects of Jesus' death would be so limited, as we see they really are! Though Satan is a vanquished enemy, there are but few who will "put their foot upon his neck." Many are his willing captives still, and love the chains with which he binds them, 2 Timothy 2:26. O, beloved, what a solemn thought is it, that to multitudes the incarnation and death of Christ are a curse, rather than a blessing! "Had he never come to die for them, they had not (comparatively) had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin:" and the state of Sodom and Gomorrah is less terrible than theirs.

When will you lay this to heart, O you who "walk according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, who works in all the children of disobedience?" Do but reflect on the account which you must hereafter give, and on the self-condemnation which you will feel in the day of judgment, when the full effects of your present disobedience will come upon you.

I cannot contemplate your condition now, or your feelings in that day, without saying with the prophet, "Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people!" O let not all the wonders of redeeming love be in vain to you; yes, worse than in vain—a melancholy source of tenfold condemnation!

2. The awakened penitent—

Are you beginning to feel your sins a heavy burden? Bless and adore your God for the provision he has made for you in the Son of his love. Your guilt is expiated by your Savior's blood: and Satan, who has kept you hitherto in such cruel bondage, is dethroned. Look unto this Savior. Did he come down from Heaven? It was to seek and save the lost, yes, and the very chief of sinners. Lay hold on him; plead with God the sacrifice which he has offered; and seek a saving interest in the victories he has gained. It is for that, he has lived; for you, he has died; for you, he reigns: and never is he better satisfied with the travail of his soul, than when he sees such as you born to God through him, Isaiah 53:11.

3. The trembling believer—

What would you have God add to all that he has done for you? What is there lacking to dispel your fears, and encourage your hearts? Are you afraid of Satan? He is a vanquished enemy. Are you afraid of death? To you it is only as the gate of Heaven. Be of good cheer. If you are weak, "your Redeemer is mighty;" and his "strength shall be perfected in your weakness." He, who for your sakes "partook of flesh and blood," with all the sinless infirmities of your nature, knows by experience all that you feel, and will afford you all needful support. Fear not, "He will not break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax, but will bring forth judgment unto victory." Rejoice then in him; rejoice evermore: and doubt not but that "he who has begun a good work in you, will for his own sake perfect it to the end."

#2277

CHRIST'S POWER TO SUPPORT THE TEMPTED

Hebrews 2:18

"Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."

THERE was in various respects a necessity for Christ's humiliation:

- on our part, that, an atonement being offered for us, we might find favor with God;
- on God's part, that his justice might be satisfied, and his law be magnified;
- and on the part of Christ himself, that he might be qualified for the discharge of his mediatorial office.

This, having been expressly asserted in the preceding, verse, is further intimated in the words we have just read; which lead us to consider,

I. The temptations of our Lord—

Great and manifold were the trials which our blessed Lord sustained:

1. From men—

Though in his infancy he grew up in favor with men as well as with God—yet from his first entrance on his public ministry, he was an object of universal contempt and abhorrence, Isaiah 49:7. He endured all manner of contradiction from all ranks and orders of men: they caviled at his words, misrepresented his actions, reviled him as an impostor, and a confederate with the devil; and, at last, apprehended, condemned, and crucified him.

2. From devils—

These assaulted him with fiery temptations in the wilderness, urging him to distrust, presumption, and idolatry. They attacked him with fresh vigor in the garden, when the powers of darkness combined all their force against him: and they made their last efforts against him on the cross; when, though "triumphed over and spoiled by him," they succeeded in "bruising his heel," and in bringing him down to the chambers of death.

3. From God—

When he stood as the surety of sinners, God exacted of him the utmost farthing of our debt. It was the Father who put the bitter cup into his hands, who laid the tremendous load of our iniquities upon him, and "bruised him," that the fragrance of his offering might ascend up as incense with acceptance before him. Compare Isaiah 53:10 with Exodus 30:36.

But, notwithstanding these sufferings of his, our text assures us of,

II. His ability to support his tempted people—

All his people, like him, are:

persecuted by men,
assailed by devils,
and chastised by God.

But Jesus is able to support them: he has a sufficiency,

1. Of power and strength—

He has all power committed to him—yes, all fullness of the Godhead dwelling in him. He can bind the strong man armed, and rescue from him his wretched captives. There is nothing impossible with him. The weaker his people are, the more shall "his strength be perfected in their weakness."

2. Of wisdom—

As he has "power to deliver the godly out of temptations," so can he defeat all the plots of their adversaries, and take even Satan himself in his own devices. He sees every weapon that is formed against them, and knows the day and hour that their enemies set themselves against them, Jeremiah 49:30. He discerns also the best time and manner in which to afford his aid, and so to proportion it to our necessities, as both to secure us the victory, and himself the glory.

3. Of pity and compassion—

He wept on account of the afflictions of his friends when he was on earth: nor will he forget to pity us, now that he is in Heaven. "The very apple of his eye is wounded, whenever any of his dear people are touched." "In all their afflictions, he is afflicted; and as, in his love and in his pity he redeemed them, and bore them, and carried them all the days of old;" so does he now, being "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," and sympathizing with us in all our troubles, Isaiah 63:9.

Having noticed his temptations, and his ability to support us under ours—it will be proper to show,

III. The connection between the two, or the dependence of the one upon the other—

As God, he of necessity possessed every perfection: but, as man and mediator, he learned much from his own experience. By his own temptations:

1. He learned our need of support—

He himself, under his own grievous sufferings, "prayed to God with strong crying and tears, and was heard," and strengthened from above, Hebrews 5:7 with Luke 22:42-43. Hence then he knows how much we must need assistance under our trials, and how certainly we must faint, if we are not supported by his almighty power.

2. He acquired a right to support us—

We are bought by him with the inestimable price of his own blood. And it was agreed with him in the covenant of redemption, that, "if he would make his soul an offering for sin, he would see a seed, and the pleasure of the Lord would prosper in his hands, Isaiah 53:10." Having then paid the price, he has a right to us as "his purchased possession;" and has therefore a right to convey to us whatever maybe needful for the salvation of our souls.

3. He attained a disposition to support us—

We are assured that "he learned obedience by the things that he suffered, Hebrews 5:8." Now, as obedience consists entirely in love to God and man, sympathy, which is the highest office of love, must of necessity have been learned by him, together with every other part of his duty. And how perfectly he had learned it, his address to the persecuting Saul declares, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" And it is worthy of observation, that the Apostle ascribes his sympathy to this very cause, "his having been tempted in all things like unto us, qualifying and disposing him to feel for us under our infirmities, Hebrews 4:15." Nay, further, he observes, that there was a necessity for him to be made like unto us in all things, in order that he might be a merciful and faithful High-priest in things pertaining to God; which office he could not have executed if he had not, by his own sufferings, been enabled to sympathize with us, Hebrews 2:17.

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are conflicting with temptations—

The Lord's people still are assaulted with manifold temptations. Satan is not idle: he still "desires to sift us as wheat," and still "as a roaring lion goes about, seeking whom he may devour." There is not a saint whom he does not labor to "corrupt from the simplicity that is in Christ," and for this end he still on many occasions "transforms himself into an angel of light."

But however severe your outward or inward trials may be, you have the comfort to reflect that Christ endured the same before you, and is able to afford you effectual support. Do not think then that your difficulties peculiar or insurmountable; but assure yourselves of his sympathy and care; and be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might."

2. Those who are yielding to their temptations—

Excuse not your compliances by pleading the frailty of your nature; for "Christ is able to make all grace abound towards you, that you having always all sufficiency in all things, may abound unto every good work, 2 Corinthians 9:8." Continue not then under unmortified tempers, or criminal neglects; but call on the Lord, who "will not allow you to be tempted above that you are able; but will, with the temptation, make also a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it! 1 Corinthians 10:13." I say again, plead not in excuse, the corruption of your nature, or the difficulties of your situation: for grace which is not effectual, is no grace. The very weakest among you may say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," and, though assaulted by all the powers of darkness, shall be "more than conqueror through him who loved me!"

#2278

NAMES AND OFFICES OF CHRIST

Hebrews 3:1

"Holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus."

OUR Lord possessed, from all eternity, a nature infinitely superior to that of angels, Hebrews 1:3; Hebrews 1:8; Hebrews 1:10; yet did he submit to the lowest humiliation for us Philippians 2:6-7. And it is by the knowledge of him, as humbled, that we attain salvation, John 17:8.

The Apostle having spoken much on this subject in the foregoing chapter, enforces it with this affectionate exhortation—

I. Explain the exhortation—

The first thing that calls for our attention is the description which he gives of all true Christians—

Wishing to persuade, he strove by tenderness to conciliate their esteem: he calls them brethren; which they are, both by relation, Matthew 23:9, and affection, 1 John 3:14.

They are "holy;" set apart for the service and enjoyment of God—washed in the fountain of Christ's blood, and renewed after the Divine image.

They are "partakers of a heavenly calling;" called to heavenly exercises and enjoyments—obedient to that call—and suitably influenced by it in their hearts and lives. How amiable is such a character! "Brethren!" "holy!" "called!" etc. Who would not wish to be found of their number!

The next thing which demands our notice is the object he sets before them—

When he speaks of Christ in common, he places the name "Jesus" first; but when he speaks with more than ordinary solemnity, the name "Christ" is first. He here describes the Savior both by his names and offices.

His names: "Christ". It is of the same import as Messiah, John 1:44 and means Anointed. Jesus is the same with Joshua, Hebrews 4:8; and Joshua is a contraction for Jah Oseah, the former of which signifies God, and the latter Savior. This name was given by God to Hoseah the son of Nun, who, as a type of Christ, led the Israelites into the land of Canaan: and the giving of this name to the Virgin's Son may be justly considered as an accomplishment of that prophecy which said he would be called Emmanuel, God with us. Its import therefore is "Divine Savior"—which is are peculiarly significant in this connection. His offices are such as Moses and Aaron sustained under the law. Christ is "the Apostle of our profession," as being sent, like Moses, to publish that religion which we profess. He is also "the High-priest of it," because, like Aaron, he performs all that is necessary for our reconciliation with God Jesus, as our High-priest, offered himself a sacrifice for us.

He has gone into the holy of holies to present his blood before the mercy-seat.

He lives to make intercession for us. He presents our offerings unto the Father.

He bears us on his breast-plate.

He and makes known to us the will of God.

The last thing to explain is the duty which he presses upon them—

The word which we translate "consider," implies an attentive regard. It might easily be shown how important this duty is; but our observations on this subject will occur more properly in another place.

Having spoken what was necessary to unfold the meaning of the exhortation, we proceed to,

II. Enforce it—

To those who answer the foregoing character we address the exhortation:

1. Consider the object set before you—

His NAMES—

As "Jesus," Divine Savior, he is able to save to the uttermost. As "Christ," he was anointed of God for this very purpose. Had he not been appointed of God, or had he been less than God, you might have been afraid to trust in him; but his names attest his right and ability to save. Think how these words would sound in Hell; and let them be as sweet to you as they would be to the unhappy spirits there.

His OFFICES—

As the Apostle or Prophet of the Church, he will instruct all, Matthew 11:29; As the High-priest, he will open a way for us into the holy place, Hebrews 10:19-20; O reflect on these, until your hearts burn within you with gratitude and love!

2. Consider more particularly the view given of him in the preceding and following context—

His compassion as a high-priest—

He himself has endured persecution from men, temptation from Satan, desertion from God, etc. Hebrews 2:17-18; he will sympathize with you under your trials, Hebrews 4:15. This may be further illustrated by the care of a refiner, whom Christ is said to resemble, Malachi 3:3. Let this be a source of comfort to you under every affliction.

His faithfulness as a Prophet—

He extends his care to all his people, Hebrews 3:2; he never suffered the weakest believer to err finally, Isaiah 35:8; nor will he fail to guide us aright, Isaiah 30:21. Psalm 73:24. Go to him then for teaching in every doubt and every difficulty.

Those who do not answer to the character may reap benefit from the exhortation—

You who are unholy, and strangers to the heavenly calling, consider this description of our blessed Lord. Consider it with attention, that you may understand it:

with faith, that you may have a saving interest in it;

with affection, that you may delight in it,

with gratitude, that you may display its influence in your heart.

This subject may be reduced to more of unity and simplicity, thus, mark:

I. What OFFICES the Lord Jesus Christ sustains for us—

Every religion has its apostles, who propagate it, and its priests, who perform its rites. Of our religion, our incarnate God, the Lord Jesus Christ—is both the Apostle and High-priest. These offices were assigned to him from eternity, Psalm 40:6-8. He executed them faithfully when on earth; the prophetic, Hebrews 1:2; Hebrews 2:3; the priestly, Hebrews 1:3; Hebrews 2:14; Hebrews 2:17. He still discharges them for the good of his people; as a prophet, teaching them by his Spirit, John 16:7-11; as a priest, compassionating and relieving all their spiritual necessities, Hebrews 2:18; Hebrews 4:15.

II. Our duty towards Him in relation to them—

We should consider him in these characters:

with attention, that we may have the fullest knowledge of him;

with faith, that we derive all benefit from them;

with gratitude, that we may give him the glory of them.

ADDRESS—

1. Those who profess to be "partakers of the heavenly calling"—

If indeed you have experienced the power of divine grace, you will need no incentives to this duty. To contemplate the Lord Jesus Christ in all his excellency and glory, will be the richest delight of your souls.

2. To those who are strangers to this holy exercise—

Alas! what do you lose! There is no other subject under Heaven that would so repay your labor. The more you delight yourselves in Christ, the more evidence you will have of his grace in your souls, and the better preparation for his glory.

#2279

CHRIST'S SUPERIORITY TO MOSES

Hebrews 3:5-6

"Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future.

But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house.

And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast."

IN order to have a just conception of the Christian dispensation, we must above all things acquire scriptural views of the person of Christ, as God and man, and of his mediatorial character, as Emmanuel, God with us. It is in this latter view more especially, that we are led to contemplate him throughout this whole epistle. As God, he is "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person;" while, as man, "he has purged our sins, and is set down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, Hebrews 1:3;" but it is as God and man in one Christ that his sacrifice becomes effectual for this great end. It is in his mediatorial capacity, as God-man, that he is exalted above all the angels in Heaven, who are expressly enjoined to "worship him, Hebrews 1:4-6." And it is in the same capacity that we are now called upon to "consider him as the Apostle and High-priest of our profession, verse 1." As "the Apostle" of our profession, sent like Moses, to instruct us in the mind and will of God, he is superior to Moses, whose instructions he is sent to supersede. And, in like manner, will his superiority to Aaron also be declared, when we shall come, in a subsequent part of this epistle, to consider his priesthood. It is the comparison between him and Moses which alone we have to notice at this time.

We proceed then to mark,

I. The superiority of Christ to Moses—

The character given of Moses is most exalted—

He was "faithful in all God's house, Numbers 12:7." From the first moment of his undertaking the office that was assigned him, he was faithful in the discharge of it. Whatever was commanded him to do, he did; adding nothing, omitting nothing, neglecting nothing. Whether the commands were moral or ceremonial, he was observant of the minutest direction that was given him. He was aware that all which he was commissioned to say or do, had respect to a future period, and was intended to shadow forth something under a future dispensation: and so accurate was he in every particular, that there is not the smallest lack of agreement between the Jewish and Christian codes, the one answering to the other, as the coin to the die by which it is stamped. As the tabernacle, even to the smallest pin, was "made according to the pattern show to him in the mount;" so was that whole dispensation in perfect accordance with that under which we live.

Much he had to try him, and to shake his fidelity: but he was immovable. Nothing could for a moment divert him from his duty, or cause him to relax his efforts in his Master's cause. And in this fidelity he stood alone. Aaron and Miriam both turned aside from the path of duty; yes, both confederated even against Moses himself. But Moses was steadfast to the end—unmoved, unwearied, unrestrained.

But Christ in this respect was exalted infinitely above him—

Christ also was faithful in all his house. He delivered nothing which he had not previously heard and learned of his Father: but all which had been given him either to do or teach, he did and taught with all imaginable fidelity: yes, and what he was ordained to suffer also for the sins of men, he patiently endured, drinking the bitter cup even to the dregs, and never stopping until he could say, in relation to it all, "It is finished!"

Thus far the two may be supposed to have been upon an equality. But there are some points of difference between them, which

exalt the office and character of Christ far above that of Moses.

Moses was "a servant in the house of another:" Christ was a Son, or Lord, "over his own house."

Moses only instructed his house: but Christ was the very source and builder of the house he governed; every member of it having been created by his power, and redeemed by his blood, and converted by his grace. The house itself would have had no existence but for him. Now, as the builder of a house, whether in a literal, political, or religious sense, must be far above the work which he has prepared; so must Christ, who formed his house, be far above every member of it: and as being the only true source of everything in the Church, he must be truly and properly "God, verse 4;" and consequently have infinitely higher glory than Moses, who was only a member of the very house which he himself was appointed to instruct and govern.

That this superiority of his is not a mere speculative point, will appear, if we consider,

II. Our saving interest in it—

"We are his house"—

The Church is called in Scripture "the house of God, 1 Timothy 3:15;" and if we have truly believed in Christ, we are that house. We are:

- those for whom all the wonders of redeeming love were planned;
- those for whom all that Christ has ever executed was undertaken;
- those for whose sake he has hitherto ordered all things both in Heaven and earth;
- those over whom he still watches with his peculiar care;
- those for whom he is engaged to complete the work he has begun.

Wonderful thought! We are his house, his family, his peculiar people!

What an honor! What a privilege! What a blessing!

But it is here taken for granted, that we have believed in him, and made him the one foundation of all our hopes, and boldly confessed him in the presence of the ungodly world:

And under this character we have appropriate duties and obligations—

We must "hold fast our confidence, and the rejoicing of our hope firm unto the end." We shall have difficulties to encounter, even as Moses and Christ had: but we must endure like them, being "steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord." Whatever we may meet with, we must not for a moment be moved away from the hope of the Gospel: we must stand fast in:

- our principles, Ephesians 4:14;
- our practice, Hebrews 10:26;
- our profession, Hebrews 10:23;

for on our steadfastness in these things our ultimate acceptance with him depends. "If we are dead with him, we shall also live with him: but if we deny him, he will deny us. And if we believe not (either the one or other of these sayings)—yet he abides faithful to his word; he cannot deny himself, 2 Timothy 2:12;" He will be with us, while we are with him. If we seek him, he will be found of us: but if we forsake him, he will forsake us, 2 Chronicles 15:2.

Improvement—

1. Let us put ourselves under his direction—

Christ is the great Head and Lord of all. From him we must receive directions, as he did from his Father, and as Moses did also.

- Nothing is to be done by us but according to his word;
- nothing is to be done which he has forbidden;
- nothing is to be omitted which he has commanded:
- no deviation is to be admitted in a way of excess or defect.

If doubt at any time arise respecting the path of duty, we must consult him, and not proceed, until we have attained, so far as we can attain, the knowledge of his will. Human opinions are to have no weight with us in opposition to his word. And if we see not as yet the reasons of his commands, as Moses certainly did not in relation to the ceremonial law, we are not on that account to disobey them, but in all humility to comply with them, saying, "What I know not now, I shall know hereafter, John 13:6-7."

Nor are we to complain of any commandment as difficult or self-denying; but to disregard even life itself, if by the sacrifice of it He may be glorified, Philippians 1:20. Admirable was the lesson which the Jews were taught in the wilderness: if the pillar and the cloud

moved for several days and nights together, they continued to follow it: and if it was stationary for a year together, they were stationary also. Thus it would be with us: we should move when, and where, and as the Lord prescribes, and in that way alone, to the last hour of our lives!

2. Let us endeavor to approve ourselves to him in our respective spheres—

He walked among the seven golden candlesticks, the seven Churches of Asia, and declared to each of them, "I know your works!" And still are his eyes as a flame of fire to penetrate the inmost recesses of our hearts. We must not therefore be satisfied with walking irreproachably before men, but must labor to approve ourselves to Him who searches the heart and tries the thoughts. We must be attentive not to our actions only, but to our motives and principles, that, if possible, every thought may be brought into captivity to his will. We must seek to obtain from God that testimony which he bore to Moses, that we are "faithful in all our house." Let us look to it, that as parents and children, masters and servants, rulers and subjects, we do all that he has required of us. Let us labor to "serve him with a perfect heart;" so that in all our commerce with men, and in our secret walk with God, we may have "the witness of his Spirit, that we please him Hebrews 11:5;" and may receive from him in the last day that testimony of his approbation, "Well done, good and faithful servants, enter into the joy of your Lord!"

3. Let us expect from him all that he has undertaken for us—

Still does he superintend the concerns of his Church: and though he has wrought much for us—yet is there much that yet remains to be done, and much that he has promised to be accomplished. But "his promises are sure to all his seed, Romans 4:16;" not one of them shall ever fail: nor shall even the least member of his house ever have occasion to complain that he was disappointed of his hope. Joshua's testimony shall be that of all the Church in the last day, that "of all which God has promised, not one thing has failed! Joshua 23:14." Take hold then of his promises, and plead them before him. If they appear too great to be fulfilled, "stagger not at them, but hope against hope, and be strong in faith, giving glory to God, Romans 4:18; Romans 4:20." If your tribulations are great, let them not for a moment obstruct your rejoicing in him; but "maintain your glorying firm unto the end." See the utmost desires of a bleeding soul all concentrated in one short prayer; and, for the accomplishment of them, rest not merely on the love and power of Jesus, but on his fidelity: and when you have been praying that the very God of peace would sanctify you wholly, and that your whole spirit, and soul, and body, may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, then add, "Faithful is He who has called me, who also will do it! 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24."

#2280

AGAINST DEPARTING FROM GOD

Hebrews 3:12-14

"Take heed, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly until the end the confidence we had at first."

THE consideration of the fullness and sufficiency of Christ, is that which animates the believer in all his conflicts. Yet it is on no account to supersede our own care and watchfulness: on the contrary, it affords us the greatest encouragement to watch, because it ensures success to us in our endeavors, which, without his Almighty aid, would be of no avail.

In this view it is that the inspired writer calls us to "consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus, who was not merely a servant, like Moses—but a son, the Heir and Lord of all, yes, the very builder of that spiritual house, of which we profess ourselves to be a part." On this truth he grounds the exhortation in the text All the words between "why," in verse 7, and the text, are a parenthesis: we must therefore connect the text thus, "Therefore," "take heed," etc, in which he suggests,

I. A solemn caution—

As difficult as it is to come to God, we find it but too easy to depart from him. We should therefore be on our guard:

1. Against any departure from him—

While men are yielding to temptation, and turning aside from the ways of God, they cherish a hope that they may still preserve their interest in his favor, though they are not studious to do his will. But a departure of any kind, whether from the faith or practice of Christianity, is nothing less than a departure from God himself, even from him who is the only source of life and happiness. We cannot therefore be too much on our guard against any secret declensions, which are so dishonorable to him whom we profess to love, and so destructive of our present and eternal welfare.

2. Against that unbelief from whence all declensions arise—

As faith is that which brings us to God, and keeps us steadfast in our adherence to him—so unbelief separates us from him, and, in proportion as it is harbored, invariably alienates us from the life of God. Whatever the more immediate object of that unbelief is, whether we attempt to lower the strictness of God's precepts, or question the veracity of his promises or threatenings—it proceeds equally from "an evil heart," and brings with it the same pernicious consequences: it is a root of bitterness, which, if it is permitted to spring up, will cause every devout affection to wither and decay. We must therefore labor to eradicate it, if we would not eat forever its bitter fruits!

That his caution may have its due effect, the Apostle prescribes,

II. The means of improving it—

Sin is of a deceitful and hardening nature—

When "a backslider in heart" commits a sin, many thoughts will arise in his mind to palliate the evil, and to make him think that it will not be attended with any significant consequences. Soon he begins to doubt whether the thing is evil at all. And, before long, he begins to justify it from the peculiarity of his circumstances. At first he felt some remorse; but presently his conscience becomes less tender, until at last it is altogether seared and callous; so that, notwithstanding he is miserably departed from God, he is regardless of his loss, and insensible of his danger! Who that has ever noticed the workings of his own heart, has not found what a bewitching and besotting thing sin is? Yes, who has not often seen reason to bewail its deceitful, hardening effects!

To guard effectually against it, we should watch over each other—

Sin, from the foregoing qualities, naturally hides itself from our view, and renders us inattentive to the means of prevention. But as ignorant as we often are of our own spirit, we see clearly enough the defects of others; yes, perhaps we condemn with severity in others the very things which we allow in ourselves. To watch over each other therefore, and to warn each other of those declensions which we either see or apprehend, is a most valuable service; and, if performed with discretion and love, it can scarcely fail of producing the happiest effects.

This is a duty to which God has solemnly called us in his word, Leviticus 19:17; and it is to be a part of our "daily" work. Our time for it will be very short: either we or our brother may be speedily removed; and our opportunity of benefitting his soul may be lost for ever. We should exhort one another therefore "daily, while it is called Today;" and, though it is often an unpleasant office, we should use all fidelity in the execution of it. By this means we may restore a brother before he has relapsed too far, and preserve him from that departure from God, which would otherwise terminate in his destruction.

Still further to enforce the caution given us, the Apostle adds,

III. A motive to regard it—

Our final participation of Christ's saving benefits, depends on our steadfastness in the pursuit of them—

Without entering into the question, whether God has decreed the final perseverance of the saints, we may be fully assured that none can attain salvation but by persevering in the way of holiness to the end of life. The Scriptures continually speak this language, "He who endures to the end, the same shall be saved:" "but if any man draws back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him, Matthew 24:13. Hebrews 10:38." It is true that believers are already in a measure "partakers of Christ;" but the complete enjoyment of his benefits is reserved for the future life: and we must not only have a scriptural and well-founded confidence at first, but must keep it steadfast even to the end, in order to attain that full possession of our inheritance.

You may call yourselves "brethren," and may boast of "your confidence in Christ:" but it is to you, yes, to all of you, that the caution is addressed; and to you I address myself, saying, "Take heed lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief," and "lest any of You be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

If anything can stimulate us to caution, surely this must—

Eternity is at stake, and depends on our present conduct: according as we approve ourselves to the heart-searching God, will our state be fixed forever. Is it not madness to be remiss and careless under such circumstances? Would anyone, who would have reason to think his house were on fire, sit still without endeavoring to find out the grounds of his alarm?

Just so, shall we know our proneness to unbelief, and not guard against its operation, lest it prevail against us, and lead us to apostasy? Shall we acknowledge the deceitful, hardening nature of sin—and not exhort each other to mortify and subdue it? Surely, if we have the smallest concern for our own souls and the souls of others, we shall not only regard the caution given us in the text, but shall labor to improve it in the way prescribed.

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have never come to God at all—

The foregoing subject is in itself only applicable to those who profess religion; but it may be accommodated to those also who make no such profession, for:

if those who have come to God, are in danger of departing from him,

if those who have enjoyed a scriptural confidence, may lose it;

if those who have believed, may "make shipwreck of their faith," if those who have "begun in the Spirit, may end in the flesh;"

if those who have "begun to run well, may be hindered,"

if those who have "escaped the pollutions of the world, may again be entangled therein and overcome;"

lastly, if those who "have been enlightened, and have tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the world to come, may so fall away as never to be renewed unto repentance;"

—then what must become of those who have never experienced any of these things? Can they be safe? Can they have any scriptural hope of Heaven?

If the strongest have so much need of caution, and the most circumspect such reason to fear the deceitful, hardening effects of sin—then surely the careless have need to tremble, lest they "die in their sins," and "be driven away in their wickedness."

If all, except two, of those who came out of Egypt, perished in the wilderness—then can they hope to enter into the heavenly Canaan, who have never once come forth from their spiritual bondage?

The point is clear! May God enable us to lay it to heart, and to consider it with the attention it deserves!

2. Those who are conflicting with their spiritual enemies—

Much has already been spoken to you both in a way of caution and direction: we beg permission to add a word of encouragement. The thing against which you are chiefly guarded, is unbelief; because that is the true source of all apostasy. We now would say: Be strong in faith, giving glory to God. "Faith is the shield with which you are to quench the fiery darts" of your enemies. Only believe, and Omnipotence will come to your support. Only believe, and you shall experience "the mighty working of his power, who raised Christ from the dead." Commit yourself to him "who is able to keep you from falling; and he will present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy."

#2281

CANAAN TYPICAL OF THE BELIEVER'S SPIRITUAL AND ETERNAL REST

Hebrews 4:1

"Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it."

THE histories of the Old Testament are very instructive to us. The divine interpositions, as well in a way of judgment as of mercy, show us what to expect from God, 1 Corinthians 10:11. The Apostle has been recording the destruction of the Jews in the wilderness Hebrews 3; and from thence he takes occasion to urge us to holy fear and diligence—

Consider:

I. What is that rest which God has promised us—

The rest promised to the Israelites was the land of Canaan: but the Israelites had already for many hundred years possessed that land. The rest therefore, which David speaks of as yet future, must be a rest of which Canaan was only a type or shadow. It includes:

1. A present rest in Christ—

A soul ignorant of Christ, can have no rest; but "by believing in Christ it has peace with God." This is that rest which our Savior promises to troubled souls, Matthew 11:28.

2. A future rest in Heaven—

The rest of the soul is never perfect in this life: tribulations are the way through which we are all to pass; but in Heaven our

happiness will be complete: that therefore must be the rest in which our labors shall terminate, Revelation 14:13.

Of this rest God has left us a promise in his word—

It is called his, because he has prepared it for us from the beginning. It is his also, inasmuch as it is the gift of his sovereign grace. It is his moreover, as enjoyed in and with him; nor has he only revealed it as an object worthy of our pursuit, but promised it to every penitent and believing sinner, Acts 2:39.

It befits us then to inquire,

II. What effect the promise of this rest should have upon us?

The news of any great and unexpected acquisition immediately produces strong emotions in our minds.

The prospect therefore of present and eternal rest would surely excite much solicitude respecting it—

We should endeavor to ascertain our title to it.

We should fear lest by any means we be deprived of it.

Nor should we account anything too much to do in order to obtain it.

Our vigilance and zeal should be proportioned to its value.

The danger of coming short of it should increase our diligence in the pursuit of it—

Of six hundred thousand that came out of Egypt, only two entered into Canaan: the others "could not enter in by reason of their unbelief." And how much unbelief is there in our hearts! Yet, if we live under its power, we in vain hope for this rest: nor will the numbers of those who are so circumstanced, afford security to us, any more than it did to those who perished in the wilderness. Surely then we should "fear lest we perish after their example."

The misery of coming short of it should also stimulate our exertions—

There is no intermediate state between Heaven and Hell; nor will there be any other state of probation afforded us. Those who do not truly rest in Christ, can never know solid peace in this world; nor will they experience anything but tribulation to all eternity, 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9. Revelation 14:10-11. There will be an impassable gulf between them and Heaven. What fear and caution should this thought excite!

We should fear lest we even "seem" to come short of it—

To be in suspense about our eternal state is dreadful: God's honor, as well as our happiness, is affected by it. We should seek to be "always triumphing in Christ," and at last to have "an abundant entrance into his kingdom."

ADDRESS—

1. To those who have no fears about their souls—

Your rest, such as it is, is by no means to be desired. It will soon vanish in the prospect of death and judgment, and it will speedily terminate in everlasting woe! Seek then the true rest, while yet it may be found: seek it in Christ, who alone can impart it to you; nor doubt but that it will abundantly recompense your labors.

2. To those who are filled with slavish fears—

These are not fears which you ought to entertain: they are calculated to rob you of the heavenly rest, rather than to bring you into it. The fear you should cultivate, is a jealous and watchful fear: to live under the influence of this, is to be truly blessed, Proverbs 28:14; this well consists with even a present rest in the Lord Jesus. Lay hold then on the promise which is left you in the Gospel, and expect that "He who has promised will also perform:" they "who trust in the Lord, shall never be confounded."

3. To those who maintain a godly fear and jealousy—

Disputes about the doctrine of perseverance are unprofitable and vain; but to unite a jealousy over ourselves with a confidence in God, will guard us against mistakes on either hand. Go on then in this good way, in which there is no danger of error or excess: thus will your soul be kept at an equal distance from presumption and despondency, and the attainment of your rest be perfectly secured!

THE REASON WHY MEN ARE SO LITTLE PROFITED BY THE GOSPEL

Hebrews 4:2

"For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith."

The Apostle is showing the superiority of Christ to Moses, Moses being a servant only in God's house, but Christ being a Son and Lord over his own house. "That house are we," says he, "if we hold fast the confidence, and the rejoicing of our hope, firm unto the end, Hebrews 3:6." To impress this idea the more strongly on our minds, he, in the language of David, urges us to guard against a departure from God, lest, like the Israelites of old, we provoke God to cut us off from his promised rest.

But regarding the very passage which he quotes, since though all the adults who came out of Egypt perished in the wilderness, their children did enjoy the promised rest, he intimates, that the very expression of David showed that Canaan was only a shadow of the rest promised to Israel, and that the true rest was common to all the children of Abraham, whether Jews or Gentiles. Of this rest, he exhorts us not to come short: for that the promise relating to it belonged to us as much as to the Jews in the time of Moses: and, as they came short of it in consequence of their unbelief—so shall we, if we mix not faith with the truths we hear.

Now this view of the Apostle's words limits the term "Gospel" to that which alone is mentioned in the context, the "promised rest." Hence, to compare the Gospel, as revealed to the Jews by Moses and the Prophets, with that which is revealed to us by Christ and his Apostles in a general view, would be beside the proper scope of our text. It would be profitable indeed to see how the moral law shuts us up to Christ, and how the ceremonial law shadows forth his work and offices; and how the Prophets also declare the fullness and excellency of his salvation; or, in the words of the Apostle, how "the righteousness which is by faith in Christ is witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, Romans 3:21-22;" but we prefer confining our views to the precise idea that was in the Apostle's mind, because we then have more clearly the mind of the Holy Spirit. This then we shall do, while we endeavor to show,

I. What is that Gospel which is preached to us in common with the Jews—

To the Jews were sent "the glad tidings" of a promised rest—

The promise given to them included three things, deliverance, preservation, rest:
deliverance from Egypt,
preservation in the wilderness,
and rest in Canaan.

Their deliverance was to be by the blood of the paschal lamb, which, being sprinkled on their doorposts, was to protect them from the sword of the destroying angel, while all the first-born of Egypt were slain. That it was which burst their bands asunder, and caused their former masters not merely to liberate them from their bondage, but to thrust them out from among them: and from that time they were in all future ages to kill and eat the paschal lamb in remembrance of that great deliverance.

From thenceforth, committing themselves to the Divine guidance and protection, they were to exist entirely on the manna given them from the clouds, and on the water that issued from the rock. At the expiration of the time appointed for their sojourning in the wilderness, they were to enter into Canaan, there to serve and enjoy God as their God to the last generations.

Now all this was to the Jews "a shadow of good things to come:" it marked the ways and means of our redemption; the nature of that life of faith which we are to live, and the happy termination of our labors. And, that it was so understood by the more spiritual among them, is evident, as from many other passages, so particularly from that quoted both in the foregoing and following context: for if the rest promised by Moses had had no reference to anything beyond the land of Canaan, David could never, after that rest had been enjoyed for five hundred years, have spoken of a rest yet future. Consequently, the typical nature of that whole dispensation was made known to them; and though obscurely—yet certainly, was the Gospel of Christ preached to them.

To us is the same rest presented as an object of faith and hope—

We are to be delivered from a worse than Egyptian bondage—even from the bonds of sin and Satan, death and Hell. And in the very same manner also are we to be delivered. "Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us:" and by the sprinkling of his blood on our hearts and consciences we are to escape the wrath of God. "We have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins, Ephesians 1:7." The destroying angel has received his commission against all on whom this mark is not found: and he will execute it on all without partiality or reserve: for, as "without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins," so it is by a believing application of that blood to our souls, and by that only, that we can ever obtain from Christ the benefits of his salvation.

Our preservation during the whole of our pilgrimage must also be secured in the same way. While under the guidance and protection of our God, we must "live altogether by faith in the Son of God, who loved us, and gave himself for us." Our blessed Lord himself has told us that He is the bread of life: that we must live from day to day upon him, even as the Israelites did upon the manna in the wilderness; and that, whereas they derived from it only the temporary support of their mortal bodies, we shall secure from him the eternal welfare of our souls!

Paul also tells us, that the rock which poured forth its waters in the wilderness was Christ; that is, a type and figure of Christ. We learn therefore from this, that we are to look to Christ for daily supplies of his Spirit, to renew and sanctify us, and to refresh and comfort us throughout the whole of our weary pilgrimage.

This is to be the one constant tenor of our way from first to last. Never until we arrive in the promised land shall we cease to need these supplies, which are to be brought to us by the exercise of a living faith. There is no substitute for them: the life of the Israelites in the wilderness is a perfect pattern of our life; and to theirs we are taught to conform our own.

To "the rest which remains for us, verse 9," we are taught to look forward with high expectations and assured confidence. There is a better country than Canaan, even Heaven itself, which the patriarchs, to whom the land of Canaan was promised, themselves regarded as their destined home, Hebrews 11:9-10; Hebrews 11:13-16. And to that must we look as our inheritance. "There, we shall rest from all our labors," there, shall all tears be wiped away from our eyes. There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain: but, having his tabernacle with us, we shall dwell with him and he with us more intimately than we have now any conception of; we being his acknowledged people, and he our endeared God, for ever and ever, Revelation 21:3-4.

But as this Gospel has not yet produced what it was destined to accomplish, it will be proper to show,

II. To what must be ascribed its inefficacy both in them and us—

The Gospel itself is not destitute of power:

it is "the rod of God's strength:"

it is "living and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword:"

it is "mighty through God to the pulling down of the strongholds of sin and Satan:"

it is the power of God unto salvation to all who truly believe it.

Yet its operations have been very limited and partial. And whence arises this? I answer,

The Jews "mixed not faith with what they heard"—

Moses from the beginning told them of all the blessings which God had in reserve for them: yet from the beginning they were an unbelieving people. Though Moses had given them abundant evidence of his divine mission, they murmured against him, when they found their burdens augmented in consequence of his interposition, Exodus 5:21-23. When they had seen all the wonders wrought in their behalf in Egypt, they again complained, as soon as ever they saw the hosts of Pharaoh pressing upon their rear, and ready, as they thought, to overwhelm them, Exodus 14:11-12.

When they had passed through the sea on dry ground, and seen their enemies, who presumed to follow them, dead upon the sea shore, they were still as unbelieving as ever, and regretted that they had ever been induced to leave the land of Egypt. They even questioned "whether God were among them or not, Exodus 17:3-4; Exodus 17:7." And a few weeks afterwards they altogether renounced God, and worshiped the golden calf.

Thus it was on all occasions, whenever any fresh difficulty arose, they distrusted God, and murmured against him. When the spies brought their report of the land which they had searched out, the people universally gave way to despondency, as much as if they had never seen any one display of God's power in their behalf. On this account they were all doomed to perish in the wilderness, "God swearing in his wrath that they would not enter into his rest." In a word, "they could not enter in because of unbelief, Hebrews 3:19."

We also are alike unbelieving in relation to the truths we hear—

The very necessity of redemption is denied by professing multitudes, or at least is acknowledged only in a speculative way, and without any due sense of its importance. The Jews under the pressure of their burdens cried mightily to God, so that their groans entered into the ears of the Lord Almighty. But when has he heard from us those sighs and groans by reason of the pressure of our sins? When has he heard those earnest cries for deliverance from the guilt we have contracted, and from the power of our indwelling corruptions? Alas! when urged on these subjects, we reply in our hearts, "Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians! Exodus 14:12."

If told, that "the whole world lies in wickedness," and that we must flee from it, as Lot from Sodom, if we will escape its ruin—then we despise the warning, like the sons-in-law of Lot, and regard our monitor as "one who only mocks us" with absurd and groundless alarms.

If brought to give a general assent to the truths we hear, we still do not approve of a life of faith as the means of our final preservation:

Why must we subject ourselves to so many trials and difficulties?

Why may we not go in an easier way to Heaven?

Why must our separation from the world be so entire?

Why may we not still enjoy the leeks and onions of Egypt, instead of subsisting upon the light and tasteless food provided for us?

Why must we be so dependent?

Why must we be looking every day and hour to the pillar and cloud for direction, and never to follow my own way?

Why am I to have nothing in myself, but all in Christ?

Why would I be necessitated to seek such a measure of sanctification, as not to entertain a "thought that is not brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ?"

We choose to have greater liberty, and an easier path. We choose to have a less humiliating way, where we may derive some supplies from a stock of our own, and be able to ascribe some measure of credit to ourselves.

Nor are we by any means satisfied with the rest that is provided for us. We wish for some rest in earthly things; and murmur at the prohibition to seek it in them. Why must I have as the one object of my desire, a portion that is invisible? Of the Israelites it is said, "they despised the pleasant land; they believed not God's Word, Psalm 106:24;" and the same may be said of us:

We do not estimate aright the felicity of Heaven.

We do not despise everything else in comparison with it.

We do not follow after it with the ardor that we ought.

We show, in the whole of our life and conduct, that we do not think the prize worth the toil necessary to secure it.

Were we duly impressed with the excellency of Canaan as "the glory of all lands—we would grudge no labors or sufferings that we may have to encounter in our way to it, nor any exertions that may be necessary for the attainment of it.

What I have here said is applicable to the great mass even of the Christian world: and the true reason of their being so little influenced by all that they hear, is, that they do not mix faith with it. They either account it a cunningly-devised fable, or else imagine that some way shall be found for the salvation of their souls, other than that which is revealed in the written Word. They believe not what God has spoken either of the way, or of the end—and therefore they fall short of that end, and perish in their unbelief!

To impress this subject the more deeply on our minds, I will endeavor to improve it:

1. In a way of solemn inquiry—

It surely is reasonable for all of us to inquire: What have we "profited by the Gospel?" If we have indeed been profited by it, we can tell, in some degree at least, what are the benefits which we have received from it. To imagine that we have been really benefitted, and not to know wherein we have been benefitted, and especially in a matter of such infinite importance, is palpable and willful self-deception! I ask then:

How have we been profited by the Gospel?

What effect has it produced upon our minds in relation to the things before spoken of?

What have we experienced of a spiritual redemption?

What are we yet daily experiencing of a life of faith in the Son of God?

How far does the prospect of eternal glory animate us to do and suffer all things for the attainment of it?

I beg you, brethren, put these questions to yourselves, and satisfy not yourselves with a superficial or evasive answer. Bring forth

the benefits which you have received: examine them; see how far they are of a saving nature, and bear the stamp and character of a work of grace upon the soul!

If such inquiries are unnecessary, trouble not yourselves about them: but, if they will be made at the last day by the Judge of living and the dead, and will form the ground of your salvation or condemnation to all eternity, then let them be duly weighed, and impartially answered by every one of us. For, if we are not profited by the Gospel now, I am sure that we shall not be profited in the eternal world; yes, rather, that very "word which ought to have been to us a savor of life unto life, will be to us a savor of death unto death! 2 Corinthians 2:16."

You all remember how greatly the guilt of Bethsaida and Chorazin was aggravated by their misimprovement of the privileges which they enjoyed under the ministry of our Lord: being exalted to Heaven in their privileges, they were cast down the deeper into Hell for their abuse of them! Luke 10:13-15. The Jews in general too would not have had sin, comparatively, if they had not enjoyed the ministry of our blessed Lord: but that left them without excuse, John 15:22. And even they will be innocent in comparison with you, if you, with the yet fuller light that is shining round you, neglect to improve the day of your visitation, Matthew 12:32.

2. In a way of affectionate remonstrance—

It is clear and manifest, that the great mass of professing Christians do not mix faith with what they hear: for, if they did, they would obey it. Faith has the same respect to the proper objects of faith, as reason has to the proper objects of reason. From reason, we know that some things will be beneficial to the body, and other things injurious: and in accordance with its dictates we act, unless we are violently impelled in opposition to them, by some more operative principle in our minds.

Just so will faith act. If we are blinded and overpowered by sense, we are then under the influence of unbelief. And if unbelief is the predominant principle in our minds, O! think how awful will be our state! Truly, of all sins unbelief is the least criminal in appearance—yet it is of all sins the most fatal in its end! Persistent unbelief precludes all hope and possibility of obtaining saving mercy from God.

See its operation as marked in our text. Methinks we have here the veil of the invisible world drawn aside. We are in the habit of thinking that all go to Heaven; but here we see how few in comparison do really attain the promised rest. Of all the six hundred thousand Israelites who were advanced to manhood, two only were allowed to enter into Canaan. All the rest (with the exception of the Levites) fell short through unbelief. And this is recorded as a warning to us, that we buoy not up ourselves with delusive expectations, in reference to our final state! 1 Corinthians 10:1-6; 1 Corinthians 10:11, Jude verse 5. We can never alter that word, "He who believes shall be saved, and he who believes not shall be damned." I entreat you therefore to "mix faith with what you hear" from the infallible records of God's Word. Mix faith with it, I say, in the same intimate and influential manner as you mix reason with the deductions of reason. Your reason soon makes you flee from a house that is on fire, and to run to a place of safety from one that seeks your life. Just so, let your faith operate in like manner, without delay; stimulating you to flee to Christ for safety, and to lay hold upon the hope that is set before you in the Gospel!

#2283

THE REST THAT REMAINS FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

Hebrews 4:9

"There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God."

THE servants of God possess many distinguished privileges. Their state in this world is far happier than that of the ungodly; but there is an infinitely richer portion reserved for them hereafter! To this David had respect in that solemn denunciation, Psalm 95:11, whence it appears, that though prefigured by other rests, it remains yet to be enjoyed.

The Apostle's argument seems to be this: God instituted a day of rest in commemoration of his having ceased from his works of creation. And many centuries afterwards he promised a rest to his people in the land of Canaan. But that rest was only typical of a more glorious Sabbath, of which David spoke a long time after the other had been enjoyed. From hence the Apostle concludes that there must yet be a rest, (for he changes the word which he had before used, in order more strongly to intimate the analogy between the different rests there spoken of) remaining for the people of God.

I. Who are the people of God?

This title cannot belong to all professing Christians indiscriminately—

The greater part of the world are idolatrous heathen. The generality of those who are called Christians are ignorant of God. Impiety

and profaneness abound in every place: this indisputably proves the Apostle's assertion, Romans 9:6. The sinful works of men plainly show whose people they are, 1 John 3:8. John 8:44; nor do all who "profess godliness" really belong to God, Romans 2:28-29. Titus 1:16. There are many who deceive both themselves and others! Revelation 3:1. James 1:26.

Those alone who have a right to this eternal rest, are described by God himself in Philippians 3:3.

They "worship God in the Spirit"—

It is the characteristic of God's enemies that they neglect prayer, Psalm 53:4; nor will formal services prove us to be God's people, Matthew 15:8-9. No worship is acceptable to him but that which is spiritual, John 4:23-24. His faithful servants are importunate at the throne of grace, Ephesians 6:18.

They "rejoice in Christ Jesus"—

They do not merely acknowledge him to be the Messiah. They make daily application to him as the only ground of their hopes. Their hearts are lifted up with devout affection towards him. They delight in him as their all-sufficient, Redeemer 1 Peter 1:8.

They "have no confidence in the flesh"—

They are deeply convinced that "in them dwells no good thing."

They see the folly of trusting to their own strength or wisdom, Proverbs 3:5.

They acquiesce fully in Solomon's direction, Proverbs 28:26.

They look for everything in Christ alone, 1 Corinthians 1:30.

To these belong many glorious privileges.

II. What is the rest which remains for them?

They have already in some respect entered into rest, Hebrews 4:3.

They are freed from the terrors of a guilty conscience, Hebrews 10:22. They feel a delight in ordinances. Their minds are fully satisfied with the Gospel salvation. They experience the truth of our Lord's promise, Matthew 11:28.

But the rest which awaits them is far superior to that they now possess:

They will enjoy a freedom from all labors and sorrows—

They are constrained to labor as long as they are in the world. Their whole life resembles a race or warfare. They can obtain nothing without strenuous exertions, Matthew 11:12; and of necessity they are encompassed with many sorrows, Acts 14:22. But in Heaven they will cease from their labors, Revelation 14:13; nor will their happiness have any intermission or alloy, Revelation 21:4.

They will be exempt from all influence of sin or temptation—

Sin now defiles their very best services! Satan is also unwearied in his endeavors to corrupt them, 2 Corinthians 11:3. These are sources of much pain to them at present. But the souls of all in Heaven are made perfect, Hebrews 12:23; nor can any unclean thing enter to defile them, Revelation 21:27. Their triumph will be complete and ever-lasting, Isaiah 60:20.

They will dwell in the immediate presence of their God—

Their capacity of enjoying God will be wonderfully enlarged: they will behold him not darkly, as now, but face to face, 1 Corinthians 13:12. The Savior's glory will be the object of their devoutest admiration, John 17:24. Their delight in him will surpass their present conceptions, Psalm 16:11. They shall know that their happiness will be eternal, Revelation 22:3-5. Then will every desire of their heart be fully satisfied, Psalm 17:15.

INFERENCES—

1. How desirable is it to be numbered among God's true people!

The rest described is the portion of them alone. God himself declares that the wicked have no part in it, Isaiah 57:21; their portion will be very different, Psalm 11:6, and its duration also will be endless, Revelation 14:11.

Who then would not wish to be numbered with the saints?

Who does not desire to participate in their inheritance?

But we must first be conformed to their character. We must renounce self-confidence, and believe in Christ alone for salvation. It was unbelief which excluded the Israelites from Canaan, Hebrews 3:18-19. Let us fear lest the same evil principle robs us of the heavenly rest, Hebrews 4:1; Hebrews 4:11.

2. With what delight may God's people look forward to death!

The hour of death is often an object of terror to the godly, but it should be welcomed as a season of joy.

Does not the gardener rejoice in his wages?

Does not the mariner in his haven?

Does not the soldier in the spoils of victory?

Much more should the Christian rejoice in the approach of his everlasting rest. Let us then long after it, like the holy Apostle, 2 Corinthians 5:2; and let us labor to attain it in full confidence of success, 2 Corinthians 5:6; 2 Corinthians 5:8-9.

#2284

THE WORD OF GOD, LIVING AND POWERFUL

Hebrews 4:12

"For the Word of God is living and powerful. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

THE state of a Christian's mind should be alike distant from slavish fear and from presumptuous confidence. He is authorized to entertain a confidence, because he has Omnipotence for his support, and the veracity of God pledged to supply him with all that is needful for his spiritual welfare. But he has need of fear also; because he is in the midst of temptations, and has a deceitful heart, ever ready to beguile him. In the view of his privileges, he may rejoice: but in the view of his dangers, he would tremble. In a word, he should, as David expresses it, "rejoice with trembling."

This frame of mind is supposed by many to be unsuited to that full liberty into which we are brought under the Christian dispensation. But Paul continually inculcates the necessity of it in order to a safe and upright walk: "Be not high-minded, but fear:" "Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall." But in no place of Scripture is this mixture of diffidence and affiance more strongly insisted on than in this and the preceding chapters. We are taught the indispensable necessity of "holding fast the confidence, and the rejoicing of hope, firm unto the end, Hebrews 3:6;" and yet we are again and again warned by the example of the Israelites, who were excluded from the promised land, lest we also would "fall after the same example of unbelief, verses 1, 11." It is in this view that the declarations in our text are introduced. There is an abruptness in them which renders the meaning of the Apostle somewhat difficult at first: but when the connecting link is supplied, the sense of the passage is clear, and very important. It speaks to this effect: The Israelites thought they had sufficient grounds for their unbelief; yet it ruined them. You also may be deceived by an evil heart of unbelief: but, however you may vindicate yourselves, that word, which you now disobey, will judge you in the last day; and will both expose your self-delusion, and justify God in passing against you a sentence of exclusion from the promised land.

The scope of the passage being thus explained, we propose to consider,

I. The description here given of the Word of God—

Many able commentators have given it as their opinion, that, by "the Word of God," we are to understand the Lord Jesus Christ, who is frequently called by that name in the Holy Scriptures. But Paul never speaks of Christ by that name: nor is there any mention of Christ in the context. On the contrary, the word of revelation is mentioned, as that which the Israelites would not believe, verse 2; as that also which excluded them from the promised rest, Hebrews 3:7-11; and as that which speaks to us precisely as it did to them, verses 7-9. And the different things spoken of it in the text are far more suited to the written word, than to the Lord Jesus Christ. To that, therefore, we limit the description before us. Its properties are set forth:

1. In figurative terms—

It is a living Word. Our blessed Lord represents it in the same view: "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life, John 6:63." And it is the very same term which Stephen also makes use of, when he calls the Scriptures "the living oracles, Acts 7:38." The word is not a mere dead letter, that will soon vanish away: it lives in the mind of God: it lives in the decrees of Heaven: it

lives and will live for ever: nor will millions of ages cause it to be forgotten, or in the least enervate its force. All besides this shall wax old, and decay: but this shall endure, without the alteration of one jot or tittle of it, to all generations, 1 Peter 1:23-25.

It is also powerful Word. Hear the appeal which God himself makes to us respecting it: "Is not my Word like as a fire? says the Lord: and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces, Jeremiah 23:29." Yes, there is nothing that can resist its force.

But in the text it is compared with "a two-edged sword," which, however sharp it may be, cannot penetrate like that. Frequently is it characterized by this image, especially as proceeding from the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ, Isaiah 49:2. Revelation 1:16. Yet does that image give but a very faint idea of its power: for a sword, though it may inflict a mortal wound, would be utterly incapable of dividing, with accuracy, the almost imperceptible organs of the human frame: but the word can "pierce to the dividing asunder the joints and marrow; yes, and the animal soul also from the rational spirit." By this is meant, that there is nothing so hidden, which it cannot detect; nothing so blended, which it cannot discriminate.

This the Apostle proceeds to set forth,

2. In plain language—

The word is "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Of the unregenerate man it is said, that "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually Genesis 6:5." The regenerate are "renewed in the spirit of their minds." But still they are not so renewed, but that some imperfection cleaves to all which they do: there is something in every thought and every purpose of the human heart, something which still shows that man is a fallen creature, and which cannot stand the strict scrutiny of God's all-seeing eye. If he lays judgment for a line, and righteousness for a plummet, there is not anything in which there will not be found some obliquity. Such a perfect standard is the Word of God: "it will discern between the good and evil that is in the most holy thought of the most perfect of men." In the hand of "the Spirit, whose sword it is, Ephesians 6:17," its power is infinite, even though it be wielded by the feeblest arm. In the hand of the prophets, it "hewed" the hypocritical Jews in pieces, Hosea 6:5. In the hand of the Apostles, it pierced thousands to the heart at once, Acts 2:37.

In the hand of ordinary ministers, it has still the same power, and can so detect all the secret thoughts of men's hearts, as to evince that, it is indeed the very Word of God himself, 1 Corinthians 14:24-25; and through him is still, as much as ever, "mighty to the casting down of the most haughty imaginations, and to the bringing of every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, 2 Corinthians 10:4-5."

But that which gives to this description its force, is,

II. The end for which it is adduced—

The Apostle means to say, that, however secret the workings of unbelief may be, they will all be detected and condemned by the word in the last day. Now,

Unbelief is a most subtle sin—

It has ten thousand pleas and pretexts by which it cloaks its malignity, and justifies to the mind and conscience its operations. See it in the Jews, whom it deceived to their ruin. There was always some great trial, some apparently insuperable difficulty in their way. They supposed that God would make all their way easy, and that they would have nothing to try their faith and patience. Hence they construed every difficulty as a violation of God's promises, and a prelude to his final dereliction of them. Hence also they made their appeals upon this subject with as much confidence, as if their conclusions were undeniable: and the chastisements which they received for their impiety only increased their complaints, as though, in addition to the disappointments of their legitimate expectations, they were treated with undeserved cruelty.

Thus it is with us: we hide from ourselves, or rather we justify to ourselves, the workings of unbelief. Its operations all seem to us to be founded in truth and equity. If we look at God's threatenings, it cannot be that they would ever be executed, because such a procedure would be inconsistent with the Divine perfections, and an act of injustice towards man. If the promises of God are the object to which our attention is turned, they are too great, and too good to be performed; or at least, that they are not intended for such sinners as we are. Besides, they are so far out of our sight, as to have, in our conceptions, little or no reality, in comparison with the objects of time and sense. Other sins we excuse as acts of frailty: but this we justify, as an act of wisdom.

But, however subtle our unbelief may be, the Word of God will discover and condemn it—

The Word of God is so comprehensive, that there is not in the whole creation a thought or purpose that does not come within its range, Psalm 119:96; and it is so minute, that there is not the slightest "imagination of a thought," of which it does not take cognizance.

The Word of God is spiritual, even as the Author of it himself is spiritual; and, when it is brought home with power to the soul, it

convinces a man of sins of which he had before not the least conception, Romans 7:9; Romans 7:14. As by a chemical process the constituent parts of material bodies may be discovered, so by the application of the word to our souls in the last day will every thought be decomposed, as it were, and its every particle of good or evil be disclosed, John 12:48. The fire that will try us will search the inmost recesses of the soul, and determine, with infallible precision, the quality of the most latent imagination there, 1 Corinthians 3:13. Of this we have a pledge in the events which happened to the Jews in consequence of their unbelief.

Thus God addresses them by the Prophet Zechariah: "Do not be like your forefathers, to whom the earlier prophets proclaimed: This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Turn from your evil ways and your evil practices.' But they would not listen or pay attention to me, declares the LORD. Where are your forefathers now? And the prophets, do they live forever? But did not my words and my decrees, which I commanded my servants the prophets, overtake your forefathers? "Then they repented and said, 'The LORD Almighty has done to us what our ways and practices deserve, just as he determined to do.'" Zechariah 1:4-6."

And the very same confession will, assuredly, be made in the last day by the most confident unbeliever in the universe: "His sin shall surely find him out, Numbers 32:23;" and it shall then be seen, "whose word shall stand, God's or his, Jeremiah 44:28." The counsels of every heart shall then be made manifest, 1 Corinthians 4:5;" and God be justified before the whole universe in the sentence that he shall pass, Psalm 51:4 with Romans 3:4.

From hence we may see—

1. How attentive we should be to the Word of God—

Would we but inspect it with humility and care, it would be as a looking-glass to reflect our own image, in a way that nothing else can do! James 1:23-24. And, is it not madness to neglect the opportunity it affords us of learning our true character, and of ascertaining, beforehand, the sentence of our Judge?

To what purpose is it to deceive our own souls? Will that Word be altered? Will any other standard be brought forward whereby to estimate our state? Or shall we be able either to dispute its testimony, or avert its sentence? Dear brethren, remember the description given of it in our text; think how unavailing all your pleas and excuses will be, when its voice shall be raised against you: and now, before it be too late, take it as a light to search all the secret corners of your hearts! John 3:19-21. Proverbs 20:27, and to guide your feet into the way of peace.

2. How fearful we should be of unbelief—

As there is no grace which so honors God, as faith—so there is no sin which so dishonors him, as unbelief. Other sins, though they oppose his authority, do not deny his right to command: but unbelief questions the very existence of his truth. Hence does John so frequently speak of it, as "making God a liar, 1 John 2:22; 1 John 5:10." Ah! little do the skeptic and the unbeliever think what guilt they contract: and little do they imagine what chains they are forging for their own souls!

How, I would ask, will any man get his sins forgiven? It can only be by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and by a living faith too: for it is not a dead faith that will suffice; but such a faith as unites the soul to Christ, and derives out of his fullness all that grace, and mercy, and peace which we stand in need of.

Most awful is that declaration of God, that "all the fearful and unbelieving shall have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone; which is the second death! Revelation 21:8." Whether we believe this or not, it will prove true in the end: and the sentence, once denounced against Israel with an oath, shall again be repeated against all that abide in unbelief, "I swear in my wrath, that they shall not enter into my rest!"

3. How earnestly we should pray to God for the gift of his Spirit—

It is by the Spirit of God alone that we can either "be convinced of unbelief, John 16:8-9," or be enabled to exercise a living faith, Ephesians 2:8. Philippians 1:29. O! beg of God to give you his Spirit. Seek Him in earnest; and you shall not ask in vain, Luke 11:13. It is the Spirit's office to "take of the things that are Christ's, and to show them unto you, John 16:14." It is his office to make the word effectual to your souls: for it is then only effectual, when "it comes in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 1 Corinthians 2:4."

Read not then, nor hear, the word in dependence on your own strength; but cry mightily to God to bring it home to your hearts "with power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance, 1 Thessalonians 1:5." Then shall you experience its life-giving efficacy, and find it "the power of God to the salvation of your souls! Romans 1:16."

GOD SEES OUR INMOST THOUGHTS

Hebrews 4:13

"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account."

MEN will commit those things in secret, which they would not commit, if they knew that the eye of a fellow-creature was upon them. But, if they duly considered the omniscience of God, they would be as watchful over their conduct in their most hidden recesses, as they now are in the noon-day. Yes, they would impose a far greater restraint on their inmost thoughts, than they now do on their outward actions. To fortify the Hebrews against apostasy, the Apostle endeavored to impress upon their minds the thought that every motion of their hearts was strictly noticed by God.

From his words we shall consider,

I. The omniscience of God—

"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account." At one glance he beholds:

1. All things—

All that is past, however long ago, or however forgotten by us, is as fresh in his memory, as if it had been transacted this very moment, Isaiah 41:22. All present things, in whatever quarter of the globe, and however hidden from mortal eyes, are visible to him, Job 28:24; All future events, whoever they concern, even the eternal states of all that ever shall be born, are known by him with as much certainty as if they were already accomplished, Isaiah 46:9-10. Acts 15:8.

2. All men—

The actions of men are not only noticed by him, but weighed in a most perfect balance, 1 Samuel 2:3. Job 31:4; Their words are all distinctly heard by him, and recorded before him, Psalm 139:4. 2 Kings 6:12. Their very thoughts, however secret or transient they be, are also marked, and written by him in the book of his remembrance, Ezekiel 11:5. Genesis 6:5. The priests, when inspecting the sacrifices that had been flayed and cut asunder, did not so infallibly discern any blemish that might be found, either on their external part or in their inwards, as God discerns "every imagination of the thoughts of our hearts." This may be further illustrated by Psalm 11:4-5, "The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD is on his heavenly throne. He observes the sons of men; his eyes examine them. The LORD examines the righteous, but the wicked and those who love violence his soul hates."

That we may not give our assent to this truth without being suitably affected with it, let us consider,

II. The concern we have in it—

The words of the text include a double interpretation.

We shall include both senses by observing,

1. "We have to do with God" in every transaction of our lives—

The law of God extends to the whole of our conduct: every action therefore, with every word and thought, is an act of obedience to him or of disobedience: there is not a possibility of detaching ourselves from him for an instant, so as to assert our independence in the least respect. Our minds should be constantly full of love to him; and our every purpose and desire should have respect to his glory, 1 Corinthians 10:31. How deeply then are we interested in approving ourselves to him! If we had merely to do with our fellow-creatures, it might suffice to have our actions right, even though there were some defect in our motives and principles; but when we have to do with the heart-searching God, we should be careful that every motion of our hearts be agreeable to his mind and will.

2. We must give an account to God of all that we do, say and think—

Everything we do is noticed by God, in order that it may be recompensed at the day of judgment, Jeremiah 17:10. The book of his remembrance will assuredly be opened in that day Revelation 20:12; and every action, word, and thought, during our whole lives, will have an influence on his decision. However trivial anything may be in our eyes, or even imperceptible by us, it will enhance our happiness or misery to all eternity: how anxious then should we be to walk as in God's sight! and how should we labor daily to lay up an increasing weight of glory, instead of "treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath! 2 Corinthians 4:17 with Romans 2:5."

We may improve this subject,

1. For the awakening of the careless—

You may think, like those of old, that God does not see or regard your ways Psalm 94:7; but, if Achan was detected and punished by God's immediate interference in this world, Joshua 7:14; Joshua 7:18; Joshua 7:25—then how much more shall you be in the day of righteous retribution!

2. For the encouragement of the sincere—

If God notices the defects of his people, he both makes allowance for them, and observes also their excellencies. Compare Psalm 103:14 with Revelation 2:9. Nor have they so much as a good desire, which he does not mark with special approbation, Psalm 38:9. Malachi 3:16. 1 Kings 14:13. Let all then stir up their hearts to seek and serve him, 1 Chronicles 28:9; so, notwithstanding their defects, they shall receive his plaudit in the day of judgment, 1 Corinthians 4:5.

#2286

ENCOURAGEMENT DERIVED FROM THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST

Hebrews 4:15-16

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Notwithstanding the excellency of the Christian religion, when compared with that of the Jews, there were not lacking many specious objections, which a Jew might bring against it, and which, on a wavering and ill-instructed mind, might operate with considerable force. A Jew might, with some appearance of truth, say, 'We know that our religion is from Heaven: we know that the sacrifices which we offer are of divine appointment: we see the priest actually making an atonement for us: we behold the high-priest carrying the blood of the sacrifice within the veil: and we hear him pronouncing the very blessing which God put into his mouth. You Christians lose all these advantages, and rely on mere notions of your own, which have nothing visible, nothing real.'

But to these objections the Christian may reply, 'We have a better sacrifice, and a greater High-priest than you: and though we see neither the sacrifice nor the High-priest with our bodily eyes, we know he is entered into a better tabernacle, that is, into Heaven itself, "there to appear in the presence of God for us:" and therefore do we "hold fast our profession," yes, and will hold it fast, whatever hindrances, or whatever allurements, are employed to turn us from it.'

But if the greatness of our High-priest is sufficient to determine us, what will not the consideration of his goodness be? Let us but contemplate that, and we shall need nothing further to keep us steadfast even to the end: for we shall have a perfect assurance that we shall never want anything that is requisite either for our spiritual or eternal welfare.

This is the idea suggested in the text; from whence we are naturally led to notice:

I. The character of our great High-priest—

Though he was "the Son of God," "Jehovah's Fellow," "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person," yet "He was in all points tempted like as we are."

In bodily sufferings, he was tried with hunger and thirst, and weariness and pain; and had not even a place to lay his head. As for persecutions from men, no human being was ever pursued with such bitter unrelenting animosity as he. No terms were too vile to be applied to him: he was called "a glutton and a drunkard," a deceiver and blasphemer, a Samaritan and a devil: and the whole nation rose against him with that indignant cry, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

Of his assaults from Satan, what shall we say? What words can express the conflicts he maintained with all the powers of darkness, in the wilderness, and in the garden of Gethsemane, when through the agonies of his soul his whole body was bathed in a bloody sweat?

From the hidings of his Father's face also, and from a sense of his wrath, when, as we are told, "it pleased the Lord to bruise him," his sufferings infinitely surpassed all that any created imagination can conceive. When his soul was sore troubled, even unto death, he prayed indeed for the removal of the bitter cup—yet drank it, when put into his hands, without complaint: but when he was called to endure the consummation of his misery in the hidings of his Father's face, he could not forbear pouring forth that heart-rending complaint, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Thus was he foremost in almost every trial that we can possibly be called upon to sustain; and notwithstanding in him was no sin, he was, far beyond any of the sinners of mankind, "a man of sorrows, and

acquainted with grief."

Having experienced in his own person all that we can feel, he sympathizes with us in all our trials—

The double negation in our text is very expressive; and imports much more than a simple affirmation. Our High-priest is most assuredly a tender sympathizing Friend: and one great end for which he submitted to be tempted like us, was, that he might learn to appreciate aright our sufferings, and "be able to support us in our temptations, Hebrews 2:18." He now can say, more emphatically than heretofore, "I know their sorrows! Exodus 3:7;" and more justly may it be said of him, "His soul is grieved for the misery of Israel, Judges 10:16." So acutely does he feel for all his members, that "whoever persecutes them, persecutes him, Acts 9:4;" and "whoever touches one of them, touches the apple of his eye, Zechariah 2:8." What he felt when he wept at the grave of Lazarus, he still feels, as it were, when he beholds his sorrowing and afflicted people. From whatever quarter their troubles arise, from men or devils, from body or from mind, yes, or even from the hand of God himself, his compassion is the same, and his sympathy is ready to exert itself for their relief.

Such being indisputably the character of our High-priest, let us contemplate,

II. The encouragement to be derived from it in all our addresses at the throne of grace—

The thought of having such a high-priest passed into the heavens to further our cause in the presence of his God, emboldens us to come to God himself:

1. Without fear, as arising from a sense of our own unworthiness—

Had we not such an Advocate, it would be impossible for us to draw near to God with any hope of acceptance. To such unholy creatures as we, God would be nothing but "a consuming fire." But, when we recollect what a sacrifice our great High-priest has offered, and that "he is entered into Heaven with his own blood," and that he pleads the merit of that blood in behalf of his believing people, how can we doubt of acceptance through his prevailing intercession? Be it so, that our sins have been most heinous: yet are we assured, that "his blood will cleanse from all sin," and that those who are washed in it, shall be as wool, and their crimson sins be white as snow. Had we the guilt of the whole world accumulated on our own souls, still need we not despair, since he who is our Advocate is also "an atoning sacrifice for us, and not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the world, 1 John 1:2." If the blood of bulls and goats prevailed for Israel to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the Eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge our conscience from dead works to serve the living God, Hebrews 9:13-14. With such an Advocate we have nothing to fear. We are sure that "the Father hears him always:" and that "he is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him, seeing he ever lives to make intercession for them! Hebrews 7:25." He has the names of all his people on his breast-plate, and on his heart: and the chief of sinners may be as confident of acceptance through him, as those who have comparatively little to be forgiven, 1 Timothy 1:15-16.

2. Without doubt, as arising from the greatness of the things we have to ask—

All that we can need is comprehended in two things, "mercy and grace;" the one, for the pardon of our past transgressions; the other, for the preservation of our souls from sin in the future. Now these are the very things specified in our text, as to be asked by us in the name of our High-priest with boldness and confidence: and we are assured, that they shall be granted, both in the time and measure that we need them. We are not to be accounting anything too great to ask, because there is nothing too great for him to give. We "are not to be straitened in ourselves, seeing that we are not straitened in him." We may "ask what we will; and it shall be done unto us, John 14:13-14." However "wide we open our mouth, it shall be filled, Psalm 81:10." Let our need of mercy be ever so great, "we shall obtain mercy;" and our need of grace ever so abundant, the supply shall be proportioned to our need. If we need grace to sustain suffering, to fulfill duty, to transform the soul into the Divine image, "Ask and have," is the Divine command: and our boldness in asking cannot be too great, provided it be of a right kind: it must not be of an unhallowed and presumptuous cast; but duly tempered with penitential sorrow, and patient resignation. Then it may rise to a confident expectation, and a full assurance of faith, Hebrews 10:19-22.

But while we are thus encouraged to draw near to God, let us learn,

1. That nothing is to be obtained without prayer—

It is not the death of Christ as our sacrifice, nor the intercession of Christ as our great High-priest, that will save us—if we do not pray for ourselves. Though he is on a throne, and that throne is a "throne of grace," we shall receive no benefit from his power or grace, if we do not sue for it in earnest and believing prayer. His offices are not intended to supersede our endeavors, but to encourage them, and to assure us of success in the use of the appointed means. Those are always characterized as "enemies, who call not upon God:" and we are warned plainly that we cannot have, if we neglect to ask, James 4:3. The means must be used in order to the end; and it is only in, and by, the means, that the end can ever be attained, Matthew 7:7-8. Hear this, you who neglect prayer, or draw

near to God with your lips only and not with your hearts! Unless "in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, you make your requests known unto God," you can never experience his blessing upon your souls, nor ever behold the face of your God in peace.

2. That in all your addresses to God your eyes must be directly fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ as your Mediator and Advocate—

When the high-priest was passing through the veil into the holy of holies, the eyes of all were fixed on him as their mediator; and from his intercession all their hopes were derived. And how much more should our eyes be fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ as our Advocate and Intercessor! It is in his name that we are taught to offer our supplications, John 16:23-26; and it is through his intercession alone that they can come up with acceptance before God, John 16:6. Seek then at all times to realize this in your minds: and beg of God to make you deeply and abidingly sensible of it: for "then only do you honor the Father, when you thus honor his dear Son, John 5:23;" and then only will the Father be glorified in you, when he is thus honored and glorified in the person of his Son, John 14:12.

3. That when you thus approach God in and through his Son, all doubts of acceptance must be put away—

We are not to be wavering in our minds when we draw near to God. To doubt either his power or his willingness to help us, is to disparage both the Father and the Son: and prayers offered with a doubtful mind will never bring with them an answer of peace, James 1:6-7. It is quite a mistaken humility that leads persons to question whether such sinners as they are, can find mercy; or whether the grace of Christ can be sufficient for them. All such doubts betray an ignorance of Christ and his Gospel. If he is not the Son of God, equal with the Father, then we may well doubt his ability to help: or if his sacrifice and intercession is not the appointed means of salvation for the whole world, then we may ask, Can he save such a guilty wretch as me? But if all has been ordered of the Father, and the whole work of redemption has been executed by the Son, then must we "not stagger at any of the promises, but be strong in faith, giving glory to God, Romans 4:20." And according to our faith, so shall it be done unto us.

3. That while we derive such comfort from him, we would labor to imitate his example—

He suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should "follow in his steps." He requires us to "love one another, as he has loved us;" and, if need be, to "lay down our lives for the brethren." And is there not a call for our sympathy at this time? Let us then show that we "possess the mind that was in Christ Jesus," and labor to the uttermost to extend to our brethren such aid as shall be suitable and sufficient for them.

#2287

CHRIST BENEFITTED BY HIS OWN SUFFERINGS

Hebrews 5:7-9

"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."

THE priestly office, as marked out by God, belonged exclusively to the tribe of Levi. Yet our Lord, though he was not of that tribe to which the priesthood appertained, was truly and properly a High-priest. He was constituted a priest of a different order from that of Aaron, and executed the duties of the priesthood in a far different manner than it was possible for any other person to perform them. He offered not the blood of bulls and of goats, but his own body, for the sins of the world. The Apostle describing the manner in which he ministered, sets before us:

I. His conduct under his sufferings—

Never were the sufferings of any creature comparable with those of Christ—

His bodily sufferings perhaps were less than many of his followers have been called to endure. But those of his soul were infinitely beyond our conceptions, Psalm 22:14-15 with Matthew 26:38; the assaults of Satan, and the wrath of God, combined to produce that bloody sweat in the garden of Gethsemane, Luke 22:44.

Under them he poured out his heart in prayer unto his heavenly Father—

He never lost sight of God as his Father, but addressed him with the greater earnestness under that endearing title, Mark 14:36; he knew that his Father was "able to save him from death:" he therefore repeatedly besought him to remove the bitter cup, and urged his petitions "with strong cries and floods of tears;" not that he repented of the work he had undertaken; but only desired such a

mitigation of his sufferings as might consist with his Father's glory, and the salvation of men, John 12:27-28. As a man, he could not but feel, and as a good man, he could not but deprecate, the wrath of God: but he desired nothing that was inconsistent with the Divine will, Matthew 26:39.

Nor did he desist from prayer until he had obtained his request—

Him the Father always heard, nor was an answer now denied to him: he was delivered from that which he chiefly deprecated. Though the cup was not removed, he was not allowed to faint in drinking it: he was strengthened by an angel in answer to his prayer, Luke 22:43, and clearly showed what an answer he had received, by the dignified composure with which he immediately resigned himself into the hands of his enemies, John 18:4-8; John 18:11.

His sufferings indeed could not be dispensed with; but they were amply recompensed by,

II. The benefit he derived from them—

The benefits accruing to our Lord from his own sufferings were:

1. Personal—

It was necessary for him as our High-priest to experience everything which his people are called to endure in their conflicts with sin and Satan, Hebrews 2:17. Now the difficulty of abiding faithful to God in arduous circumstances is exceeding great: this is a trial which all his people are called to sustain, and under it they more particularly need his almighty support; this therefore he submitted to learn. Though as the Son of God he knew all things in a speculative manner—yet he could not know this experimentally, but by being reduced to a suffering condition; this therefore was one benefit which he derived from his sufferings. He learned by them more tenderly to sympathize with his afflicted people, and more speedily to support them when imploring his help with strong crying and tears, Hebrews 2:18.

2. Official—

As the priests were consecrated to their office by the blood of their sacrifices, so was Jesus consecrated by his own blood, see Hebrews 7:28. From that time he had a right to impart salvation: from that time also he exercised that right. The persons indeed to whom alone he is "the author of eternal salvation," are "those who obey him." Not that they possess this qualification before he vouchsafes his mercy to them; but he invariably transforms his people into his own image, and makes them, like himself, obedient unto death, Philippians 2:8.

We may learn from hence,

1. What we should do under sufferings, or a dread of God's displeasure—

We should not hastily conclude that we are not his children, Hebrews 12:6; we should rather go with humble boldness to God as our Father, Luke 15:17-18; we should plead his gracious promises, Psalm 50:15; nor can we possibly be too earnest, provided we be content that his will would be done. (Alas! that there would be so little resemblance between our prayers and those of Christ!) We should however consider that as the best answer to prayer, which most enables us to glorify God.

2. Where to go for salvation—

The Father was "able to save his Son from death," and doubtless he can save us also; but he has exalted his Son to be a Prince and a Savior, Acts 5:31. To Christ therefore we are to go, and to the Father through Christ Ephesians 2:18. In this way we shall find him to be the author of eternal salvation to us, Hebrews 7:25.

3. What is to be our conduct when he has saved us—

Jesus died "to purchase to himself a peculiar people zealous for good works." We must therefore obey him, and that too as willingly in seasons of severe trial as in times of peace: we must be content to be conformed to the likeness of our Lord and Master. Let us be faithful unto death, and he will give us a crown of life, Revelation 2:10.

#2288

THE SLOW PROGRESS OF MANY REPROVED

Hebrews 5:11-14

"We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be

teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil."

THERE is in the Holy Scriptures a great diversity of truths suited to the various states and capacities of men. There are some so plain and simple, that "he who runs may read" and understand them: there are others so deep and mysterious, that persons of the strongest intellect and most extensive erudition are utterly lost in the contemplation of them.

In human sciences, men of genius and penetration have a great advantage over those of a less cultivated and comprehensive mind; because the strength of their faculties enables them to prosecute their researches to a far greater extent than the others can.

But in divine knowledge, it is not the most learned, but the most humble and heavenly-minded person, who will make the greatest progress. Ignorance in divine things (especially among those who enjoy a faithful ministry of the Gospel) springs from willful remissness, rather than from any lack of capacity; and involves the offender in very deep guilt. It is on this ground that the Apostle reproves the Hebrews for their inability to receive what he had to say respecting Melchizedek and Christ. He represents their infantile state as the consequence of their own sloth, and as an occasion of considerable embarrassment to himself, since he knew not how to open to them the sublimer truths of Christianity, because they were yet so ill-instructed in its very first principles.

In explaining the drift of his address we shall:

I. Inquire whence it is that men's progress in divine knowledge is so disproportioned to the advantages they enjoy—

That many who hear the Gospel are but little profited by it, is a melancholy and undeniable fact—

That persons would continue ignorant when little else than heathen morality is set before them, cannot be wondered at. But many, who for a course of years have had "Christ crucified set before them," and have from time to time been addressed with the greatest plainness and fidelity—yet are surprisingly dark in their views of the Gospel.

They think they understand the plan of salvation; and yet they confound things the most distinct. They mix faith and works, either uniting them as joint grounds of our salvation, or making their works a warrant to believe, and disjoin things the most inseparable.

They cannot conceive how the exercises of their own free-will must, as far as they are good, be ascribed to the agency of the Holy Spirit, while, as far as they are evil, they are not to be considered as the emanations of their own wicked hearts in concurrence with the agency of Satan.

But, when their notions are ever so clear and accurate, they still remain without any experimental acquaintance with the truths of God. They are "unskillful in the word of righteousness." Whatever they profess to believe respecting the depravity of the heart, and "a life of faith upon the Son of God," they have not an experience of it in their own souls; so that they still need as much as ever to have "the first principles of the oracles of God" inculcated and enforced. "Considering the time" that they have been learning, "they ought to have been long since qualified to teach others;" and yet "have they need to be taught the very same things again" and again. They still need as much as ever to have "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little."

The reason for this must be sought for in their own negligence—

If this lack of proficiency had existed only since the days of the Apostles, we might have ascribed it to the weakness and insufficiency of the teachers: nor are we disposed entirely to exclude that as a concurrent cause of the slow progress that is made among us. But the same complaints which we make, were uttered by the Apostles; and the lack of proficiency in their hearers is imputed to their "dullness in hearing," and slothfulness in improving what they heard. You are ready enough to hear; and perhaps, like Ezekiel's hearers, are pleased with the sound of the Gospel, as you would be with some delightful music, Ezekiel 33:32; but are you careful to apply to yourselves what you hear?

Do you examine yourselves by it?

Do you labor to treasure it up in your hearts?

Do you pray over it?

Do you make it the subject of your conduct with your families, and of your meditations in the hours of retirement?

Do you not, on the contrary, find, that, through your neglecting to harrow in the seed, "the birds of the air come and take it away;" or that, "through the cares and pleasures of this world, it is so choked that it never grows up to perfection?

Yes, this is the reason of that slow progress which people make in divine knowledge. This is the reason that persons, who would account themselves idiots if they received so little benefit from instructions in any other branch of knowledge, continue mere "babes"

throughout their whole lives.

Having found the reason of men's unprofitableness under the ministry of the Gospel, we proceed to,

II. Show the sad consequences arising from it—

The misimprovement of this talent is greatly overlooked among the sins we commit, or the evils we deplore. But,

1. It incapacitates men for receiving instructions—

"Babes" must have food suited to their age: if "strong meat" were administered to them, they could not receive it: instead of being profited by the deeper mysteries of the Gospel, or by a full exhibition of the divine life as it exists and operates in the hearts of more advanced Christians, they would very probably be injured: the display of light would be too bright for their organs; or, to use the metaphor in the text, the meat would be too strong for their digestive faculties.

What a loss then is this to the persons themselves! What a loss too to many who would be greatly benefitted by the stronger food, but who must have only milk presented to them, lest others, unable to partake of their repast, would be deprived of what is absolutely necessary for their subsistence!

Let this be duly considered; and it will surely prove an effectual incentive to diligence!

2. It imposes a restraint on their instructors—

"We have many things to say, and hard to be uttered:" not that the difficulty lies in expressing them: but in reducing them to the comprehension of persons who are so "dull of hearing." When we speak to "those who are of full age," we can enter largely into every part of the Gospel; because "they, having their spiritual senses exercised by use and habit, can discern both good and evil." They have a clear perception of the things we say, just as a man has of things bitter or sweet. We need not be laboring always to prove that such or such things are bitter or sweet; because they see in an instant the true and proper quality of the things that are set before them: they understand the analogy of faith; and are prepared to follow us as far as God enables us to lead them.

But, however delightful such deep researches might be, we dare not, except in a very sparing manner, prosecute them. We are forced to use the same caution as Christ did towards his hearers John 16:12; and as Paul did in addressing the Church at Corinth: "I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual; but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto you were not able to bear it; neither yet now are you able, 1 Corinthians 3:1-2."

And is not this a sad effect of men's "dullness?" Is it not an injury to us, as well as unto them? Would not our own ability in ministering be increased, if we were more at liberty to search into "the deep things of God" for their instruction? And would not the growth of all be more speedily advanced?

Let this then be an additional motive for diligence. When you see how extensive and lamentable are the consequences of supineness, learn, in pity to yourselves and to the whole Church of God, to press forward with increasing earnestness and zeal.

Advice—

1. Let us improve to the uttermost the advantages we enjoy—

God notices how long, and how often, we have the means of grace afforded us; and he will call us to an account for them as talents committed to our charge. And if the Gospel we hear is not "a savor of life unto life, it will be a savor of death unto death, 2 Corinthians 2:16." The opportunities of improvement which the Jews had under the ministry of our Lord, rendered their guilt and punishment more aggravated than that of Sodom and Gomorrah! Matthew 11:20-24 with 12:41, 42. May the Lord grant that such may never be the effects of our ministry on you!

2. Let us not be satisfied with low attainments—

It is doubtless a mercy to be "babes in Christ," if we are really such. But what parent in the universe, however pleased with the birth of a child, would take pleasure in it, if, instead of growing towards manhood, it always retained its infantile weakness and stature? Can God then behold with delight such a monster in his family? Does he not expect that, from "children we become young men, and from young men we advance to be fathers in his Church John 2:12-14." Let us then have our "spiritual senses exercised:" let us endeavor to have them matured "by use and habit;" let us get a nice "discernment of good and evil." Let us "desire the sincere milk of the word," not merely that we may be satisfied with it, but that we may grow thereby, 1 Peter 2:2, and be qualified for the reception of stronger food. "In malice," or any other kind of evil, "be children; but in understanding be men, 1 Corinthians 14:20."

3. Let us make a good use of the attainments we already possess—

They who themselves "need to be taught the first principles of the oracles of God," have no pretensions to set up themselves as teachers of others: and it is much to be lamented that such teachers would ever be admitted into the Church of God; or, when admitted, be allowed to retain their office. But all who are taught of God, "ought" to exert themselves in teaching others. We say not, that all are to become preachers of the word: but we say, that all would endeavor to instruct their friends, and their neighbors, and more especially their children and dependents, Romans 15:14. Hebrews 3:13. In laboring thus to do good, they would get good; and "in watering others, they would themselves be watered" with the dews of Heaven Proverbs 11:25.

#2289

GOING ON CHRISTIAN MATURITY

Hebrews 6:1-3

"Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, we will do so."

IN arts and sciences of every kind, the greatest proficient feel a need of improvement: their very advancement only serves to show them how little they know, and to increase their zeal in the pursuit of higher attainments. But in religion, everyone thinks he knows enough, and is content with the progress he has already made. What we learned in our early youth serves, for the most part, as a sufficient stock to carry us on through life; and the habits which we have acquired in our place and station satisfy our minds, so that we are ready to ask, "What more do I lack?" But surely this is not right. If, as the Apostle John informs us, there are diversities of age and stature in the Christian life, and in the Church there are little children, young men, and fathers, it surely does not befit us to remain all our days in a state of infantile weakness and ignorance, as if that were the full measure that God had authorized us to expect.

Peter expressly tells us, that we should "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." And in the preceding context, the Apostle complains of his Hebrew converts, that "whereas, from the time since their conversion, they should have been qualified for teachers, they had need to be taught again the very first principles of the oracles of God; and were become such, as still had need of milk, rather than of strong meat, Hebrews 5:12." But, as there were some of them who were no longer "babes, but had attained to full age, and by reason of use had their senses exercised to discern both good and evil," he should, for their instruction, "leave," as it were unnoticed, "the first principles" of the Gospel, and, by a fuller statement of its mysteries, "lead them on unto maturity, Hebrews 5:13-14 with the text." Now, "this will we also do, if God permits." My endeavor at this time shall be to show,

I. What those principles are, the development of which we shall at present wave—

The first of these is, "Repentance from dead works"—

This is so plain a duty, that no one who has ever heard the Gospel can entertain a doubt respecting it. Sin of every kind must be mourned over, as deserving of death; and must be utterly forsaken, as an object of our most sincere abhorrence.

The second is, "Faith towards God"—

This also is required, as indispensably necessary to salvation. Not only must we "believe that God is, and is a rewarder of all who diligently seek him;" but we must believe that he is reconciled to man through the Son of his love; and that "of those who come to him in his Son's name, he will never cast out one." This is God's promise in the Gospel: and we must believe "Him faithful who has promised."

The two which are next specified, namely, "Baptisms, and the laying on of hands," are not additional principles; but rites of the Jewish law, by which the two foregoing principles were prefigured—

Commentators have tried to explain these two as additional principles; and have represented the "baptisms" as signifying the baptisms of John and of Christ; and "the laying on of hands," as referring to the imposition of the Apostles' hands on men, for the purpose of communicating to them the gifts of the Holy Spirit, or of ordaining them to the blessed office of the ministry. But they are no principles; nor would we attempt to explain them as such. They are explanatory of the preceding words. By "baptisms," we understand the "divers washings" which were observed under the law, Hebrews 9:10; which shadowed forth a cleansing from sin and dead works by repentance, or, as the Apostle expresses it, "the washing of regeneration." And by "laying on of hands," we understand the offerers of sacrifices laying their hands upon the head of their victim, in order to transfer to it their guilt, and express their hope of acceptance through it, Leviticus 4:4; Leviticus 4:15; Leviticus 4:24; Leviticus 4:33; Leviticus 16:21. It was in this way

that they exercised their "faith towards God."

Now, then, put these two into a parenthesis, as being only illustrative and explanatory of the former two, and all the difficulties, in which commentators have involved the passage, will vanish.

The third principle is, "the Resurrection of the dead"—

This, also, is an essential part of "the doctrine of Christ." It was indeed, though not very fully, revealed under the law: but under the Gospel it is declared with the utmost possible clearness and certainty; so that it may well be said, that "life and immortality are brought to light by the Gospel, 2 Timothy 1:10." The resurrection of our blessed Lord is indeed the one foundation of all our hopes: and it has assured to us, beyond a possibility of doubt our own resurrection; seeing that Christ was the first-fruits" of the harvest that shall in due season be gathered in, 1 Corinthians 15:20.

The last is, "Eternal judgment"—

Temporal rewards and punishments were chiefly insisted on under the law; but under the Gospel, we are taught to look forward to a day of future retribution, when "God will judge the world by that blessed Jesus, whom he has ordained" to that office; and will separate the wicked from the just; consigning the one to everlasting misery, and exalting the other to everlasting blessedness and glory! Matthew 25:32; Matthew 25:40.

The consideration of these principles we shall at the present wave—

The importance of them cannot be doubted: for the Apostle speaks of them as a "foundation which he had laid." And every minister must inculcate them, with all possible earnestness. In truth, unless his mind be continually under the influence of these principles, a man has not the smallest right to call himself a Christian. He may have been baptized; but he is no other than a baptized heathen, that has no part or lot in the Gospel salvation.

Having, times without number, enforced these things on your attention, I now pass them over; and proceed to the more immediate object of my discourse; which is, to show,

II. What are those sublimer views which it is our high privilege to contemplate—

Of course, we cannot in one discourse enter at all fully into this subject: we can only give some faint outline of it; some hints, which may afford matter for your further meditation in secret.

By "going on unto maturity," the Apostle meant that he would unfold to them the deeper mysteries of the Gospel, which it was of great importance to them to comprehend. These mysteries he unfolds in all the remaining part of this epistle. We shall comprehend them under two heads:

1. The "perfection" of Christ's priestly office—

The priesthood under the Mosaic dispensation was confined to the tribe of Levi. Of this our blessed Lord could not partake, because he was of the tribe of Judah. But a new order of priesthood was to arise, after the order of Melchizedek: and this was the priesthood to which Jesus was called. In all its offices it resembled the Levitical priesthood; by which it was, in fact, shadowed forth, in all its parts.

Our blessed Lord, as our great High-priest, offered himself a sacrifice to God. He was to expiate the sins of mankind. Not all the cattle on a thousand hills were sufficient for that. But "a body was prepared for him" for that end; a body "like, indeed, unto sinful flesh," but altogether "without sin." This body he offered upon the cross; as the Apostle says, "He offered himself without spot to God." In reference to this, the Baptist pointed him out as "The Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world:" and even in Heaven he appears "as a Lamb that has been slain," and receives the adorations of all his redeemed people, on a perfect equality with the Father: "they sing, day and night, salvation to our God, who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever!"

The high-priest, having offered the sacrifice, carried its blood within the veil, and there sprinkled it on the mercy-seat, and before the mercy-seat.

Now, our blessed Lord was both the Sacrifice and the Priest who offered it: and having offered his own blood as an atonement upon the cross, he rose from the dead, and "entered with his own blood into the Heaven of heavens," there to present it unto God in our behalf, Hebrews 9:12. With that blood he sprinkles, as it were, the mercy-seat of the Most High; and God the Father, beholding it, is pacified towards us; or, as Paul expresses it, "He is reconciled towards us by the blood of the cross, Colossians 1:20-22."

While within the veil, the high-priest covered the mercy-seat with clouds of incense: and this also our blessed Savior does, by his continual intercession. "He appears in the presence of God for us," as our all-prevailing Advocate and Intercessor: and by his

intercessions, founded on the merit of his own sacrifice, he obtains for us all those supplies of grace and peace which our daily necessities require: for "Him the Father hears always."

Having fulfilled these offices within the veil, the high-priest came forth, clad in all his splendid garments, to bless the people. And so will our great High-priest come forth, in his own glory, and in all the glory of his Father, to complete the blessedness of his redeemed people. To all of them he will say, "Come, you who are blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!"

2. The "perfection" of our privileges, as secured by it—

This also the Apostle unfolds, though, alas! we have only time to specify one or two particulars. But through our great High-priest we receive a full and perfect and everlasting remission of all our sins. The forgiveness obtained by the Levitical sacrifices was only temporary. The very services by which it was obtained were only "a remembrance of sins" still unforgiven. But, "through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, we are sanctified once for all;" yes, "by one offering he has perfected for ever those who are sanctified, Hebrews 9:13-14; Hebrews 10:10; Hebrews 10:14." God himself engages, by covenant, and by oath, that "our sins and iniquities he will remember no more, Hebrews 10:17, compared with Hebrews 8:10; Hebrews 8:12."

Through him, too, we are admitted into the immediate presence of our God. Not a soul was admitted into the holy of holies, except the high-priest; nor he, except on one day in the year. But "into the holiest of all have we access by the blood of Jesus, by that new and living way which he has consecrated for us through the veil: and having him as our High-priest over the house of God, the Apostle says, "Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, Hebrews 10:19-22." There is not a sinner in the universe who may not thus come to the very mercy-seat of our God, where he shines forth in all his glory, provided only he comes in the name of Jesus, and pleading the merit of the Redeemer's blood.

The highest possible elevation, too, of which our nature is capable, is given unto us through the intervention of our great High-priest. We are every one of us made both kings and priests: for in Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female: all are on a level in this respect: all are partakers of the same privileges: all are now "a royal priesthood, 1 Peter 2:9;" and all shall before long join in that triumphant song, "To him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen, Revelation 1:5-6."

What now shall I say, as an improvement of this subject? I will say,

1. Press forward for higher attainments in knowledge—

Do not imagine that you know enough of the Gospel: there are in it unfathomable depths which even the angels in Heaven are continually "desiring to look into." See what was Paul's prayer in behalf of the saints at Ephesus, whom he speaks of as eminent for their "faith in the Lord Jesus, and their love to all the saints:" "Ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, Ephesians 1:15-20." Let this be your prayer for yourselves, my beloved brethren, however advanced you are in faith and love. In truth, it is by your increase in knowledge that you are to increase in grace: for it is by your "comprehending with augmented clearness the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, by comprehending this, I say, you are to be filled with all the fullness of God, Ephesians 3:18-19."

2. Press forward for higher attainments in holiness—

"This I wish, brethren, even your perfection, 2 Corinthians 13:9." Rest not satisfied with anything short of a perfect transformation into "the Divine image, in righteousness and true holiness." Make this the ultimate object of your knowledge; and employ your knowledge for the production of it. Paul's prayer for his brethren at Colosse will serve you as a model for your prayers, and as a standard for your endeavors: "Since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light, Colossians 1:9-12."

You will scarcely think yourselves so advanced as the Apostle Paul: yet what does he say of himself? "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward

what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you, Philippians 3:12-15."

I charge you, brethren, to indulge no listless habits, no self-complacent thoughts. Take this holy Apostle for your example: "Let your conduct be in Heaven, where your Lord and Savior has gone before, Philippians 3:17; Philippians 3:20;" and rest not until you are changed into his image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of your God! 2 Corinthians 3:18.

#2290

THE DANGER OF APOSTASY

Hebrews 6:4-6

"It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace."

IT is of great importance in interpreting the Scriptures, to lay aside theological systems, and to attend carefully to the connection of any passage with the context; because a just view of the general scope of the passage will throw the best light upon any particular expressions contained in it.

The words before us are confessedly difficult to be understood: but, if we adopt the mode of interpretation now proposed, we shall not err very materially in our explanation of their import. The Apostle has been reproving the Hebrews for the little progress which they had made in the divine life, considering the length of time since they were first initiated into the knowledge of the Gospel. He complains that, on account of their inability to comprehend him, he scarcely knows how to open to them the deeper mysteries of our religion, Hebrews 5:11-14; which however he must do, for the benefit of those who could digest strong meat, and make a due improvement of the truths he would set before them, Hebrews 6:1-3.

In the meantime, he warns them that the neglecting to advance in religion is the surest road to apostasy; and that apostasy, after such attainments as they had made, would in all human probability outcome in their eternal ruin, verse 4-6.

Then, illustrating that point by an apt simile, verse 7, 8, he proceeds to exhort them to put away sloth, and with all diligence to follow those who through faith and patience were now inheriting their promised reward, verse 11, 12.

Hence it appears that the attainments mentioned in the text are such as were found in persons recently converted and of doubtful character; especially because they are contrasted with other attainments which accompany and manifest a state of salvation, verse 9, 10.

In our further illustration of the text, we shall show:

I. How far men may go in religion, and yet apostatize from it—

Confining ourselves to the words before us, we observe:

That unstable persons may possess many enviable gifts—

Their minds may be "enlightened" with the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. Compare Numbers 24:3-4 with Hebrews 10:26. There is not anything which the most eminent saint can know, but it may be known by a hypocrite: the difference between them is not in the matter known, but in the manner of knowing it; the one assenting to it with his head; and the other feeling it in his heart.

Their hearts may be moved by hearing and reading "the Word of God," and by considering the mysteries of the Christian dispensation, or the realities of "the invisible world. "The world to come" may be taken in either of these senses. See Hebrews 2:5." Their hope, fear, joy, and sorrow may be called forth successively in a very powerful manner, according as they apprehend themselves to be savingly interested in the promises of the Gospel, or liable to its threatenings, Ezekiel 33:31-32. Matthew 13:20-21. John 5:35. Mark 6:20. Acts 24:25.

Their powers may be enlarged, as well for the discharging of duties which their unassisted nature would be unequal to perform, as for the working of miracles, to which no created power is competent. By "the heavenly gift," or the gracious operations of the Holy Spirit, they may make some considerable advances in the divine life, 2 Peter 2:20; and through his miraculous agency, "of which they may also be partakers," they may do wonders that shall astonish all who behold them, Matthew 7:22 with 1 Corinthians 12:11.

It is observable, however, that the Apostle expresses himself in terms calculated to convey rather a low idea of the attainments of these persons: he speaks of their "tasting of the heavenly gift," and "tasting of the good Word of God;" designedly intimating thereby, that they never lived upon the word as the food of their souls, or made true religion their great solace and support, but contented themselves with a slight, transient, and superficial taste of both.

Such persons may certainly become apostates from the truth—

That they may "fall away" from the practice of religion, is evident from the instances of David and others, who, after a long experience of "the power of godliness," have grievously departed from the path of duty. But they may also apostatize from even the profession of the truth. How many are there who "for awhile believe, and, in a time of temptation, fall away? Luke 8:13." The instance of Demas, Colossians 4:14 and Philemon, verse 24 with 2 Timothy 4:10, if there were no other, is very sufficient to prove, that men may possess, not only gifts, but graces too—and yet "return with the dog to his vomit," and "draw back unto perdition, 2 Peter 2:22. Hebrews 10:38-39."

Miserable, indeed, will their situation then become, on account of,

II. The extreme difficulty of renewing them again unto repentance—

To "renew them to repentance," is a great and arduous work—

If repentance were no more than a slight conviction of their folly in renouncing the truth—then we might hope that a very little experience of the fatal change would bring them to it. But it implies a total renovation both of the heart and life: which is a work at all times difficult; but peculiarly so under their circumstances. It is said to be "impossible;" by which we are to understand, not that it is an absolute, but only a moral, impossibility. When our Lord declared that it was "easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of Heaven," he explained himself by saying, "With man this is impossible; but with God all things are possible, Matthew 19:24-26." Thus, the recovery of such apostates is quite contrary to all reasonable expectation; nor can anything but a most extraordinary interposition of the Deity effect it.

What reason is there to hope that it would ever be accomplished in them?

Consider,

1. The dishonor they do to Christ—

Those who renounce Christianity do, in fact, proclaim Christ an impostor: they declare their approbation of the Jews who crucified him; and thus, as far as in them lies, they "crucify him afresh." But we must not confine this to avowed infidels: the same is true respecting those who decline from the ways of God, and return to a worldly and carnal life: "they put Christ to an open shame:" they proclaim to all around them, 'I once thought that it was my highest interest and happiness to serve Christ: but I was quite mistaken. I made the experiment; I became his follower; I loved him, served him, glorified him; but I found, after all, that I had given up a greater good for a lesser good. I now am assured that Christ cannot make us happy; and, therefore, I have again returned to the world, and chosen it as the better portion: and, whoever would be wise or happy, let him follow my example; let him renounce religion as a needless restraint, and despise it as an enthusiastic delusion: let him lend all his powers and faculties to the pursuits of time, and the enjoyments of sense; and let him cast off the yoke of Christ as an intolerable burden.'

Who can suppose that a man, after having cast such dishonor upon Christ, would ever be brought again to embrace and honor him? While he continues to reject the Savior, his restoration to repentance is absolutely impossible; because, there is no way to repent, but by returning to Christ, Hebrews 10:26-27. And that he would return sincerely to Christ is morally impossible; because his way to Christ is barred up by shame, and fear, and almost every consideration that can influence the human mind.

2. The despite they do to the Holy Spirit—

This, though not adverted to in the text, is necessary to a just view of the subject, and is expressly mentioned in the same connection in a subsequent part of this epistle, verse 28, 29. It is not possible but that such apostates must have experienced on many occasions "the strivings of the Holy Spirit" with them; they must have felt many secret checks and remonstrances of conscience; all of which they must have resisted, before they could prevail upon themselves to throw off their profession of religion, and to "make shipwreck of their faith." In short, they must have altogether "quenched the Spirit," and "seared their consciences as with a hot iron."

What prospect then is there that such persons would be renewed unto repentance? If they could not maintain their ground when they had the assistances of the Holy Spirit—then how shall they recover it when he is departed from them? And what reason is there to hope that the Holy Spirit, whom they have so "grieved," and "vexed," by their misconduct, would again dwell in them, and increase

his gracious communications in proportion as they have accumulated their transgressions? If the contempt which they pour upon this Divine Agent amount to what is called the sin against the Holy Spirit, their damnation is sure; it is decreed in Heaven, and sealed by their own act and deed. And, though it falls short of this unpardonable sin, still is their case almost hopeless: they are like "the earth, which, bearing only thorns and briers, is rejected, and is near unto cursing; whose end is to be burned, verse 8."

This solemn subject must not be concluded without a few words of advice—

1. Guard against the means and occasions of apostasy—

He who would not fall, must take heed to his steps and be careful on what ground he treads. Now we are told by God himself, that worldly cares, worldly pleasures, worldly company are the bane of religion; and that we must guard against them all, if we would be steadfast in the faith. We quite mistake, if we think that nothing but what is palpably sinful in itself is dangerous: almost all apostasy arises from secret neglects of duty, and from a lack of necessary self-denial. By going to the utmost boundaries of what is lawful, we are easily and imperceptibly drawn into what is unlawful. Therefore watch! Watch against error; watch against temptation; watch against the cares and pleasures of life; watch against secret declensions! In short, "let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall."

2. Do not be satisfied with low spiritual attainments—

It was to enforce this idea that the warning in the text was introduced by the Apostle: and therefore it demands our peculiar attention. Persons who, like "babes," are weak in the faith, are of course more liable to be turned from it: and if they do not grow towards an adult state, they will certainly decline. "Press forward then, forgetting what is behind, and reaching forth unto that which is ahead!"

3. Under any backsliding, apply instantly to Christ for grace and mercy—

The warning in the text is not to discourage the humble, but to alarm the careless, and quicken the remiss. The Apostle does not say that repenting sinners, however they may have apostatized, shall not be forgiven; the danger is that they will not repent; and not that, if they repent, they shall not be pardoned. Let not any then say, "I have fallen away, and therefore cannot hope for mercy;" but rather, "I have departed, and must return instantly to God in his appointed way." God himself addresses us, "Return, O backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings, and love you freely!" Let a hope of acceptance aid your fears of final apostasy: so shall the end of God's warnings be best accomplished, and the fulfillment of his promises secured.

#2291

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FRUITFUL AND BARREN PROFESSORS

Hebrews 6:7-8

"Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned."

COMPARISONS, when just—have the double effect of illustrating, and of confirming, any truth which they set before us. They have not indeed the force of demonstration, when considered as arguments: but they are peculiarly calculated to impress the mind; and, in that view, have often a stronger effect than the clearest statements, or most logical deductions. Of this kind is the comparison in the text, which is adduced to illustrate the guilt and danger of apostasy. It exhibits figuratively, in a way of contrast,

I. The benefit of ordinances when duly improved—

What is that improvement which God expects us to make of divine ordinances?

Everyone knows what benefit the cultivator of any land expects from showers which water the earth; he expects, whether in his field or garden, an increased production of those fruits which he has been laboring to obtain. And what does the great Gardener labor to produce in the enclosures of his Church? Surely he looks for augmented penitence and contrition as of primary and indispensable importance. He desires that every man be brought to a more simple affiance in his dear Son, and to a more unreserved devotedness of heart and life to his service. He desires an increased mortification of all sin, and a progressive fruitfulness in all the fruits of righteousness, and a more perfect transformation into the Divine image.

Where his ordinances are made subservient to this end, he will bestow the richest blessings—

There is a peace which passes all understanding, which God will confer in rich abundance. He will shed abroad his love in the heart of him who thus profitably waits upon him, and will give him such testimonies of his adoption into God's family, as shall dissipate all doubt or fear either of his present acceptance with God, or of his future fruition of the heavenly glory. Yes, such testimonies as shall

be a foretaste of that glory, a very beginning of Heaven in his soul. In fact, whatever the devoutest worshiper in the universe can wish for, it shall be given him in answer to his prayer, John 15:7.

But it is not to all that divine ordinances are thus blessed, as we shall see from,

II. The sad result of them when habitually misimproved—

As in barren lands, so in the Church, the showers descend on many in vain—

How many are there who, after years of culture under the richest ordinances, remain as earthly in their minds, as sensual in their habits, and as devilish in their tempers—as the very heathen, who have never once had the means of grace given unto them: Their hearts are yet sealed up in impenitence and unbelief, as much as if they had never heard of the Savior's love, or received the offers of a free salvation.

And what can these expect, but the curse of God upon them?

A man will not always cultivate a field that requites all his labors with nothing but "thorns and briers:" neither will God always bestow his care on those who hold fast their iniquities, and continue unchanged under all the efforts that are made for their salvation. He has told us that "his Spirit shall not always strive with man, Genesis 6:5," and that, "if his word is not a savor of life to the life of any soul, it shall become a savor of death to his condemnation! 2 Corinthians 2:16." To this effect God warned his Church of old, Isaiah 5:4-6. And our blessed Lord has told us that a similar misimprovement of his Gospel will render our state worse than that of Sodom and Gomorrah! Matthew 10:15.

See then, brethren,

1. What matter here is for diligent inquiry—

You see, and all around you see, the effects produced on the earth by fertilizing showers, Isaiah 55:10-11; and should not similar effects be found on you? See then whether you have, both in your heart and life, an evidence of the change which the Gospel produces on all who receive it aright, and to whom it comes with power.

I must warn you of your responsibility to God for all the means of grace. You do not depart from the house of God the same persons that you were when you came into it. If you are not softened by the Word of God—then you are hardened by it: and if you are not brought nearer to God by it—then you are driven farther from him, to your everlasting confusion, James 1:23-25.

2. What reason here is for watchfulness and care—

When you come to the house of God, remember that you come into the more immediate presence of the Deity; and that every word you hear, wings its way to Heaven to record the manner in which it was heard. Pray therefore to God before you go thither, and while you are there under the ministry of the word, and when you depart thence, that the word preached may be accompanied with a divine energy, and prove "the power of God to the salvation of your souls."

And, if at any time a favorable impression is made upon you, beware that you do not lose it. It is in that particular view that the Apostle suggests the comparison in my text: and I wish very particularly to put you on your guard, that you do not convert the blessing of God into a curse, and render the very means which he has bestowed for the salvation of your souls, into an occasion of deeper and heavier condemnation!

#2292

THE THINGS THAT ACCOMPANY SALVATION

Hebrews 6:9-11

"Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case--things that accompany salvation. God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown Him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure."

WHOEVER we address, it is needful at times that we use the language of warning and admonition. For in a mixed assembly all are not alike saved: there will always be found some tares among the wheat: and even the most upright may derive benefit from admonitions faithfully administered. Hence, in addressing the believing Hebrews, Paul warned them against the danger of apostasy; declaring that if they did not make a just improvement of the privileges they enjoyed, they would bring upon themselves an aggravated condemnation.

But did he therefore conceive of them as hypocrites? No; he had a good opinion of their state: "he was persuaded better things concerning them," notwithstanding he thus addressed them: yet, while he acknowledged with gratitude their active piety, he urged them to abound in it more and more.

Under a similar persuasion in respect to many of you, and with similar desires in reference to all, we proceed to point out,

I. What are those things which accompany salvation—

There are many things which are common both to the hypocrite and the true believer. But there are some things which belong to the true believer exclusively, and which will assuredly outcome in his everlasting happiness. Wherever there is genuine love to the saints for Christ's sake, there is salvation. But to speak more particularly,

It must be a love to the saints, as saints—

There may be a strong attachment both to individuals and collective bodies, without anything beyond the workings of nature. A great variety of considerations may give rise to the emotions of love, and the heart be as far from God as ever. Of course the bare existence of this feeling towards our fellow-creatures can be no just ground for concluding ourselves to be in a state of grace. Even love to the saints may exist on grounds which do not prove it to be of divine origin. We may love them because they are amiable in themselves, or kind to us, or an ornament of the party to which they belong. But when we love them purely because they are beloved of the Lord, and belong to him; when we love them as members of our own body; as partakers of the same divine nature with ourselves; and as heirs of the same glory—then we possess a grace which no hypocrite ever did possess, and which is inseparably connected with the salvation of the soul.

This love must be operative and laborious—

Our love must "not be in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth." It must be such as "works and labors in ministering" to the welfare of the objects beloved. Love of any kind is regarded as a mere pretense, if it does not exert itself in such a way as to evince its reality by a corresponding practice. And much more will our pretensions to so high a principle as Christian love be deemed nugatory—if we labor not to display its efficacy by a suitable conduct. The temporal and spiritual comfort of the saints must be promoted by us to the uttermost. We are not to be indifferent to the welfare of any: but, while we "do good unto all men, we must do it especially unto the household of faith." Nor must we do it merely occasionally, when more urgent circumstances arise to remind us of our duty: we must make it, as it were, our business to promote to the uttermost the edification of the body of Christ in general, and of all its members in particular. Nor must we shrink back from any "labor" that may be conducive to this end; or any sacrifice that may be requisite to the attainment of it. It is only when our love is thus operative, that it approves itself to be a sure evidence of grace, and a certain pledge of glory.

There is yet one more ingredient in this love, namely, that it must be exercised towards the saints for Christ's sake—

It must be "the love you have shown Him as you have helped His people and continue to help them" as reconciled to us in Christ Jesus. It is this which gives to love its chief excellence. Though the saints are ostensible objects towards whom it is exercised—yet it must in reality terminate on God in them. It is to him that everything must be done: but as he personally is out of our reach, we are to do it to them as his representatives. He is to be the one great object in whom all our affections center: and not being able to pour out our ointment upon his head, we must, in testimony of the desires of our souls, pour it out, as we are able, upon all his members.

This principle so operating, most assuredly "accompanies salvation"—

It is declared by our blessed Lord to be that whereby we may know to a certainty our own conversion, 1 John 3:14, and may be distinguished for his people by all who behold us, John 13:35. Moreover, if we live in the exercise of this principle, we are assured by God himself, that "we shall never fall, but that an abundant entrance shall be ministered unto us into the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, 2 Peter 1:10-11." So infallibly is the final salvation of the soul connected with it, that every exercise of it shall be remembered, "not so much as a cup of cold water given to a disciple in the name of a disciple, ever falling short of its reward."

Indeed, God would consider himself as "unrighteous, if he were to forget" to recompense these things in the eternal world. Not that any works of ours can claim any recompense on the ground of merit. But, on the ground of God's promises, we may be assured that salvation shall be given to us, if we live under the influence of this love: and we may expect it from him as a merciful, a faithful, and a "righteous Judge, 2 Timothy 4:8."

Such being "the things that accompany salvation," we proceed to show,

II. Our duty in relation to them—

It is the duty of all to abound in them—

It is supposed in the text that the believing Hebrews had both possessed and exercised this love: indeed, it was from a persuasion of this that Paul was so well satisfied of their being in a state of acceptance with God. And we too must live under the habitual influence of this gracious principle, taking every occasion to manifest it towards the saints in acts of kindness both to their bodies and their souls. "We must walk in love, just as Christ has loved us."

It is yet further our duty to persevere in these labors even "to the end"—

We are "never to be weary of well doing:" never to think that we have done enough; or rather, never to think we have done anything, as long as anything remains to be done. We are not to be deterred by difficulties, nor to draw back on account of disappointments.

In extending our labors of love to all the saints, we shall sometimes find that we mistake the characters of those whom we have endeavored to serve: but we must not on this account neglect or intermit our duty. We may take the more care to discriminate between the different characters of men; but must on no account refuse to give the children their food, because some portions of our bounty have been unwittingly wasted upon dogs. If any have abused our kindness, the loss is their own: but if we neglect to show kindness, the loss is ours. We must never lay down the habit, but with our lives.

In so acting we benefit ourselves no less than others—

The exercise of love is an evidence of grace; and as such, a foundation of hope. And the more the acts of love are formed into a habit, the livelier our hope becomes, until at last it grows into a "full assurance of hope." We must again say, that it is not on our actions as meritorious, that our hopes are founded—but only as evidences of a true faith, and as evincing a state which God has promised to reward.

Having these evidences, we may as assuredly hope for glory, as if we saw the holy angels ready to bear our souls to the realms of bliss. "God is love" and, if we resemble him in this world, we may well have boldness in reference to the day of judgment, 1 John 4:16-17. "We know by it infallibly that we are of the truth; and therefore may on safe grounds assure our hearts before him, 1 John 3:19."

Let me now, in applying this subject to ourselves, tell you,

1. What is my "persuasion" respecting you—

Of many "I am persuaded," that they have these "things that accompany salvation." Many manifest it in the whole of their life and conduct; and many more would manifest it, if they had the same opportunities as are offered to others. There can be no doubt but that the principle of Christian love is deeply implanted in the hearts of many, who from various circumstances are unable to display it as they could wish. And we are assured, that God, who searches the heart, will bear witness to them in the last day, as well as to those who were able to carry into effect their good desires.

But, in reference to many, we have no such persuasion. Many do not even possess those things which hypocrites and apostates may have; and much less "the things which accompany salvation." How many of you are there who have never "been enlightened, never tasted of the heavenly gift, never been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, never tasted of the good Word of God, or the powers of the world to come, verse 4, 5." Alas! beloved, what hope can you enjoy? Your confidence is altogether delusive, and will deceive you to your eternal ruin.

But where these specious appearances have been found, there is in too many instances an entire lack of that gracious principle of which the text speaks. The love that has been exercised has been essentially defective in all its most distinguishing points. It has not been to the saints as saints, but on account of some accidental circumstance that has attended them: it has not been laborious and persevering, but has displayed itself only in easier services, and on more partial or particular occasions. Above all, it has not originated altogether in love to God; or been exercised simply for the glory of his name.

What then must be my persuasion respecting you? Must it not rather be, that, so far from possessing the things that accompany salvation, you have as yet "no part or lot in this matter; but are yet in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity!" Beloved brethren, think of your danger before it is too late; and beg of God that you may rest in nothing short of true conversion, and of that "hope which shall never make you ashamed."

2. What is my "desire" for you—

Truly this accords with that of the Apostle Paul. On behalf of "every one of you," I would desire, that you would show all diligence in the exercise of this grace; and that you would continue in the exercise of it even "to the end:" like him also I would desire it with all earnestness.

I desire it, first, on your own account: for truly the exercise of love is a Heaven upon earth. "Love is of God; and he who dwells in

love, dwells in God, and God in him."

Look at the Christians that are full of doubts and fears; and you will almost invariably find that they are comparatively selfish, indolent, unprofitable servants, and greatly defective both in love to man and in zeal for God.

On the other hand, look at the laborious and self-denying Christians, and you will find almost invariably that they are happy in their own souls, and happy in their prospects of the eternal world. For your own sakes therefore I would say: Live in the constant exercise of love, and spare no pains to honor God and to benefit his people!

Next, I would desire it for the Church's sake. How happy must that Church be, where such is the employment of all its members! What peace, and love, and harmony will prevail among them! What mutual edification will be found in all their social fellowship! And with what joy will they go up together to the house of God! Nor will the fragrance of their graces refresh themselves only; it will be fragrant also to many who have never experienced any such emotions in their own souls, and will cause them to say, We will go with you; for we perceive that God is truly with you.

But, above all, I would desire it for the Lord's sake, that he may be glorified; for in comparison with this all other motives are weak and of no account, 2 Corinthians 9:11-14. If it is true that "herein is the Father glorified, that you bear much fruit," then it must be most eminently true, when that fruit is such as is described in our text. Has the Lord Jesus Christ said, that "what we do unto the least of his disciples, we do it unto him?" Then what delight must he feel in a Church where all the members are vying with each other in the exercises of love! "When the spices of his garden thus flow out, then our Beloved will surely come into it, and eat his pleasant fruits, Song of Solomon 4:16."

To all then of every description I say, "Walk in love!" If you have already begun this heavenly course, labor to abound more and more!

#2293

EXHORTATION TO DILIGENCE

Hebrews 6:12

"We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised."

IN the general course of God's providence, we perceive that his blessings are dispensed in proportion to men's exertions in the pursuit of them. And though the Disposer of all events sees fit, on some occasions, to vary his dispensations, loading the slothful with opulence, and allowing the industrious to be in want—yet for the most part we behold diligence rewarded, and indolence put to shame. In spiritual things none are disappointed; labor is invariably attended with success: no one asks without receiving, or seeks without finding. God uniformly shows himself a rewarder of such as diligently seek him. "To him who studies to improve his talent, more is uniformly given; and he is made to possess abundance."

The experience of the saints in all ages fully corresponds with this. No one ever suffered loss, but in consequence of his own remissness. Nor did ever any one devote himself sincerely to God, without receiving grace sufficient in the time of need.

The author of this epistle confirms these observations: for, having spoken of those who apostatize from the truth, he tells the Hebrews, that he was persuaded better things of them, and things that accompany salvation; for that they were active in every labor of love; which was to him a convincing evidence of their conversion to God. He then takes occasion to exhort them all to use the same diligence; and recommends them, if they would possess an assurance of hope, and enjoy it to the end—to press forward in the way which the patriarchal saints had trodden with such success. In his words we see,

What we must guard against in our Christian course:

I. A caution—

There is scarcely any evil more universally prevalent than spiritual sloth—

In worldly concerns, sloth is often overcome by the force and influence of other propensities: the predominant affection of the mind, whatever it is, will often gain such an ascendancy, as to subdue the workings of less powerful corruptions. Yes, to such a degree will self-interest or ambition lead us to mortify our love of ease, that we shall scarcely be sensible of the existence of sloth in our hearts.

But, when once we turn our attention to spiritual things, this evil disposition will discover itself, and prove, that notwithstanding it has hitherto been concealed from our view, it had taken deep root in our souls.

In temporal things, our exertions are all on the side of nature. And, though we may feel some reluctance from contrary principles within us, we shall on the whole not find it so difficult to surmount their opposition.

But, in spiritual things, we do not advance one step without conquering the united force of all our natural inclinations. Hence the evil against which the Apostle cautions us, extends its empire over the whole world, and is to be resisted by every individual of mankind.

As Christians, we have very abundant reason to mortify and subdue spiritual sloth!

1. Spiritual sloth is repugnant to our duty—

A life of godliness is represented as a race and a warfare, in order to convey to us some idea of the activity and perseverance necessary for a right discharge of our duty.

Do persons in a race find time to loiter? Have they their attention diverted by every trifle around them? Do they not press forward with unremitting ardor, and exert themselves the more as they approach the goal? Do they not bear in mind the prize, and strain every nerve to gain it?

Look at those who are engaged in war, and arrived upon the field of battle; do they indulge security? Do they not watch the motions of the enemy, and animate one another to the combat, and endure almost insupportable fatigues, and expose themselves to the most imminent dangers, to defeat their enemies?

If these then are fit images to represent the Christian's duty, then what must we think of sloth? What propriety is there in these images, as applied to those who live regardless of eternity? Surely they rather form the strongest contrast to the whole life and conduct of such persons.

2. Spiritual sloth is inconsistent with our Christian profession—

Every one who calls himself a Christian professes:

to value his soul,

to serve his God,

to be seeking Heaven.

But what value has he for his soul, who prefers every vanity before it, and cannot be prevailed upon to seek its interests?

What regard has he for God, who will not put forth all his powers to please and honor him?

What desire after Heaven has he, who will not renounce his sins, and fulfill his duties to secure it?

How absurd it is to call ourselves Christians, when the whole of our conduct so flagrantly contradicts our profession!

3. Spiritual sloth is subversive of our welfare—

Let the effects of sloth be viewed in those, who, in the judgment of charity, are not altogether destitute of true religion: how little victory have they over the world and their own corruptions, in comparison with what is attained by more diligent Christians! How little do they know of heavenly consolations! For the most part they are full of doubts and fears; and instead of enjoying that peace which surpasses all understanding, they are harassed with the accusations of a guilty conscience. Their lamps being but seldom trimmed, they afford but a dim light to the world around them, and experience but little of the light of God's countenance in their souls. Moreover, at the close of their day, they frequently set as the sun behind a cloud; and instead of having "an abundant entrance into the kingdom of their Lord," they leave the world uncertain where they are going, and what shall be the outcome of the future judgment.

If we inquire into the cause of all this, we shall find it was sloth! They too often slumbered and slept, when they should have been watching unto prayer with all perseverance. If such then be the effects of sloth, where it gains only an occasional ascendancy, what must be the consequence of a habitual subjection to its dominion? Alas! its willing captives can expect nothing, but to perish under the wrath of an offended God! Matthew 25:26.

Having given us this beneficial caution, the Apostle tells us,

II. What line we should pursue—

He proposes to our imitation the patriarchs and saints of old.

These are described as "inheriting the promises"—

They had not indeed received the promised Messiah, Hebrews 11:39, having died long before he came into the world; but they had partaken in all the fruits and benefits which he was in due time to purchase with his blood. When on earth, they, like minors, had enjoyed as much of the inheritance as had been judged proper for them; but now they were of full age, and had attained the full possession of all the promises. Having been adopted into the family of God, and been begotten by his word and Spirit—they were heirs of God, and had God himself, together with all the glory of Heaven, as their unalienable portion!

The way by which they attained to this inheritance was "by faith and patience"—

They had no claim whatever to it upon the ground of their own merit: they all looked to that "Lamb of God who was slain from the foundation of the world." They all lived and "died in faith." "To their faith they added patience." They, no doubt, as well as we, had "fightings without, and fears within;" and sustained many sore conflicts, both with the world around them, and with their own hearts. But they "ran their race with patience," and "endured unto the end."

These therefore we would propose to ourselves as patterns.

We should imitate,

1. Their faith—

If we begin not here, we can never stir one step in the way to Heaven. We must "have like precious faith with them," renouncing all dependence on ourselves, and "making Christ our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and our complete redemption."

2. Their patience—

"If we set ourselves to seek the Lord, we must prepare our hearts for trials and temptations." Cain and Ishmael have their followers in every age. We must not be offended and turn aside on account of persecution, but must "possess our souls in patience." Nor must the love of this present world, or the difficulties of our spiritual warfare, be permitted to divert us from the path of duty. Having "put our hand to the plough, we must never look back," "lest, having a promise left us of entering into God's rest, we would come short of it" at last.

3. Their diligence—

It is in this view more especially that we are called to follow them, "Be not slothful, but imitate them." Even those among them, who, like Moses and David, had a kingdom to govern, were yet exceedingly diligent in every duty of religion, devoting themselves entirely to the service of their God. Let us then tread in their steps: let us "walk, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil!" Let us "give all diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end;" and "whatever our hand finds to do, let us do it with all our might."

If any motives are needed to enforce the Apostle's advice, consider further,

1. The effects of diligence in this life—

The more earnest we are in serving God, the more will our hearts be comforted, our fellow-creatures benefitted, and God glorified. Let us place ourselves more especially on our death-bed, and look back from thence, not with pride and self-delight, but with gratitude and thanksgiving, on a life devoted to God: and let us contrast our state with that of one who has never done anything but treasure up wrath against the day of wrath, or one, who, though on the whole, pious, has filled his dying pillow with thorns by his remissness; and surely we shall need no other motive to fight a good fight, and war a good warfare.

2. The consequences of it in the world to come—

There can be no doubt but that the greater our labor here, the richer will be our reward hereafter: and "one star will differ widely from another star in glory." It is true, the most eminent saint might well be satisfied, and magnify the Divine goodness, if he is admitted to the lowest place in God's kingdom: but if our capacity for happiness will be enlarged by all that we do for God, and every man will be filled according to his capacity, would we not be encouraged to exert ourselves? Would we not "forget what is behind, and reach forward unto that which is ahead?" would we be contented to suffer loss in Heaven, merely because we do not lose Heaven altogether, 1 Corinthians 3:15. "Let us look to ourselves then, that we lose not the things that we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward, 2 John verse 8."

"Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged."

THE multiplying of oaths is a dreadful snare to the consciences of men; and a light method of administering and of taking them is among the most heinous of our country's sins. But they run to a contrary extreme who affirm all oaths to be sinful: on many occasions they were prescribed to the Jews by God himself: the most eminent saints also, under the Christian dispensation, as well as under that of the Jews, have, on many occasions, appealed in the most solemn manner unto God.

In the passage before us God sanctions the use of oaths in concerns which are of great moment, and which cannot be settled in any other way. We are even assured that God himself has condescended to adopt this very method of confirming and establishing the minds of his people. From the Apostle's account of this astonishing transaction, we shall be led to consider,

I. The description here given us of God's people—

They are described by,

1. Their state—

They once "were, like others, children of wrath! Ephesians 2:3;" but they have been regenerated by God's Spirit, and adopted into his family. "Being thus his sons, they are also heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, Romans 8:17." The promises, temporal, spiritual, eternal—are their inheritance. Hence they are justly called, "the heirs of promise." To this happy state they have been brought in consequence of God's eternal counsels, 2 Timothy 1:9. But they have nevertheless attained to it in the use of means, Ezekiel 36:37.

2. Their conduct—

Eternal life has been set before them in the Gospel; and Christ has been declared to be the only way in which that life can be found, 1 John 5:11-12. This record they have believed: and, feeling their utter need of mercy, they have sought it in Christ, Galatians 2:16. They have regarded him as the city of refuge, in which the man-slayer found protection from the avenger of blood; and have fled to him with holy earnestness as their only hope, Numbers 35:11-12. In this way they have "laid hold" of God's promised mercy; and have attained to that state in which they may assuredly expect it.

That these are the most highly favored of all people will appear, if we consider,

II. The regard which God manifests towards them—

He wills that they would enjoy "strong consolation"—

He would not have them held in doubtful suspense, or be harassed by fluctuations of hope and fear. He wishes rather that they would enjoy the privileges of their high station. Though they have in themselves much cause to fear—yet in Jesus they have reason to exult and triumph. They would "know in whom they have believed, and that he is both able and willing to keep what they have committed to him, 2 Timothy 1:12."

In order to this he would have them persuaded of "the immutability of his counsel"—

Nothing more contributes to the comfort of God's people than a view of everything as subjected to his unchanging will and irresistible control. If only they learn to refer everything to his overruling agency or righteous permission, then all cause for disquietude will cease. Do the dispensations of his providence appear dark? The soul will be satisfied when it can say, "This has God done! 1 Samuel 3:18." If events seem to contradict the promises, the reflection that God's ways are unsearchable will silence every murmur, and dispose us to trust God, until he shall be pleased to unfold his purposes to our view, Hebrews 11:17-19. Abraham's faith as described in these, verses will admirably illustrate the subject, "Who shall separate me from the love of God?" is the triumphant challenge that will be given to all our enemies, as soon as ever we see God appointing everything with immutable and unerring wisdom, Romans 8:33.

For this purpose God confirms his promise with an oath—

His promise could not be made more sure. But we are prone to unbelief. On this account he condescends to consult our weakness, and to swear by himself, that we may be the more firmly persuaded of his veracity. Even though God had not sworn, he never could have receded from his engagements, seeing "it is impossible for God to lie." But his oath is calculated to satisfy the most fearful mind; and must convince us, beyond a possibility of doubt, that he will never leave us nor forsake us, Hebrews 13:5.

INFERENCES—

1. How astonishing is the condescension of God!

That God would voluntarily lay himself under any obligations at all to us, may well excite our astonishment. But that he would so far indulge those who doubt his veracity, as to confirm his promises with an oath, with a view to their more abundant consolation and encouragement, is a condescension of which we could have formed no idea. In this he has cast a reflection, as it were, upon his own character, in order that he might silence their unreasonable doubts. But he is God and not man, and therefore he could submit to such a degradation. O let all of us admire and adore him! And let us be careful that we "receive not this grace of God in vain, 2 Corinthians 6:1."

2. How great is the sin of unbelief!

Unbelief says, in fact, not only that "it is possible for God to lie," but that He is indeed "a liar! 1 John 5:10." How would such an indignity be borne by us, especially if we had never given the slightest occasion for it, but had fulfilled every promise that we had ever made? No doubt then God must be displeased whenever we cast such a reflection upon him. And if now, after he has confirmed his promise with an oath, we disbelieve him, the affront will be aggravated in a tenfold degree, and our guilt be proportionably increased. Let us know then, that "not one jot or tittle of his word can fail;" and rest assured, that, if we trust in him, we shall never be confounded, Isaiah 45:17.

3. How wide is the difference between God's people and the world at large!

There may be but little visible difference between them: but they do differ very widely; nor is the difference the less real because it is invisible.

The godly have fled for refuge to Christ as their only hope: they make the promises of God in Christ their boast, and their inheritance: and, while God regards them as his heirs, he fills them with a peace that surpasses all understanding.

But what hope have the careless and ungodly world? What consolation have they from the immutability of God? All their comfort is founded on the hope that God is a liar, and that all of his promises and threatenings are lies! Hence, instead of being children and heirs of God—they are children of the wicked one, and inheritors of his infernal portion. Let these awful truths sink deep into our minds. And "let us not be of those who turn back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of their souls, Hebrews 10:39."

#2295

THE CHRISTIAN'S ANCHOR

Hebrews 6:19-20

"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."

THIS life, we know, is but a passage to the eternal world; a wilderness state, leading to the heavenly Canaan. In it we meet with trials, which are necessary for the exercise of our faith and patience: but in the midst of trials, we are favored with consolations and supports, perfectly adequate to our necessities, and sufficient for our wants. The lives of Abraham and the patriarchs are very instructive to us in this view. They had promises in abundance; but did not actually possess the things promised. They were called to endure much, before their course was run; and "through faith and patience they inherited the promises, verse 12." Thus are we also to "walk by faith, and not by sight;" and "patiently to endure" our destined trials, in the assured expectation of "obtaining in due season the promised blessings, verse 15."

In the mean time, like mariners, we have "an anchor" provided for us, which shall hold us fast amidst the storms and tempests with which we are assailed, and secure our ultimate arrival at the desired haven. This is declared in the words which we have just read; and which will lead me to show you,

I. What is "the anchor" here spoken of—

The universal voice of commentators has, together with our English version, determined it to be "HOPE," and from such a host it seems the greatest presumption to differ. Nor indeed would we be guilty of such presumption, if we could by any means acquiesce in the general sentiment.

But the word "hope" is printed in italics, to show that it is not in the original; and, consequently, the only question is: What is the word which would have been supplied from the foregoing context? or, What is the antecedent to which the relative in our text refers?

I will, with the diffidence that becomes me, state my view of this question: and leave every one to adopt, or reject, my alteration, as he shall see fit. I will first, then, state my reasons why I think the word "hope" is not the word to be supplied.

The word "hope," in the preceding context, must unquestionably mean the object of hope; but in the text it is put for the grace of hope: for it is something within ourselves which we have as "an anchor," and which is to be cast by us on something that is without. But to use the relative in a sense so essentially different from that in which its antecedent is used, is a construction that should never be admitted, without an absolute and indispensable necessity.

If it is said, that in the text it may be used for the object of hope, I answer, that it cannot with any propriety; for it can scarcely be made sense. Moreover, if taken in that sense, it will be the same as the Forerunner, who is said to have entered where that is.

The true antecedent, I conceive, and consequently the proper word to have been inserted, is, the word "consolation:" and this will appear from a minute consideration of the context. It is true, the word "hope" occurs in the last member of the preceding sentence, while the word "consolation" is more remote; but the member of the sentence immediately preceding the text is nothing but a periphrasis for "we," or a description of the persons spoken of; and if the word "we" be taken without that particular description annexed to it, the connection between the relative and antecedent will be perfectly clear: "God has confirmed his promise with an oath, that we might have strong consolation; which consolation we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast." The remarkable parallelism also between the words—a parallelism sufficiently observable in the translation, but still more marked in the original—renders this construction yet more obvious. God designed "that we would have consolation; which consolation we have:" he designed that we would have strong consolation; and strong it is, even an "anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast." Thus, to say the least, there is nothing forced in this construction; but, on the contrary, it is plain and simple, and such as could not possibly have been avoided, if that member, which is a mere periphrasis, or description of the persons possessing that consolation, had not intervened.

But can "consolation" properly be called "an anchor of the soul?" Most assuredly it may: for where consolation is lacking, the soul is liable to be tempest-tossed, and driven to and fro by every wind of temptation; but where consolation abounds, there the soul is kept firm and immoveable; agreeably to what God himself has said, "The joy of the Lord is our strength, Nehemiah 8:10." And hence Paul unites the two, in his prayer for the Thessalonian converts: "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which has given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work, 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17."

I say then, that the word "consolation" should, if my view of it be right, have been here supplied; even the consolation arising from a view of "the immutability of God's counsels," which are made over to us in express promises, and confirmed to us with an oath: it is this consolation, I say, which is indeed "the anchor of the soul" spoken of in our text.

It is remarkable, that in other parts of this same epistle, the Apostle speaks of his consolation in precisely the same view: "We," says he, "are Christ's house, if we hold fast the confidence, and the rejoicing of the hope, firm unto the end:" and again, "We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end, Hebrews 3:6; Hebrews 3:14. "Cast not away your confidence, which has great recompense of reward, Hebrews 10:35."

That "hope" may be fitly represented as an anchor, there can be no doubt; but the doubt is, what is the anchor here spoken of: and that, I say again, is the consolation arising from an assured confidence in the promise and oath of an unchanging God.

Let us now proceed to consider,

II. On what ground it must be cast—

It is said to "enter into that within the veil." Other anchors descend into the deep: this anchor ascends to the highest heavens, and lays hold on the very throne of God!

We might here speak of the things which were within the veil; as the mercy-seat, on which abode the bright cloud, the Shechinah, the symbol of the Deity; and the ark, which contained the law, and which was covered by the mercy-seat: and we might show how this anchor of the soul fixes on them, even on our reconciled God and Father, and on the Lord Jesus Christ, who has fulfilled the law for us. But it will be better to adhere more simply to the preceding context, and to speak of the anchor as fixing on the immutability of a promise-keeping God. This is a proper foundation for it to rest upon: nor can we by any means lay too fast hold upon it. For, God has from all eternity entered into covenant with his only-begotten Son; engaging, if he would assume our nature, and "make his soul an offering for sin, he would see a seed who would prolong their days, and the pleasure of the Lord would prosper in his hand, Isaiah 53:10." To this the Son consented: and, having taken our nature upon him, he has fulfilled every part of his engagement; never ceasing from his work until he could say, "It is finished."

Now, will the Father recede from his engagements? Assuredly not: for "He is not a man, that he would lie; or the son of man, that he would repent, Numbers 23:19." Having confirmed "his promise with an oath, it is impossible for him to lie;" since "both the one and the other are absolutely immutable, verse 18." On this covenant, then, we may lay hold; and on it we may rest, as "ordered in all things, and sure, 2 Samuel 23:5." In it, everything is provided for us that we can stand in need of, whether for time or for eternity: it engages to impart to every one that has been given to Christ, pardon and peace, and holiness and glory.

On nothing short of this must our anchor fix. It must rest on nothing that is in us: no frames, no feelings, no experiences, no attainments. From God's covenant all our hopes flow; and on that must they all rest. We, alas! are changeable; and on us can no confidence be placed. But God is unchangeable, in all his purposes, which are unalterably fixed, "according to the counsel of his own will, Ephesians 1:11;" in all "his promises, which are all yes, and amen, in Christ Jesus, 2 Corinthians 1:20;" and in all his gifts, for "his gifts and calling are without repentance, Romans 11:29." This is a foundation which will hold us fast; as it is said, "The foundation of God stands sure; the Lord knows those who are his, 2 Timothy 2:19."

But, as this anchor is said to be sure and steadfast, it will be proper for me to show,

III. From whence it derives its power and tenacity—

In order that a tempest-tossed vessel may be preserved in safety, it is necessary that the anchor itself would be of a good quality, and that the anchorage would be firm. And both these are requisite for the establishing of the soul: the "consolation" must not be like "that of the hypocrite, which is but for a moment, Job 20:5;" or that of the novice, which will give way on the very first assault of temptation, Matthew 13:20-21. It must be far more solid; but it must be formed in us by God, even by the Holy Spirit, the Comforter: and it must lay hold on God himself, and derive all its efficacy from him.

But still, it is not from the strength of the anchor that our stability will be derived; but from the Lord Jesus Christ, who will render it effectual for its desired end.

It is not obvious, at first sight, why the Forerunner would be mentioned: for what has Jesus, as our Forerunner, to do with our anchor entering within the veil? But, on a closer inspection, it will be found, that though there is an apparent change in the figure, there is a perfect unity in the subject; the whole power and tenacity of our anchor being derived from Him, who has entered into the very place where that anchor is cast: for it is by means of the very same anchor that he himself has entered there, even as all the saints before him did, Hebrews 11:10; Hebrews 11:14; Hebrews 11:16; Hebrews 11:26; Hebrews 11:35; and he is entered there expressly "for us," that he may secure to us the very same outcome as he himself has attained.

Let us enter a little more distinctly into this. I say, that it was by means of the very same anchor that Jesus himself rode out the storms with which he was assailed, and is now at rest in the desired haven. See him in the midst of all his storms: hear his reply to the most powerful of all his adversaries: "You could have no power at all against me, except it were given you from above, John 19:11." Here his perfect confidence in an unchanging God is the manifest source of his stability.

But to see this anchor in full operation, mark it as described by the Prophet Isaiah: "The Lord God will help me: therefore I shall not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint; and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifies me: who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God will help me: who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old, as does a garment: the moth shall eat them up, Isaiah 50:7-9." And was this an empty boast? No! this anchor held him fast, through all the storms that earth and Hell could raise against him; as Paul informs us, saying, that "for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, and despised the shame, and has sat down on the right hand of the throne of God Hebrews 12:2."

It may still however be asked, what are his triumphs to us? I answer, He is not entered within the veil for himself only, but "for us;" that he may "appear in the presence of God for us, Hebrews 9:24," and secure to us the same blessed rest which he himself has attained. While we are casting our anchor within the veil, he, by his grace, enables us to do it, and keeps the anchor itself from losing its hold. And, while we are confiding in the promises of God, and pleading them at the throne of grace, he is pleading for us, as our Advocate, before the throne of glory: he is pleading the covenant which the Father has made with him, in behalf of all the members of his mystical body. Thus is he there engaged, on God's part, as it were, to afford us all needful support; and on our part, to remind the Father of his engagements, and to see them all fulfilled.

But there is yet a further connection between these things, which must by no means be overlooked. The Lord Jesus is entered into Heaven, not as our Advocate merely, but as our Head and Representative: so that we may be fitly said to be already "sitting with him in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, Ephesians 2:6." We are one with him, as our federal head, 1 Corinthians 15:22; yes, we are one with him also by a vital union, as members of his body, John 15:1-2; we are even "one spirit with him, 1 Corinthians 6:17;" "our life is hidden with Christ in God:" he is "our very life" itself: and hence it is that neither earth nor Hell can ever prevail against us; according as it is written, "Our life is hidden with Christ in God; and therefore when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we also shall appear

with him in glory! Colossians 3:3-4."

Now this subject may well show us:

1. What is the proper and legitimate use of the deeper doctrines of our holy religion.

While, by some, the doctrines of predestination and election are made for the display of their controversial skill, and are brought forward on all occasions as if they were the very milk of the Gospel, fit indiscriminately for the contemplation of all; to others, the very mention of the words sounds almost as blasphemy. But these doctrines are true, and capable of the most valuable improvement; though, if entered upon with an unhallowed and contentious spirit, they may prove as injurious as they are to the humble mind truly beneficial. "The godly consideration of them," as our Seventeenth Article states, "is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons; as well because it does greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal salvation, to be enjoyed through Christ, as because it does fervently kindle their love towards God. But, for curious and carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God's predestination, is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the devil does thrust them, either into desperation, or into the wretchedness of most immoral living, no less perilous than desperation."

The true use of them, is to compose the mind with a humble affiance in God, as unbounded in mercy and unchangeable in his promises. They lead us to refer every mercy to God, as "the Author," and to look to him for the continuance of it, as "the Finisher," of our salvation, Hebrews 12:2. A just view of these doctrines, at the same time that it teaches to put away all carnal hopes, tends to raise us also above carnal fears. It shows us, that, in the whole work of man's salvation, the creature is nothing, and God is all: it furnishes us with a consolation which nothing can destroy, and with a strength which nothing can overcome. In a word, it is "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast."

It is quite a mistake to imagine that the possession of this anchor supersedes the necessity of care on our part: we must be as diligent in the use both of the chart and compass, as if we had no such means of safety on board. It will never justify us in running needlessly amidst rocks and quicksands; nor do we ever find such a use made of it among the saints of God. Its use is to keep us steadfast in a time of need: and, if improved to that end, it will be found of incalculable advantage to the believing soul.

2. The advantage which the Christian has over all other people upon earth—

A man that knows not God as a merciful and unchanging God, knows not where to look in a time of trial. He may, indeed, comfort himself with some general notions of God's mercy; but he has no solid ground of hope; nor can he ever know what is meant by "the peace of God which surpasses all understanding." But the truly enlightened Christian can glory in the midst of tribulations: for he refers all to God, who is:

too wise to err,
too mighty to be foiled,
too faithful to forsake his people!

He views God as presiding in every storm, and as "ordering all things for the good of his own people, Romans 8:28. He regards not the various circumstances which occur, as though they were accidental: whatever their aspect is, he considers them as parts of one great whole; and, whether the steps which he is constrained to take in this wilderness appears, in the eye of sense, to be progressive or retrograde, he still bears in mind, that they are leading him "in the right way," to the city of habitation, the heavenly Jerusalem! Psalm 107:7.

Behold this illustrated in the Apostle Paul. What storms and tempests he had to sustain, you well know: but was he appalled by them? No! "he knew in whom he had believed; and that He was able to keep that which he had committed to him, 2 Timothy 1:12."

"Who," says he, "is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, yes rather, who is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For your sake we are killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him who loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature—shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord! Romans 8:34-39."

Here you see the anchor in the full discharge of its office; and here you behold a stability which no created power could impart. This shows the Christian in his true light. I pray God we may all have an ever-increasing measure of that confidence in God which so mightily upheld his soul; and that we may thus be "kept in safety for that inheritance, which we know to be reserved in Heaven for us! 1 Peter 1:4-5."

MELCHIZEDEK A TYPE OF CHRIST

Hebrews 7:1-3

"This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means "king of righteousness"; then also, "king of Salem" means "king of peace." Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever."

THE principal scope of the Epistle to the Hebrews, is to show the superiority of Christ above the ordinances and dispensers, of the Levitical law. In prosecuting this argument the inspired writer frequently mentions a priesthood different from that of Aaron, a priesthood instituted by God before any one of Abraham's chosen descendants was born, and consequently intended for the benefit of the Gentile world; and he shows that Christ was, according to an express prediction, and a most solemn oath, to be a priest of this higher order, the order of Melchizedek, Psalm 110:4 with Hebrews 5:6; Hebrews 5:10; Hebrews 6:20; Hebrews 7:17; Hebrews 7:21.

The words of the text are properly be connected with chapter 5:10, the whole intervening part being, as it were, a parenthesis. The Apostle, having laid great stress upon this prediction, now proceeds to illustrate it. He recites, in few words, the history to which the prediction itself refers, and declares, that it was altogether typical of Christ, Genesis 14:14-20. The agreement between Melchizedek and Christ may be observed in two particulars:

I. The dignity of their persons—

Melchizedek, in reference to the import of his name, and the name of the city over which he presided, was called, king of righteousness, and king of peace. But in an infinitely higher degree do these titles belong to Christ!

Christ is a king, not only over one city or country, but over the whole world, "his kingdom rules over all;" "he has the utmost ends of the earth for his possession;" he is "King of kings, and Lord of lords." In his own person he is holy, harmless, separate from sinners, "he loves righteousness, and hates iniquity;" he is indeed "the Holy One, and the Just." His laws are a perfect transcript of his mind and will, all holy, and just, and good. In his government he exercises the most perfect equity, not oppressing or despising any, but ever ready to afford protection, and support, to all who call upon him.

The very ends for which he administers his government, are altogether worthy of his divine majesty; he rules his people, only that he may transform them all into his own image, and make them "partakers of his own holiness." In every view, he approves himself worthy of that august title which the voice of inspiration assigns him, "The Lord our Righteousness! Jeremiah 23:6."

But Jesus is also called, "The Prince of peace! Isaiah 9:6;" nor is this without reason, since he reconciles us to an offended God, and makes peace for us by the blood of his cross: yes, he brings peace into the wounded conscience; and calms the tempests which were accustomed to agitate the soul.

That typical king, Melchizedek, is also called a "priest of the Most High God;" yet, though glorious in this respect, he was only a shadow of Jesus, our great High-priest.

Melchizedek, though a king, was not ashamed to execute the priestly office. Whether the bread and wine, which he provided for the refreshment of Abraham's troops, had any mystical signification, we cannot say: but certainly he acted as a priest, when he blessed Abraham; and was regarded as a priest by Abraham, who presented to him the tenth of all his spoils.

As for Jesus, there was not any part of the priestly office which he did not perform. He was not indeed of that tribe to which the priesthood belonged, and therefore he was not instituted "according to the law of a carnal commandment;" but he was appointed of God with a solemn oath; and anointed to his office with a superabundant measure of the oil of gladness, Psalm 45:7. Having, in order that he might have something to offer, taken upon him our nature, he "presented himself an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor." And having shed his own blood, he is gone with it within the veil, and there carries on the work of intercession for us; and will soon come forth again, not like the Jewish high-priest, to bless one nation only, but, like Melchizedek, to bless the father of the faithful, together with all his children dispersed throughout the world.

Thus both in their names and offices is there a very striking agreement between Melchizedek and Christ. But the parallel between them may be yet further noticed in,

II. The duration of their priesthood—

We are altogether indebted to Scripture revelation for a just construction of what was related respecting Melchizedek, and of what

was intentionally omitted in his history—

Melchizedek, like other men, was doubtless born of human parents, and in due season cut off by death from this present state of existence. But there is no mention made of his birth, or parentage, or death: nothing is said of any predecessor, whom he followed in his office, or of any successor to whom he resigned his office. These omissions, which might have been well accounted for from the brevity of that part of the Mosaic history, we are assured were ordered of God, on purpose that, by appearing "not to have beginning of days or end of life," he might, as far as a mortal man could do, shadow forth the eternity of Christ's priesthood.

What was figuratively ascribed to him, is literally true with respect to Christ—

Christ, though born after the world had stood four thousand years, was appointed to this office from all eternity; and actually executed it, by his representatives at least, from the first moment that Adam or Abel offered their sacrifices on the altar. Nor has he ceased from his priestly work: he is now within the veil, offering up the incense of his own prevailing intercession, while his people continue praying without. Nor will he desist from his labor as long as there shall continue one single soul for whom to intercede before God. As he had none to precede him in his office, so will he have none to follow him: "He abides a priest continually, the same yesterday, today, and forever! Hebrews 7:23-25; Hebrews 7:28; Hebrews 13:8."

Advice—

1. Regard the Lord Jesus according to his real dignity—

Jesus unites in himself the kingly and priestly character. None of the Levitical kings or priests ever attained to this honor. Uzziah, presuming to exercise the priestly office, was smitten with a leprosy, and made a monument of the Divine displeasure to the last hour of his life, 2 Chronicles 26:16-21. But Jesus, as was foretold concerning him, was, like Melchizedek, "a priest upon his throne, Zechariah 6:13." Let us view this combination of character with sincere gratitude. Let us contemplate him as every way qualified to be a Savior to us. And let us beg that he will exalt us also to "a royal priesthood, that we may offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through him, 1 Peter 2:5; 1 Peter 2:9."

2. Look to him for the blessings which he is authorized to bestow—

As our exalted head "he is a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance and remission of sins." "He has received gifts even for the most rebellious:" and, having given himself for us, he is fully authorized to bestow upon us the purchase of his blood. Shall we not then make our application to him? What "bread and what wine" would he not bestow on us for the refreshment of our weary souls! Shall we not then "open our mouths wide that he may fill them?" Surely, "If we are straitened, it is not in him, but in ourselves." He would "satisfy the hungry with good things;" he would "fill us with all the fullness of God." O that that "God, who raised him up from the dead, would now send him to bless us, in turning every one of us from our iniquities! Acts 3:26."

3. Consecrate to him, not the tenth only of your spoils, but all that you possess—

Though we should "honor him with our substance, and with the first-fruits of all our increase," yet that is by no means sufficient. We should dedicate to him all that we possess in mind, or body, or estate. We are not indeed called to dispose of all our goods in charity, but to ascribe to his bounty everything we possess, and "whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do—to do it all to his glory."

Have we overtaken as Abraham did, and destroyed, our spiritual enemies? Let us acknowledge that "his was the power, and the glory, and the victory." Let us see him in all things, and glorify him for all things; and "present to him both our bodies and our souls a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service, Romans 12:1."

#2297

THE SUPERIORITY OF THE CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION ABOVE THE MOSAIC DISPENSATION

Hebrews 7:18-19

"The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God."

THAT the Jewish religion is superseded by the Christian religion, is well known: but why it is superseded, and what relation the two have to each other, is not so generally considered.

The true light in which the law is to be considered, is this: it was "a shadow of the things which were to be more fully revealed by the Gospel," or a scaffolding erected for a season for the purpose of constructing the edifice of Christianity, and to be removed of course as of no further use, when that building would be complete.

It is in this view that the Apostle speaks of it in the passage before us. He has shown that, while the law was yet in the summit of its glory, David foretold, that a priesthood, of an order totally different from that established by Moses, would be introduced; and that consequently all the rites and ceremonies connected with the Levitical priesthood would be done away. The reason that he assigns for this is, that the legal economy was "weak and unprofitable." Not that it was so in that particular view in which it was designed by God; but that it was so as far as related to those ends which the Jews, through the ignorance of its nature, expected to be answered by it.

As a scaffolding is of use for the building of a house, but most unprofitable if resorted to as a residence instead of the house, so the law was good, as a typical exhibition of the way of salvation; but it is weak and unprofitable to those who would expect salvation by it. Salvation was, from the beginning, intended to be, and could be, by the Gospel alone: "for the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by which we draw near to God."

It is our intention to mark,

I. The difference between the Mosaic and the Christian dispensation—

By "the law," the whole dispensation of Moses was meant. By "the introduction of a better hope," is meant the dispensation of Christ; which alone affords a solid ground of hope to sinful men. The things which the law could not effect, the Gospel does—it gives us,

1. Perfect reconciliation with God—

The sacrifices which were offered under the law could never take away sin. There was nothing in them that was at all suited to this end. What was there in the blood of an animal to make satisfaction to Divine justice for the sin of man? The Apostle truly says, it was not possible for the blood of bulls and of goats to take away sin, Hebrews 10:4.

But the Gospel points us to an atonement which was of infinite value, even the blood of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son. This might well satisfy even for the sins of the world; because more honor was done to the Divine law by His performing its commands and suffering its penalties, than could have been done by the obedience or suffering of the whole human race. Hence the Scriptures invariably represent the Father as "reconciled to the world by the death of his Son;" and as requiring nothing more of us, than to come to him in the name of his Son, pleading the merits of his blood, and relying wholly on his atoning sacrifice. To all such persons he says, that, "though their sins may have been as crimson, they shall be as white as snow;" and that they not only shall be, but actually are, from the first moment of their believing, "justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses, Acts 13:39."

In this view the Gospel is called "the ministry of reconciliation:" and the one message which all the ministers of the Gospel have to declare, is, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them! 2 Corinthians 5:18-19."

2. Perfect peace of conscience—

The annual repetition of the same sacrifices under the Mosaic dispensation showed that the sins for which they were offered were not yet fully pardoned. Hence they were rather "remembrances of sins" than actual means of forgiveness: and consequently "they could not make men perfect as pertaining to the conscience, Hebrews 9:9-10; Hebrews 10:1-3."

But the atoning "blood of Christ really cleanses from all sin." It "purges the conscience, Hebrews 9:14;" so that, being justified by it, "we have peace with God," and in our souls "a peace which passes all understanding." "In fleeing to Christ for refuge, and laying hold on that hope that is set before us, we have strong consolation." Divine justice being satisfied, we are satisfied also. "We know in whom we have believed, and are assured that he is able to keep that which we have committed to him." According to his promise, "he keeps our minds in perfect peace, because we trust in him:" he fills us with "peace and joy in believing," yes, "with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

3. Perfect holiness of heart and life—

The law commanded, but gave no strength for obedience. But Christ procured for his followers the gift of the Holy Spirit, "by whose effectual aid we can do all things" that are required of us. Absolute perfection indeed is not to be expected in this life: for even Paul, after having ministered in the Gospel for twenty years, said of himself, "I have not yet attained, neither am I already perfect."

But evangelical perfection, which consists in an unreserved surrender of our whole souls to God, we may, and must attain. For this purpose are "the Scriptures given, that by them the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works, 2 Timothy 3:16-17." For this purpose are the promises in particular revealed, that "by them we may cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God, 2 Corinthians 7:1."

Nor is holiness merely provided for us; it is actually secured to us by the Gospel, "Sin shall not have dominion over us, because we are not under the law, but under grace." On the contrary, we shall be made "new creatures," and "be renewed after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness." This is "that which the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh; and which God, sending his own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, as a sacrifice for sin, has done. He has so condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law shall be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit, Romans 8:3-4."

Corresponding with this difference is,

II. The distinguishing benefit which we enjoy under our dispensation—

The access to God which Christians possess, results entirely from the nature of the dispensation under which they live: and the Apostle, in speaking of it, includes two things:

1. The liberty which we have of drawing near to God—

The whole of the Jewish ritual tended rather to keep men at an solemn distance from God than to bring them near to him. There was one court for the priests, into which they alone had admittance: and into the holy of holies none but the high-priest could enter—and he only on one day in the year; and then only according to certain forms that were prescribed. By these restrictions "the Holy Spirit signified that the way into the holy place was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was yet standing, Hebrews 9:8." Had anyone presumed to violate this law, he would have instantly been visited, if not with a fatal stroke, at least (as King Uzziah was) with some awful calamity.

But for us there is "a new and living way opened through the veil, Hebrews 10:20-22," which was rent in twain from the top to the bottom at the very moment of our Savior's death! And, as by Christ "we have access unto the Father," so we are told to "come with boldness into the holiest by his blood." The golden scepter is held out to every one of us, so that we may "come boldly to the throne of grace," assured of obtaining mercy, and of "finding grace to help us in the time of need".

2. The delight which we have in the exercise of that liberty—

The approaches of persons to God under the law were full of burdensome ceremonies; but those under the Gospel are intimate and delightful. "God draws near to us, while we draw near to Him." On those occasions, "he manifests himself unto us as he does not unto the world:" he "lifts up the light of his countenance upon us," and "sheds abroad his love in our hearts." Hence the Christian accounts prayer not so much a duty as a privilege: he says with the beloved Apostle, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ".

This arises entirely out of the nature of our dispensation, which is justly called, "the perfect law of liberty." It presents to our view our great High-priest entered for us within the veil, and "ever living to make intercession for us." And, "having such a high-priest, we draw near unto God with full assurance of faith." Nor does he take less pleasure in communing with us, than we with him; for "the prayer of the upright is his delight!"

Learn from hence the true reason why the generality of professing Christians differ so little from the Jews or heathen—

They do not understand the nature of the dispensation under which they live; and therefore they get no material good from their religion. They are not made holy by it, nor are they made happy. They think that an assured sense of our acceptance with God is unattainable; and that communion with Him is an enthusiastic dream.

They regard Christianity as little else than a milder publication of the law; reducing the demands of the law to the present ability of man, and making ample allowances for man's infirmity.

They view it as a system of duties, rather than of privileges; and they expect more from their partial obedience to its precepts, than from a humble affiance in its promises.

What wonder then if, when when they so assimilate the Gospel to the law, they experience no more benefit from it than the law conveyed? What wonder, I say, if they never are made perfect by such a religion as theirs.

Would we attain to perfect love, and perfect peace, and perfect holiness, we must look more to the atoning blood of Christ, and to the sanctifying influences of his Spirit. In the former, we shall find all that we need for our reconciliation with God; and in the latter, all that we need for our restoration to his image. The Gospel, mutilated and debased by unbelief, will bring us neither present nor eternal happiness: but if embraced, as it ought to be, with unmixed, unshaken confidence, it will prove "the power of God to the salvation of our souls!"

CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD, AND ABILITY TO SAVE

Hebrews 7:25

"Therefore he is able to save to the uttermost, all who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them."

THE Mosaic economy was never intended to be either universal or perpetual.

It was not universal, because many of the principal rites prescribed by it could never be performed by those who were far distant from Judea.

It was not perpetual, because, while it was yet in all its force and grandeur, its dissolution, and the establishment of a better in its stead, were expressly and frequently foretold.

The appointment of another priesthood to supersede that of Aaron, was of itself, as the Apostle teaches us, sufficient to prove that the abolition of the Aaronic priesthood and of the whole Levitical law was to take place, as soon as that better priesthood after the order of Melchizedek would be established.

The show wherein that priesthood was superior, is the great scope of the chapter before us. But it is to one particular only that we shall confine our attention at this time; and that is, the continuance of it in one person, while the Aaronic priests were removed by death, and constrained to transmit their office to a successor.

We notice then,

I. The perpetuity of Christ's priesthood—

"The priests under the law were many, because they were not allowed to continue by reason of death: but this man, the Lord Jesus Christ, because he continues ever, has an unchangeable priesthood." "He ever lives to make intercession for us."

When in a vision he revealed himself to John, he said, "I am he who lives, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore! Revelation 1:18." "He was indeed crucified through weakness; but yet he lives by the power of God, 2 Corinthians 13:4;" and "being raised from the dead, he dies no more; death has no more dominion over him, Romans 6:9." Nor is it merely in a state of rest that he lives; but for the purpose of carrying on his priestly office in our behalf.

The high-priest under the law, when he had offered the sacrifice upon the altar, carried the blood within the veil into the holy of the holies, there to sprinkle it before, and on the mercy-seat, and to offer incense in the more immediate presence of his God. This is the very thing which Jesus now lives to effect. Having offered himself a sacrifice upon the cross, he has now gone with his own blood into Heaven itself, there to exhibit it as a memorial before God, and as the ground of all his intercessions. In his Father's presence he pleads it for us as a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the world, and as the price paid for all those blessings which his people stand in need of for their full and complete salvation. True it is, that he has entered into Heaven, to take possession of that glory which by the covenant-engagements entered into by the Father was to be conferred on his human nature: but yet, it was not for his own glory only that he ascended thither, but for our good; that he might carry on and perfect in our behalf the work he had undertaken for us.

Only let us contemplate the ends for which the high-priest on the great day of atonement entered into the holy of holies; and we shall have a distinct, and accurate, and perfect view of the ends for which our blessed Savior has gone into Heaven, and of the work which he is there living to accomplish. Here a distinct view may be taken of the pleas founded upon his sacrifice, as having been appointed of the Father for certain ends, and offered by the Son in the full confidence of its being accepted of the Father, and of its prevailing for all who trust in it.

But without further dwelling on so clear a point, let us proceed to notice,

II. The consolatory truths resulting from Christ's priesthood—

As the continual changing of the priests under the Mosaic dispensation showed the weakness and unprofitableness of their ministrations; so the unchanging continuance of Christ's priesthood shows that "he is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him!" Here observe,

1. What is taken for granted—

It is taken for granted that all his people "come unto God through him." If it is asked: What is meant by coming to God through him? The answer is plain: Look unto the Aaronic priests and their ministrations, and there you shall find a perfect representation of what is

experienced by the people of God in all ages.

When the high-priest entered within the veil, there was but one sentiment pervading all the worshipers in every part of the temple: all considered him as their mediator and intercessor with God. They knew that of themselves they were incapable of drawing near to God: but regarding the high-priest as their head and representative, they considered themselves as approaching God in and through him. They had no hope whatever but in the blood of the sacrifice which he carried within the veil, and in the incense which he offered there. Among all the Jews there would not be any diversity of sentiment on this head.

Thus it is that we also come unto God by Christ: we see him as going into Heaven with his own blood which he has offered for us; and as presenting also the incense of his own prevailing intercession: and in him as so occupied, is all our hope. Nor is this a mere theoretical sentiment in the Christian's mind, but a living and an abiding principle, by which he is actuated in all his approaches to the throne of grace: nor has he any hope whatever of finding acceptance with God, but by coming to him in this way.

But while this striking correspondence exists between the Jewish and Christian mode of approaching God, there is one remarkable point of difference, which must by no means be overlooked. The Jew, during the mediation of the high-priest, was kept at a solemn distance, not daring to pass the limits that were assigned him: but the Christian has access into the secret of God's presence for himself, and may urge the very same pleas before God at the throne of grace, which his great high-priest is urging for him at the throne of glory. The pleas are the same, and the grounds of hope are the same, to each: but the superior liberty of the Christian marks the superiority of the priesthood which has procured it for him.

2. What is plainly asserted—

The Jewish high-priest, notwithstanding he presented all the sacrifices according to the prescribed form, could not prevail so as to obtain for the people a perfect and perpetual forgiveness: at the same period in the ensuing year he must present the same offerings again: which showed, that a further expiation was necessary in order to a full remission of their sins. But our great High-priest has no occasion ever to renew his offering: nor will he ever devolve on another the office which he executes. "He therefore is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him."

The words, "to the uttermost," imply two things; namely, that he can save completely and forever. The conscience of a Jew was never perfectly liberated from a sense of guilt by the offerings which were made for him: but the Christian is brought into a state of perfect peace, "his conscience being purged from dead works to serve the living God." Nor does he feel a need of anything more than that which he finds in the sacrifice of Christ. He looks forward to nothing to add to it, or to give it efficacy. Being once sprinkled with the blood of Christ, his soul is at rest; because he knows that Jesus by his one offering has perfected for ever those who are sanctified. The Jew found his sacrifices to be little else than remembrances of his sins: but the Christian knows that, by virtue of his sacrifice, "his sins and iniquities shall be remembered no more! Hebrews 9:1-3; Hebrews 9:11-18."

This subject, duly apprehended, is replete:

1. With instruction—

If Christians were more in the habit of considering the Jewish law, they would gain a far clearer insight into the nature and principles of their own religion. Ask a professing Christian, How he is to be saved? and he will give you some vague and indistinct answer about God's mercy, and his own repentances and reformations. Even the teachers themselves, who should instruct others, are not always clear on this matter. But no Jewish priest would have hesitated to point to the sacrifices as the only means of acceptance with God.

Let us then learn from them, that, if we will ever come to God at all, it must be simply and solely by the Lord Jesus Christ: "He is the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes unto the Father but by him, John 14:6." And let this especially be remembered, that there is no salvation for us in any other way: "for no other persons will the Lord Jesus intercede; nor shall his saving power be exerted for any others." This is clearly intimated in the text. Whom is it that he is able to save? it is "those who come unto God by him." And for whom is it that he intercedes? "He ever lives to make intercession for them." O that we might all consider this, and seek the Lord in the only way in which he ever can be found!

2. With consolation—

What an astonishing thought it is, that our adorable Emmanuel, now seated at the right hand of God—is living, as it were, only for us, to transact our business there, as once he transacted it here on earth. From Heaven he came to offer a sacrifice for us; and to Heaven has he gone again, to plead that sacrifice in our behalf. Christians do not sufficiently think of a living Savior: they dwell with pleasure on the thoughts of his death, but scarcely pay attention to the life which he is now spending in their service above. But Paul teaches us to derive from this source more comfort and encouragement than any other; not even the death of Christ itself being so rich a source of consolation as this, Romans 5:10; Romans 8:34.

Reflect then on him in this view, as presenting his own blood before his Father in our behalf, and as asking for us a daily and hourly supply of all that we can stand in need of. Bear in mind, that you can be in no difficulty which he does not see; nor in any danger, from which he cannot save. And, as his care of you is perfect, so let your affiance in him be perfect also.

3. With encouragement—

What motive can any one have for an entire surrender of himself to God, like that which is here proposed to him? Does Jesus live altogether for us in Heaven, and shall not we live altogether for him on earth? Is not this reasonable, and our bounden duty? Romans 12:1. Dedicate, then, yourselves to him; and count no work too arduous to engage in for him, nor any sacrifice too great to make: It is but little that you can do for him, though your life were protracted to ever so great a length; but time is short and uncertain, therefore "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, Ecclesiastes 9:10."

#2299

CHRIST, A SUITABLE HIGH-PRIEST

Hebrews 7:26

"Such a high priest meets our need--one who is holy, blameless, undefiled, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens."

WITHOUT the Epistle to the Hebrews, we could never have understood the true scope of the Levitical law, much less its full accomplishment in the Lord Jesus Christ; we could never have ventured to trace such a correspondence between Melchizedek and Christ, or to lay such a stress on a variety of minute expressions in the prophetic writings as the Apostle does. And though we might easily have maintained the truth of our holy religion as founded on miracles and prophecies, we never could have silenced an unbelieving Jew so easily, as by the help of this epistle we are enabled to do.

The Apostle is here tracing the superiority of Christ and his priesthood—to all the priests, and their services, under the Levitical law. And, in the words before us, he observes that no person, but one endowed as Jesus was, would have been sufficient for the necessities of fallen man. In confirmation of this sentiment, I will show,

I. What kind of a high-priest the Lord Jesus was—

He is here compared with the high-priests under the law. Now, they were sinful creatures, like ourselves, Hebrews 5:1-3; but of Jesus it is said,

He was perfectly "holy"—

In his own nature, he was "holy;"
in the whole of his conduct, he was "innocent;"
and though in the midst of an ensnaring and polluting world, he was "undefiled."

In no one act, word, or thought, did he ever, in the smallest degree, violate the perfect law of God. "In him was no sin! 1 John 3:5."

He was, in all respects, "separate from sinners"—

In his very birth he was widely different from them: he came not into the world like other men: he derived not his human nature in a way of ordinary generation, but from the immediate hand of God. He was born of a pure virgin; and therefore, though born under the law, he was in no respect subject to the curse entailed on Adam's posterity for the violation of it: nor did he inherit the taint and pollution which is, of necessity, transmitted to all who in a natural way descend from him.

In his life, too, he was separate from them: for though he sojourned among them, and was continually holding the most intimate fellowship with them, he never, in any degree, imbibed their spirit. He was as pure as the light itself, which is incapable of contamination from the things among which it shines.

In his death, also, he was altogether separate from them: for he voluntarily gave up his life; as he showed, by speaking in a loud voice at the moment of surrendering up his soul to God, Luke 23:46 with John 10:17-18; and he died also as a victim, an expiation for sin, Matthew 20:28.

He was "higher than the heavens"—

He was so previous to his incarnation. From all eternity was he "in the bosom of the Father, John 1:18," and "had a glory with him before all worlds, John 17:24." He was in a sense that the highest archangel never was, the Son of God, "his only-begotten

Son, Hebrews 1:5," whom "all the angels of Heaven worshiped, Hebrews 1:6." He was "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person, Hebrews 1:3."

And subsequent to his death, also, was he exalted "far above all principalities, and powers, and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come, Philippians 2:9-11. Ephesians 1:20-21;" "for he rose again, and went into Heaven, and sat on the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him, 1 Peter 3:22."

In all these respects he was widely different from all the priests under the Levitical law—

They were "taken from among their brethren," and "compassed with the same infirmities" as others; and "received honor from," rather than conferred honor upon, the office they sustained; and could execute it only during a few short years of their existence upon earth, Hebrews 5:1-2; Hebrews 5:4. Had Jesus in any of these respects resembled them, he would not have been a suitable High-priest for us.

To elucidate this, I will proceed to show,

II. Why "such a high-priest alone befits us"—

Had the Lord Jesus been an imperfect being, like the high-priests of old:

1. He would have needed an offering for himself—

The high-priests were forced to offer a sacrifice first for their own sins, before they could hope for any acceptance in what they would offer for the sins of others, Hebrews 5:3. But this was unnecessary for Him, because there was no spot of sin found in him. And this is the very particular which the Apostle, in the words following my text, specifies, as resulting from His spotless character: "He needs not daily, as those high-priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's." Having not the slightest imperfection of his own to atone for, he could atone for us, and intercede with God for us.

2. He would have had nothing that he could offer for us—

He could not offer slain beasts, because he did not belong to the tribe to which this office was exclusively assigned. From the tribe of Judah he sprang: and "of that tribe nothing was said respecting priesthood, verse 13, 14." The law would have inflicted death upon him, if he had attempted to interfere with the duties of the Aaronic priesthood. As for his own body, he could not offer that; seeing it would have been polluted: and the law required that every sacrifice would be "without spot or blemish."

The paschal lamb was set apart four days before it was offered, on purpose that it might be thoroughly examined, so as to be found free from outward blemish: and, after it was slain, it was flayed, and laid open; so that the inwards also might be inspected, and be found perfect.

Now such an offering must our Lord present: but, if any imperfection cleaved to him, he could not. No such impediment, however, was found in him; so that he could offer himself to God, as "a Lamb without blemish and without spot, 1 Peter 1:19."

3. He would not have corresponded with his type, Melchizedek—

He was to be "a Priest after the order of Melchizedek, verse 15, 17, 21." Now consider how great a man Melchizedek was: for even Abraham himself, and, in Abraham, all the Levitical priests also, offered tithes to him, confessing thereby their inferiority to him, verse 4-7. But, if Jesus was a mere man, he was inferior to Abraham, who, as being "the father" must be considered as the head, "of the faithful."

Being however such a one as we have before described, he was a worthy successor of Melchizedek. What Melchizedek was in a shadow, that was Jesus in reality, "King of righteousness, and King of peace; without father (as to his human nature), or mother (as to his divine nature), without descent (having no direct successor); having neither beginning of days, nor end of life, but abiding a Priest continually, verse 1-3."

4. He would in no respect have answered to our necessities—

All perfection must be in him, to enable him to atone for sin.

All power must be in him, to make that atonement effectual.

Had either the one or the other been lacking, he would not have been capable of fulfilling that high office: but, possessing all these requisites, he is accepted by the Father, and is "able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him! verse 25."

Improvement

Learn, then, from hence,

1. What is the only means of acceptance with our God—

Is there "a great High-priest over the house of God? Hebrews 3:1." We must go to God through him. We must not attempt to approach God, except through this appointed Mediator. To think of looking for acceptance through any works of our own, or of uniting any works of ours with his meritorious sacrifice, would be folly in the extreme. Even when the blood of beasts was presented in sacrifice, the offerer did not unite with it anything of his own: how much less, then, can we add anything to the sacrifice which our High-priest has offered!

Let not the thought enter into your heart; or, if it enters, let it be discarded with abhorrence: for there is no High-priest, but he; no sacrifice, but his; no other name given under Heaven, whereby any man can be saved, but the beloved, the honored, the adored name of Jesus! "Look to him, and you shall be saved, Isaiah 45:22; look any where else, and you perish beyond a doubt.

2. How blessed a thing it is to live under the Christian dispensation—

Supposing a Jew were at this moment living at Jerusalem; and the temple were now standing, as richly furnished in every respect as in the days of Solomon. Suppose, too, that he had the cattle upon a thousand hills at his disposal; he could not offer unto God one acceptable sacrifice; because he could not find, upon the face of the whole earth, a Jew who could infallibly trace his pedigree to Aaron. If any other person would presume to officiate for him, in the place of the high-priest, he must instantly be put to death, Ezra 2:62. Unhappy people! the only people upon the face of the whole earth, who are incapable of approaching God, in the way which they themselves think and believe to be right!

But, Christians, blessed are you; for you have a high-priest; and one, too, who is altogether suited to you, and sufficient for you. Rejoice in this and know your privilege: and, "having such a high-priest over the house of God," avail yourselves of the opportunity afforded to you, "drawing near to him with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having your hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and your bodies washed as with pure water: and hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering: for (all the promises of God are yours; and) He is faithful that "has promised! Hebrews 10:21-23."

#2300

CHRIST THE MEDIATOR OF THE NEW COVENANT

Hebrews 8:6

"But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises."

THE use of the Mosaic law is by no means sufficiently appreciated in the Christian world. The value of a map to travelers, or of a chart to one who navigates the trackless deep, is well known: but when God has given to us a graphic exhibition (if I may so speak) of every part of our road to Heaven, we never think of looking to it as the means of instruction to our souls. Yet one would think that, after the strict injunctions given to those who drew these maps, no one would be inattentive to them. The whole Mosaic law was intended to represent, in plain and visible characters, the way of life.

Hence, when Moses received his instructions from God relative to the tabernacle and all its vessels, he was ordered to take the utmost care not to deviate from them in the smallest matter, Exodus 25:40. Of this the Apostle takes notice in the words preceding our text: Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for see, says he, "That you make all things according to the pattern showed to you in the mount."

A similar direction was given to David also in reference to the temple which his son Solomon was to erect, 1 Chronicles 28:19.

But whence arose this extreme need of accuracy? The whole plan of salvation was laid in the divine mind; and the tabernacle and temple, with their vessels and their services, were intended to shadow it forth: and the smallest deviation from the model would have led to mistaken apprehensions about the way to life: it would either have kept back from man something which God designed to execute, or taught him to expect something which it was not God's intention to perform. But, the law being a perfect model of the whole spiritual building, the Gospel-edifice in all things corresponds with it; and thus reciprocally receiving and reflecting light, they mutually illustrate each other, and prepare the mind for a most accurate perception of the great mystery of redemption.

The point of which the Apostle is here speaking, is the superiority of Christ's priesthood to that of Aaron. Having dwelt upon it at some length, he recapitulates the subject, and gives as "the sum of" his observations, That Christ, our High-priest, is every way

superior to the Levitical priests, since he is the Mediator of a better covenant, and, consequently, "has obtained a more excellent ministry than theirs."

To elucidate this important truth, I shall consider,

I. The covenant of which Christ was the Mediator—

It is spoken of in reference to another covenant to which it was superior. Let us inquire then:

1. What is that other covenant?

It is an "Old Covenant, which vanishes away, verse 13." In the Holy Scriptures we read of three covenants:

the Adamic covenant, that is, the covenant of WORKS;

the Abrahamic covenant, or covenant of GRACE; and

the Mosaic covenant made with the nation of ISRAEL, that was peculiar to them, and was not binding on any other people.

Now it is not with the Adamic covenant that the Christian covenant is compared, because that never waxes old nor vanishes away: it is at this hour as much in force as ever; and all who continue under it, will be dealt with according to it, until they take refuge in the covenant of grace, Galatians 3:10; Galatians 5:3.

Neither is it the Abrahamic covenant with which the Christian covenant is compared; for they are, in fact, the same covenant, and differ only in the measure of light with which they are revealed. Nothing that is subsequent to the Abrahamic covenant has ever disannulled it, Galatians 3:17; and consequently, inasmuch as it never vanishes away, it cannot be the one to which the Christian covenant is here said to be superior.

It remains then that the covenant with which the Christian covenant is compared, is that which God entered into with the Israelites in the wilderness. This was of a mixed nature: it was, in part, a covenant of works; and, in part, a covenant of grace. In as far as it promised manifold blessings to sincere though imperfect obedience, it was a covenant of grace; but in as far as it suspended those blessings altogether upon the performance of those works, it was a covenant of works. The full account of this covenant is given by Moses in the twenty-fourth chapter of Exodus. Compare Exodus 24:3-8 with Hebrews 9:19-21.

The Prophet Jeremiah contrasts Mosaic covenant with that New Covenant which God promised to make with his people under the Christian dispensation, Jeremiah 31:31-34; and the Apostle, in the words following our text, expressly tells us, that it was of that covenant he spoke, when he said it was inferior to the Christian covenant and superseded by it, verse 8, 9. But,

2. Wherein was the Christian covenant better than it?

It was so in its own nature, being incomparably more liberal in its terms, more rich in its provisions, more permanent in its duration. The Mosaic covenant (as I will call it) granted nothing but in a way of remuneration for services performed: the Christian covenant grants everything upon the simple condition of our laying hold of the covenant, and asking for the blessing for Christ's sake.

The Mosaic covenant held forth only temporal benefits to those who were under it: but the Christian covenant imparts to the believer all the blessings both of grace and glory.

The Mosaic covenant waxed old and vanished away: the Christian covenant will endure for ever and ever!

It was so also in the promises with which it was established:

The possession of the promised land, with a long continuance of peace and plenty, was the chief promise of the Mosaic covenant. It is true, there were promises of pardon and acceptance through the offering of certain sacrifices: but the pardon did not bring peace unto the conscience; nor continue longer than until the next day of annual expiation; nor extend at all to sins of greater enormity, as adultery and murder.

But the Christian covenant purges away all sense of guilt from the conscience, and brings into the soul a peace that passes all understanding: it extends to every sin that man can commit; and assures the believer that he shall in due time possess all the glory of Heaven. There cannot be conceived any need that the believer can feel, or any circumstances under which he may feel it, but there are promises in the Christian covenant precisely suited to his situation, and commensurate with his necessities: and all are to be apprehended simply by faith. Even the repentance which is necessary to fit the soul for the reception of the blessings, and the faith that is to apprehend them, are comprehended within the promises: they are not required of us in order that other blessings may be bestowed as a reward for them; but they are promised to us, as means of introducing the soul to the possession of all other blessings. If we attempt to spin them, as it were, out of our own hearts, that we may be at rest in them, and make them a web

whereby to catch other blessings, both they and we shall soon be swept away with the broom of destruction. But, if we go to God for them, then shall they be conferred upon us, and wrought in us by God as initiatory blessings, preparatory to the full bestowment of all the kingdom of Heaven.

How much better then this New covenant is than the Mosaic, must be obvious to the most superficial observer.

In order to a just understanding of the text, it will be proper yet further to inquire,

3. In what sense is Christ "the Mediator of this better covenant?"

Moses, in the first instance, and after him the Aaronic priests in succession, were the mediators of the Old Covenant. Everything was transacted by, and through, them. They offered the sacrifices, and carried in the blood of them before God, and offered incense before God in behalf of the people; and then went forth from God to bless the people.

So is the Lord Jesus Christ the Mediator of this better covenant. He is "the Daysman that lays his hand upon both parties, Job 9:33," and mediates between them. No man comes to God, but by him; nor does God grant his blessings to any man, but through him.

This part of our subject will be more fully opened, while we mark,

II. The excellency of his priesthood as connected with it—

To set forth this is the chief scope and aim of the Apostle in the whole context. And, to illustrate his subject, he points out,

1. The superior dignity of his person—

Christ is the true Melchizedek, the "King of righteousness and peace," without father (as it respected his human nature), without mother (as to his divine nature); having neither beginning of days, nor end of life, Hebrews 7:1-3, "for from everlasting to everlasting he is God! Psalm 90:2. Proverbs 8:22-31."

But the Aaronic priests were poor mortals like ourselves. Besides, the Aaronic priests were sinners, and needed first to offer sacrifices for their own sins, and then for the people's: but not so the Lord Jesus: "he knew no sin:" "he was without spot and blameless:" "he was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens," even "the Son of God who is consecrated for evermore! Hebrews 7:26-28."

2. The transcendent excellency of his offering—

The Mosaic priests offered nothing better than the blood of bulls and of goats: but the Lord Jesus offered his own immaculate body; yes, "he made his own soul an offering for sin! Isaiah 53:10 with Hebrews 9:11-12." True, it was the manhood only that suffered; but his manhood, having "the Godhead dwelling in it bodily, Colossians 2:9," was of more value than all the cattle upon a thousand hills: it was a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the world, 1 John 2:2.

3. The glory of the place where he ministers—

The tabernacle where the Mosaic priests officiated was glorious, as being consecrated to such a holy use: but, as glorious as it was, "it had no glory by reason of the glory that excels," even of that heavenly "tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. Compare 2 Corinthians 3:10-11, with, verse 1, 2." There Jesus is:

not in a room darkened with a veil, but in the Heaven of heavens;

not in the presence of a bright cloud, a mere symbol of the Deity—but in the immediate presence of God himself;

not presenting the blood of beasts—but his own most precious blood, that was once shed on Calvary;

not offering a cloud of incense—but pouring forth his own prevailing intercession;

not bearing a breast-plate with the names of the twelve tribes—but bearing on his bosom the name of every individual of his elect;

not appearing there for one people only—but for all the sinners of mankind;

not obtaining mere temporal blessings, or spiritual blessings for a limited period—but spiritual and eternal blessings, even all that man can need, or God bestow;

not coming forth, himself a sinner, delegated to pronounce a blessing—but "appearing without sin to confer by his own authority everlasting salvation" on all his believing people! Hebrews 9:28.

Such are the views which the Apostle gives us of our great High-priest, and of "the transcendent excellence of his ministry."

Judge then,

1. What is our duty towards this great High-priest—

As "a minister of this New Covenant, 2 Corinthians 3:6, I hesitate not to say what MY duty is. It is:

to make known this Savior to you in all his offices;
to set before you this covenant in all its fullness, its freeness, its sufficiency, its immutability;
to point Jesus out as the only Mediator of it, through whose sacrifice and intercession you must seek its blessings, and through whom alone you can obtain them;
to open from time to time all the promises contained in it;
and to lead you to a simple reliance on them, as the one only means of obtaining the accomplishment of them to your souls!

How inadequately they execute the ministerial office who dwell on the evidences of Christianity, or on morals to the exclusion of the sublimer subjects of the New Covenant.

What then is YOUR duty, but to:

Contemplate these subjects with admiration, and love, and gratitude; and to seek a personal interest in them all! Contemplate "the covenant," "ordered in all things, and sure;" and expect nothing but as the fruit of God's eternal love, as expressed towards you in that covenant.

Contemplate the peculiar privileges which you enjoy under this "better" covenant, above all that were ever enjoyed by God's people of old.

Contemplate Jesus as "the Mediator" of this covenant; and see all the conditions of it fulfilled by him for you, and all the blessings of it as the fruit of his sacrifice and intercession.

Contemplate the "promises" of it, so abundant, so suitable, so sufficient, so sure to all who plead them before God, and rely upon them as the only ground of their hopes.

In a word, look to the ministry of Christ, as the Jews did to that of their high-priests. They expected nothing but through the intervention of their appointed mediators: and in like manner you must expect nothing but in and through your adorable Advocate and Intercessor.

2. The danger of neglecting this New Covenant—

The generality of Christians lamentably neglect their duty in relation to our great High-priest. Instead of relying on that "better covenant," of which he is "the Mediator," they make covenants of their own precisely similar to the Mosaic covenant, which for its unprofitableness is abrogated and annulled, Hebrews 7:18-19. They reduce the standard of the moral law to their own imagined ability to fulfill it: they look for the first motions to good to arise from themselves, from some imagined stock of which they imagine themselves possessed; and then expect ulterior blessings as a reward for their own personal merits and deserts.

They will be as little indebted to the free grace of God as possible: and, instead of receiving from the Lord Jesus Christ all their salvation as the fruit of what he has done and suffered for them, they give him no higher honor than that of obtaining for them a right and a power to save themselves. This is the covenant which they prefer, and for which they abandon that "better covenant," which God has revealed in his Gospel.

But let all such daring despisers of the Gospel hear what the Apostle Paul speaks to them in this epistle: "If," says he, "he who despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses, of how much more severe punishment, suppose you, shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and has done despite to the Spirit of grace! Hebrews 10:28-29."

Mark, this is not an assertion merely, but an appeal, an appeal to every considerate man: and, if you will only consider it candidly, I will consent that you shall be judges in your own cause: If you say, 'I am not guilty of the things here spoken of;' I ask, 'How is it possible to deny your guilt, if you are systematically rejecting the Christian covenant, and substituting another of your own? How can you be guiltless in respect to these things, when you thrust the Lord Jesus Christ from his mediatorial office, and seek to place his crown upon your own head? Beware, I beg you, of this fatal evil; for, "how shall you escape, if ye-neglect so great salvation? Hebrews 2:3." Remember, there is no other covenant whereby any human being can be saved; no promise, but what is contained in that; no mediator, through whom we can obtain a saving interest in it, but the Lord Jesus Christ. Lay hold on this covenant, and you are safe: reject it, and you perish forever!

#2301

CHRIST ABOVE THE LEVITICAL PRIESTS

Hebrews 9:11-12

"When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption."

THOUGH there are a multitude of types besides those which were instituted by Moses—yet the most direct and complete representations of Christ are certainly to be found in the Mosaic ritual. Amidst the various ordinances relative to the priests and the temple, there is perhaps not any one point, however minute, which has not a typical reference; though, for lack of an infallible instructor, we cannot precisely ascertain the meaning in every particular. The Epistle to the Hebrews, however, affords us great assistance in our inquiries into this subject, inasmuch as it declares the exact relation between the types and the one great Antitype in all the principal and most important points. The text especially, connected as it is with the whole preceding and following context, leads us to consider,

I. The resemblance between Christ and the Aaronic priests—

It would be endless to enumerate all the points of agreement between them: we shall rather confine our attention to those referred to in the text.

1. The high-priests were taken from among men to mediate between God and them—

This is expressly declared to be the end of their institution, Hebrews 5:1. Aaron and his descendants were called to this office, Hebrews 5:4; and, in all the transactions between the Israelites and their God, they performed that office according to the commandment.

Thus our blessed Lord was taken from among men; he was bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. He assumed our nature for that very purpose, that he might be capable of officiating as our great High-priest, Hebrews 2:14-17, and, in that nature, he both comes from God to us, and goes to God from us.

2. Their mediation was to be carried on by means of sacrifices—

The precise method in which they were to execute their office is recorded in the 16th of Leviticus; nor could they deviate from it in the least. If any but the high-priest had presumed to enter within the veil, or he, on any other day than that of the annual atonement, or even then without the blood of the sacrifices, verse 7, he would have instantly been smitten, as a monument of Divine vengeance.

Thus Christ did not approach his God without a sacrifice, Hebrews 8:3. He presented his own sacred body as an offering for sin; and, having "offered himself without spot to God," he has "gone with his own blood within the veil," and makes that blood the ground of his intercession on our behalf, verse 24 with the text.

3. They obtained blessings for those on whose behalf they mediated—

The judgments, which God had denounced against the transgressors of his law, were averted when the high-priest had presented the accustomed offerings, and God was reconciled to his offending people.

In like manner does Christ make reconciliation for us by the blood of his cross, Colossians 1:20; He "gives his own life a ransom for us," and thus redeems us from those awful judgments which our sins have merited. Nor is it a mere deliverance from punishment that we obtain through him: "we are brought near to God by his blood," and are restored to the possession of our forfeited inheritance, Ephesians 1:7; Ephesians 1:11.

But while the text intimates the resemblance between Christ and the high-priests, it most unequivocally declares also,

II. His pre-eminence above the Aaronic priests—

This part of the subject also would open a large field for discussion: but, confining ourselves to the text, we shall notice his pre-eminence only in the particulars which are there specified.

1. He officiated in a far nobler tabernacle—

As he Jesus did not belong to the tribe to which the priesthood attached, he could not exercise his ministry within the precincts allotted to them, Hebrews 7:13. The tabernacle therefore, in which he officiated, was his own body, while he continued upon earth; and the Heaven of heavens, when he ascended within the veil, Hebrews 8:2. The "tabernacle" seems primarily to refer to his body. Compare John 1:14 with Colossians 2:9. But it may also relate to Heaven, since it certainly was a figure of that also, verse 24.

How infinitely does this exalt him above all the Aaronic priests! We allow that the Mosaic tabernacle was glorious: but what glory had it, when compared with Christ's immaculate body, in which, not a mere symbol only of the Divine presence dwelt, but all the fullness

of the Godhead? And what was the holy of holies in comparison with Heaven itself, where Christ sits at the right hand of God? Surely in whichever light we view the tabernacle in which Christ officiated, we must acknowledge it to have been far "greater and more perfect than that which was made with hands."

2. He offered a far more valuable sacrifice—

The high-priests could offer nothing but the blood of beasts, which had not in itself the smallest efficacy towards the expiation of sin: the virtue, which it had, was wholly derived from its typical relation to the great Sacrifice.

But "Christ is entered into the holy place with his own blood;" and there presents it before God as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Compare the sacrifices then, the blood of goats and of calves, with the blood of our incarnate God. Who does not see the worthlessness of the one, and the infinite value of the other? No wonder that the former needed to be "offered year by year continually," since they had no power to take away sin, or to pacify an accusing conscience, verse 9; but the latter fully satisfies for the sins of the world, and, having been once offered, perfects for ever those who are sanctified by it, 1 John 2:2. Hebrews 10:14.

3. He obtained far richer benefits for his people—

The utmost that the high-priest obtained for the people was, a remission of those civil or political penalties which were annexed to their several transgressions. But with respect to real pardon before God, the annual repetition of their sacrifices sufficiently manifested, that that was beyond the sphere of their influence, Hebrews 10:1; Hebrews 10:4; Hebrews 10:11.

But Christ has obtained for us redemption from all the bitter consequences of sin; as well from the sufferings which we would have endured in the future world, as from the bondage to which we would have remained subject in this present life.

Nor are the effects of his sacrifice transient, like those under the law: it excels no less in the duration than in the greatness of the benefits it procures; it obtains for us, not redemption only, but "eternal redemption."

Well then may he be called "a High-priest of good things;" for there is nothing good in time or eternity, which he does not procure for those who seek a saving interest in his mediation.

This subject may serve to show us,

1. What use to make of the Levitical law—

If we read it merely as a system of rites and ceremonies, without considering the end of its institution, it will appear absurd, and utterly unworthy of its Divine Author. But, if we view it in its relation to Christ, it will appear beautiful and very instructive. There is no longer a veil over it with respect to us, 2 Corinthians 3:14; let us look at it therefore as at a mirror that reflects his glory; and we shall have no cause to regret the time and labor that we employ in exploring its mysterious contents.

2. How to appreciate the blessings of redemption—

We may form some judgment of them by meditating on the terrors of Hell, and the glories of Heaven. But there is nothing that can so fully reveal their value, as a consideration of the price Jesus paid for them.

Who can reflect on "the precious blood of Christ by which we are redeemed," and entertain low thoughts of the blessings purchased by it? Would men be so indifferent about salvation, if they thus considered how great it was? Surely, it would be impossible! As callous as the human heart is, it would melt into contrition at the sight of an expiring God! Zechariah 12:10. Let us but habituate ourselves to such views as these, and neither earth nor Hell shall ever hold us in the bonds of sin. With such a sight of the prize, we shall never cease to run until we have obtained it!

3. What grounds of hope there are for the very chief of sinners—

Had any other price been paid for our redemption, many might have doubted whether it were sufficient for them: but who can doubt, when he knows that he has been bought with the precious blood of Christ?

This will expiate the foulest guilt! The difference that exists between one sinner and another, is lost, when we apply to Christ's infinitely meritorious atonement: its efficacy is the same, whatever degrees of guilt we may have contracted: it will avail for one as well as for another; nor is there any "sin of such a scarlet or crimson dye, but it shall be made white as snow," the very instant it is washed in this fountain: "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin!"

Let none then despair: let us rather consider what "a High-priest we have over the house of God;" and "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help us in the time of need! Hebrews 4:14; Hebrews 4:16; Hebrews 10:19-22."

THE JEWISH SACRIFICES TYPICAL OF CHRIST'S

Hebrews 9:13-14

"The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!"

THE peculiar benefits of Christianity are usually displayed by contrasting our state with that of the heathen world: but they will be seen nearly to the same advantage, if we compare our privileges with those that were enjoyed under the Jewish dispensation. The Jews indeed had much that distinguished them above other nations: but we possess in substance what they enjoyed only in the shadow. One great object in the Epistle to the Hebrews is, to set this matter in a just point of view. This has been done with great perspicuity and strength of argument in the preceding context: and the author having shown that we have a true, and eternal redemption obtained for us; while that accomplished by the Jewish ordinances was only typical and temporal, states afresh, in few words, the grounds of his conclusion, and appeals to every intelligent reader for the justness of it.

In discoursing on his words we shall show,

I. The excellence of the type—

The Jewish ordinances were altogether typical of Christ's sacrifice—

The ordinances mentioned in the text, though similar, as means of purifying from pollution, were very different from each other as to the kind of pollution which they were intended to remove. The blood of bullocks and goats was offered annually on the great day of expiation, to atone for the moral guilt both of the priests and people, Leviticus 16:6; Leviticus 16:15. The ashes of the heifer, which, together with cedar, hyssop, and scarlet, had been burned outside the camp, were to be mixed with running water, and sprinkled upon a person who had contracted any ceremonial impurity (as from the touch of a grave, a corpse, a human bone, or anything that had been touched by an unclean person). On the third day, and on the seventh, they were to be sprinkled on him; and then he was to be esteemed clean, Numbers 19:12.

These were typical of Christ's sacrifice, by which the greatest sins may be forgiven; and without which, not even the smallest imaginable pollution can ever be purged away.

As types, these certainly were deserving of much regard—

While they shadowed forth, and prepared men for, the Messiah that would come, they conveyed many real benefits to those who conformed to the rules which they prescribed. The penitents who bewailed their moral defilements, had their hopes of mercy and forgiveness revived and strengthened: and they who, on account of some ceremonial impurity, were separated for seven long days from the house of God, and from all fellowship with their dearest friends, were restored, as it were to the bosom of the Church, and to communion with their God. Doubtless these rites were burdensome; but everyone who valued the favor of God, and the blessings of social converse, would thankfully use the means which God had prescribed for the renewed enjoyment of them.

Nevertheless the things which were glorious in themselves, lost all their glory when contrasted with,

II. The superior excellence of the antitype—

As, by a type, we mean a shadowy representation of something future and substantial.

Just so, by an antitype, we mean that thing which corresponds to the type, and had before been represented by it, 1 Peter 3:21. The antitype then, or the thing that has been before represented, is, the sacrifice of Christ: and this infinitely excels all the ordinances by which it had been shadowed forth. The superior excellence of the antitype, Christ's sacrifice, appears particularly, in that:

1. Christ's sacrifice purifies the conscience—

The legal offerings never could remove guilt from the conscience, Hebrews 9:9; they were mere remembrances of sins, Hebrews 10:3-4; and the constant repetition of them showed that those, which had been before offered, had not availed for the full discharge of the persons who offered them, Hebrews 10:2.

But the blood of Christ, once sprinkled on the conscience, "perfects for ever those who are sanctified, Hebrews 10:10; Hebrews 10:14." No other atonement is then needed, or desired: the sinner needs only to exercise faith in that, and he will have peace in his soul, "being justified by faith, he shall have peace with God." How strongly does this mark the superiority which we ascribe to the

sacrifice of Christ!

2. Christ's sacrifice sanctifies the life—

Though the Jewish ordinances availed for the restoration of men to the enjoyment of outward privileges, they never could renew and sanctify the heart. On the contrary, they rather tended to irritate the minds of men against both the law, and him who enjoined it.

But the blood of Christ sprinkled on the soul, instantly produces a visible change in the whole man: "the dead works" which were daily practiced, are now abandoned; and "the service of the living God," which before appeared irksome, is now its chief joy. It is undeniable that many in every place throughout the world (wherever the Gospel is preached) have undergone a very great change in all their views, desires, and pursuits; they have become dead to the things of time and sense, and have devoted themselves in body, soul, and spirit, to the service of their God.

Let the question be put to all of them: When did this change take place? There will be but one answer from them all: they will with one voice acknowledge, that it was effected by the sprinkling of the blood of Christ upon their hearts and consciences; that, until that blessed period, they were altogether carnal; and that from that time, they have been under the habitual influence of spiritual affections. What more can be lacking to establish the point before us?

The pre-eminence of Christ above the legal offerings will yet further appear, while we show,

III. How it is that the transcendent worth of Christ's sacrifice may be inferred from the comparatively trifling value of the Jewish types—

The Apostle's argument in the text is this: If the Jewish sacrifices availed for the smallest good, then how much more will the sacrifice of Christ avail for the greatest possible good? The force of this argument will appear by comparing,

1. The nature of the offerings—

The blood that was sprinkled on men under the law, was merely the blood of worthless beasts: but what is that which is sprinkled on us? Let the voice of inspiration answer this question: It was "GOD that purchased the Church with his own blood! Acts 20:28." Astonishing mystery! "the blood of Christ" was the blood, not of a mere man, but of one who was God as well as man! How plain is the inference in this view! Surely, if the blood of a beast, which was only externally "spotless," availed for anything, much more may the blood of Christ, that immaculate Lamb, avail for everything!

2. The persons by whom they were offered—

Under the law the offerings were presented by sinful men, who needed first to offer for their own sins, before they were permitted to offer for the people's.

But our sacrifice was offered by God himself: Christ was both the sacrifice and the priest! Yes, each person of the ever-blessed Trinity was engaged in this stupendous work:

the Father was the person to whom the sacrifice was offered;

Christ was the person who offered it;

and the Eternal Spirit concurred and co-operated with him in this mysterious act.

Let then the offerings be compared in this view, and how infinite will the superiority of Christ's appear!

3. The suitableness of each to the end proposed—

What was there in the blood of bulls and goats that could wash away the stain of sin! How could that satisfy the Divine justice, or avert his wrath from sinful man? There was not the least affinity between the means and the end.

But Christ was "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh;" and he assumed our nature on purpose that he might stand in our place and stead. Here was a perfect suitableness between the means and the end.

Must the penalty due to sin be endured? He became a curse for us, and submitted to endure its just deserts.

Must the law be fulfilled and honored? He magnified it by his perfect obedience.

And being God as well as man, he was at liberty to do this for us; and his substitution in our place justly avails for our salvation. How plain then is the Apostle's inference when viewed in this light! Surely, when these considerations are all combined, there will be a strength in his argument, and a force in his appeal, which must bear down every objection, and fix the deepest conviction on our minds.

This subject may further lead us to observe,

1. How manifest is the doctrine of the divinity of Christ!

We need not look to any passages that confirm this doctrine by direct assertions; since in the text it is contained with yet stronger evidence in a way of implication.

Let it be supposed for one moment that Christ was a mere creature: how will the Apostle's argument then appear? If the blood of one creature avails for the obtaining of a mere shadowy and temporal benefit, how much more shall the blood of another creature avail for the obtaining of all that God himself can bestow? This were as absurd as to say, if a child can lift a feather, how much more can a grown person lift a mountain? Such an appeal would be unworthy of any man that pretends to common sense; and much more of an inspired Apostle.

But let the divinity of Christ be acknowledged, and the appeal is clear, convincing, incontrovertible. Indeed the doctrines of the atonement and of the divinity of Christ are so interwoven with each other, that neither of them can be denied without effectually subverting both. Let us seek then to be well established in these important truths.

2. How necessary is it to trust entirely in Christ's atonement!

It is not possible to state a case more strongly than this is stated in a chapter before referred to, Numbers 19. We cannot conceive less guilt to be contracted by any act than by unwittingly touching a thing, which, unknown to us, had been before touched by an unclean person: yet nothing but the sprinkling of the ashes of a red heifer could ever remove the impurity contracted by it. If the person that had contracted it were the holiest man on earth, and were to shed rivers of tears on account of what he had done, and increase his circumspection in the future a hundredfold, it would be all to no purpose; he must die as a defiler of God's sanctuary, if he did not use the purification which the law appointed.

How much more then must that soul perish which is not purified by the blood of Christ! How impossible is it that even the smallest sin would ever be expiated in any other way! Let this then teach us to look unto Christ continually, and to have our consciences ever sprinkled with his precious blood.

3. How inseparable is the connection between faith and works!

They greatly err, who think that the doctrines of faith are subversive to morality. The very faith that purges the conscience from guilt, purifies the life also from dead works, and animates us to serve the living God. Let this connection then be seen in our lives; so shall we most effectually remove the calumny; and "by well-doing put to silence the ignorance of foolish men!"

#2303

NO REMISSION WITHOUT BLOOD

Hebrews 9:22

"Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin."

THE external administration of religion has been extremely different in different ages of the world: but the method of acceptance with God has been invariably the same. Before the Mosaic ritual was formed, pardon was dispensed through the blood of sacrifices: and since it was abolished, men obtain mercy through that blood which the sacrifices both before and under the law were intended to prefigure.

To mark the correspondence between the sacrifices under the law, and that offered by Jesus on the cross, is the great scope of the Epistle to the Hebrews. In the preceding context it is observed that the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry were purged with blood; and then it is asserted as a universal truth, "that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin."

This assertion being of infinite importance, we shall:

I. Establish it—

The observances of the ceremonial law show that men were saved by blood under the Mosaic dispensation—

For every offense, sacrifices were to be offered according to the rank and quality of the offender: and whatever animals were sacrificed, whether bullocks, goats, lambs, or pigeons, they were to be slain, and their blood was to be sprinkled both on the altar, and on the offerer: and it was by the blood so sprinkled, that the offerer was cleansed from guilt. If a person were so poor that he could not bring a pair of young pigeons, he was at liberty to offer a measure (about five pints) of fine flour: a portion of which,

answerably to the destruction of the beasts, was to be burned, in order to show the offender what he merited at the hands of God, Leviticus 5:6-13.

There were indeed other purifications, some by fire, and others by water: but these were for ceremonial only, and never for moral defilement.

Thus the law, with the one exception above mentioned, spoke exactly the language of the text.

The same way of salvation still obtains under the Gospel—

The typical sacrifices are indeed superseded by the one sacrifice of Christ. It is through his sacrifice, and through it alone, that any man is saved.

This is capable of direct proof from Scripture—

The warning which Eli gave to his sons, when they poured contempt upon the sacrifices, and caused them to be abhorred by the people, not obscurely intimated, that acts of injustice towards men might be punished by the magistrate, and yet be forgiven through the great Sacrifice: but that, if any person poured contempt upon the sacrifices, he rejected the only means of salvation, and must therefore inevitably perish, 1 Samuel 2:17; 1 Samuel 2:25.

There is a yet stronger assertion to this effect in the chapter following the text, where it is said in the most express terms, that those who reject this Sacrifice have nothing to expect but wrath and fiery indignation, Hebrews 10:26-27; which could not be true, if there were any other way of salvation provided for us.

It may be yet further proved by arguments, which, though of an indirect nature, are not less satisfactory than the foregoing—

If salvation be not by blood, the whole Mosaic ritual was absurd. For what end could so many innocent beasts be slaughtered, and consumed by fire, if it were not to prefigure the great Sacrifice? If they were intended to shadow forth the way of salvation through the sacrifice of Christ, there was abundant reason for such observances; and the lives of myriads of beasts were well bestowed in such a cause. But on any other supposition, the legal sacrifices, having no typical reference, were unworthy of God to institute, or of man to offer.

If salvation is not by blood, the prophets grossly misrepresented their Messiah—

Christ was spoken of as "making his soul an offering for sin;" as having "our iniquities laid upon him;" as "wounded for our transgressions," that he might "heal us by his stripes, Isaiah 53:5-12;" it was foretold that he would "be cut off; but not for himself;" that he would "finish transgression, make reconciliation for iniquity, make an end of sin, and bring in an everlasting righteousness, Daniel 9:24; Daniel 9:26." Yes, he was prophesied of as "a fountain that would be opened for sin and for impurity Zechariah 13:1;" and John, who was more than a prophet, pointed him out as that very Lamb of God, that would take away the sins of the world, John 1:29. Now what can be the meaning of these passages? how are they applicable to Christ, if they do not mark out his atonement? and what truth is there in such representations, if we are not to seek remission through his atoning blood?

If salvation is not by blood, the declarations of the Apostles, yes, and of Christ himself, are far more likely to mislead, than to instruct the world—

Christ expressly told his disciples, that his "blood was shed for the remission of sins, Matthew 26:28." And the Apostles uniformly declare, that God purchased the Church with his own blood Acts 20:28; that our reconciliation to God, Ephesians 2:16. Colossians 1:20, and our justification before him, Romans 5:9, together with our complete redemption, Ephesians 1:7. Revelation 5:9—are by blood, even by the blood of Christ, that spotless Lamb, 1 Peter 1:19. Is this the way to teach men that they shall be saved by their works? Must we not utterly despair of understanding anything they have said, if we are not to expect salvation by the blood of Christ?

The Apostle's assertion being thus fully established, we shall,

II. Improve it—

The death of Christ has an aspect upon everything that relates to our souls.

But not to enumerate many points, let us reflect on:

1. The evil of sin—

We are assured that not one sin could have been forgiven without shedding of blood. Nor was it the blood of bulls and of goats only that was necessary, but the blood of God's dear Son, even of Jehovah's Fellow. What then must sin be, that required such a

sacrifice! We behold the evil of sin:
in the miseries that are in the world;
and still more in the torments of the damned;
but most of all do we see its malignity in the sufferings of the Son of God; without which not the smallest transgression could ever have been expiated. Let us then view sin in this light, and we shall no more account it a small and trivial evil.

2. The folly of self-righteousness—

Self-righteousness consists in substituting something of our own in the place of the atonement, or in blending something of our own with it. In either case we utterly make void the death of Christ, Galatians 2:21. And what madness is this! It is, in fact, to shut ourselves out from all hope of pardon, and to rivet our sins upon our souls forever!

It may be thought indeed that Christ died to purchase us a right and power to save ourselves by our works. But if this was the case, why did Paul impute the rejection of his own nation to their going about to establish their own righteousness, Romans 9:31-32; Romans 10:3. And why did he desire to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, Philippians 3:9. Why did he declare that if any man were circumcised with a view to obtain justification by the law, Christ would profit him nothing, Galatians 5:2; Galatians 5:4. Why did he contrast salvation by grace, and salvation by works, so as to show that they could not be blended or consist together, Romans 11:6. This alas! is a refuge of lies, which, together with all who flee to it, will be swept away with the broom of destruction!

Let us not then dare to put ourselves in that way wherein God declares there is no remission.

3. The encouragement which the Gospel affords to sinners—

When it is said that "without the shedding of blood there is no remission," it is doubtless implied, that through shedding of blood there is remission of sin! And what a glorious truth is this! How refreshing to the weary soul! Let it be contemplated with holy joy and wonder. There is no sin, however great, from which the blood of Christ will not cleanse the soul! 1 John 1:7. David, after contracting the foulest guilt, was yet able to say, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow! Psalm 51:7. Let every one then go to the fountain opened for sin; let him plunge, as it were, beneath that sacred flood; and he shall instantly become pure and spotless in the sight of God! Ephesians 5:25; Ephesians 5:27."

4. The wonderful love of Christ—

He knew that sin could not be forgiven, unless he would take upon him our nature and make atonement for us by his own blood. And rather than leave us to perish as the fallen angels, he accepted the hard conditions, left the bosom of his Father, put himself in our place, and submitted to endure the penalty due to sin.

O what transcendent love! How inconceivable its heights, how unsearchable its depths! Ephesians 3:18-19. Let our minds dwell upon it continually; that our hearts being warmed with this mysterious, incomprehensible love, we may be ever vying with the hosts of Heaven in singing, "To him who loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be glory and dominion for ever and ever! Revelation 1:5-6.

#2304

USE OF TYPICAL PURIFICATIONS

Hebrews 9:23

"It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these."

The scope of the whole chapter is clear: it is intended to show, that, while the sacrifice of Christ was shadowed forth by the Levitical sacrifices, it was infinitely superior to them all.

I will show from it,

Whence arose a necessity for typical purifications—

Doubtless, the necessity arose, primarily, from the mere arbitrary appointment of God, who had commanded them to be made. But, subordinate to that, there were other, and most important, reasons too for these ordinances: for by purifying everything with blood: God first showed to his people their extreme need of mercy; next, He shadowed forth to them the mercy which he had in reserve for them;

lastly, He confirmed their expectation of that mercy in his appointed time.

What could a sinner think, when he understood that the very altar of God itself, yes, and the most holy place, the immediate residence of the Deity, needed to be purified with blood, because they were defiled by their use in the service of man? Must he not feel that his depravity was extreme, when his very best services were so polluted, that not only must they be purified with blood, but the very altar, on which his offerings were laid, and the sanctuary itself also, into which the blood of them was carried, must be purged with blood also? Truly these ordinances were a daily source of the deepest humiliation to every soul among them.

But knowing, as of necessity they must, that these ordinances were only "shadows of good things to come, Hebrews 10:1," they would look forward to a better sacrifice, which would in due time be offered. They would see that remission of sins can be obtained through blood alone, through the blood of an innocent victim shed in their place and stead, and through the sprinkling of that blood upon their souls.

And by the daily repetition of the same ordinances, they must be constantly reminded of God's gracious purposes towards them; and be assured that he would, in due time, accomplish all that he had promised.

Thus were the typical purifications necessary in their place.

But it was not in the patterns only of heavenly things that there existed a need of purification, but "in the heavenly things themselves." I must therefore proceed to show,

II. What necessity there is for purification in the things typified—

Under the New Covenant, no less than under the Old Covenant, must everything be purified with blood—

Our persons are altogether polluted and defiled: our bodies are a mass of corruption, and our souls are a sink of iniquity! There is no abomination that sin has brought into the world, but the soul is the very womb in which it is generated, or rather the fountain from whence it flows, as its proper and perennial source. How can such a creature find acceptance with a holy God, if there is not found some blood capable of purifying him from guilt, and some water capable of cleansing him from his inherent defilements?

Our services also must, of necessity, partake of all this defilement: for "who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" Truly, as our common actions in life need purification; so do our very tears need to be washed, and our repentances to be repented of.

But of "the heavenly things" spoken of in my text, Heaven itself is the principal: for it is that which was typified by the most holy place; it is that of which the sanctuary was intended to be a "pattern." And does that need purification? Yes, it does: nor could God himself endure it as a residence, so to speak, if it were not cleansed from the defilement it contracts by the introduction of sinners into it. Therefore, as the high-priest sprinkled the sanctuary with blood; so does our great High-priest, who "has entered into Heaven, with his own blood, verse 12," sprinkle and purify that holy place, and thus "prepare it as a mansion for his believing people, John 14:2-3.

But for this end there must be a better sacrifice than any that were offered under the law—

The blood of beasts might suffice to cleanse men from ceremonial defilement: but it could never avail for the cleansing of moral guilt in any one particular: no, "it was not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats would take away sin! Hebrews 10:4." To effect that was beyond the power of any created being.

Had the first archangel assumed our nature for that end, he would have failed in the attempt. To so great a work none but God himself was competent: and God himself must become a man, and shed his own blood for us, before one single sin can be blotted out from the book of God's remembrance, or one of our fallen race be able to present to God one acceptable service. All that was shadowed forth under the law, must actually be fulfilled. The Son of the living God:

must take upon him our nature;

must die as an atonement for sin;

must enter into Heaven with his own blood;

must sprinkle that blood upon and before the mercy-seat;

must sprinkle us also, even every man who shall ever be savingly interested in his atonement: even the covenant itself, too, must he sprinkle with his blood, in order to its ratification before God, and its application to our souls.

All this, I say, must be done, in order to the admission of any human being to the realms of bliss. It is all necessary for God's honor; for no less a sacrifice than this would satisfy his justice: and it is all equally necessary for our happiness; since nothing less can bring peace into our consciences, or operate with a transforming efficacy on our souls!

As the patterns then of these things needed a purification by the blood of beasts—so do the things typified need to be purged by the

blood of our incarnate God.

Let us, then, learn from these things,

1. The need we all have of the Covenant of Grace—

God, as you know, has made a covenant with us. And this covenant we must receive. We must, as all Israel did, declare our consent to it, and engage to look for life on the terms which it prescribes. Paul says, "This is the blood of the covenant which God has enjoined unto you." If God had only offered it as a gift, methinks no sinner in the universe would have hesitated to accept it: but God enjoins it with authority; and declares, that on no other terms whatever shall any sinner ever find acceptance with him.

Accept, then, this covenant. Do not think to make covenants of your own, whereby to secure some glory to yourselves: for you may be assured that God will never agree to any other, than that which he has proposed, and his only dear Son has ratified. The Israelites were not left to modify the covenant after their own taste; but were required to accept that which was given them of the Lord. So is there no other alternative for you, but to accept or reject the covenant of grace. In this covenant God gives all, and you receive all.

For what could you do to recommend either your persons or your services to God? If you were to shed rivers of tears, you could never wash away so much as one sin: nor, whatever efforts you might make, could you ever offer one single service, which would stand the test of God's law, and defy the eye of Omniscience to discern a flaw in it. I say again, therefore, lay hold on this covenant; and look for all its blessings, as the free gift of God for Christ's sake.

2. The way in which we may become partakers of it—

You have already seen how Moses sprinkled all the people with the blood of the sacrifice: and by that sprinkling were they all made partakers of it—and in the same way must you also become partakers of the covenant of grace. Paul tells us, that to this sprinkling of blood every believer comes, Hebrews 12:24; and Peter tells us, that by it every believer is saved, 1 Peter 1:2. In truth, as it was the shedding of the blood of Christ that satisfied the Divine Majesty, and ratified the covenant; so it is the sprinkling of that blood on our hearts and consciences that can alone entitle us to its benefits.

But, in relation to this matter, there is a very important difference between the Israelites and us. They were sprinkled in the persons of their representatives: but we must be sprinkled in our own persons: nothing among us can be done by proxy. We must ourselves dip the scarlet wool and hyssop, so to speak, in the blood of our great Sacrifice; and by faith must sprinkle it on our own hearts and consciences. Yes, we must daily sprinkle with it both our persons and our services, and look for Heaven as prepared for us by it, that we may to all eternity sing, "To Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood!" "The sacrifice of Christ was unto God of a sweet-smelling savor, Ephesians 5:2;" let it be so to us also; and all that has been purchased by it shall be ours.

#2305

THE HOLY OF HOLIES, A TYPE

Hebrews 9:24

"For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered Heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence."

IT appears, at first sight, unworthy of God to appoint with such precision all the minutest circumstances relating to the tabernacle and its services. Provided he were worshiped and served, it would seem a matter of no importance whether the place wherein he was worshiped, were of such or such an exact form, or whether the ceremonies observed in his worship were exactly of such or such a kind.

But God intended to prefigure everything relating to the Messiah and his kingdom: and therefore it was necessary not only that a model of everything would be given to Moses, Hebrews 8:5, but that these patterns of heavenly things, made by Moses according to that model, would undergo a purification by the blood of carnal sacrifices, so that the heavenly things themselves, which were to be purified by the great Sacrifice, might be the more evidently prefigured, verse 23.

These types having been given, Christ accomplished them on earth in part, and is now perfecting the accomplishment of them in Heaven; where he is gone, as the high-priests went into the holy of holies, to appear before God on behalf of his people.

It is our intention to show:

I. In what respect Heaven was typified by the holy of holies—

The whole edifice of the tabernacle or temple was a figure of Christ's human nature, in which the God-head dwelt; and of the Church also, in which God resides, John 2:19; John 2:21. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17. But the most holy place, which is also called "the tabernacle, verse 3," eminently represented Heaven:

1. It was the immediate residence of the Deity—

The Shechinah, the bright cloud, which was the symbol of the Deity, dwelt between the cherubim upon the mercy-seat; and there God manifested himself more than in any other place on earth, Exodus 25:22. Thus also, but in an infinitely brighter manner, does he display his glory in Heaven. He is indeed on earth and even in Hell; neither can the Heaven of heavens contain him; for he pervades all space. But, though he is on our right hand, we cannot see him; nor, if we look for him on the left hand, can he be found by us, Job 23:8-9. But in Heaven he is seen face to face; and all the heavenly hosts behold him shining forth in all the brightness of his glory.

2. It was inaccessible, except with the blood of sacrifices—

No person whatever was to enter into the sanctuary, except the high-priest; nor could he enter except on the great day of annual expiation; nor even then, except with the blood of beasts, that had been offered in sacrifice to God, verse 7.

"Not without blood." Thus is there no admittance into Heaven but through the blood of our great Sacrifice. Not even our great High-priest himself, when he had become the Surety and Substitute of sinners, could enter there without his own precious blood, verse 12; and Heaven itself needed, as it were, to be purified from the defilement it contracted through the admission of sinners into it, even as the sanctuary, with all the vessels of it, were purified from the pollutions they had contracted through the ministry of sinful man, verse 21, 23 with Leviticus 16:16.

3. It was the repository of all the principal memorials of God's power and grace—

The Apostle enumerates the various things which were deposited in the holy of holies, verse 4, 5. The Apostle does not say that the censer, or altar of incense, was in the holy of holies (for it was on the outside of the veil), but that the holy of holies had it: that being of very distinguished use, when the high-priest entered within the veil; all of them, either memorials of God's providential care, or exhibitions of his covenant love.

And are they not all in Heaven, concentrated and combined in the person of Christ? Christ is the true ark, in which the law is kept, and fulfilled: and, while he makes intercession for his people, he is also the food of their souls, and the performer of all those miracles of grace that are wrought on their behalf. We cannot behold him, but we must immediately be persuaded that God is able and willing to accomplish for us all that our necessities may require.

But while we see that the true tabernacle, even Heaven itself, was prefigured by the holy places made with hands, let us consider,

II. The end for which our Lord ascended there—

Our Lord could not go into the earthly tabernacle, because he was not of that tribe to which the priesthood belonged: but into the heavenly sanctuary he went:

1. As our Forerunner—

God has ordained, that all his people would one day dwell with him around his throne. All true penitents now are priests unto God, whether they are Jews or Gentiles, male or female, Revelation 1:6; and Jesus is gone, as he himself tells us, to prepare places for them, John 14:2-3. He is expressly said to be gone within the veil as our Forerunner, Hebrews 6:20. Let us then contemplate him in this view; and look forward to the time when we shall follow him within the veil, and "be presented faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy."

2. As our Head and Representative—

It was not as an individual merely that Christ ascended into Heaven, but as the Head and Representative of his redeemed people. All that he did and suffered was in their place and stead. Hence they are said to be "circumcised in him," and to be "buried with him in baptism," and "crucified with him." In the same capacity also he went within the veil, to appear in the presence of God for us. Hence we are said to be "risen with him," yes, to be already "sitting with him in heavenly places! Ephesians 2:6." And on this our hope greatly depends: for, because "our life is hidden with Christ in God, we may be assured that, when he shall appear, we also shall appear with him in glory! Colossians 3:3-4."

3. As our Advocate and High-priest—

It is in this view that the Apostle principally speaks of him in the text. The end for which the high-priest entered into the typical sanctuary, was, to present the blood of the sacrifice, and to cover the mercy-seat with the clouds of incense. It was precisely thus

that Jesus went into the Heaven of heavens for us. He is gone to present his own blood before the throne of God, and to plead the merit of that blood on behalf of sinful men. And it is on this very account that he is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him, namely, because he ever lives to make intercession for them, Hebrews 7:25.

INFERENCES—

1. How excellent is the Gospel salvation!

The Mosaic economy was excellent in comparison with the state of heathen, because it provided a way of acceptance with God, a way, too, that was of divine appointment. But the Gospel points out to us:

a far greater Priest,
officiating in a nobler tabernacle,
presenting an infinitely richer sacrifice,
and offering a more powerful intercession on our behalf!

Let us then value this Gospel, and search into its contents, and seek its blessings with our whole hearts.

2. What encouragement have all to embrace and to hold fast this Gospel!

Were anything lacking to complete the work of salvation for us, we might well hesitate before we embraced the overtures of the Gospel. But a view of Christ as our High-priest dissipates our fears, and encourages both the weakest and the vilest to come to God through him. "If any man sins," says the Apostle, "we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is also the atoning sacrifice for our sins! 1 John 2:2." Again it is said, "Seeing we have a great High-priest who has passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession, Hebrews 4:14;" and again, "Having boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, and having a high-priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, Hebrews 9:19; Hebrews 9:21-22." Let us then make this improvement of the subject; so shall we, each in his appointed order, appear before God for ourselves, and dwell in his immediate presence for ever and ever!

#2306

CHRIST'S APPEARANCE TO TAKE AWAY SIN

Hebrews 9:26

"Now once, in the end of the world, has he appeared, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."

TO obtain a just knowledge of the Gospel, we should view it in its connection with the law; partly, in a way of comparison; and partly, in a way of contrast. From the comparison, we shall ascertain its nature: from the contrast, we shall learn its excellency.

Compare the Gospel it with the law; and you will find that it agrees with the law, as the seal with the impression on the wax: there is not the smallest feature in the law, to which there will not be found a corresponding lineament in the Gospel.

In contrast, there are in the Gospel points which the law could by no means exhibit.

Its priests were men, who needed first to offer for themselves. They officiated in an earthly tabernacle; and presented only beasts, for offerings; and presented them often, on account of their inefficacy to expiate the sins of men.

But the High-priest under the Gospel is no other than God himself; who, having assumed our nature, offered his own body, once for all; and is entered into Heaven itself, there to carry on and perfect his work for all who come to God through him. It is in this view that the Lord Jesus Christ is spoken of in the passage before us. He is contrasted with the priests under the law, as "not having entered, like them, into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into Heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us:" and as "not offering himself often, as the high-priest entered into the holy place every year, with blood of others; for then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world. But now once, in the end of the world, has he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."

From these words I shall take occasion to show:

I. The insufficiency of the Mosaic sacrifices—

By "the end of the world," we are to understand, the end of the Mosaic dispensation. That period is called the Fullness of Times, Galatians 4:4. Ephesians 1:10; and the Last Days, Hebrews 1:2. 1 Peter 1:20; and the Ends of the World, 1 Corinthians 10:11. During that period, sacrifices were offered. But they were insufficient for the removal of sin.

1. The Old Testament sacrifices had not in themselves any suitableness to take away sin—

What virtue could there be in the blood of bulls and of goats? "It was not possible for them to take away sin Hebrews 10:4."

2. The Old Testament sacrifices were not ordained of God to take away sin—

They were intended only to prefigure Christ; and to direct the eyes of men to him, and to keep up the expectation of him in the world, Hebrews 8:5.

3. The very repetition of the Old Testament sacrifices was an acknowledgment of this—

Had they fully expiated sin, there would have been no occasion for the repetition of them; and "they would therefore, of course, have ceased to be offered, Hebrews 10:1-2."

In contrast with them, we here behold:

II. The perfection of the Christian Sacrifice—

"To put away sin, the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world."

He was a proper sacrifice for sin—

He was altogether spotless, both in body and soul, 1 John 3:5. In him, therefore, there was both a suitableness for a sacrifice, and sufficiency to make atonement for sin: a suitableness, because he was a partaker of our nature; and a sufficiency, because he was a partaker also of the divine nature. On him the iniquities of the world were laid, Isaiah 53:6; and under the curse due to them he died, Galatians 3:13.

By his one offering of himself, he effected what the Mosaic sacrifices never could—

He put away sin from before God, "who is reconciled to us through the blood of the cross, Colossians 1:21-22;" and he put it away also from man, both in its guilt and power. So did he cancel the guilt of men, that "all who believe in him are justified from all things, Acts 13:39;" and so did he break its power, that it never can have dominion over one of his redeemed people, Romans 6:14.

INFERENCES—

1. How highly privileged are we who live in the present age!

We have not to present to God those poor and worthless sacrifices which left the conscience still burdened with guilt, verse 9; but can plead one which is a sufficient atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world, 1 John 2:2, and "perfects for ever all those who are sanctified, Hebrews 10:14."

2. What foolishness are they guilty of, who hold fast their sins!

Think what has been done to deliver us from them. God has laid them all upon his only-begotten Son, that they might be "put away from us, as far as the east is from the west." But, in holding them fast, we say, in fact, "You shall never wash my soul, John 13:8;" I regard not your tender mercies: I prefer my sinful gratifications before all that you can do for me; and I will have them, in despite of all that you have threatened to do against me."

Say, beloved, what will be your views of this conduct, in a short time? May the Lord grant, that, before it be too late, you may believe in Christ; lest "the corner-stone, which you so ungratefully reject, would fall upon you, and grind you to powder!"

#2307

CHRIST'S SECOND COMING

Hebrews 9:27-28

"Just as man is appointed to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him."

IT is probable that many in the first ages of Christianity wondered, as indeed many even at this time do, how persons would be saved by the death of Christ, thousands of years before he came into the world; more especially since the most solemn sacrifices under the Jewish economy were of no effect beyond the year in which they were offered. But the Jewish sacrifices needed to be repeated, because they were worthless and inefficient: whereas the perfection of Christ's sacrifice gave it a retrospective and

prospective efficacy, so that, at whatever period of the world it would be offered, it needed never to be repeated. This is the scope of the passage before us; and the Apostle illustrates his argument by a solemn and acknowledged truth. To comprehend the force of his observations, we must consider,

I. Man's destination to death and judgment—

Every man must die—

This is too obvious to need a proof. Whatever be our age, condition, pursuits, and prospects—we must die. If our life were protracted to the age of Methuselah—we must die at last. God has "appointed" it; nor shall his decree be either defeated or reversed. But it is only "once" that we can die. Though some few who have been miraculously restored to life, have died a second time, we must not expect to return from our graves. If the great work of salvation is not completed before we die, we shall be undone for ever! Ecclesiastes 9:10.

After death we shall all be judged—

God has appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness, and reward every man according to his works. And this also shall be but "once:" for, though every man's state is fixed as soon as he goes into the invisible world, it is not until the general resurrection that his body shall participate in the portion assigned to his soul. And, as there is no return from death to another state of probation, so there is no appeal from the sentence that shall be passed in that day.

The Apostle having mentioned this, proceeds to state,

II. A similar appointment respecting Christ—

Christ "once" died for the sins of men—

Though in appearance our Savior died like other men—yet in reality his death was altogether different from theirs. He died as a sacrifice for sin: his death was that very atonement which had been typically represented from the beginning of the world. But though he was to be "an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world," he died only "once." The legal sacrifices were constantly repeated, because they were rather "remembrances of sins" than a real expiation of them. But "he, by one offering of himself, has perfected for ever those who are sanctified, Hebrews 10:14;" and "many," even all that believe in him, have their sins removed for ever by virtue of it.

He also will "appear a second time" at the day of judgment—

At his first coming he appeared "in the likeness of sinful flesh, Romans 8:3," and was treated as a sinner both by God and man: but at his second coming he will assume a very different appearance. As the high-priest, while offering the annual sacrifices, was clothed only in plain linen garments, but when he had completed his sacrifice, he came forth in his splendid robes to bless the people, Leviticus 16:23-24 with 8:7, 9 and Numbers 6:23-24; so our great High-priest will take off the garb of humiliation, and shine forth in all his majesty and glory Matthew 25:31. At his first coming, he saved not himself; but, at that day, he will impart "salvation" unto others, even to all who seek him in sincerity and truth.

The Apostle having introduced God's appointment respecting man to illustrate that respecting Christ, we shall point out,

III. The correspondence and connection between them—

The mention of death and judgment as appointed unto man was not at all necessary to the Apostle's argument: but, as an illustration of it, it was very pertinent.

1. Death and judgment are the consequences of sin; and the first and second coming of Christ shall be the means of salvation.

If there had been no sin, there would have been no death, nor any occasion for a day of judgment: and, if Christ had not come to bear the sins of men, there would have been no salvation: all must have inevitably and eternally perished. Moreover, as the law required that the High-priest, after having finished his work within the veil, would come forth to bless the people; so in the Divine appointment, Christ's second coming is necessary to the complete salvation of his followers.

2. Death and judgment shall be fatal to unbelievers; and the first and second coming of Christ shall be the means of salvation to them that believe—

The Lord Jesus, as a Judge, will condemn the wicked, "he will come to take vengeance on those who know not God, and that obey not his Gospel." But as a Priest, he will come forth only to bless his redeemed, who are praying without, while he is interceding for them within the veil, Luke 1:9-10. They are fitly represented as "looking for him;" and he will appear to their unutterable and eternal joy.

ADDRESS—

1. To those who are regardless of their spiritual welfare—

O that you would duly consider the certainty and nearness of death and judgment! You would then soon turn from vanity and sin, and labor to secure a saving interest in Christ. Let this subject then dwell upon your minds, until you are quickened by it to seek the Lord, and have obtained through him the remission of your sins.

2. To those who are anxious to save their souls—

If you really look to Christ to take away your sins, you need not be afraid of death and judgment. You may look forward to Christ's second coming, not with comfort only, but unspeakable delight. Stand then in this posture, looking for and hastening to that blessed day, 2 Peter 3:12. If he tarries, wait for him; and in due time you shall hear from his lips that reviving sentence, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world!"

#2308

SEASONS OF PENITENCE RECOMMENDED

Hebrews 10:1-4

"The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming--not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."

IN the institutions of the Mosaic law, as burdensome as they were, God consulted the best interests of his people. Repentance, faith, and obedience, were inculcated in them all. The daily sacrifices and frequent ablutions were intended to show them that they stood in need of mercy and of spiritual renovation: and the authority with which they were enjoined, taught them, that their whole happiness depended on an entire submission to the will of God.

Those ordinances had also a further use; which was to lead the minds of all to the contemplation of mysteries, which would in due season be more fully revealed. Those ordinances did not themselves convey any solid or lasting benefit: they were mere shadows, which indicated indeed a substance; but which would vanish away, when that substance would appear. This is the view given of the law in the passage before us.

Hence it appears that the most solemn institutions of the law, not excepting the sacrifices offered on the great day of annual expiation, were, in fact, no more than mere "remembrances of sins," which could never be removed, but by that better sacrifice which would in due time be offered.

But that we may have a fuller insight into this subject, I will endeavor more distinctly to show:

I. For what end those annual remembrances of sins were enjoined—

Doubtless they were intended, as the whole of the Mosaic ritual also was, to separate the Jewish people more entirely from all the nations of the world. But they were more particularly designed,

1. To make them sensible of their need of a Savior—

Every offering had this tendency: no man could see his victim bleed, without seeing and acknowledging what was his own desert before God. But, if there had been no day of annual expiation appointed, the people would have been ready to imagine that every offering which they had presented to God had actually taken away the sin for which it had been offered. To guard against this fatal error, a day was appointed annually for a more especial remembrance of their sins, and for a deeper humiliation of their souls before God on account of them. Thus they were taught that neither their repentances nor their sacrifices had really availed to put away their sins: for, if they had, there had been no occasion for a repetition of them.

Moreover, the same ordinances being still appointed annually, and annually observed, they were made to feel that not even these more solemn rites had been able to prevail for the expiation of sin; so that, in fact, the guilt contracted throughout their whole lives still abode upon their souls; no offerings which they had ever presented, having been able to remove it.

In the view of this, they were particularly required to "afflict their souls, Leviticus 16:29; Leviticus 16:31." And, in truth, this ordinance

was well calculated to produce in them the deepest humiliation: for, having occasion every year to review their lives through the past year; and to add, as it were, the sum of their recent iniquities to the incalculable score that was against them in consequence of former transgressions; and being at the same time necessitated to see that nothing which they either had done, or could do, could cancel the smallest portion of their debt; they would, of necessity, be led to cry for mercy with the deepest contrition, and to acknowledge their need of that Savior whom they were instructed to expect.

2. To show them the insufficiency of the legal sacrifices—

Nothing could carry stronger conviction with it than this particular ordinance: for, if former sacrifices had prevailed, why would they be repeated? What occasion was there for the annual offerings, if the occasional ones had answered their full end? Or why would the same sins be atoned for in a future year, which have been expiated in the present year, if the present expiation has been satisfactory and complete?

Here, then, was the axe laid to the root of all self-righteous conceits. It was to no purpose that these ordinances were of Divine appointment; or that they were observed according to the strict letter of the law: they were never intended to serve as real expiations of sin; nor was the observance of them ever intended to form a justifying righteousness before God. They were intended only to shadow forth a Savior, to whom all must look, and through whom all must be justified. The very repetition of them was, in fact, not only a remembrance of the sins which rendered a Savior necessary; but a pledge, that such a Savior as they needed would in due time be sent to them.

3. To direct their eyes to that Great Sacrifice who would in due time be offered—

In every sacrifice which was offered, they saw the Lord Jesus Christ exhibited before them: and were reminded, that in due time he would "come to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself." They were informed that there was to arise from the loins of Abraham, "a Seed, in whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed." The Prophets Isaiah and Daniel had fully described the way in which the promised seed would effect the work assigned him: that he would "be cut off, but not for himself;" that he would be "wounded for our transgressions, and be bruised for our iniquities, Isaiah 53:5-6; Isaiah 53:11. Daniel 9:24;" that he would "make his soul an offering for sin; and that in this way he would "finish transgression, and make an end of sin, and bring in an everlasting righteousness," by which all sinners who would believe in him, would be "justified."

Now, all this was set before them; and was seen by them, with more or less distinctness, according to the faith they had in exercise: and in every sacrifice which, from year to year, was offered, they saw a herald sent, and heard his proclamation, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!"

That we may bring the matter more home to ourselves, let us consider,

II. What good may be expected from stated remembrances of sins among us—

It is granted, that nothing equivalent to the Mosaic ordinances is required of us. Yet, if we were to appoint stated seasons for ourselves—seasons for reviewing our past lives, and for special humiliation of our souls before God; I am persuaded we would find it highly conducive to our spiritual welfare. Such seasons would be useful,

1. For the deepening of our repentance—

We are apt to lose, very speedily, the convictions which sin has fastened upon our mind. At first, perhaps, they are pungent, and cause considerable anguish; but in a little time the impression wears away, and we almost forget that we have sinned at all. But if we had stated seasons for calling our ways to remembrance, our past convictions would be revived, and our humiliation before God be greatly promoted. The sins of early life being thus from time to time set before us, and those of daily incursion being added to them, we would have juster views of our extreme unworthiness. The whole life would then appear to be, what in reality it is—one continued scene of iniquity. For lack of such seasons of recollection, men view their sins as they do the heavens in a cloudy night, when they can see only here and there a star of greater magnitude, and at remote distances. Whereas, if our self-examinations were strict, and our retrospect frequent, our lives would appear rather like the heavens in the clearest night, full of stars of a greater or lesser order, and so connected as scarcely to leave an interval between them. With such views of ourselves, our repentance would not be slight, partial, transient—but deep, universal, permanent.

2. For the endearing of the Savior to us—

True is that saying, that "where much is forgiven, men will love much; and little, where little has been forgiven." Now, if we are in the habit of bringing before our eyes the sins of our whole life, and of viewing them, even as God does, in the aggregate, how shall we adore that mercy of God that has been extended to us, and that love of Christ which he has evinced in giving himself for us! Truly, it will appear almost incredible that even God himself would be capable of such condescension and grace.

This self-knowledge is at the root of the experience of the saints in Heaven. Behold them all prostrate before the throne, and casting down their crowns at the Savior's feet; while they sing, "To him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood!" This is the state of mind which self-knowledge has a tendency to generate: and if our seasons of humiliation were more deep and frequent, we would more resemble the glorified saints, both in the nature and in the expressions of our joy.

3. For the augmenting of our vigilance against the recurrence of sin—

It is a truth not generally considered, that the sins which more easily beset us in early life, continue, more or less, our besetting sins to the end of our days. Pride, envy, wrath, malice, lewdness, covetousness, rarely leave the soul of which they have once got an undisturbed possession. Now, if a person has been in the habit of self-examination from year to year, and of seeing by what temptations chiefly he has been overcome, he will know the better against what he needs more especially to watch: he will have seen, how, on many occasions, that which, if resisted in the first moment, might have been easily overcome—has, by being harbored in the mind, acquired an ascendancy over him, and defied his utmost efforts to subdue it.

He will have seen, especially, how he has been betrayed, by unwatchfulness, into sins to which he had no natural propensity; and that there is not an evil in the human heart against which he has not reason to watch and pray. In a word, he will feel the need of committing himself wholly to the guidance of his God, and of crying continually, "Hold me up, and I shall be safe!"

From this subject, then, we may learn,

1. What use to make of the present season—

There are seasons which seem to claim somewhat more than an ordinary regard. The commencement of a new year, or the return of our birthday, may well lead us to a review of the past year, and consequently of our whole lives: and, were it so improved, how far more profitable would we find the season, than if it were spent in carnal mirth!

I may add, too, how important is this suggestion in reference to eternity! Thousands go into the eternal world without having ever, in their whole lives, devoted one single day to the revision of their lives, and to humiliation for their sins. God forbid, my brethren, that you would be of that unhappy number! Let me recommend it to you all to begin, this day, to call your ways to remembrance; to enter minutely into the sins of your early youth, and of every succeeding year, even to the present hour.

Let me recommend you to mark, not merely the sins of greater enormity, but those which the world accounts as slight and trivial. Let me recommend to you to notice the sins of omission, as well as of commission; and the sins of defect, as well as those of utter neglect. Could you be prevailed upon to take such a retrospect, it could not fail of being attended with the best consequences to your spiritual edification in this life, and to your eternal welfare in the life to come.

2. What especially to aim at, in all the exercises of your souls—

There is a frame of mind peculiarly characteristic of the advanced Christian: and which, I conceive, is suggested by the considerations of my text. You have seen that the most pious of God's people, no less than others, were to observe a day in every year for the special purpose of remembering their past sins, and of afflicting their souls on account of them; while, at the same time, they were to renew their applications to God for mercy through the appointed sacrifices. A sense of sin was not to weaken their hope of God's mercy, on the one hand; nor was their confidence in God's mercy to weaken their sense of sin, on the other hand: both were to be retained in constant and united exercise; so that, while they "rejoiced with trembling," they might tremble with rejoicing.

Now, this is a state of mind by no means so common as might be wished. The generality of Christians, if they could feel towards God as a loving, obedient, and devoted spouse towards her husband, would conceive that they had attained the highest state of which they are capable. But, to make that image fully suited to our case, we must suppose the spouse to have been originally taken from the lowest and most degraded state by her husband; and, after her union with him, to have dishonored him, and debased herself, by the grossest enormities. We must further suppose her husband to have followed her with the most affectionate entreaties to return to him; to have assured her of his most entire forgiveness; and, having prevailed on her to return, to be exercising towards her all imaginable kindness, without ever once uttering a single word of upbraiding.

Now, suppose her to become faithful and obedient, and you will have a juster conception of the Christian's state. Though her husband has forgiven her—can you imagine that she has forgiven herself? On the contrary, does not every act of love on her husband's part fill her with deeper humility and self-abhorrence, for having ever acted so basely towards one of so exalted a character? Does not her whole fellowship with him, from day to day, augment her admiration of him, and her loathing of herself? Yes! Though forgiven, she never for a moment forgets what she is, or what she deserves: and her whole soul is prostrate before God and man, even in the midst of her fondest endearments or her sublimest joys.

Here is the Christian character: here is the character which I wish you all to attain. Do not mistake; you need not rush into gross sins

in order to have a foundation for it: the spiritual adulteries of every one of you are manifest enough, without any fresh iniquities—you need only see how you have treated your divine Husband, and what base lusts you have harbored in your bosoms, from your youth up even until now, and you will see that you have need to "walk softly before God all your days," and to "loath yourselves before him in dust and ashes." This is "walking humbly with God." This will not abate either your confidence or your joy: but it will temper the one with fear, and the other with contrition!

#2309

CHRIST SUPERSEDING THE LEGAL SACRIFICES

Hebrews 10:5-10

"Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burned offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am--it is written about me in the scroll-- I have come to do your will, O God.'" First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burned offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

THERE is not any important truth contained in the New Testament, which was not before revealed in the Old. But we have an advantage over the Jews, in that the obscurity which was cast over the language of prophecy, is removed by the interpretations of men divinely inspired to explain the sacred oracles. Hence we are enabled to see what the Jews could never comprehend, though plainly and repeatedly declared to them: God's determination to abrogate the Mosaic economy, in order to make way for the Christian dispensation. This was declared by David, while the law was yet in full force: and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews both quotes his words in proof of this point, and confirms them by additional declarations to the same effect.

We shall consider,

I. The quotation as explained by the Apostle—

In his comment on David's words, the Apostle throws great light upon:

1. What is expressed in them—

The Psalm beyond all doubt refers to Christ: for it was not possible that David would boast of his own obedience as superseding the law; since a compliance with the law constituted a very essential part of his duty. If it is thought that what is spoken in verse 12 is adverse to this construction, it must be remembered that the sins of the world were Christ's by imputation, Isaiah 53:6; and therefore they might justly draw from him that complaint.

In the Psalm David speaks in the person of Christ, whom he represents as addressing the Father to this effect: 'You never designed the legal sacrifices to take away sin; that office you have assigned to me: and I have most willingly undertaken it, nor will I ever relinquish my services until I have completed all that I have undertaken.'

That the sacrifices were never ordained to take away sin is plain, from the contempt poured upon them by God himself in comparison with moral duties, 1 Samuel 15:22. Hosea 6:6. Yes, and absolutely too, if unaccompanied with suitable dispositions in the offerers, Isaiah 1:11-14; Isaiah 66:3.

That Christ was sent into the world for that end appears also from the very first promise made to man, that "the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head, Genesis 3:15."

That he willingly undertook the office is declared by David much more strongly than in the passage as quoted by the Apostle. In the passage as quoted in my text, it is merely said, "I come to do your will, O God:" but in the Psalm it is written, "Lo, I come; I delight to do your will, O my God; yes your law is within my heart." All which additional expressions show the zeal with which Christ undertook our cause, and executed the arduous work that was assigned him.

That he would never relinquish it until it was accomplished was also strongly declared in those words, "My ears you have opened," which refer to the custom of boring the ear of a servant who refused to be liberated at the day of release, and engaged to abide for ever in his master's service, Exodus 21:5-6.

The Apostle, in citing the passage, varies it in words, though he adheres to it in sense. He says, "A body have you prepared for me;" that is: It was necessary to the completion of my undertaking, that I would have somewhat to offer in sacrifice; and therefore you

have prepared for me a body in the womb of a pure virgin, that being free from the taint and corruption transmitted to all the posterity of Adam, it might be fit to be offered in sacrifice for the sins of the world. The Apostle's meaning is precisely expressed in Philippians 2:6-8.

But, to the inconceivable advantage of the Church, the Apostle brings forth from David's words,

2. What is implied in them—

Here we see the benefit of having an inspired commentator on the Old Testament. No Jew could have conceived all that was designed to be revealed in these words: but we are informed by God himself, that "when it was said, Lo, I come to do your will, O God," it was designed to intimate that all the legal sacrifices would be swept away, and the whole Jewish economy be superseded by the Christian dispensation, "He takes away the first, that he may establish the second." This was an explanation of God's hidden purpose, an explanation, which no uninspired man could have dared to offer. But in several other parts of this epistle are similar explanations given, and not in a way of conjecture, but of authoritative declaration.

Thus, from the mention of a New Covenant which God would make with his people, the Apostle infers, "In that he says: A New Covenant, he has made the first old. Now that which decays and waxes old is ready to vanish away, Hebrews 8:8; Hebrews 8:13."

In another place, having cited God's declaration that, to those who laid hold on that covenant, their sins and iniquities he would remember no more, he draws this inference, "Now where remission of sins is, there is no more offering for sin; and consequently all the Jewish sacrifices are swept away! Hebrews 10:17-18.

Again, in another place having cited the words of the Prophet Haggai, "Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also Heaven," he says, "This word—yet once more, signifies the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things which are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain, Hebrews 12:26-27."

Thus we have obtained a deep insight into the meaning of our text, and may with confidence proceed to consider:

II. His declaration founded upon it—

There are two important points which the Apostle deduces from these words of David, namely:

1. That salvation flows from God's will as the source—

Sanctification imports a setting apart of anything for God. Hence the tabernacle with all its vessels are said to have been sanctified, Exodus 40:10-12; and Christ himself says, "For their sakes I sanctify myself, John 17:19;" and it is in this sense that the term "sanctified" is used in the text, verse 14; it means a separation for God, in order to eternal salvation.

Now it is solely from the "will of God" thus made known to his Son, and thus fulfilled by him, that any are made partakers of salvation. It was not possible for any such plan to have originated with any other than God himself. When God's dealings with the fallen angels were considered, who would have imagined that man, partaking of their iniquity, would yet be rescued from their doom?

Supposing that such a thought could have entered into the mind of man, who could have contrived such a way of maintaining the honor of the Divine government, and of making the discordant attributes of justice and mercy to harmonize in the salvation of man? If such an expedient as the substitution of God's own Son in the place of sinners could have been devised, who could have dared to propose it to the Deity! Who could have prevailed upon him to acquiesce in it? The more this is considered, the more will the salvation of man appear to be totally independent of man himself (as far as respects the contriving or the meriting of it), and to be the fruit of infinite wisdom, sovereign grace, and unbounded love! 2 Timothy 1:9. From the first laying of the foundation, to the bringing forth of the top-stone, we must cry, Grace, grace unto it! Zechariah 4:6-7.

2. That salvation flows from Christ's sacrifice as the means—

It might seem that men, under the law, were accepted on account of the sacrifices, which were offered according to the Mosaic ritual. But, not to mention the impossibility that the blood of bulls and of goats would take away sin, verse 4, the very repetition of those sacrifices showed their insufficiency for the removal of guilt, or for the satisfying of men's consciences, verse 1:3. Hebrews 9:9. They had no effect but as they led the offerers to the Lord Jesus Christ, or expressed their faith in his sin-atoning sacrifice.

All who have ever found acceptance with God, whether before the law, or under it, or since its abolition, have been admitted to mercy purely "through the one offering of Jesus Christ." Nothing but that could ever satisfy Divine justice; nothing but that could ever atone for one single sin. Nor can any creature, to the end of the world, ever obtain favor with God, but in consideration of that sacrifice presented to God for us, and pleaded by us as the one ground of our hope! Acts 4:12. 1 Corinthians 3:11.

Here I cannot but call your attention to the minuteness and force of David's statement, and to the redoubled force and energy

expressed in the Apostle's citation of it. David enumerates the different kinds of sacrifices, in order to show that none (whether those burned outside the camp, Leviticus 16:27, or those consumed on the altar, Exodus 29:38-42, or those of which but a small part was burned, and the rest was divided between the priest and the offerer, Leviticus 7:1-6; Leviticus 7:19, were of any avail to take away sin.

Twice does the Apostle repeat this enumeration of them, in order the more abundantly to manifest the eternal purpose of God to liberate us from the Jewish yoke, and to establish throughout the world the purer dispensation of the Gospel; so that all, whether Jews or Gentiles, would henceforth "know nothing as a ground of hope, but Jesus Christ and him crucified!"

INFERENCES—

1. How vain is men's confidence in any services of their own!

To have been baptized in our infancy, to have attended punctually the outward duties of the Sabbath, and to have waited occasionally upon the Lord at his table—are deemed in general satisfactory evidences of our conversion to God, and sufficient grounds for our hope towards him. But, if the whole multitude of legal institutions, framed by God's own order, and according to a model shown to Moses in the mount, were of no value as recommending men to God—then how much less can the few services which we perform be sufficient to procure us acceptance with him?

But it may be said, that moral services are more pleasing to God than ceremonial: true; but we are not told that God willed them, any more than the others, as means of effecting our reconciliation with him. It was the incarnation and death of Christ that God "willed;" and, in a remarkable correspondence with the text, he thrice, by an audible voice from Heaven, said: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, verse 8 with Matthew 3:17. Let every self-righteous hope then be banished; and let us learn to glory in Christ alone! Galatians 6:14.

2. What encouragement have all to devote themselves to God through Christ!

We have the united testimony of Prophets and Apostles that God wills the salvation of men through the sacrifice of his own Son, and that Christ as willingly offered himself a sacrifice in order to effect their salvation. What more can be needed but that we go to God in that new and living way, which is so clearly pointed out to us? We can have no doubt of God's willingness to save, or of the sufficiency of that salvation which he has provided for us.

Let nothing then keep us back from God: but let us look to Christ as the atoning sacrifice for our sins, 1 John 2:2, and plead the merit of his all-atoning blood. Thus, sanctifying ourselves in his name, we shall be perfected before God, verse 14 with Hebrews 9:12; being sanctified also by the Holy Spirit, we shall be acceptable in the sight of God and our Father for ever and ever! Romans 15:16.

#2310

THE PERFECTION OF CHRIST'S SACRIFICE

Hebrews 10:14-17

"By one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more."

IT is a favorite sentiment with some, that we need not study anything but the four Gospels in order to attain a complete view of our holy religion. But while I acknowledge that a person who studies the four Gospels may certainly learn the way of salvation from them, I must add that his views of Christianity will of necessity be very imperfect, if he does not avail himself of the further light which is afforded to him in the epistles.

To what purpose has the Apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, written so argumentatively on the subject of justification by faith alone, if we do not derive from his statement a fuller knowledge of that fundamental doctrine, than we could have acquired without it?

And who will say that he could have attained from the Gospels, or even from the Mosaic law itself, such clear views of the priestly office of Christ as are set before us in the Epistle to the Hebrews? There the parallel between his and the Aaronic priesthood is recorded, and the superiority of his priesthood is pointed out with a fullness and precision which no uninspired man could ever have attained.

The tabernacle in which the Levitical priests ministered was glorious; but Christ's was more glorious, being not made with hands,

even his own sacred body.

They were appointed to their office by a command; he, with an oath.

They entered into a holy place on earth; he, into Heaven itself.

They entered with the blood of beasts; he, with his own blood.

Their sacrifices purified the patterns of heavenly things; his, the heavenly things themselves.

Their sacrifices purified legally, the flesh; his sacrifice purified, really, the conscience.

Their priests were only priests; he, a Priest to God, and a Testator to us.

They offered their sacrifices often; he, only once.

They offered for themselves first; he, for us only.

They entered the veil to come forth again; he, never to come forth until he shall come to judge the world.

They obtained a temporary remission of some sins; he obtained an everlasting remission of all sin!

It is in this last view that his office is spoken of in the passage before us. The Aaronic priests offered often, because their offerings could never take away sin. But he, "by his one offering, has perfected for ever them that are sanctified: whereof the Holy Spirit also is a witness to us."

The peculiar solemnity with which his asseveration is here confirmed, even by an appeal to God himself, will lead me to consider,

I. The truth attested—

A more important truth than this can scarcely be conceived: that Christ's one offering has done that which all the Levitical sacrifices never could have done! It has procured for all who trust in it, a full and perfect and everlasting remission of all their sins.

Let us notice this truth as contrasted with the ordinances of the Mosaic law—

The Levitical sacrifices were renewed from year to year, because of their inefficiency: but Christ's sacrifice was offered only once, because it completely answered every end for which it was designed.

The Levitical sacrifices perfected no man, either as to his acceptance before God, or as to the peace of his own soul: as far as they had any efficacy, they prevailed only for a year; and then must be repeated, in order to obtain a further remission. But Christ's sacrifice rendered men perfect, both before God and in their own consciences. God was so satisfied with it, that he has nothing more to demand at the hands of those who trust in it. He considers it as a full discharge of all that the law requires of us, and a full price for all that our souls can need either in time or eternity. The sinner who looks to it may well be satisfied, since God himself is satisfied, and all the demands of law and justice are satisfied.

Thus, all who are "sanctified" to the service of their God, whatever their past sins may have been—are perfected, and that for ever! Sins of the deepest die are purged by this sacrifice; and "all who believe in it, are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses."

In this view, what a glorious truth it is!

How honorable to Christ! how consoling to us! As it respects the Lord Jesus Christ, it shows how completely he has effected all which he came into the world to do. "He has made an end of sin, and made reconciliation for iniquity;" and "obtained eternal redemption for us." Nothing is lacking to complete his work: his one offering has effected all.

As it respects us, we have in Christ's sacrifice all that we can desire:

when once we recollect who he is, not man only, but God manifest in the flesh;

when we recollect the covenant-engagements entered into between his Father and him; he on his part undertaking to make atonement for sin; and the Father undertaking to accept it in our behalf;

when we recollect that he has been raised from the dead in proof of his having fulfilled all his engagements; and that he is now invested with all power in Heaven and in earth to impart to sinners the blessings he has purchased for them—then what more can we want? The soul acquiesces in this mysterious appointment, and confidently relies upon it, assured, that, if salvation is not to be found in him, it is not to be found at all.

This truth being attested by the Holy Spirit, let us consider,

II. The testimony adduced—

The witness to this truth is no other than "the Holy Spirit"—

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God:" and whether the writers of it were Prophets or Apostles, "they all spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." Throughout the whole Scripture, too, that Divine Spirit has one great object, which is to testify of Christ. By the prophets he testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ, and of the glory that would follow. Indeed, "the testimony of Jesus was the spirit of prophecy" throughout, Revelation 19:10, and in this light we should regard all that the prophets have written. We should consider their words, not merely as the words of the Holy Spirit, but as a testimony given by the Holy Spirit, in order to show us what we should believe respecting the Lord Jesus, and to increase our faith in him. And, whatever his testimony is, we should give the most implicit credit to it, adoring him for his wonderful goodness in thus condescending to teach the inquiring, and to confirm the doubting, soul. On this occasion,

His testimony is most convincing—

The passage cited by the Apostle, is taken from the prophecies of Jeremiah, Jeremiah 31:31-34. He has before cited it in a preceding chapter, Hebrews 8:8-12. There it is adduced more at length, in order to show that the Jews under the Mosaic dispensation were taught to look forward to a New Covenant, and to regard their own as waxing old.

In the passage before us, a smaller portion of it only is adduced, in order to mark in a peculiar manner the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice for the sins of the world. Its force will be best seen by contrasting it with the provisions made for the forgiveness of sin under the Mosaic dispensation. There was no actual forgiveness of sins obtained by the sacrifices which the law prescribed: they were pardoned, so to speak, for a year only; at the expiration of which time, the same sacrifices were to be again offered, in order to the obtaining of a protracted pardon. Thus the very sacrifices which were offered for sin, were rather a remembrance of sins than a real expiation of them; so that the conscience of the sinner was never relieved from a sense of guilt, and never brought to the enjoyment of solid peace.

But, under that very dispensation, the Holy Spirit testified that provision was made by the New Covenant, for the full and everlasting remission of all sin, since God expressly engaged, "Their sins and iniquities I will remember no more:" and consequently no further sacrifice was needed to be offered for them. This testimony comes exactly to the point. The Aaronic priests repeated annually the same sacrifices; because the sins for which they were offered, were still kept in remembrance by God: but, in consequence of the offering which Christ has made, the sins of those who believe in him shall "never be remembered:" and consequently, without any repetition of his sacrifice, his people are "perfected forever," being brought into perfect peace with God, and perfect peace in their own consciences.

Hence we see,

1. How amply the Scripture testifies of Christ!

It is not merely of his Messiahship that the prophets speak: they enter fully into every part of his character, and work, and offices. There is not anything which we are concerned to know respecting him, which is not revealed in the Old Testament. The revelation of him is indeed less clear than in the New Testament, but not a whit less glorious. When the true sense of the different passages is ascertained, there will be found truths of which the superficial reader has no conception.

Our blessed Lord says, "Search the Scriptures; for they are they that testify of me." And if we would fulfill that duty with care and diligence, and with earnest prayer to God for the teachings of his Spirit, we would find in the Scriptures an inexhaustible mine of wealth, and be enriched by them with all "the unsearchable riches of Christ! Proverbs 2:1-6."

2. What loss they sustain, who receive not its testimony!

It is a lamentable fact, that the generality of professing Christians are looking out for some other offering to present to God, in order to effect their reconciliation with him. Every considerate person will sometimes put this question to himself, "With what shall I come before the Lord?" And the ignorant conceit of Balak is that which then presents itself to his mind, "Shall I come before him with burned-offerings, with calves of a year old? 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?"

But if men read even the Jewish Scriptures with attention, they might see how erroneous such views were, and how vain such hopes are. They would see that the New Covenant, which has been ratified by the blood of Christ, prescribes a very different method of acceptance with God: they would see that the one offering of Christ is a sufficient atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world, and that all attempts to add to it are vain.

Dear brethren, believe, I beg you, the witness of the Holy Spirit on this all-important subject. "Make not God himself a liar," as John

expresses it, by denying or doubting this record. Be assured that he will not deceive you. If this were the testimony of a fallible man, you might well question it: but when Prophets and Apostles, all inspired by the Holy Spirit, concur in it, you should embrace it with your whole hearts, and rely upon it with your whole souls.

3. How exalted are the privileges of every true believer!

All who are savingly interested in the one offering of Christ upon the cross, are "perfected forever." God has cast all their sins behind his back, and into the very depths of the sea. He has not only forgiven, but, if I may so speak, has forgotten, all their sins. They are blotted out as a morning cloud. True it is, that they still need the application of the same blood to their consciences, because they are yet compassed with infirmities, so that even their holy things need to be cleansed from the iniquity that cleaves to them. They are like persons who have been washed in a bath; they are clean every whit; yet need they to wash their feet, because they contract defilement in walking even from the bath, John 13:8-10.

But as to all their former sins, they are altogether blotted out of the book of God's remembrance. Yet let it not therefore be supposed that they should be forgotten by us. No! they should be ever before us as a ground of humiliation, though not as a ground of fear: and the more assured we are that God is pacified towards us, the more should we loath ourselves; and pant the more to "be sanctified wholly, in body, soul, and spirit."

#2311

THE WAY OF ACCESS TO GOD THROUGH THE VEIL

Hebrews 10:19-22

"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water."

MAN, by the fall, lost that fellowship with God which he had maintained in his state of innocence. The intent of Christianity is to restore him to the enjoyment of his privilege. Hence the inspired writers urge the great doctrines of the Gospel, not merely as truths which are to be believed, but as motives which are to animate and direct our conduct. The author of this epistle has set forth at large the correspondence between our blessed Lord, and the typical representations which were given of him under the Mosaic law. He now proceeds to the practical improvement of his subject. In the words before us he opens,

I. The grounds of our access to God—

They who are ignorant of their own extreme guilt and helplessness, imagine, that they can come to God without any mediator. But the Scriptures uniformly declare that the way of access to him is,

1. Through the atonement—

The original way of access to God by the covenant of works was shut up for ever upon the first transgression. Nor does that typical way which was appointed under the law continue any longer. There is "a new way" now opened to us through the veil. The human nature of Christ was represented by the veil of the temple. At the very instant that his body expired upon the cross, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom Matthew 27:51. That being the precise time of the evening sacrifice, all the worshipers in the temple had a perfect view of the holy of holies. Thus an intimation was given to them, that, by the rending of Christ's body, the way into the most holy place was opened indiscriminately to all. As the high-priest went into the typical sanctuary with the blood of the sacrifice, so might all from henceforth go into the very Heaven of heavens, as it were, with the blood of Jesus.

This way was now "consecrated for them" by Jesus himself. It was a new way, not only because it was different from that which had existed before, but because it would never wax old or vanish as the other had done, Hebrews 8:13. And it was a living way, because, while the former way prohibited access to all, except the high-priest, under the penalty of death, this new and living way infallibly imparts life to all who come to God in it.

2. Through the intercession of Christ—

The Church of God is that "house" which the temple of Solomon prefigured. In it God dwells in a more immediate manner than he ever did by the Shechinah upon the mercy-seat, 2 Corinthians 6:16. Christ, as the great High-priest, presides over this house. He is gone with his own blood into the holy of holies, Hebrews 9:12. He is there sprinkling it on our behalf in the presence of his heavenly Father. There also is He offering the incense of his continual intercession.

Under the law, the hopes of the Israelites were founded on the intercession of their high-priest. In vain was the sacrifice killed, if its blood was not carried within the veil: and in vain would it be carried thither, if it were not sprinkled before the mercy-seat, and accompanied with the clouds of incense.

Thus not even the death of Christ is, of itself, a sufficient warrant for us to draw near to God. But his intercession added to it gives us boldness, and access with confidence, Hebrews 7:25. We may go to God upon this ground as to a reconciled father. Nor need any sinner whatever deem himself too unworthy to approach his throne. All are now constituted priests unto God, 1 Peter 2:9. Revelation 1:6. And all who bring the blood of Christ with them, and rely on his prevailing intercession, shall surely find acceptance with him.

There is however something further which the worshipers of God must attend to, namely,

II. The manner in which we would approach him—

Christians are not to go to God with a crude and inconsiderate familiarity. They would consider the majesty of Him before whom they come; and would draw near to him with,

1. A sincere heart—

To go before God and declare things which we neither feel nor believe, is to mock and insult him. If our confessions are without humility, our petitions without fervor, and our thanksgivings without gratitude—then how is it possible that God would hear us? If we draw near to him with our lips while our hearts are far from him, we worship him in vain, Matthew 15:8-9. To have imbibed true notions, is not sufficient. God requires truth in our inward parts, Psalm 51:6. And those alone can worship him acceptably, who worship him in spirit and in truth, John 4:24.

2. An assured faith—

When we go to God in prayer, we should not doubt whether He is willing to accept us. We should be thoroughly persuaded that "Christ is the way, the truth, and the life, John 14:6;" and that he will save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him. To be assured of our own personal interest in him is not necessary. But we should have the most assured belief of the sufficiency of his atonement and intercession.

Nor should we limit his power and grace under an idea of our own unworthiness. To ask with a doubtful mind, is to cast a reflection upon him at the very time that we are imploring his favor. And we are warned by God himself that such wavering petitions never shall prevail, James 1:6-7.

3. A good conscience—

The conscience of every man has been more or less defiled. Nor could the offerings under the law perfect a man with respect to it, Hebrews 9:9. But the blood of Jesus will cleanse it from its defilement, Hebrews 9:14. And, if we heartily endeavor to keep it void of offense in the future, we shall enjoy the testimony of a good conscience, 2 Corinthians 1:12. But if we live in the habitual neglect of any duty, or the allowed commission of any sin, we shall have an evil and accusing conscience.

It is necessary therefore that our hearts be purged from the guilt of sin by the sprinkling of Christ's blood, and from the love and practice of sin by his Spirit. Without this we can never approach God with comfort or acceptance. We shall stand self-condemned as hypocrites, and every petition we offer will appear a solemn mockery of God. We must therefore have our hearts purified from all habitual and allowed sin. Nor unless we have, can we hope for any answer of peace unto our souls, Proverbs 28:9. Psalm 66:18.

4. A holy conduct—

As our inward principle must be pure, so must also our outward practice be. The priests washed their bodies before they went within the veil, to denote the purity which was required of them by God, Leviticus 16:4. Thus must we also be careful to possess that purity, if we would approach him with acceptance. Not that our sanctity of heart and life will procure us favor in his sight. The only grounds of our acceptance have been before stated. But there is a fitness for the enjoying of his benefits. And if we possess not that fitness, in vain shall we expect the benefits themselves.

APPLICATION—

Some may ask, What shall I do, seeing I do not possess these requisites? Shall I stay away from the throne of grace entirely? We answer, No; if we cannot ask as we ought, we would ask as we can. God will assist us if we endeavor to serve him aright; and will impart to us those holy dispositions, that shall qualify us for the reception of his richest blessings. Let us then thankfully improve the liberty he has afforded us. Let us see the veil now rent asunder, and behold our God upon his mercy-seat. Behold, his address to

every one of us is: Draw near to me, and I will draw near to you; cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded, James 4:8. In obedience to his command, let us surround his throne with fervent importunity. Let us ask for mercy and grace to help us in every time of need, Hebrews 4:16; and so open our mouths wide before him that He may fill and satisfy us with good things, Psalm 81:10. Thus shall we enjoy the sweetest fellowship with him in this world; and shortly be admitted to his more immediate presence in the world to come!

#2312

STEADFASTNESS AND ACTIVITY IN GOD'S SERVICE INCULCATED

Hebrews 10:23-25

"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

Mere professing Christians in general do not sufficiently advert to Christian principles as a ground of action. While they acknowledge their obligation to serve God, they lose sight of those considerations which alone can render his yoke easy, and his burden light. They bear in mind that Christ offered himself a sacrifice for sin; but they forget that his priestly office, which was but in part executed on earth, is still carrying on in Heaven. Were this duly contemplated, it would afford a stimulus to exertion which nothing else can give.

In the fourth chapter of this epistle, the Apostle urges Jesus' priestly intercession in Heaven as a motive to steadfastness in our most holy profession: "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess, Hebrews 4:14." In the passage before us he repeats the same glorious truth, and grounds upon it, not only the same exhortation, but an exhortation to various other duties connected with it. What these duties are, it is my intention at this time to point out.

Consider then,

I. Our duty as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ is hope, hope being the offspring of faith—

It is our duty to profess openly our faith and hope in the Lord Jesus Christ—

We are not to be contented with exercising faith in him as our Savior: we must confess him also before men: for, if "with the heart we believe unto righteousness, it is with the mouth that confession must be made unto salvation, Romans 10:10." But,

This profession we must "hold fast without wavering"—

The more we make our light to shine before men, the more will those who "love darkness, rather than light" oppose us. Nothing will be left untried to divert us from our purpose. Persuasion, derision, menaces, will all be used in their turn: and all manner of influence will be brought to bear upon us, if by any means we may be prevailed upon to renounce what the world calls our wild enthusiasm and folly. But we must "hold fast our profession," whatever efforts be made to wrest it from us: we must hold it fast "without wavering." There must be no inclination of the mind towards the ways we have forsaken, or the society we have left: "We must forget our own people and our father's house, if we would that our heavenly Bridegroom would have pleasure in our beauty, Psalm 45:10-11." We must "hate father and mother, and even our own lives," in comparison with Christ, Luke 14:26-27. There must be in us a determination of heart to "follow the Lord fully," and at all events; even though we are threatened with scourging and imprisonment, as the Apostles were, Acts 4:19-20; or with a cruel death, as were Daniel and the three Hebrew youths, Daniel 4:18; Daniel 6:10.

As for those vain reasonings by which men endeavor to justify their departure from God, they must not be entertained for one moment: Our whole life and conduct should proclaim "whose we are, or whom we serve." We should be "shining as lights in the world," and be as "epistles of Christ, known and read by all men."

Connected with our duty to Christ as his followers, is,

II. Our duty as members of his mystical body—

We are "not to put our light under a bushel or a bed." When once we become united to Christ by faith, we become members of the body, of which he is the Head. To that body we from henceforth have duties, even as the members of our corporeal frame have to the body of which they constitute a part. With that body we are to unite, both in its public and social meetings, and not by

withdrawing ourselves from it, to show an indifference to its welfare.

Some there were, even in the Apostle's days, who, through cowardice or worldly-mindedness, forsook the assemblies of the Church: and some there are who do so at the present day. But whatever vain excuses they may offer for their conduct, they grossly neglect their duty, which is, to edify, as far as they are able, every member of Christ's mystical body. This all are bound to do,

1. In a way of mutual inspection—

We should "consider one another;" we should notice each other's wants and weaknesses, defects and failings, in order to guard each other against the very beginnings of declension in the divine life, and to stimulate one another to exertion in the cause of truth and love. We should mark also one another's abilities and opportunities for serving God, in order that the energies of all may be employed to the best effect.

The members of our natural body, if attempting to execute offices for which they are not fitted, can effect little; but, when exerting themselves in their appropriate sphere, they all contribute to the general good. Thus should all the members of the Church seek out for themselves, and assign to each other, such offices as they are best qualified to perform; that, each laboring in his proper vocation, ("he who ministers, for instance, or teaches, or exhorts, or gives, or rules," in the due discharge of their respective duties, Romans 12:7-8,) the whole body may be edified, and God's name be glorified.

2. In a way of mutual edification—

Love, both in its feelings and actings, is apt to languish, if it is not watched, and nourished, and quickened to activity, from time to time. "This gift of God that is in us, needs to be stirred up," and fanned to a flame, by mutual exhortations. Hence we are told to "provoke one another unto love and to good works." No member of the body should be idle: there are some good works which all may perform: and all should be penetrated with a desire to do what they can. It is by the unwearied exertion of all their powers that the designs of God are to be accomplished, both in the Church and in the world. But, as all are apt to be remiss, all should exhort and animate one another, and, "so much the more as we see the day approaching."

The final destruction of Jerusalem was very near at hand when this epistle was written: and that period would be most afflictive to the Church who fled to the mountains, as well as to those who abode in the city: and therefore they all needed to prepare for that trial, and to labor with redoubled zeal for the Lord, while an opportunity of serving him was afforded to them.

And to us also, there is a day of trial near at hand, even the day of death, and of our appearing before God in judgment. Then all our opportunities of serving and honoring God will be terminated forever. O how diligent then should we be in redeeming the present time, and in laboring while it is day; seeing that the night, when no man can work, is so near at hand! To impress these thoughts on each other's minds, and to stimulate one another to activity in the consideration of them, is our bounden duty: and whatever we may imagine about serving God acceptably in secret, while we neglect these public and social duties, we shall find ourselves awfully mistaken, when God shall call us to account for "hiding our talent in a napkin."

Such being our duties to Christ and his Church, let us notice,

III. Our encouragement to perform both the one and the other—

God is faithful to his promises—

Great, "exceeding great and precious are the promises" which he has given us in his word; promises suited to every state in which every member can be placed. In the covenant of grace they are all contained, even in that covenant of which Christ is the Mediator and Surety: and "in Christ they are all yes and amen, to the glory of our covenant-God and Father, 1 Corinthians 1:20." Not one of them shall ever fail of accomplishment: for "God is not a man, that he would lie, or the son of man, that he would repent." Indeed "he has confirmed his promises with an oath, that, by two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong consolation."

The experience of all ages attests this blessed truth, that God is faithful to his promises. Joshua's appeal to all Israel, at the close of his long-protracted life and warfare, may be made also to every child of Abraham, "Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed! Joshua 23:14."

This consideration may well animate us to the performance of all our duties—

If no promises had been given us, we might well have been discouraged: for who could "engage in such an unequal warfare at his own charges?"

In like manner, if the promises had been less extensive, or less free—then we might well despond; because we could have never

merited the performance of them, nor ever have supplied what might be lacking in them.

Moreover, if there had been any room to question God's fidelity, we would still have been equally far from any solid comfort.

But when we find the promises so perfectly free, that all are at liberty to lay hold upon them; and so full, that they extend to every possible need; and so sure, that sooner shall Heaven and earth pass away, than one jot or tittle of them shall fail; do we not feel encouraged to embrace them, and to rely upon them, and to plead them, and to go forth in the strength of them to serve our God? Is not this one word, "My grace is sufficient for you!" a full warrant for undertaking any service, or for meeting any trial, to which God may call us? May we not boldly say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!"

Here then is our encouragement to perform our duties to Christ and his Church. Whatever we may have to encounter for Christ's sake, we may, in reliance upon his word, "hold fast our profession;" and whatever exertion may be necessary for filling up our respective offices as members of his body, we may labor and not faint; assured that, if we are "steadfast, and immovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord, our labor shall not be in vain in the Lord! 1 Corinthians 15:58."

What then shall I say more?

Is God faithful to his engagements? Then,

1. Be faithful to your commitment to God—

If you have given up yourselves to him as his purchased possession, then have you bound yourselves to "glorify him with your bodies and your spirits which are his."

Address yourselves then to the work of the Lord; and "whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might." If you meet with difficulties and trials, be not discouraged, but go on boldly in the name and strength of the Lord. Draw not back on any account: for, "if any man draws back, God will have no pleasure in him." "He only who endures to the end, shall be saved." "Look to yourselves then, that you lose not the things which you have wrought, but that you receive a full reward, 2 John verse 8." "Be faithful unto death; and God will give you a crown of life!"

2. Live by faith upon the promises—

It is "by the promises that you have already been made partakers of a divine nature, 2 Peter 1:4;" and "by them must you cleanse yourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God, 2 Corinthians 7:1." Lay hold then on the promises: search them out with care: plead them before God with earnestness: and expect the accomplishment of them with confident assurance. This is the great secret of living unto God. This will keep up a continual fellowship between God and the soul. This will bring down Omnipotence to your aid. This will make every trial light, and every duty easy. This will enable you to defy all your enemies, and to challenge them all, whether individually or collectively, "Who shall separate me from the love of Christ! Romans 8:35-39." This will render you blessings to others, as well as blessed in your own souls: for those who behold your light, will "thank God, and take courage," and be emboldened to serve God with increased alacrity themselves. Thus too you will be prepared for "the day that is approaching:" for while the idle and unprofitable servant will be "cast into outer darkness, where is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth," the active and faithful servant will receive the plaudits of his Divine Master, and will "enter into the joy of his Lord!"

#2313

THE EVIL AND DANGER OF APOSTASY

Hebrews 10:26-31

"If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!"

WE cannot be too strongly on our guard against attaching ourselves to human systems in religion. The partisans of human systems take a partial view of the Scriptures, leaning invariably to those passages which appear to sanction their favorite dogmas, and excluding all mention of those which have a contrary aspect. They all take it for granted, that the things which they know not how to reconcile, are contrary to, and inconsistent with, each other. But as in a machine wheels may move in opposite directions, and yet so

harmonize as to subserve one common end—so, in the Word of God, truths which have an opposite aspect, may be perfectly reconcilable to each other, and equally conducive to the accomplishment of the Divine purposes.

The Apostle Paul insisted, as strongly as anyone could do, on the doctrines of grace, showing that all was ordered by God according to the counsel of his own will: yet no Apostle spoke more strongly than he on the danger of apostasy; or taught more forcibly the necessity of continual watchfulness on our part in order to the attainment of those blessings which God had from all eternity prepared for us. It is on this subject that he is speaking in the passage before us; wherein he cautions the Hebrew converts against apostasy, bidding them to hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering; and warning them, that, if they turned back from God, it would be to their everlasting perdition.

In the words which I have just read, he sets forth,

I. The evil of apostasy—

It is not of all sin, or even of all willful sin, that he speaks: for, if there were no pardon for willful sin after baptism, or after we have embraced the Gospel, who could hope ever to attain salvation, since there is not a man in the universe who has not, on someone occasion at least, knowingly and willfully done what he ought not, or left undone what he ought to have done.

The sin spoken of in the text, is, a total and willful apostasy from the Gospel of Christ. This appears from the whole context, both from that which precedes, and that which follows.

In the preceding context he bids them to "hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering;" and then he adds, "for, if we sin willfully;" that is, by renouncing our holy profession, we reduce ourselves to the most awful condition that can be imagined; seeing that, having put away all affiance in the sacrifice of Christ, there remains no other sacrifice for our sins.

In the following context the sin is opened at large under three separate heads, which, while they mark distinctly the nature of the sin which is intended, display the evil of it in most tremendous colors.

Let us consider each of them in its order—

1. Apostasy, he tells us, is a "trampling the Son of God under foot." The Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, came down from Heaven to seek and to save those who were lost. We, when we are baptized in his name, or make a profession of faith in him, acknowledge him before all to be the Savior of the world. All other lords we then renounce; and all other grounds of hope before God; and in effect we say with Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life: and we believe and are sure that you are that Christ, the Son of the living God! John 6:68-69." But when we renounce our faith in him, we, as far as in us lies, cast him down from his throne, and trample him under our feet; declaring that he is unworthy of the honor which we had erroneously put upon him, and that we will "no longer have him to reign over us:" yes, we even "crucify him afresh, and put him to an open shame! Hebrews 6:6."

2. Next, it is a "counting of the blood of the covenant an unholy thing." The Mosaic covenant was ratified with blood; and with that blood both the tabernacle with all its vessels, and the people who worshiped before it, were sanctified, and set apart as holy to the Lord, Hebrews 9:18-21.

The covenant of grace is ratified with the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ; and, when we "come to the knowledge of the truth," we also are sanctified with it, and set apart to the service of our God. We profess to consider that blood as the one procuring cause of all that we either have or hope for: and we look for all the blessings of the covenant solely through the merit of his blood as shed for us, and as sprinkled on us. But, when we cast off our profession, we declare before all, that we consider the blood of Christ as having no virtue at all as an atonement for sin, and as being, in fact, of no more efficacy than the blood of bulls and goats, or even of a malefactor, justly put to death.

3. Further, it is an "insulting of the Spirit of grace." The Holy Spirit, both before and after the death of Jesus, bore witness to him by innumerable signs and wonders: and, when we are brought to the knowledge of the truth, it is by that same blessed Spirit illuminating our minds, and sealing the truth with power upon our souls. But, when we renounce the truth we have received, we insult that Divine Agent, as having borne witness to a falsehood: and we ascribe all his miracles either to Satanic agency, or to some mysterious imposture. We even laugh also at the impressions which he has made upon our minds, and deride all his merciful suggestions as fanaticism and delusion.

In this view of the above, apostasy is a most tremendous evil!

Those who are guilty of it, speak of it only as a change of sentiment resulting from conviction; and thus they take credit to themselves as having grown in wisdom, and been faithful to their convictions.

But God sees not as man sees. God beholds all the evils of the heart which have been accessory to this change; and all the injury

that results from it, both to his honor, and to the world at large. He sees the pride of heart which will not receive the truth upon his testimony. He sees the love of the world which operates to draw the heart from him; yes, and the enmity of the heart against him, which will not submit, either to be saved or governed in so mysterious a way. In other sins he beholds only a resistance to his authority; but in this sin he beholds a contempt of all the wonders of his wisdom and love.

A person who has never received the knowledge of the truth, cannot commit this sin, or any sin of equal malignity. It is the resisting of light that has been imparted, and the acting contrary to it to such an extent as to call it darkness; this it is which makes the guilt so great, that, humanly speaking, it can never be forgiven. Were it indeed repented of, and were mercy sought through the blood of Jesus, even this sin, great as it is, might be forgiven: but the commission of it implies such desperate wickedness and obduracy, that it never can, without a miracle of mercy, be repented of, Hebrews 6:4-6.

Hence then may be seen,

II. The danger of apostasy—

This is declared,

1. From the very nature of the sin of apostasy itself—

Consider what the sin of apostasy is. It is a discarding of the only remedy which God has provided for the necessities of fallen man. Under the Mosaic dispensation, God revealed himself to the Hebrews as the only true God; and entered into covenant with them to be their God, if they would serve him in sincerity and truth. But, if any one made void that law, verse 28, and departed from him to worship other gods—he appointed, that, upon the fact being proved by two or three witnesses, the offender would be stoned to death! Deuteronomy 17:2-7. It was expressly forbidden to any person to conceal the crime: if it would have been committed by a man's dearest friend or relative, he must reveal it to the constituted authorities, and take the lead in executing sentence on the offender! Deuteronomy 13:6-9.

In this law the Hebrews had acquiesced as holy, and just, and good. (Here let me suggest, by the way, that the illustration here brought by the Apostle farther shows, what the sin was of which he spoke; namely, that it was not every willful sin, but a willful renunciation of the Gospel of Christ.) Now, says the Apostle, if so severe a sentence was executed, without any mercy, on the despiser of the Mosaic covenant, and the judges themselves declared the offender to be "worthy of it Deuteronomy 17:6," "of how much sorer punishment, suppose you, shall he be thought worthy, who has renounced the Christian covenant; since he has trodden under-foot the Son of God, etc." Here he appeals to them, and makes them judges in their own cause. And to you also do I appeal. If those who renounced that legal covenant, the provisions of which were chiefly of a temporal nature, and the engagements of it ratified only with the blood of beasts, were counted worthy of such a tremendous punishment as death; of how much more severe punishment must he be worthy, who renounces the covenant of grace, in which all the blessings of grace and glory are made over to us, and which has been ratified and confirmed with the blood of God's only dear Son? I consent that you shall be judges in your own cause, and the arbiters of your own fate.

Those who renounced the law were guilty of most egregious folly and ingratitude: but their impiety was not to be compared with yours: for while, as renouncing the only means of salvation, you resemble them, your impiety is greater than theirs, in proportion as the covenant which you despise is more glorious than theirs, and the mercies which you reject have been purchased at a dearer rate.

Know then, that to such persons "there remains no more sacrifice for sins." Under the law, the sacrifices were repeated from year to year; but not so under the Gospel. Christ will never die for your sins again; nor will any other offering be made in his stead: and therefore, having renounced him, "nothing remains for you but a certain fearful looking-for of judgment," while you continue here; and "of fiery indignation," when you go hence, "that shall devour all the adversaries" of God and his Christ.

Even here, I say, the punishment of such persons is awful: for, to say the least, they are in a state of uncertainty what shall be their fate in the eternal world; and they have frequently in their minds and consciences such an anticipation of their doom, as appals their souls, and terrifies their spirits, and forms a very Hell within them: and the moment they go hence, the wrath of an incensed God comes upon them to the uttermost!

2. From the fixed determination of God to punish it—

God has said, "Vengeance belongs unto me; and I will recompense! Deuteronomy 32:35." And again, "The Lord shall judge his people, Deuteronomy 32:36." Now if he, as the moral Governor of the universe, has determined to execute justice, as well as to show mercy; and if the administering of justice be no less necessary to his own glory than the dispensing of mercy, what have the despisers of his Gospel to expect? He has said, he will thus display his righteousness at the last day: and "we know him who has said it." We know that he is almighty, and therefore able to inflict punishment; and we know he is true, and therefore will fulfill his

word. It is in vain to think that he will change: for "he is not a man, that he would lie; or the son of man, that he would repent."

Seeing then that he will take the matter into his own hands, judge whether it be not "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Were it only a mortal man that was incensed, and you had no way of escape from him, it were a terrible state for you to be in: but what must it be to be exposed to the wrath of the living God, who, while he ever lives to execute vengeance, will preserve you in existence, that you may eternally endure it! Think of enduring "the wrath of the Lamb," which will be so much the more terrible, in proportion as his mercy in submitting to be slain for you has been slighted and despised.

A word of Exhortation—

1. Watch and pray against every willful sin—

"Keep your servant from presumptuous sin," said David, "then shall I be innocent from the great transgression, Psalm 19:13." Now, though it is true that every willful sin, or every presumptuous sin, does not involve us in all the guilt of apostasy—yet it leads to apostasy as its natural end and outcome; because it hardens the heart, and sears the conscience, and grieves the Holy Spirit, and provokes God to leave us to ourselves: and, if once God says of us, "They are joined to idols; let them alone! Hosea 4:17;" then our doom is sealed, and our perdition sure. Let me then affectionately entreat you to guard against every willful sin, whether of commission or omission.

A man does not become an apostate all at once:

He first indulges some secret lust, some filthiness either of the flesh or mind.

Then he declines into formality in his secret walk with God.

Then his besetting sin gets an ascendant over him.

Then he becomes indifferent to public ordinances.

And so, from opposing the Gospel in his heart and life, he comes to abandon it even in profession, and to relapse into avowed infidelity, and a contempt of all true religion. The misery which such persons frequently endure in this life, is sufficient to make us dread such an event as this. But that which the apostate soul shall endure in the eternal world, surpasses all conception. It would have been better for such a one never to have known the way of righteousness, than, having known it, to desert it, and make shipwreck of his faith, 2 Peter 2:20-21.

2. Bear in mind your obligations to Christ and to his Holy Spirit—

Why did the Lord Jesus Christ die under the load of all your guilt? Was it that you might continue in your sins? Why did the Holy Spirit undertake to renew and sanctify your souls; and why has he begun a work of grace in your hearts? Was it that you might "return again with the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to a wallowing in the mire?" Let then the Lord Jesus Christ behold in you the fruits of his love: and let the Holy Spirit rejoice in beholding in you the efficacy of his grace. Then it will be no formidable thing to "fall into the hands of the living God:" on the contrary, you may then with joyful hope look forward to the time of your departure, and, after the example of that Savior in whom you have believed, you may say in your dying hour, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit!"

#2314

THE BENEFIT OF PAST EXPERIENCE

Hebrews 10:32

"Call to remembrance the former days."

TO take a retrospect of our past lives, is the duty of every man. Without a frequent reversion to the past, no man can repent, no man believe, no man be saved. We must be sensible of our guilt and helplessness, before we can ever come aright to Christ for mercy and grace; and such a consciousness of our need of him can proceed from nothing but self-knowledge, the fruit of much self-examination and of a diligent inquiry into our own state. But it is not in this general view that we are now to consider the subject before us.

The words were addressed to those who "had been illuminated" with Divine truth, and had "endured a great fight of afflictions" in the service of their Divine Master. It is to such therefore that we propose chiefly, if not exclusively, to limit our attention, while we notice the exhortation,

I. As given to the Jewish converts—

They were subjected to cruel persecutions throughout the world: and they were in danger of yielding to intimidation, and of making shipwreck of their faith. To fortify their minds and encourage their hearts, he bids them "call to remembrance the former days."

The former days deserved remembrance—

They had been days of heavy trial to all who had embraced the Christian faith. Every convert was an object of hatred and contempt both to Jews and Gentiles. No reproaches were too bitter to cast upon the followers of Christ, no injuries were too heavy to inflict upon them. Their persons were assaulted, their property destroyed, and their lives menaced. The community of interest which all felt in the welfare of the whole body, greatly augmented the sufferings of every individual. Wherever one member suffered, all the members suffered with it.

Yet in the midst of all these afflictions, the believing Jews, as a body, had maintained their steadfastness, and held fast their profession. They had not only submitted to the loss of all things for the sake of Christ, but "had taken joyfully the spoiling of their goods;" "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for the Redeemer's sake."

To this measure of firmness they had attained by keeping their eye steadily fixed upon the heavenly state, where their portion was, and where an infinitely "better and more enduring substance" was treasured up for them. They had no doubt that their trials would be richly recompensed in the eternal world; and therefore they made light of all that they possessed below, "reckoning that the sufferings of this present time were not worthy to be compared with the glory that would be revealed in them! Romans 8:18."

Such were their former days, immediately after the light of divine truth had shone into their hearts; and,

The recollection of the former days would be of singular utility to them at this time—

From a review of their past experience, they would see, that, though the difficulties which they now had to sustain, or which they were daily expecting to encounter, were formidable; they were not new, nor insupportable, nor unprofitable.

They were not new, since they were no other than what had come upon them from the beginning: and consequently were not to be regarded as "strange" and unlooked for, 1 Peter 4:12.

Nor were they insupportable; for every convert had already borne them for a long period; and consequently might, with the help of divine grace, support them still.

Nor were they unprofitable; since the effect of them had been to drive the sufferers to prayer, and to bring down into their souls an increase both of grace and peace.

In a word, the tribulations which they had already endured, "had wrought patience, and experience, and hope;" and therefore, instead of trembling at the prospect of future trials, it befitted every believer to hold fast the profession of his faith, and, together with that, the rejoicing of his hope firm unto the end."

What we have spoken sufficiently shows the scope of the Apostle's advice as given to the Hebrews to whom he wrote; and having ascertained that, we are prepared to consider it,

II. As applicable to ourselves—

That there are many among ourselves, who, through the tender mercy of our God, "have been illuminated" with divine truth, we firmly believe. And to a certain extent the same consequences have followed, and do still follow, a profession of the Gospel in these latter times, as in the days of old. To all of you then who have been illuminated, we would offer the same advice as the Apostle did to the Hebrew converts, persuaded that it will be profitable,

1. For our humiliation—

"Call to remembrance the former days," when you first received the knowledge of the truth, and see whether there was not much in your experience then, which may justly operate for your humiliation now. You then saw and bewailed your lost estate both by nature and practice, and gladly fled for refuge to the Lord Jesus Christ, as to the hope set before you in the Gospel. Having obtained a view of him as your Redeemer and your all-prevailing Intercessor, you rejoiced in him with joy unspeakable, so that you seemed to be come as it were into a new world! Then the cares and pleasures of this life appeared to you as empty vanities, that were scarcely worth a thought: and then, whatever you were called to suffer, whether of loss or shame, for Christ's sake, appeared to you rather a ground of joy than of sorrow, insomuch that "you took joyfully" the injuries that were inflicted on you, and rejoiced that you were counted worthy to sustain them for Jesus' sake. Nothing intimidated you; nothing was allowed to retard your progress. With the world under your feet, and Heaven in your eye—you went on cheerfully, and made your profiting daily to appear.

But now perhaps:
your love has grown cold;
your delight in the Word of God and prayer has abated;
your exertions in the pursuit of heavenly things have languished;
and the power of divine grace upon your souls has visibly declined.

Now your zeal has greatly abated.

Now the cares of this life have regained an ascendant over you.

Now the frowns of the world, which once were disregarded, have become formidable in your eyes.

Now the fear of suffering loss in your worldly interests dampens all your ardor.

Now, instead of being altogether crucified to the world, and living only unto God, as in former days—you can scarcely be distinguished, except by an outward profession, from those who were never yet irradiated by the light of Gospel truth!

Is this an uncommon case? Would to God it were! But what we see in the Church of Ephesus of old is yet visible, wherever the Gospel has been long preached. Of them the Lord Jesus says, "You have borne, and have had patience, and for my name's sake have labored, and have not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against you, because you have left your first love!" "Remember therefore from whence you are fallen; and repent, and do the first works! Revelation 2:3-5."

So then say I to you: "Call to remembrance the former days:" remember what you once were, and what your former works: and let the view of your spiritual declension fill you with shame and sorrow and contrition. Be afraid and tremble, lest the Lord withdraw from you the light with which you have been illumined; and beg of him to return in mercy to your souls, and to "strengthen in you the things which remain, and are ready to die, Revelation 3:2."

2. For your encouragement—

It may be that either outwardly from men, or inwardly from Satan, you are strongly tempted at this time, and need to have a word of consolation and encouragement spoken to your souls. If this be the case, "Call to remembrance the former days."

Trials have not for the first time come upon you now—you have in a greater or less degree experienced them from the time that you were first illumined. Who is it then that strengthened you to bear them at that time? Is he not still as able and as willing to help you as ever? Is not the grace of Christ as sufficient for you now as in former days? And does he not deserve as much at your hands now as he did formerly? If you rejoiced in doing so for him years ago, is there not the same reason that you would do so now? If there was "a need that you would be in heaviness through manifold trials" formerly, 1 Peter 1:6, may there not be the same occasion still? And if the "trial of your faith was precious to you heretofore, yes more precious than gold, because you knew it would be found to your praise and honor and glory, as well as to the praise and honor and glory of your Lord at his appearing, 1 Peter 1:7," should it not be alike precious now?

If too an assured prospect of "a better and an enduring substance in Heaven" once made all earthly things appear to you so light, that you could take joyfully the loss of all of them in the prospect of it—is it not of equal value now? Or do you think that, when you shall have obtained the enjoyment of it, you will regret the sacrifices which you made with a view to it?"

Then I say, "Continue to walk by the rule whereunto you have attained, Philippians 3:16;" and "look to yourselves that you lose not the things which you have wrought, but that you receive a full reward, 2 John, verse 8."

Let me improve the subject in a more particular address—

1. To those who have never yet been illumined by the Gospel of Christ—

How painful would the review of former days be to you! O! the seasons you have lost! the mercies you have abused! the guilt you have contracted! How differently have your lives been spent from what they would have been if you had been Christians indeed! You would have been fleeing from the wrath to come, and would have so made your light shine before men, as to "condemn the world" around you, even as Noah did when he built the ark: and you would have found in Christ such peace as passes understanding, and such joy as would have infinitely overbalanced all that you could ever do or suffer for him.

But of persecution for righteousness' sake you know nothing; and still less of that high attainment of glorying in tribulation for the sake of Christ.

Look back then to the days that are past, and be confounded before God because of your impiety: and pray that "the eyes of your understanding may be enlightened," and that you may yet be "brought out of darkness into the marvelous light of his Gospel." Be

thankful to God that the light yet shines around you: and, "while you have the light, be careful to walk in the light;" and "give glory to the Lord your God before he causes darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and, while you look for light, he turns it into the shadow of death, and makes it gross darkness.

But, if you will not hear this admonition, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and my eye shall weep sore and run down day and night," because of the awful judgments that await you, Jeremiah 13:16-17.

2. To those who, though illuminated by the Gospel, are not walking in the enjoyment of the Divine presence—

This may arise from temptation and spiritual declension, or from sloth and carnality, and worldly-mindedness. If it have arisen from the former, God forbid that I would "break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax:" let me rather "hold up the hands that hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees, and encourage the fearful heart."

I well know that the soul of a righteous man may be bowed down with spiritual distress, and be so sore troubled under the hidings of God's face, as to be deaf to the voice of consolation. Such was the state of David at one time Psalm 77:2-4; and the remedy to which he betook himself was precisely that which is recommended in my text. "I considered," says he, "the days of old, the years of ancient times. I call to remembrance my song in the night, Psalm 77:5-10." Then comparing his present painful experience with that which he had formerly enjoyed, he acknowledges, that all his present doubts and fears were the result of "his own infirmity." And then, to prevent the return of any such distressing apprehensions, he adds, "I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember your wonders of old! Psalm 77:11."

Thus you should do—call to remembrance the experience of former saints, and your own also at more favored seasons: and then bear in mind that, though you change, God is the same, and that "with him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

But if, as in too many instances is the case, your darkness arises from a relaxation of your diligence, and an indulgence of worldly or carnal affections; I must "change my voice, for I stand in doubt of you;" and would have you also stand in doubt of yourselves, until it be clear that "Christ is truly formed in you."

If you are drawing back from God in secret, beware lest he leaves you to yourselves to "go back to everlasting perdition." To "have run well for a season," will be of little avail, if you do not press forward in your heavenly course. The threatening denounced against backsliding Ephesus lies in full force against you; and you will do well to take heed to it. "I will come unto you quickly," says Christ, "and will remove your candlestick, unless you repent!" Oh, return from all your backslidings with penitential sorrow and a living faith; so shall your backslidings be healed; and "so iniquity shall not be your ruin!"

3. To those who are walking steadfastly in their Christian course—

Are you under trials? Every day brings you nearer to the termination of them. Your Lord and Savior is just ready to set the crown of victory upon your head, and to put you into full possession of that better and enduring substance that awaits you. Look up to Heaven and see the myriads that are now around the throne. "Whence came they? They all came out of great tribulation, and washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb! Therefore they are before the throne of God, Revelation 7:14-15." And therefore shall you soon join their company, and unite with them in songs of praise to God and to the Lamb for ever. Only "be faithful unto death, and God will give you a crown of life," according to that sure word of promise, "To him who overcomes, I will give to sit down with me upon my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father upon his throne." "He is faithful who has promised, who also will do it" in its appointed time!

#2315

PATIENT FORTITUDE REQUIRED

Hebrews 10:35-36

"So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised."

THERE have been, to the Church of Christ, seasons of bitter persecution, and seasons of comparative tolerance and peace: but in whichever of these states we are, it befits us not to yield to dejection on the one hand, or undue security on the other. We are soldiers on the field of battle, and must be ready to encounter our enemies whenever they may advance against us. It will be time enough to put off our armor, when we have received our dismissal from an earthly warfare, and are crowned with laurels in the realms of bliss!

There had been to the Hebrew Christians seasons of severe trial, which the Apostle called to their remembrance: and it is probable,

that when this epistle was written to them they enjoyed somewhat of tranquility: but he bade them not to cast away their confidence: since they would still have need of it, as long as they would continue in the body.

In this apostolic injunction we see,

I. What state of mind befits the Christian—

The "confidence" here spoken of is a holy boldness in confessing Christ—

This is essential to the Christian character. Not even faith itself will avail for our salvation, where this is lacking: "With the heart, man believes unto righteousness; but, with the mouth, confession is made unto salvation, Romans 10:10." "If we are ashamed of Christ, and deny him, he will be ashamed of us, and deny us, Matthew 10:32-33."

This holy fortitude we should maintain under all circumstances. Never, for a moment, should we "cast it away." If trials increase, we need it the more: if they abate, or even cease, we still need this divine quality; because we know not how soon it may be called for, or to what an extent it may be required.

This "confidence" will bring its own reward along with it—

It will keep us from all that disquietude and distraction which the menaces of the world might occasion in an unstable mind. It will induce a consistency of conduct, under all circumstances; and will bring into the soul, stability and peace. It will be to him who exercises it an unquestionable evidence of his own sincerity; and will doubtless be honored with peculiar manifestations of the Divine favor. If more than ordinary supports are called for by reason of the augmented troubles that assault us, they shall be given to us; even as they were to the Hebrew Youths in the furnace, when the Son of God himself condescended visibly to appear in their behalf.

To every Christian is this requisite, because of,

II. The occasion he will have for this confidence—

Different as may be the path of different persons in some respects, in their great outline they are all the same. In their progress, all these different steps may be clearly and distinctly seen:

1. Duty—

Every Christian "does the will of God." To believe in Christ, to receive everything from Christ in the exercise of faith and prayer, and to give himself up to God without reserve; this is the one habit of his mind, and the one labor of his life. From day to day he does not his own will, or the will of an ungodly world; but the will of God, as it is revealed in his blessed word.

2. Suffering—

This will always more or less attend a faithful discharge of our duty to God. There will now, as formerly, be seasons of comparative peace: but it is not possible for unregenerate men to love the light, whether it be set before them in the word, or be exhibited before them in the conduct of God's faithful servants. "The servant cannot be greater than his Lord:" if they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, those of his household must assuredly expect some opprobrious designation at the least. And though, in comparison with imprisonment and death, this may be regarded as a light matter; yet is it not light, when we consider that the names with which the godly are designated, are a signal for the world to load them with every species of obloquy and contempt.

3. Patience—

Our blessed Lord was "as a sheep led to the slaughter," and, in the midst of all the indignities that were offered him, "opened not his mouth." And in this manner his faithful followers also "possess their souls in patience." They expect that they shall "have need of patience;" and it is their endeavor so to demean themselves under their trials, that "patience may have its perfect work; so that they may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing."

4. Glory—

This is the object of their pursuit; and to this they press forward with all their might. They know, that "if they draw back, it must be unto perdition;" and that it is by believing only, and maintaining their faith with steadfastness, that they ever can be saved, verses 38, 39. They are well assured that the means must be used for the attainment of the end; and that if used aright, the end shall be attained. They are well aware that duty must be performed, suffering expected, patience exercised: and in this way they have no doubt but that glory shall be ultimately secured. "By a patient continuance in well-doing, they seek, and will obtain, eternal life."

APPLICATION—

1. Let us be thankful for the peace that we are privileged to enjoy—

These are days of extraordinary toleration and candor. We cannot indeed say that "the offense of the cross has ceased:" for it never can cease, as long as the ungodly constitute the great majority of the world. But persecution, except in private circles, is but little known. The flames of martyrdom are no longer kindled among us, as in the days of old. Let us, then, make a due improvement of this great mercy, for the more abundant edification of our own souls, and for a more active advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world. See Acts 9:31.

2. Let us, however, stand prepared for other days—

No one can tell how soon the face of things may be changed. If Popery were to gain an ascendant again, it should, in all probability, bring with it all its attendant horrors. But even in private life we may be called to make severe sacrifices, and to suffer the loss of all our prospects upon earth. But let us remember, that Heaven will richly repay us for all that we may either lose or suffer: and if only we "receive at last the promise" of eternal life, we shall never have reason to regret the "patience" we exercised, and the "confidence" we maintained.

#2316

THE TRUE MEANS OF PERSEVERING TO THE END

Hebrews 10:38-39

"But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved."

TRIALS are the portion of all the people of God. Times and circumstances may occasion a considerable difference as to the measure in which individual believers may be called to endure them: but to all, without exception, it must still be said, as well as to the Hebrews of old, "You have need of patience, that, after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise." To all may the same consolation also be administered; namely, that our Lord and Savior will speedily come to the relief of his afflicted people; and that, if only we believe in him we shall assuredly be saved.

The words in which the Apostle thus consoled the Hebrews, are taken from the Prophet Habakkuk; who was himself comforted with this assurance, when bewailing and deprecating the calamities which were about to be brought upon the Jewish nation by their Chaldean enemies, Habakkuk 1:6; Habakkuk 1:12; Habakkuk 2:2-4.

These words are applicable to the Church of God in all ages; since that same almighty Savior, who promised to interpose in behalf of his believing people then, still engages to be their support in the time of trouble, and only requires that they would look to him with humble and assured confidence, that their trust in him shall not be in vain.

To this consolatory declaration the Apostle adds a most solemn caution, that, if any be turned back from God by means of their trials, it will be to their everlasting perdition!

That the warning may come more distinctly before you, I will endeavor to show,

I. The way to eternal life—

This is the same in all ages: we must live by faith alone. Whatever our own personal character may have been, we must look to God as "the Author and Giver of all good;" and on him as reconciled to us in the Son of his love, we must rely for a supply of all that we need either for body or for soul, for time or for eternity.

By faith we are first introduced into the divine life—

From the manner in which the Apostle quotes this prophecy in other places, it is evident that the sense of it is more large and comprehensive than we would of ourselves have imagined. In the Epistles to the Romans and to the Galatians, Paul enters fully and argumentatively upon the subject of a sinner's justification before God; and shows, in opposition to all the erroneous notions both of Jews and Gentiles, that it is not by works of any kind, whether ceremonial or moral, but simply and entirely by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In both these epistles too, he not only adduces this prophecy as confirming his doctrine, but he lays a peculiar stress upon it, as establishing his doctrine beyond all contradiction, Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11. Know then, as a matter of primary importance, that, if ever you would live before God, you must come to him as sinners destitute of all help or hope in yourselves, and must cast yourselves entirely upon that Savior, "whom he has set forth to be an atoning sacrifice for sin," and "not for your sins only, but also for the sins of the world." There is no other way in which any man can come to God, John 14:6; nor any other name but that

of Jesus, whereby any sinner in the universe can be saved, Acts 4:12.

By faith also we must persevere in it even to the end—

There is no other way for our continuance in spiritual life, than that by which we are first brought into a state of spiritual existence. As at the beginning it is said, "He who has the Son of God has life; and he who has not the Son of God has not life, 1 John 5:12;" so must it be said even to the end: for "all our fresh springs are in him:" "He is the fountain of life; and in his light alone we can see light."

Have we continually fresh sins to be forgiven? There is no way of being cleansed from them but by washing continually in "the fountain which has been once opened for sin and impurity, Zechariah 13:1."

Have we on account of our remaining corruptions continual need of fresh supplies of grace? There is no other source of grace but Jesus: "it has pleased the Father that in him would all fullness dwell Colossians 1:19," and "out of his fullness must we all receive, even grace upon grace John 1:16."

Are our trials and afflictions multiplied from time to time? It is in his everlasting arms that we must be upheld, and "his grace alone that can be sufficient for us."

In a word, it is "by faith that we must stand" every moment, Romans 11:20, "by faith too we must walk, 2 Corinthians 5:7." Yes, from first to last, "we must live altogether by faith in the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself for us, Galatians 2:20." "As we have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so we must walk in him, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith as we have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving, Colossians 2:6-7."

But in order to maintain our steadfastness in this way, it is necessary we would consider,

II. The danger of departing from it—

On few passages of Scripture do we behold more glaring perversions than in comments upon these words. Some, in order to uphold a favorite system, will deny that the persons here cautioned against apostasy are the same as are spoken of in the preceding and following context. But I entreat you, brethren, never so to wrest the Word of God. Take the word as little children, without inquiring what human system it appears to favor; and let it have all the force which it evidently bears in the passage from whence it is taken. If you cannot reconcile different parts of God's blessed word, leave that to him, saying, "What I know not now, I shall know hereafter." It is plain that every man, whatever his attainments are, has need of this solemn warning.

It is evident beyond all contradiction, that many, after having long professed to believe in Christ, and some also of the most distinguished attainments in religion, have gone back, and made shipwreck of their faith! Paul himself felt a need of exercising continual watchfulness and self-denial, "lest, after having preached to others, he himself would be a cast-away! 1 Corinthians 9:27." Consider then, all of you, the danger of turning back from the good way in which you are now walking:

1. You will inexpressibly grieve and offend your God—

God says, "My soul shall have no pleasure in you." In the humble and steadfast saint he has great delight, "he takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his mercy Psalm 147:11." But if any man stops striving to live a holy life—then how can God take pleasure in him? While walking steadfastly and uprightly before God, the believer complies with all God's gracious designs, and furthers, to that extent at least, the glory of God's name. But when he draws back from God, he proclaims to all around him, that, in his estimation at least, God is not so worthy to be loved and served as once he had thought him to be; and that, after a full estimate of their respective claims, the world and the flesh are deserving of at least an equal regard with him, if not also a superior regard. Now, I ask, can a jealous God look with delight on such a man? Should even a fellow-creature, when once admitted into the nearest relation to us, be satisfied with such an avowal?

But the words in my text are intended to convey much more than they express: they import that God will look upon such a backslider as an object of his utter abhorrence. This is more plainly declared in the book of Revelation; where the Lord Jesus Christ, addressing the Laodicean Church, says, "I wish that you were cold or hot: but because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue you out of my mouth! Revelation 3:15-16." This shows us the true light in which God views "the backslider in heart;" he loathes and abhors him as a base ungrateful wretch, who has ceased to behave himself wisely, and has "returned, like a dog to his vomit, and like a sow that has been washed to her wallowing in the mire."

2. You will infallibly destroy your own soul—

So says my text: those who draw back, "draw back unto perdition!" O what a fearful thought! Who can tell all that is implied in the word "perdition?" It is remarkable, that the day of judgment is expressly called, "the day of the perdition of ungodly men, 2 Peter 3:7;" and so indeed it will prove.

Now the ungodly have the upper hand, and do what they can to destroy the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom in the world. But then the Judge of living and dead will deal with them, and recompense upon their heads all the evil that they have done. But on none will so severe a doom be inflicted as on those who "have forsaken the right way," and "after having once escaped the pollutions of the world, have been again entangled therein and overcome: with them the latter end will be worse than the beginning! 2 Peter 2:10; 2 Peter 2:15; 2 Peter 2:20-21."

Yet, though the danger of falling is such as may well excite in us a holy watchfulness, it need not generate in us a slavish fear: since God engages to uphold the upright in heart: and they are therefore warranted in expecting from him all needful aid.

That we may not unnecessarily make the heart of the righteous sad, we shall endeavor to mark,

III. When our actual progress in the way of life has been such as will warrant a good hope of our continuance in it to the end.

But here we must not take a high standard, since the Apostle's confidence referred not to himself only, but to the great mass of the believing Hebrews throughout the world. If then it is asked: Who they are who may hope to persevere in the good way? I answer,

1. Those who are still advancing in the face of difficulties—

Where there is nothing to try our faith and patience, no conclusions can be drawn respecting the principle of grace that is within us. But when we are fighting against the world, and the flesh, and the devil, and maintaining the conflict undismayed, we may be sure that God is truly with us: and a certainty that "God has begun a good work within us, is a just ground of confidence, that he will carry it on, and perfect it to the end, Philippians 1:6." God has promised that "he will keep the feet of his saints:" and that "the righteous shall hold on his way, and he who has clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger." If then we have an evidence within ourselves, that we are indeed endeavoring to approve ourselves to God in a holy and consistent conduct, we need not alarm ourselves about future trials, but may safely and confidently commit the keeping of our souls to God, assured, that he will order everything for us, and that "as our day of trial is, so shall our strength to meet it be."

2. Those who regard the salvation of their souls as that one object which they are determined at all events to attain—

If a man has not thoroughly learned that lesson, that his soul is of more value than the whole world, it matters not what his present attainments are; he has no security whatever against a speedy and final apostasy. But, if he is determined in his heart, that, whatever come, he will not barter away his soul, or allow the salvation of it to be compromised, that man will stand: "he has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from him." The faith of such a one may be but weak at present; but it shall prevail at last: and because he believes to the valuing of his soul, his faith will operate to the saving of his soul.

Lower than this we cannot go; but thus low we must: for it is not the measure of a man's attainments, so much as the reality of his faith, that we are concerned to inquire after. It is the Lord Jesus Christ alone who can carry on the work effectually in the heart even of the most advanced Christian: and if he sees in the least and basest of his people, that their hearts are upright towards him, "he will carry the lambs in his bosom," and "allow none to pluck them out of his hands."

Be persuaded now to bear in mind,

1. That there is in the mind of God, an immense difference between man and man—

Here we are all together; and the world sees little difference between us. But on some, God looks with pleasure and delight; and on others, with aversion and abhorrence. Yes, if there is one among us that is poor and of a contrite spirit, God says, "To that man will I look." And he will look on him with unutterable delight, insomuch that his very "soul" shall be refreshed with the sight of him.

See this poor despised creature, whom man regards as "the filth of the world and the off-scouring of all things." He has a beauty in God's eyes, which makes him lovely beyond all conception: his every word and thought are so dear to God, that he listens to it with delight, and records it in the book of his remembrance, and anticipates with joy the period when he shall have an opportunity of testifying before the whole assembled universe his love for him, Malachi 3:16-17. No bridegroom ever so rejoiced over his bride, as he does over this creature that is bemoaning his own unworthiness, Isaiah 62:5. No monarch conceives himself so enriched by the most splendid diadem, as God does by this acquisition to his family, Isaiah 62:3. He contemplates with inconceivable delight the prospect of securing to himself the everlasting possession of one in whom he takes so deep an interest, Jeremiah 32:40-41.

But is it thus that he looks on all? Alas! alas! we read of many, whom the world accounts blessed, whom yet "his soul abhors! Psalm 10:3." On them indeed his eye is fixed, as well as on others; but "it is upon them for evil and not for good;" and the only delight which he feels respecting them is, "Ah! I will ease me of my adversaries: their foot shall slide in due time." "I will whet my sword, and will make my arrows drunk with their blood! Deuteronomy 32:19-20; Deuteronomy 32:35; Deuteronomy 32:40-42."

Do not think that God is the same to all—indeed he is not. If to some he is a God of love and mercy, to others "he is a consuming

fire!" Ah! beloved, when will you believe this? When will you realize this thought? When will you ask: What are God's views of me? what are his thoughts towards me? Could you but be persuaded to do this, we might yet hope to see you humbled before God, and God's soul delighting in you.

2. That there is, and will be, a corresponding difference between men in the eternal world—

Not only of the world at large are there millions "perishing for lack of knowledge," but even of the Church; and of those who once appeared in a hopeful way, are multitudes "drawing back unto perdition." How little do both the one and the other of these imagine what awaits them at the moment of their departure hence! Could they conceive it, how would they now be filled with horror! How would their spirits sink within them! How earnest would they be in their inquiries: "What must I do to be saved?"

Truly they would no longer be so mirthful, and easy, and secure, as they now are: nor, if we had a just view of their condition, could we speak of them but with floods of tears.

Ah! brethren, when will you believe that such a thing is possible? When will you believe that such a thing is true? But true it is, whether you will believe it or not! I pray God, you may so believe it on the report of the Gospel, as never to taste it by bitter experience.

But of others there are a goodly number, (O! that God would multiply them a hundred-fold!) who are "believing in Christ to the saving of their souls." They are already brought out of Egypt, and are pursuing their journey steadily through this dreary wilderness to the promised land. They meet with difficulties; but they are not discouraged. They go on in the strength of the Lord Jesus Christ: and speedily will they attain the great end of their faith, even the everlasting salvation of their souls! O who can estimate aright their prospects? Happy, happy people!

How shall we attempt to describe the blessedness that awaits you? What a Heaven will burst upon the soul at the first instant of its departure from the body! And what inconceivable bliss will it enjoy in the immediate and everlasting fruition of its God! But I must forbear. In attempting to expatiate on such a subject, I am only darkening counsel by words without knowledge. But do you, my beloved brethren, have worthy thoughts of your high calling; and labor night and day to walk worthy of it.

These things may to many appear as a cunningly-devised fable: but know, all of you, that they are the very truth of God; and that, of the multitudes who are now around you, there will soon be many weeping and wailing and gnashing their teeth in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone!

Others who have been plucked as brands out of the burning, will be seated upon thrones of glory, and singing everlasting Hallelujahs to God and to the Lamb!

3. That the one great line of distinction between them is "faith"—

It is by "faith that the just live;" and it is by unbelief that all others are excluded from the kingdom of Heaven. Faith is indeed a hidden principle: but it is strongly operative, wherever it exists; and wherever it operates aright, will assuredly be productive of all the benefits which are here traced to it.

But, notwithstanding all that is said of this principle in the Holy Scriptures, and the indispensable necessity of it to the salvation of the soul—how few condemn themselves for their lack of it! How few pray to God for it, or are even conscious of their need of it! What greater proof can there be of the blindness with which Satan has blinded the whole world! Men will readily enough acknowledge their need of holiness; but of faith they feel no need: they think they have as much of it as is necessary for their salvation. But, if they would only see how totally inoperative their supposed faith is, they would see at once that they are as destitute of real faith as are even the beasts that perish!

Dear brethren, be aware of this: and cry mightily to God to impart unto you this spiritual gift. Faith is, in all who have it, the gift of God. No man can produce faith in his own heart: it is not a mere conviction founded upon reasoning, but a principle infused into the soul: and it is by that living principle alone you can ever be brought to a state of acceptance with God in this world, and the enjoyment of his favor in the world to come! May God in his mercy create faith in all our hearts! and may its fruits within us now be a pledge of its yet richer blessings in the realms of glory!

#2317

THE NATURE OF FAITH

Hebrews 11:1

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

Considering how much the Scriptures speak of faith, one is surprised that the subject of faith so little occupies the attention of the world at large, or even of the religious world. But the truth is, that the nature of faith is but little known. The world at large consider it as no more than assent upon evidence; while the religious world confine their views of it almost exclusively to the office of justifying the soul before God. But faith is of a far more comprehensive nature than even good men generally suppose. Faith extends to everything that has been revealed; and is the one principle that actuates the Christian in every part of the divine life.

The description given of faith in our text has been frequently misunderstood. The precise import of the passage will best appear by considering the context. The Apostle is encouraging the believing Hebrews to hold fast their profession. He tells them that faith is the only principle that will enable them to do this: he then proceeds to show them in a great variety of instances, how faith will act, and how certainly, if duly exercised, it will prevail for the carrying of them forward even to the end.

It is in this general view, and not in the light of justifying the soul, that the Apostle calls it, "the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen."

Let us then in this enlarged sense consider,

I. The nature of faith—

Within its proper and legitimate scope is all that God has revealed in his blessed word—

Faith comprehends within its grasp the past, the present, and the future.

By faith, the Christian knows that the universe, but a few thousand years ago, had no existence, and that it was created out of nothing by the Word of God.

By faith, he sees everything upheld and ordered by the hand that formed it, and not so much as a hair of our head falling to the ground without his special permission.

By faith, he foresees that all the human race which have in successive ages passed away, shall be recalled into existence at the last day, and be judged according to their works.

But more particularly faith views that great mysterious work, the work of redemption. It beholds the plan formed in the eternal councils of the Father and of the Son; and in due season with gradually increasing light revealed to man. It sees the incarnation, the death, the resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the sending forth of the Holy Spirit in all his miraculous and new-creating powers, to attest that the work was finished, and to render it effectual for the salvation of a ruined world.

This work it still beholds carrying on in Heaven by the Lord Jesus as our great High-priest within the veil, and as the living and life-giving Head of his Church and people. And, carrying its eye forward to future ages, it sees the Redeemer's kingdom universally established, and every subject of his empire seated with him upon his throne of glory!

Faith beholds all intermediate matters fulfilled in their season, and is assured, that, of everything that God has spoken, not one jot or tittle shall ever fall to the ground.

Of all this faith brings a full conviction to the mind, and, as far as it can be desired, a full experience to the soul—

Faith is "the evidence of things not seen." By "evidence" is meant such a proof as silences all objections. Of the past, the present, or the future, what could reason declare? Nothing with any certainty. Of the mystery of redemption more especially, it could determine nothing. With our bodily senses we could ascertain nothing. Everything is apprehended by faith alone.

Yet is it therefore uncertain? No! it is as clear to the mind of a believer, as if it had been demonstrated to his reason, or subjected to his sight. Having assured himself from reason, that the Scriptures are the Word of God, and that the great mystery of redemption, as apprehended by him, is revealed in them, he has no doubt concerning it.

His fall in Adam;

his recovery by Christ;

his restoration to the Divine image through the influences of the Holy Spirit

—these things appear so worthy of God, and so suitable to man, that no doubt respecting them exists in the mind: and all the objections which pride and ignorance have raised against them are scattered like mists before the rising sun.

But it is not only as true that faith presents these things to the mind, but as good, as desirable, and as promised: and it so apprehends them, as to give them an actual existence in the soul: it is "the substance of things hoped for." These things, as far as

they are good, and future—are the objects of hope; and therefore, as we might suppose, unpossessed. But, though future, they are made present by the exercise of faith; and, though only hoped for, are actually enjoyed. This is a wonderful property of faith. Consolations, victories, triumphs, glory, though remote in ultimate experience, are by anticipation rendered present, so that the first-fruits, the pledge, the foretaste are in actual possession; and while the grapes of Eschol assure the soul of the final possession of our inheritance, the views of Pisgah transport it thither, and enable it to realize its most enlarged hopes and expectations.

From this description of faith we may see,

II. Faith's aspect on the welfare and stability of the soul—

As entering into every part of the divine life, faith's influence might be pointed out in an almost infinite variety of particulars. But we will content ourselves with specifying two, which will, to a certain degree, give an insight into all:

1. Faith renders us comparatively indifferent to the concerns of time and sense—

While we are in the body we cannot be absolutely indifferent to earthly things; but comparatively we may. The unbeliever has respect to nothing else: he sees nothing, knows nothing, cares for nothing, but what is visible and temporal. He is "of the flesh," and "savors only the things of the flesh." His hopes, his fears, his joys, his sorrows, are altogether carnal.

So it once was with the believer: but it is now so no longer. By faith he now views other things, which fully occupy his mind, and engage all the powers of his soul. Earthly vanities once appeared as grand and glorious as the starry heavens. But they are fled from his sight: they are all eclipsed by the splendor of the Sun of Righteousness which has arisen upon his soul. There indeed they are; and were the light of God's truth withdrawn from his soul, they would again resume a measure of their former importance. But they are now reduced to insignificance: and the things which "once appeared glorious in his eyes, have now no glory by reason of the glory that excels."

Ignorant persons are ready to impute the believer's withdrawal from the world to superstition, to moroseness, to pride, to wild enthusiasm, to gloom and melancholy. But he renounces the world as an empty vanity, and an ensnaring "lie," that deceives all who follow it, and ruins all who trust in it. Once "a deceived heart had turned him aside, so that he could not deliver his soul, or say: Is there not a lie in my right hand?" but now he knows, that what he formerly grasped, was a mere shadow; and that there is nothing substantial but what is apprehended by faith. Hence "What was once gain to him, is now accounted loss; yes all things are now but as dung, that he may win Christ, and be found in him."

Such are now his views of the cross of Christ, and of the glory that shall be revealed, that "the world is crucified to him, and he is crucified unto the world! Galatians 6:14."

2. Faith strengthens us both for action and for suffering in the service of our God—

Before faith has brought a man to a view of the things which are invisible and eternal, he has no zeal for God, no fortitude to suffer shame for the sake of Christ. But when once the realities of the eternal world are open to his view; when once Heaven with all its glory, and Hell with all its terrors, are apprehended by him; who shall stop him? Who shall intimidate him? Who shall persuade him? Bid him relax his diligence, and give way to carnal ease and pleasure; he will say, 'Go, offer your advice to one that is running in a race, or fighting for his life: will he listen to you? Expect not me then to listen, who am running for eternity, and fighting for my soul.'

Is he called to suffer? He knows for whose sake it is that he is called to take up his cross; and he takes it up with cheerfulness, and "rejoices that he is counted worthy to bear it." Has he made considerable advance in the ways of God? He does not on that account relax; but "forgetting what is behind, and reaching forward to that which is ahead, he presses on towards the mark for the prize of his high calling of God in Christ Jesus, Philippians 3:13-14." These are the things which are chiefly insisted on throughout the whole of this chapter: and, as such were the operations of faith in the days of old, such also they are at this hour; and such will they be to the very end of time.

Application—

1. How little there is of true faith in the world?

If you will believe the report which men give of themselves, there is no lack of faith at all. Everyone who calls himself a Christian, considers it as a matter of course that he possesses faith.

But how would faith operate under other circumstances? Let a man believe that a house in which he is sitting is on fire; or that a vessel in which he is embarked is ready to sink; will he not evince the truth of his faith by some efforts to escape? But here men profess to believe all that God has spoken about the danger of their souls, and the way opened for their deliverance—and yet are as unconcerned about either the one or the other as the beasts that perish! Alas! how fearfully do they deceive their own souls!

But even in the religious world there is an awful lack of faith. For how little are men actuated by the truths which they profess to believe! How strong is the hold which earthly things yet retain of the believer's soul, and how faint are his impressions of eternity! Well might our Lord say, "When the Son of man comes, shall he find faith on the earth? Luke 18:8." Know brethren, that "if you had faith but as a grain of mustard-seed, it would remove mountains:" and, consequently, you may judge of the smallness of your faith by the slender effects which it has produced upon your souls. Pray then to Him who alone can give you faith, "Lord, help my unbelief;" "Lord, increase my faith."

2. In what way alone you can hope to vanquish all your spiritual enemies?

It is "by faith that you are to walk, and not by sight." In order to form a correct judgment of things, listen not to the report of sense, but consult the testimony of faith. Send faith as a spy to search out the heavenly land that is before you. If you attend to the voice of unbelief, it will tell you of nothing but Anakim that are invincible, and "of cities that are walled up to Heaven." But if you ask for the account which faith will give, it will tell you, "They are bread for us! Numbers 14:9," and shall be as easily devoured, and as profitably to our souls, as the food that is put into our mouths.

What the effect of this principle shall be upon your souls, you may see in the case of the Apostle Paul. Greater trials than his, you cannot expect to encounter: and greater supports you cannot need. But whence arose his supports? He was animated by "a spirit of faith:" by that, he foresaw the outcome of his conflicts: and by that he was upheld: and, through the influence of that, all his afflictions appeared but light and momentary, yes, and the very means of augmenting his happiness and glory! 2 Corinthians 4:8-9; 2 Corinthians 4:13-18.

Thus shall faith operate in you: it shall "work by love;" it shall "purify the heart;" it shall "overcome the world, 1 John 5:4." Only "live by faith:" and if at any time you be ready to stagger through unbelief, remember that "he is faithful who has promised;" and "be strong in faith, giving glory to God." For of this you may be perfectly assured, that the more lively your faith is, the more abundant will be its fruits; and that in every hour of trial "according to your faith it will be done unto you."

#2318

ABEL'S OFFERING INSTRUCTIVE TO US

Hebrews 11:4

"By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead."

IN reading the history of the saints under the Old Testament dispensation, we are constrained to admire their conduct on many occasions, and to regard them as excellent patterns for our imitation. But we would not readily have traced all their diversified excellencies to one principle, and still less to the principle of faith, if it had not been done for us by an inspired writer. But, now that it is done, we see the truth, and the importance too, of the suggestion; and are stirred up to cultivate the same principle in order to the attainment of their virtues.

The Apostle, in adducing instances of the power of faith from the beginning of the world to the close of the Jewish records, omits all mention of Adam, who, we doubt not, both lived and died in faith. But his aim in this part of his epistle is to encourage the believing Hebrews to persevere in their holy profession, notwithstanding all the trials to which they might be subjected on account of it: and, as nothing particular is recorded concerning Adam's faith, and Abel was a martyr for the faith, it was more to his purpose to commence his catalogue of worthies with the name of Abel; of whose offering we are now more particularly called to speak. To illustrate what the Apostle says concerning it, I shall show,

I. In what consisted the peculiar excellence of Abel's offering, as contrasted with that of Cain—

By referring to the account given us in the book of Genesis, we find,

1. That Abel's offering differed widely from that of Cain—

Cain brought only "of the fruits of the ground, Genesis 4:3." Now this he might have done even in Paradise; since it was only a tribute of gratitude towards his heavenly Benefactor, and an acknowledgment of dependence on him for a continuance of his favors.

But Abel brought "of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat, Genesis 4:4," by which he acknowledged himself a sinner deserving of death, and his hope of mercy only through the intervention of a vicarious sacrifice. By this act, he professed his faith in that Savior who was in due time to die for the sins of the world, and whom the sacrificial ordinances already instituted were intended to prefigure. That sacrifices had been ordained by God, is evident, from its being said that Abel offered his sacrifice "by faith:" for had

Abel offered this sacrifice of his own mind, there could have been no scope for the exercise of faith; since faith necessarily has respect to some divine declaration; and in this instance must have had respect to a command from God to present such an offering, and a promise from God to accept it.

When the command was first given, we are not certainly informed: but I conceive it to have been immediately after the Fall, when, as we are told, "the Lord God made coats of skins to clothe" our first parents, Genesis 3:21. It is evident that living creatures were then slain; and slain by God's command: and, if we suppose those living creatures then offered in sacrifice, we have the most complete exhibition of the way of salvation that is contained in all the sacred records: since, as the sin of our first parents was atoned for by the blood of those sacrifices, and the shame of their nakedness was covered by their skins—so are our sins expiated by the blood of our great Sacrifice, and our souls are clothed in the robe of his unspotted righteousness.

At all events the fact is clear, that such an institution had been formed by God; or else Abel's faith could not have had respect to it: and no other period for the commencement of it seems so proper as that to which we have referred, because it is the only period mentioned in the inspired history, and because, if not instituted until the time of Abel, our first parents must have been left many years without that instruction and consolation which such an ordinance was calculated to convey.

It is evident then that Abel's offering excelled that of Cain in two most important respects, namely: in the matter of it, and in the disposition with which it was offered: his offering being "a firstling of his flock," while Cain's was only "of the fruits of the ground;" and being offered with an express view to the sacrifice which was in due time to be offered, while Cain had no respect whatever to himself as needing salvation, or to the Savior by whom alone he could find acceptance with God.

2. That God had respect to Abel's offering, and not to Cain's—

In what way God testified his acceptance of Abel's offering we are not informed: we are sure however that it was in some way clearly understood by Abel; and as clearly by Cain also, since it was the means of filling him with envy and wrathful indignation. It is probable, that God sent fire from Heaven to consume the sacrifice of Abel. This in after ages was frequently done by God; as at the first offering of sacrifices by Aaron in the tabernacle Leviticus 9:24, and at the first offering of sacrifices also in the temple of Solomon, 2 Chronicles 7:1. Whatever the testimony was, God showed, by it, that he accepted both the person and the offering of Abel, while neither the person nor the offering of Cain were at all acceptable in his sight, Genesis 4:4-5.

Such being the acknowledged superiority of Abel's sacrifice, let us consider,

II. What instruction the pre-eminent acceptance of it conveys to us—

We are told that "by it, he being dead yet speaks." The whole record concerning it shows,

1. That man, however righteous he may be, needs a sacrifice—

Abel is characterized by our blessed Lord himself as eminently righteous; being designated by the name "righteous Abel, Matthew 23:35." And in our text it is said, that "God bore testimony to him as a righteous man." But did he on account of his distinguished piety not need an atonement? Or did he think himself entitled to approach his God in any other way than as a self-ruined sinner, that could be saved only through the blood of a vicarious sacrifice? No! It is remarkable that Cain, who was at heart a murderer, thought he might find acceptance with God without such a sacrifice; while "righteous Abel" dared not to hope for mercy in any other way than through the sacrifice of Christ. At this very hour none more deride the necessity of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and in his atoning blood, than those who are hostile in their hearts to all vital godliness!

But, however moral any may have been, they are sinners before God, and must seek for mercy solely through the blood and righteousness of Christ: for an Apostle expressly tells us, that "without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins! Hebrews 9:22."

Let this then be remembered by us all: for it is by no means so deeply considered as it ought: there lurks in all of us a self-righteous disposition. We, no less than the Jews of old, are averse to "submit to the righteousness of God," and make the Lord Jesus Christ "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense." But there is "no way to the Father but by him, John 14:6," nor "any name under Heaven but his whereby any man can be saved! Acts 4:12."

2. That a sacrifice has been appointed of God for the sins of the world—

It has been before shown, that Abel's "faith" necessarily presupposes a divine institution as the object of his faith. And what was the sacrifice that was ordained by God? Was it to the blood of bulls or goats that men were taught to look? "The blood of bulls and of goats," as the Apostle tells us, "could never take away sins." That same person who was foretold to Adam as "the Seed of the woman who would bruise the serpent's head," was to effect that victory by having his own heel first bruised, Genesis 3:15, or, as Paul expresses it, he was "through death to destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, Hebrews 2:14." In a word, he

was to "redeem us to God by his blood," and to be the atoning sacrifice not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the world. He it was who, both in Abel's sacrifice, and in all the sacrifices under the law, was shadowed forth; and who is therefore called "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world! Revelation 13:8." Before he came into the world, his sacrifice had a retrospective, as at the time of its being offered it had a prospective, efficacy for the salvation of all who trusted in it; so that, from the beginning to the end of time, he is the only Savior of sinful man!

3. That through that sacrifice all who believe in it shall assuredly be saved—

We are told that the record concerning Abraham's having his faith imputed to him for righteousness, "was not written for his sake alone, but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed if we believe on him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, Romans 4:23-24." And we may be perfectly sure, that the record concerning the efficacy of Abel's faith, and the testimony given to him from God respecting the acceptableness of his sacrifice, was not for his honor merely, but for our encouragement.

It shows to us how pleasing in God's sight the humble Publican is in comparison with the self-applauding Pharisee, especially when he rests all his hopes of mercy on the atoning blood of Christ. It shows us, that God "will fill the hungry with good things, while the rich he will send empty away." In a word, it shows us that:

"the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse from all sin!"

"whoever comes unto God by him shall never be cast out!"

"all who believe in him shall be justified from all things!"

Thus, while it directs us to the blood of Christ as the ground of our hope, it assures us, that that "blood speaks not only as much and as satisfactorily as the blood of Abel did, but far better things than that ever did or could speak, Hebrews 12:24."

There is one thing not yet noticed in our text, which deserves particular attention, and which will serve us for an APPLICATION of the subject to our souls—

"By his faith," and the consequent acceptance of his sacrifice, "Abel, though dead—yet speaks to us."

Hear then Abel as now speaking to you from the dead!

'Brethren, though dead, I yet live; and though I have been dead almost six thousand years, I would speak to you as though I had died but yesterday. I am concerned that you would profit by my experience. You are all assembled to worship and serve your God: and you are ready to conceive that on that account you are all rendering unto God an acceptable service. But I must declare to you that this is far from being the case. Your outward forms, considered independently of the frame of mind in which you engage in them, are of no value in the sight of God. You may "kill an ox in sacrifice, and be only as if you slew a man—you may sacrifice a lamb, and be as if you cut off a dog's neck—you may offer an oblation, and be as if you offered swine's blood—you may burn incense, and be no more accepted, than if you blessed an idol! Isaiah 66:3." God looks not at the act, but at the heart: and if the heart is not right with him, your sacrifices, however costly they may be, are only "an abomination to him! Proverbs 21:27."

"Of all this you may be assured from what is related concerning my brother Cain and myself. He, as you have been told, was not accepted, while I was honored with tokens of God's merciful approbation. What was it that made the difference? Why did God look on me with delight—and with abhorrence on him? It was because I approached him as a sinner, whose hopes were founded solely on the sacrifice of his Son, while my brother approached him without any such exercise of repentance and faith.

"And so it is with you. On those who draw near to him with a broken and contrite spirit, and with their eyes fixed on the Lamb of God to take away their sins, he looks with delight: he will even give to them sweet tokens of his acceptance, and testimonies of his love: and, if he does not give the same visible demonstrations of his love to them, as he did to me, he will not leave them without witness even in the minds of their enemies: for he will so enrich their souls by his grace, as shall make it evident, that God is with them of a truth.

"But on the proud self-righteous formalist he will look with scorn and indignation. Yes, to those of you who have come up hither merely to perform a duty which custom has prescribed, he says, "You hypocrites, in vain do you worship me, seeing that, while you draw near to me with your mouths, and honor me with your lips, your hearts are far from me! Matthew 15:7-9." I warn you then not to deceive your own souls: for assuredly, whether you will believe it or not, God will before long make the same distinction between you that he did between me and Cain. The contrite and believing worshipers shall have a testimony of his approbation before the whole assembled universe; but the impenitent and unbelieving shall be marked out as monuments of his everlasting displeasure.

"As for you who worship him in faith, he may for the present leave you in the hands of the ungodly, who from envy may be incensed against you; he may even allow your "greatest enemies to be those of your own household;" yes, he may leave you even to be put to death, and to suffer martyrdom for your fidelity to him. But let not that deter you from confessing him openly before men. I have never regretted the sufferings I endured for him; nor will you ever regret anything which you may be called to sustain. Even the

testimony which you shall now enjoy in your own conscience, shall be an ample recompense for all. What then shall that testimony in the day of judgment be, when he shall say, "Well done, good and faithful servants, enter into the joy of your Lord?"

"Go on then without fear, and "hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering." "Be faithful unto death; and he will give you a crown of life! Revelation 2:10." '

Such we may well conceive to be the strains in which Abel would now address you: and I pray God that they may sink down into our ears, and produce a saving effect upon our souls.

Are there any here who are "going in the way of Cain, Jude verse 11," and "hating those who are more righteous than themselves, 1 John 3:11-12." Ah! think what misery attaches to such a state of mind, both in this world and the next. Even here, as God has said, "there is no peace to the wicked; but they are like the troubled sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt, Isaiah 57:20-21;" and what will they be hereafter?

What does Cain now think of that piety that he despised, and of that enmity with which he persecuted it even unto death? Now he knows who was right: and so will you before long, whether you will now learn it or not.

But O! Stop before it be too late: and have recourse to that sacrifice which will avail for all who trust in it. And you who are suffering for righteousness' sake, "marvel not as though some strange thing happened unto you, but rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Abel's sufferings and of Christ's also, that, when his glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy! 1 Peter 4:12-13."

#2319

ENOCH TAKEN TO HEAVEN WITHOUT DYING

Hebrews 11:5

"By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God."

Among those who obtained a good report through faith, Enoch bears a very distinguished place. He was a prophet, and bore testimony against the abominations which prevailed around him, with the utmost possible fidelity. His prophecy, indeed, is preserved to us, as it were, by miracle: for neither Moses, nor any other writer of the Old Testament, makes any mention of it; nor is it referred to by any of the evangelists, or in the Acts of the Apostles. But, Jude who wrote only one short epistle, records it, and thus throws light upon the "faith" which in my text is ascribed to Enoch: he shows that Enoch had a view of Christ as the Judge of living and dead, and of the judgment itself as passed in perfect accordance with the character and conduct of every individual of mankind, Jude verses 14, 15.

Enoch, though the seventh from Adam in descent, is here introduced immediately after Abel; in order to show, that, as in Abel the operations of faith were illustrated, so in Enoch might be seen the reward of faith. Indeed, the translation of Enoch took place very soon after the death of Adam; so that, while God's hatred of sin was manifested in the one, his love of holiness might be displayed in the other.

In considering the translation of Enoch, I shall notice it,

I. As a testimony to him—

Enoch doubtless had received many tokens of God's approbation before—

To Abel's offering God had borne witness, as being more acceptable to him than that of Cain, verse 4. And, no doubt, many testimonies of Divine approbation had been given to Enoch also. Did Enoch "walk with God Genesis? 5:22; Genesis 5:24." No doubt, God also walked with him "as a Friend, James 2:23," "manifesting himself to him as he did not unto the world, John 14:21-23," and "witnessing with his spirit that he was a child of God, Romans 8:15-16." Indeed, there is no one who "draws near to God, but God will also:

draw near to him, James 4:8,"

"hold sweet fellowship with him, 1 John 1:3,"

"lift up upon him the light of his countenance, Psalm 4:6,"

and "shed abroad his love in his heart, Romans 5:5."

In his translation, such a testimony was borne to his character, as carried conviction with it to the minds of others also—

A man, by inward tokens of God's approbation, "has the witness of it in himself, 1 John 5:10;" but here was an expression of it, which carried its own evidence along with it to all who were then living upon earth, and has from that moment stamped the character of Enoch as a most distinguished favorite of Heaven. No man was ever thus honored before; and only one other person even to the present hour.

By this translation to Heaven, the sentence of God against sin was reversed: for death was disarmed of its power over this holy man; and he was borne to Heaven, both in body and soul, without ever encountering the agonies or terrors of death.

We do not know the circumstances attendant on his removal, we know not; but, as in the case of Elijah, it must have been witnessed by someone of undoubted credibility; else the effect of it would have been lost: and, from its being said, that "he was not found," it is evident, that, as in Elijah's case also, a search was made for him, lest he would have been transported to some remote place only, instead of being borne, as they were taught to believe, into the very presence of his God, 2 Kings 2:10; 2 Kings 2:16-17. But the fact itself, whatever its circumstances were, is a standing proof to the whole world, that this holy man had so walked as to please his God.

But let us view this event,

II. As an instruction to us—

Two things it obviously teaches us:

1. That there is a future state of existence, both for our souls and bodies—

It is clear that the future judgment was known to Enoch; and therefore it is most probable that he was informed as to the resurrection of the body. But, at all events, his translation gave to those of his day, and to all future ages—an evidence that the body was capable of participating in all the glory and felicity of the soul. Of course, some change was made in him, even as there shall be in those who shall be living at the time of our Lord's advent to judge the world. At that time, all who are alive "will be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet: for this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality, 1 Corinthians 15:51-53."

But it was essentially the same body, even as that of our blessed Lord was at the time of his ascension to Heaven, Philippians 3:21; and, though our bodies shall be consumed by worms—yet shall they be raised again, and be the subjects either of eternal happiness or eternal misery, according as they were employed, either in the service of God, or in rebellion against him, Daniel 12:2.

2. That those who have pleased God in this world shall assuredly dwell with God in the world to come—

The eminent piety of Enoch was well known. What, then, did his translation announce, whether to that or future generations? God said by it: 'Behold how I will act towards those who serve and honor me. I will not leave you to guess at it, as a matter above your comprehensions. You shall see it; you shall have it brought so manifestly before your eyes, that you shall have no doubt whatever respecting it.

Did Enoch believe in me?

Did Enoch serve me?

Did Enoch walk with me?

Did Enoch, in the whole of his life and conduct, strive to honor me?

In a word, did Enoch "please" me?

See then, in Enoch, the felicity that awaits you: for I have set him forth as a pattern to all future ages, and as a pledge, that "whoever honors me, shall be honored by me, 1 Samuel 2:30;" and that "to him who orders his conduct aright, I will show the salvation of God, Psalm 50:23."

What now shall I add? What, but these two things?

Learn—

1. What must be your aim in life—

You have seen what it was in Enoch that pleased God. You have seen, that he really "believed" in God; and that his whole life was one continued walk with God. "He walked, not as pleasing men, but God, who tries the thoughts." So walk, and you shall please him too; yes, and shall have such tokens of his approbation, as shall richly recompense all that you may either do or suffer for him,

though it were a thousand times more than was ever yet done or suffered by mortal man.

2. What should be your comfort in death—

What is death to a child of God? It is not death—no; it is a sleep, a "falling asleep in Jesus, 1 Thessalonians 4:14. Acts 7:60." This it is, as it respects the body; which shall surely "awake from the dust, Isaiah 26:19," and be re-united to the soul, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18.

And what shall it be to the soul? A translation, such as Enoch's was. Could you but see what takes place at the departure of a real saint, you would see the angels waiting to catch his spirit at the instant of its departure from the body, and bearing it on their wings into the presence of its God. And is not this an object to be desired? Do you wonder that Paul "desired to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better, Philippians 1:23." than any state on earth can be! Regard you death, then, in this view: and learn to number it among your treasures, 1 Corinthians 3:21-22; and in the daily habit of your minds, "be looking for, and hastening unto, the coming of the day of Christ! 2 Peter 3:12."

#2320

THE NECESSITY OF FAITH

Hebrews 11:6

"Without faith it is impossible to please God."

THIS whole chapter is one continued commendation of faith: which is marked, throughout, as the one source of every good action, and as the certain prelude to everlasting felicity. But, in what is spoken of Enoch, there seems, to a superficial observer, to be no connection with faith: for his translation was a mere act of God's favor: and, though it is said that "he pleased God," it may be supposed that it was by his works that he approved himself to God, and not by any actings of faith.

But, in my text, the Apostle proves that Enoch's faith was the leading principle from which his works proceeded, and the true object of God's peculiar approbation. His argument may be thus stated in a few words: "Without faith it is impossible to please God." But Enoch did please God: therefore it is clear that Enoch believed; and that his works, whatever they were, were the fruits of faith. Now, in confirmation of this momentous truth, I will show,

I. What is that "faith, without which we cannot please God"—

Let the Apostle himself be heard in the words following my text. Three things he points out, as the objects of true and saving faith. It has respect to GOD,

1. A belief in God's eternal and immutable existence—

The believer does not conceive of God as resembling the gods of the heathen, or as having a derived existence; but as existing necessarily from everlasting; and as immutable in every one of his perfections, "the same yesterday, today, and for ever."

2. A belief in God as the Moral Governor of the universe—

This is implied in the regard he manifests to those who seek him. For, if he were not observant of the ways of men, and if he did not inspect the most secret motions of their hearts, he could not "reward" men according to their works.

3. A belief in God as fulfilling to us all his covenant engagements—

This is very particularly intended in our text. For how could he "reward" men, if they were not first "accepted in his beloved Son?" Men are sinners; and, as sinners, they are condemned and utterly incapable of removing their guilt and condemnation by anything which they themselves can do. It is through the atonement which Christ has offered for them, that they obtain reconciliation with God; and through Christ alone can any work of theirs come up with acceptance before God.

The mediation of Christ was agreed upon between the Father and Son from all eternity; Christ engaging to "make his soul an offering for sin;" and the Father engaging, for his sake, to accept the person and services of all that would believe in him, Isaiah 53:10.

This, therefore, is essential to saving faith: and, in order to "please God," we must unite these three things:

a belief in God's eternal and immutable existence;

a belief in God as the Moral Governor of the universe;

a belief in God as fulfilling to us all his covenant engagements.

Now, "without such faith," we are told, "it is impossible to please God." Let me then proceed to show you,

II. Why faith is so indispensable for that end—

1. Without such faith, we cannot have any right dispositions towards God—

How can we love to an unknown being?

Can we fear one who neither regards, nor will ever take cognizance of, our actions?

What can we feel of gratitude towards one to whom we can trace no obligations?

Can we trust in one of whose agency in the affairs of men we are altogether ignorant?

It is obvious, that, so far as respects pious feelings, we are no better than "Atheists in the world, Ephesians 2:12." How, then, can God be "pleased" with such wretches as these?

2. Without such faith we cannot render unto God any acceptable service—

Any service, in order to be accepted of God, must be such as he himself has required: it must have respect to his authority, as commanding it; to his word, as the rule to which it is to be conformed; and to his glory, as the end for which it is to be done. But, if we do not possess faith in God, then:

How can we have respect to his authority?

How can we conform to his word?

How can we desire to advance his glory?

Any pretense of this kind must be downright hypocrisy or delusion: and, whatever the service is, it can be no better, in God's estimation, than "the cutting off a dog's neck for sacrifice, and the offering of swine's blood! Isaiah 66:3."

APPLICATION—

Inquire, then, I beg you,

1. Into the nature and reality of your faith—

Men, if they inquire into their state at all, are apt to confine their attention to their works. But here we see how necessary it is to inquire into our faith; since, if our faith is not sound and scriptural, nothing else can be right before God.

Inquire, whether you have any deep conviction even of the existence of God; and still more, of his moral government, and of his inspecting everything in order to judge the world in righteousness at the last day.

Inquire still further, what views you have of God, as covenanting with his Son to expiate our guilt, to renovate our souls, and to present our services to him perfumed with the incense of his own merits, and rendered acceptable through his prevailing intercession.

Indeed, my brethren, these should be subjects of our most anxious inquiry from day to day. Paul says, "Examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith, 2 Corinthians 13:5." And I also would say the same: for, if "without a true faith it is impossible to please God," you cannot but feel the indispensable importance of having this matter clearly ascertained, and distinctly determined.

2. Into the fruits and effects of your faith—

It is here taken for granted, that the believer "comes to God," and it is certain that true faith will bring us to God, in deeply penitential sorrow, and in earnest cries for mercy. If we really believe in God, we shall "diligently seek him" in the use of all his appointed ordinances, and in the name of his only dear Son. Yes, and we shall have our expectations of mercy greatly enlarged. We shall delight to view God, not merely as a Sovereign, but as "a Rewarder," who is at all times waiting for opportunities to express the utmost possible love towards his obedient people.

Say now, brethren, whether such be your views, your contemplations, your joys? Of what value is your faith, if it is not productive of these fruits? If it does not operate in this way, it is no better than the faith of devils! James 2:19.

"But, beloved, we are persuaded of better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak, Hebrews 6:9."

"But we desire that every one of you" make these things a subject of most earnest inquiry; so that, after a diligent and candid

examination, you may discern your real state before God; and may be brought "to a full assurance of hope" that you are really "pleasing God" in this world, and shall be "rewarded by him" in the world to come! Hebrews 6:11.

#2321

NOAH'S FAITH

Hebrews 11:7

"By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith."

OF all the principles which operate in the Christian's mind, faith is the most distinguished. In some respects indeed love claims a preference, because it is the very image of the Deity, 1 John 4:8, and will exist when faith and hope shall be no more 1 Corinthians 13:13. But as faith is that grace which most of all honors God, so it is that which God most delights to honor. On many occasions wherein a bright assemblage of graces shone forth, our blessed Lord overlooked all others, and commended faith, Matthew 8:10; Matthew 15:28. Mark 10:52. Luke 7:50. The chapter before us recounts the exercises of faith in the most eminent saints from the beginning of the world to the days of the Apostles. We shall call your attention at present to the faith of Noah; and,

I. Illustrate Noah's faith—

The different things here spoken respecting it require us to notice:

1. Its operations—

He believed the "Divine warning".

God had declared to him his intention to destroy the world by a deluge. And how did he receive the warning? Did he indulge vain reasonings about the practicability of such an event; or pretend to be more merciful than God? No. Though there was not the remotest appearance of such a thing, he believed it would certainly take place: and though to proud reason it seemed hard that all living creatures, old and young, men and beasts, would be involved in one indiscriminating ruin—yet he doubted not but that it would be as God had said; and was persuaded that "the Judge of all the earth would do right."

He was "moved with fear" on account of it.

He had nothing to fear respecting his eternal state, because he was a perfect and upright man, and walked in holy fellowship with his God. But God was incensed by the wickedness of his creatures, insomuch that "he regretted he had made them:" and he determined to pour out his fury upon them to the uttermost.

Did it not then befit Noah, as well as others, to fear and tremble? Did it befit him to be so absorbed in selfishness as to be unconcerned about the destruction, the sudden, and perhaps everlasting, destruction, of all the human race? Indeed a dread of the Divine judgments was necessary to stir him up to use the proper means for his own safety: and it was an unequivocal proof of his crediting the declarations of God concerning them.

He exerted himself in God's appointed way.

God commanded him to construct a vessel of an immense size, and such as had not been seen from the foundation of the world. It was above one hundred and sixty yards long, twenty-seven broad, and sixteen high. The expense of building it must be exceeding great, so as to swallow up all his fortune. The time it would occupy would be many years; during all of which the people would be scoffing at him as a deluded visionary, and taking occasion from the very forbearance of God to load him with grosser insults, 2 Peter 3:4. But he regarded not any labor, any odium, any sacrifice in the path of duty: he was intent only on executing the Divine mandate, and on providing for the security of those who would believe his testimony.

2. Its effects and consequences—

He "condemned the world".

During the hundred and twenty years that he was engaged in building the ark, he preached to the world with much earnestness and fidelity: and therefore doubtless condemned them often in his discourses. But he condemned them yet more by his example.

His faith condemned their unbelief;
his fear condemned their security;

his obedience condemned their disobedience.

If he had not spoken one word with his lips, his constructing the ark would have been a tacit, but keen, and continual reproof to all around him.

He "saved his family".

At the appointed time the flood came. The world, notwithstanding all the warnings given to them, were as far as ever from expecting the event, Matthew 24:38-39. It is probable that their contempt of Noah's superstition and folly (as they would have called it) had risen to its height, when they saw this immense vessel built, and filled with all different kinds of animals, and provisioned for many months; and Noah with his little family enclosed in it, before the smallest sign of any inundation had appeared. But in the midst of their revels the flood came and swept them all away! Only Noah, with his family, were preserved. That his family owed their preservation to him is clear; not only because it was ascribed to the exercise of his faith, but because one at least of them was as deserving of God's wrath as the generality of those who perished.

He "became an heir of righteousness".

Noah knew that the whole of that mysterious dispensation was typical of the salvation which is given us in Christ Jesus, 1 Peter 3:20-21. He saw that a more terrible deluge was about to overwhelm an ungodly world: and that Christ was the ark which God had prepared for us. Into that ark he entered by faith: and thus, being "found in him, Philippians 3:9," and "preserved in him, Jude verse 1," he "became an heir of the righteousness which is by faith;" or, in other words, he was accepted, justified, and saved through the Savior's merits.

While we call you to admire the faith of Noah, we would also,

II. Commend it to your imitation—

Our circumstances being wholly different from his, there must be many particulars in his faith which we cannot imitate, but the substantial parts of it are imitable by all.

1. Believe God's testimony respecting the judgments which he will bring upon the world—

There are great and terrible judgments denounced against the ungodly, yes, "against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, Psalm 9:17; Psalm 11:6 and Romans 1:18." Nor shall gross wickedness alone, be the object of God's wrath: a state of unregeneracy, whether attended with more or less open sin, will certainly involve us in the general doom! John 3:3. Nor shall one of all the human race escape, unless he gets into the ark prepared for him, Acts 4:12.

Now do not presume to dispute against this. Do not, because there is no appearance at present of such calamities, imagine that they shall never come. Do not pretend to be more merciful than God, and to say: God will never execute such tremendous judgments: for "he has said, and he will do it; he has spoken, and he will make it good." It may appear as improbable as the deluge; but, however improbable it may appear, it shall come to pass; and all who will not believe it now, shall experience the truth of it to their cost.

2. Use the means of safety which God has appointed—

You have not to build an ark: there is one constructed and provisioned by God himself; and the door is open for you to enter in. Do not absurdly ask, "How can that vessel save me?" Neither attempt to form another for yourself: nor flee to this or that mountain for safety. But go to Christ: seek a saving interest in him by faith: commit yourself wholly and cheerfully to him: and then you may defy all the storms and billows that menace your destruction.

Moreover, delay not to place yourself beyond the reach of danger; because, while you are loitering, "the door may be shut!" and all entrance into it may be barred forever! Matthew 25:10-12.

It is not at all improbable that many who had derided Noah, or perhaps assisted in constructing the ark, clung to it when the floods came; and cried to Noah, "Open to us, and take us in!" And doubtless, if that were the case, Noah would pity their deplorable condition when he heard their cries or saw their unavailing endeavors. But God had shut the door; and Noah was not at liberty to open it: so that, one after another, they all "sank like lead in the mighty waters." Thus many in the last day will say, "Lord, Lord, open to us!" Or "they will cry to the rocks to fall upon them, and the hills to cover them from the wrath of the Lamb, Revelation 6:16;" but the judgments they once despised, will come upon them irresistibly, and for ever. Cultivate then a holy fear; and enter into the ark while it continues open to you!

3. Allow nothing to divert you from your purpose—

We have said that Noah incurred much odium as well as much expense in this exercise of faith. And it is certain, that you also will be called to make some sacrifices for your God. Not your reputation only, but your worldly interests also, may be materially affected by your obedience to Christ. But what did Noah lose in the outcome? What concern did he feel either about the harsh reflections cast on him, or the labor and money he had bestowed—when he found himself safe in the ark, and saw the whole world perishing in the waters?

Still less will you feel, when you shall see the floods of divine vengeance deluging the ungodly, and yourselves, as "heirs of righteousness," placed beyond the reach of harm. Fear not then to be singular in a good cause. It is better to condemn the world by a holy singularity, and to be condemned by them on account of it; than to be condemned with them, and endure the wrath of an incensed God.

#2322

ABRAHAM'S LIFE A PATTERN FOR OURS

Hebrews 11:8-11

"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith Abraham, even though he was past age--and Sarah herself was barren--was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise."

THERE can scarcely be proposed to our consideration any subject more important than the practical efficacy of faith. It is the one subject which pervades this whole chapter: and it is set before us in the most advantageous way that can be imagined, being exhibited in living examples, in whom it was so embodied as to be visible, as it were, before our eyes. Had the Apostle launched forth into a general description of it, we might possibly be thought to lay an undue stress on any expressions which he has used: but, when he merely refers us to historic facts as illustrative of the point, we feel, that there is no room for misapprehension on the part of any candid inquirer.

The Apostle has already adduced instances which occurred before the flood: and now he comes to specify others which took place at different and distant periods, almost to the apostolic age. At the head of these is the case of Abraham, who, both in this chapter, and in other parts of Scripture, is more celebrated for his faith than any other of the children of men. We propose to consider,

I. His conduct under the influence of faith—

It is but a partial view that we shall be led to take at present of Abraham's faith, because other, and yet more remarkable, circumstances will come under our consideration at a future time. We now notice only two things:

1. His departure from his own country—

While Abraham was in Ur of the Chaldees, God appeared to him, and said, "Get out of your country, and from your kindred, and from your father's house, unto a land which I will show you, Genesis 12:1 and Acts 7:3." Whether this was done in a vision, or by a voice, we are not informed: but it is clear that it was done in such a way as not to leave the smallest doubt upon Abraham's mind, that the command proceeded from Jehovah, the only true and living God. It was a command which required much self-denial: for every man naturally feels attached to his country, and his kindred, and his possessions; and, unless induced by the prospect of some great advantages, is averse to leave them. But the self-denial was the greater, because he was not informed where he was to go: it was to a land which would afterwards be shown him. What would all his friends and relatives think of him, when he told them that he was about to forsake them all, and did not so much as know where he was going? Would they not account him mad? Yet he did obey, without hesitation, and without a murmur.

God, at the same time that he issued this command, had engaged to "make of him a great nation," and to raise up from his loins the promised "Seed, in whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed, Genesis 12:2-3;" and of God's power or faithfulness he had no doubt, Romans 4:18-21. He therefore went forth, willingly renouncing all present comforts in obedience to his God, assured that, however despised or ridiculed his conduct might be, it would prove in the outcome to be the path of happiness and wisdom.

2. His sojourning in the land of promise as in a strange country—

When he went forth from his own country, he took with him Sarah his wife, and Terah his father, and his nephew Lot. But though he went towards Canaan, he stopped short of it in Haran; and there abode five years, until his father's death: when he proceeded to

Canaan, Acts 7:4, where, except when driven from it by a famine, he abode during the remainder of his days. But did he then merely change one inheritance for another? No; he had not there the smallest inheritance, "no, not so much as to set his foot on." He had not even a stationary abode; but dwelt in tents, which were moved from one place to another, as occasion required. Thus avowing himself to be a mere pilgrim and sojourner there, and to be "looking for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

The city which he had left in his native land, and those which were in the land of promise, had their foundation in the dust, to which they would all in time be reduced. But the heavenly city, which God had formed for his own habitation and the eternal residence of his saints, would continue forever: and to that he looked as his home; content to have no abiding place here, if only he might attain to that as his eternal rest, Hebrews 13:14.

Nor was it for himself only that he chose this unsettled mode of life, but for his children also, even for "Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise:" for what he desired for himself, he desired for them also—the enjoyment of the Divine favor, and the possession of an unseen, but everlasting inheritance.

But while we contemplate his conduct in these respects, it will be proper to show,

II. How far his example is a pattern for us—

It is evident that the whole catalogue of saints here enumerated is intended to illustrate the nature and efficacy of faith. Yet in considering the conduct of the individuals, we must make due allowance for the difference of circumstances, and rather mark the principle by which they were actuated, than the particular acts in which it was displayed. If, for instance, we would imagine that we were called to forsake our country and kindred in the way that Abraham did, we would greatly err. But I conceive, that, in the two following respects, all will confess we are bound to follow him:

1. The authority of God would in our minds be paramount to every other authority—

As he "consulted not with flesh and blood," when once the Divine will was intimated to him, so neither should we. It should be sufficient for us that God has commanded anything. There should then be no inquiry whether the command be easy or not; nor should there be any regard to consequences in obeying it: there should be in us a fixed determination of heart to fulfill his will at all events.

If, for instance, the Lord Jesus Christ says to us, "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me;" we must not stand to inquire into the extent of the self-denial that may be requisite, or the weight of the cross which we may have to bear—but leave that to his wise and gracious disposal, being intent on nothing but the performance of our duty to him. If he adds that we must "forsake all, and follow him," not only not loving, but actually hating, in comparison with him, our own nearest and most honored relatives—yes, and "our own lives also," we must not reply, "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" but must set ourselves instantly to fulfill in all its extent whatever he has required of us. If men, who know not God, despise, and revile, and persecute us, we must be ready to welcome it all for his sake; and to reply to the menaces of the most ferocious adversaries, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge you." In a word, we must spare no pains to ascertain the mind of God; and, that once learned, neither men nor devils should deter us from laboring to fulfill it.

2. The interests of the eternal world should be paramount to every other interest—

Abraham had never seen the heavenly city; but, in the hope of reaching it, he counted all earthly possessions, interests, or pleasures, as unworthy of notice. We too are ignorant of what awaits us in the eternal world: we have no conception of the glory that shall be revealed to us at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. But by faith we may even now get such views of it, that all earthly glory shall vanish before it, as the stars before the meridian sun.

How empty did all the glory of Egypt appear to Moses, when he had respect unto the recompense of reward which awaited him in the eternal world, verse 26. And to Paul all his accumulated afflictions appeared lightness itself, while he looked, not at "the things which are visible and temporal, but at those which are invisible and eternal! 2 Corinthians 4:17-18." And thus it will be with us: it will be a small thing to us that we have no inheritance here, or even that we are called to give up an inheritance we already possess. We shall even "take joyfully the confiscation of our goods, knowing that we have in Heaven a better, and an enduring, substance Hebrews 10:34." We shall contentedly live as pilgrims and sojourners here, and seek our rest only in the world above.

Let us then take occasion from this subject to inquire,

1. Whether we are truly children of Abraham—

Our blessed Lord has told us, that, "If we are Abraham's children, we shall do the works of Abraham, John 8:39." Do we then these works? Do we in these respects "walk in the steps of Abraham? Romans 4:12." Inquire what authority has God's Word with you? Do

you set yourselves to obey every command of his as soon as you know it? Are you anxious to know his will in order that you may obey it? Inquire also, what influence the world has over you? If you belong to Christ, though you are in the world, you are not of it: "you are not of the world, even as Christ was not of the world, John 17:14-16;" you love it not, nor anything that is in it: "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, are shunned by you as ensnaring, and despised by you as unsatisfying, 1 John 2:15-16." "The very friendship of it you avoid, as enmity with God, James 4:4;" you "come out from it, 2 Corinthians 4:17;" and will "not be conformed to it, Romans 12:2;" you are even "crucified unto it, and esteem it as a crucified" object in your eyes, Galatians 6:14.

Say, is it thus with you? and do you regard it thus in reference to your children, as well as unto yourself; contented that your children after you would live in tents, if only they may attain an everlasting inheritance? The description of all true Christians is, "They walk by faith, and not by sight! 2 Corinthians 5:7." And surely it is no difficult thing to ascertain what your habits are in this respect. Oh! remember, that if you are not Abraham's sons, you have another father, even the devil! This may sound harsh; but it is the declaration of Him who "spoke as never any man spoke, John 8:38-44." I beg you, leave not such an interesting subject any longer in suspense: nor rest until you have given evidence that you are "Abraham's seed," by walking as Abraham "walked, and as Christ himself also walked 1 John 2:6."

2. How you may become Abraham spiritual children—

It was by faith that Abraham was brought into a justified state: and by faith are we also to be made partakers of that happiness. By our works we must prove our relation to him; but by faith alone, can we obtain an admission into his family. We must believe in the promised Seed, as he did; and then shall we be Christ's, as he was: "And, if we are Christ's, then are we Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise, Galatians 3:6-7; Galatians 3:29."

Now it is of the utmost importance that we understand this matter well. For there are many who imagine, that to sequester themselves from the world is meritorious, and to live as monks or hermits is to secure the favor of their God. But this is a fatal error. There is no acceptance with God but by Jesus Christ, even by faith in his atoning blood. The Apostle especially guards us on this head. Abraham was circumcised: yet his righteousness came not by circumcision, but by the faith which he had while he was yet uncircumcised, Romans 4:9-11. So it is not by any obedience of ours that we are to purchase an inheritance in Heaven; we must receive it as the free gift of God through Christ Jesus; and then press forward towards it in the way of his commandments. Let us walk with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in this world, and then we shall "sit down with them for ever in the kingdom of our God!"

#2323

THE PRACTICAL EFFICACY OF FAITH

Hebrews 11:13

"All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth."

THE precepts contained in Scripture may be supposed to admit of a latitude of interpretation favorable to the views of those who profess to regard them; but the examples that are recorded there, exhibit a light which the ingenuity of man in vain attempts to obscure. Who that reads the history of the patriarchs, and the commendations bestowed upon them, can doubt the efficacy of faith to produce obedience, or the nature of that obedience that ought to be produced? After all the allowance that must of necessity be made for a diversity of situation between them and us, the principle by which they were actuated remains the same, and its operation also must be the same, as far as the circumstances in which we are, agree with theirs. It is manifest that the catalogue which is here given us of holy men, was not recorded merely for the sake of historical information, but for our instruction in righteousness, and as an incentive to imitate their virtues. The passage before us relates to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who alone "had opportunity to return to the country which they had left:" confining therefore our attention to them, we shall show,

I. Wherein they excelled—

From the account given of them in the text, we are led to admire,

1. The strength of their faith—

They were taught to expect a numerous seed, and the possession of the land of Canaan: and, together with these temporal blessings; others of a far sublimer nature were promised; namely, a descendant in whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed; and an everlasting inheritance in Heaven. These promises they did not see accomplished: yes, not even the temporal blessings did they receive: for in the space of two hundred and forty years their posterity in the promised line amounted to but

seventy; and Jacob, after sojourning as a stranger in Canaan, died in Egypt. But the patriarchs "walked by faith, and not by sight;" and, notwithstanding all their discouragements and delays, held fast their confidence even unto death: "they all died in faith."

2. Faith's practical effects—

Expecting higher blessings than this world could afford, they disregarded the things of time and sense as of little value. They considered themselves as mere "pilgrims and sojourners on the earth," and repeatedly "confessed" this to be their true and proper character, Genesis 23:4; Genesis 47:9. This correspondence between their principles and their practice marked both the sincerity and efficacy of their faith, and was, in fact, their highest commendation.

It will be easily seen from hence,

II. Wherein they should be imitated—

We are certainly not required to resemble them in their wandering unsettled kind of life; but we should imitate them:

1. In the state of their minds—

We have promises, as they also had; and promises which yet remain to be fulfilled to us. God has not only assured us of acceptance with him in and through his beloved Son, but has engaged to send his Holy Spirit into our hearts, for the carrying on and perfecting his work within us. We meet with many delays and difficulties, which at times disquiet our minds, and lead us almost to doubt the truth of the promises themselves: but we would "against hope believe in hope:" yes, we would "hold fast the rejoicing of our hope firm unto the end." If God be true to his word, and able to perform it, "not one jot or tittle of it can ever fail." Convinced of this, we would say, "Though he slays me—yet will I trust in him."

2. In the habit of their lives—

The name "pilgrims and strangers" was not given to the patriarchs merely on account of their sojourning in a strange land; for David, after he was established on his throne, and had subdued all his enemies on every side, assumes the same title, 1 Chronicles 29:15; and the same appellation is given to us also under the Christian dispensation, 1 Peter 2:11. Though we are not called to dwell in moveable habitations, we, as much as the patriarchs themselves, should answer to the character of pilgrims. We should feel only indifference to the things of this world. We should be daily advancing towards the heavenly world. And we should look forward to death as the consummation of all our happiness.

#2324

THE CHRISTIAN'S DESIRE

Hebrews 11:16

"Instead, they were longing for a better country--a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them."

WHEREVER the Gospel is faithfully declared, it is generally known that we are to be saved by "the same faith as that which dwelt in our father Abraham:" but it is not so generally understood, that we are to "walk in the steps of Abraham;" and that, in the most self-denying acts of his life, he was intended to be an example to us, Romans 4:12. But in its fruits, as well as in its object, our faith must resemble his.

Now, among his most eminent virtues we must reckon his superiority to the world, in that he willingly left his own country to "sojourn in the land of promise, as in a strange land;" and continued, with Isaac and Jacob, to the very end of his days, to walk as a pilgrim and a sojourner there, in the assured hope and expectation of a better country, which he had in view, Hebrews 11:8-10.

Both he and his family "had opportunities in abundance to return" to their own land, if they had been so disposed: but they knew themselves to be under the Divine guidance and direction; and regarded nothing in comparison with God's favor, and the ultimate possession of that recompense to which they had respect.

In them, then, we may see,

I. The character of every true Christian—

The true Christian seeks a better portion than this world can give him—

He is in the world, and performs the duties of his station, like others; and, as to external appearance, he differs not materially from

the sober part of mankind. He does not make an unnecessary parade of his religion; nor does he affect needless singularities: but he moves quietly and unostentatiously in the sphere which God has assigned to him. But, in "the spirit of his mind," he is widely different from every unconverted man. "His affections are set on things above, and not on things below, Colossians 3:2." He sees the emptiness and vanity of all earthly things: he has weighed them in a balance, and found them lacking in every respect. He has seen how uncertain they are, both in the acquisition and enjoyment; how wholly unsatisfying to a spiritual mind; and how soon they pass away.

Heavenly things, on the contrary, he has found to be every way worthy of his pursuit: and he has determined, through grace, to disregard everything in comparison with them. He has learned to regard this world as a mere wilderness; a land through which he is passing to his own native country—the country where his Father dwells, and which is the place of his ultimate abode.

The conduct of the patriarchs gives, in this respect, a just idea of the Christian. They dwelt in tents, and not, like those around them, in cities: and thus they showed to all, and indeed avowed confessed, verse 13, that they were traveling towards a better land.

Thus the Christian takes not up his rest in anything here below; but shows, by the whole of his spirit and conduct, that he is indeed looking for "a better country, that is, a heavenly one."

In this he is distinguished from all other persons whatever—

Others may be weary of the world through disappointment and vexation; or they may feel an indifference towards some things that are in it. But there is no man, except the Christian, that is uniformly and universally dead to the world, at the same time that he has every opportunity to enjoy it.

No person, but the true Christian, compares the two worlds together, so as to give a deliberate and determined preference to that which is above. The glories of the eternal world are seen by none but him, and therefore are coveted by him alone. Others, in their judgment indeed, will acknowledge the superior excellence of the eternal world: (in truth, there is no man so stupid and brutish as to entertain a doubt of it,) but in their hearts they do not love it; and in their lives they do not seek it.

The true Christian, on the contrary, does seek it above all. And in this there is no difference to be found between saints of any country, or any age. The mind of the Patriarchs is the mind of every Christian under Heaven. The same sentiment prevails among the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the learned and the unlearned, the healthy and the dying. There may be a difference in many points both of faith and practice: but in this there is none. Every individual that is truly converted to God will say, "Hear my prayer, O LORD, listen to my cry for help; be not deaf to my weeping. For I dwell with you as a sojourner, a stranger, as all my fathers were, Psalm 39:12."

If the Christian is exalted in his character above others, so also is he in,

II. The high honor conferred upon him—

God is, by way of eminence, his God—

Jehovah is the God of all the universe: there is not a creature in Heaven, earth, or Hell, that is not subject to his control. But he is in a peculiar manner the God of those who consecrate themselves to him, and endeavor to walk according to his will. This is particularly declared in reference to the point before us; a separation, in mind and spirit, from the unbelieving world. "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18."

See what God was to Abraham, how he:
conversed with him as a friend;
admitted him to the closest fellowship;
heard and answered his prayers;
protected him from every enemy;
and finally admitted him to his beatific presence in Heaven.

Thus will he do to all, who, like Abraham, endeavor to maintain a constant fellowship with him. Yes, whatever God himself possesses, even all his own infinite perfections, shall be employed in behalf of the believing soul, as much as if there were not another creature in the universe to engage his attention.

Thus will he do, I say, in this life: and, in the life to come, "he has prepared for the heavenly-minded Christian a city," a fixed habitation, a habitation suited to him, and worthy of God himself.

Nor will God be ashamed to avow himself his God—

God would be utterly ashamed to acknowledge a worldling as standing in such a relation to him; just as we would to acknowledge as our friend and favorite a notorious robber, or an abandoned prostitute. The worldling "robs God" in ten thousand respects. He robs him of his heart, his time, his service, Malachi 3:8; and commits whoredom and adultery, as the Scripture expresses it, with every base thing which solicits his regards, James 4:4. How is it possible that God would approve of such base proceedings, or profess himself the friend of such worthless creatures?

Our Lord tells us that "of those who are ashamed of him, he will be ashamed, when he shall come in the glory of his Father with his holy angels Mark 8:38." He will turn from them with indignation, saying, "Depart from me; I never knew you."

But of a faithful servant, neither God the Father, nor the Lord Jesus Christ, will ever be ashamed. On the contrary, "both the Father and the Son will come to him, and make their abode with him John 14:23." Indeed, God rather loves to be called his God, and chooses to be designated by that very name.

When Moses asked of God, by what name he would make him known to the children of Israel, God replied, "Thus shall you say unto the children of Israel; the Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me unto you. This is my name for ever; and this is my memorial unto all generations, Exodus 3:15." Individual believers indeed are not, nor can be, mentioned in Scripture, as these patriarchs are: but it is as true of one as of another: and God will put no difference between one and another, any further than the fidelity of each individual shall justify a distinction in his behalf.

ADDRESS—

1. Those who set their hearts on earthly things—

How unlike are you to the saints of former days! Compare your life, or rather your spirit, with that of the persons mentioned in my text. Do not mistake, as though their call was peculiar, and nothing resembling it is given to you. I know you are not called to go out from your country, and to dwell in tents: but you are called to "desire a better country," and that supremely; yes, and not only to desire it, but to seek it; to seek it with your whole hearts. And is there not just occasion for you to seek it? Compare the present with the future world: can you doubt which would have the preference in your esteem? You cannot. Why, then, do you not act agreeably to your convictions? Do you not know, that you can never have any hope of Heaven if you do not desire it—you can never possess it, if you do not labor for it? I must further say, that, if you will not be the Lord's people, you can have, no hope that he will give himself to you as your God. You are afraid, perhaps, that your names will be cast out as evil if you renounce the world, and live in it as pilgrims and sojourners. To be ridiculed as righteous overmuch is, in your eyes, too formidable an evil to be encountered. But, if you are ashamed to be called God's servants, will not he be ashamed to be called your God? No doubt he will: and I wish you to consider this, before it be too late. Without a surrender of yourselves to him, you can never hope that he will give himself to you.

2. Those who are endued with patriarchal virtue—

There are some, I trust, who, like the patriarchs, desire, and show too by their lives that they do "desire a heavenly country." Go on, beloved, in your heavenly way; and whatever opportunities are afforded you to go back, regard them not: yes, if even the fiercest opposition be made to you, let it not impede your course one moment. What if people despise, and hate, and persecute you—shall that be allowed to divert you from your purpose? Do you not remember what is said of our Lord, that "for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross and despised the shame, and is set down on the right hand of the throne of God, Hebrews 12:2." Then, walk in his steps; and, like him, in due time you shall "inherit the glory prepared for you from the foundation of the world!"

#2325

ABRAHAM OFFERING UP ISAAC

Hebrews 11:17-19

"By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death."

THE whole life of the patriarchs was an apt illustration of the life of faith; because, when they had abundant opportunities of returning to the country from whence they had come out, they refused to do so, and preferred living as strangers and pilgrims in a foreign

land, testifying plainly to all around them, that they regarded not this world as their home, but were in pursuit of a better, that is, a heavenly country, verse 13-16. The Apostle, having shown us this, returns to the case of Abraham, of whose faith he had already spoken in terms of high commendation, but whose principal act of faith remained yet to be noticed, as being the most illustrious exercise of that grace which the world had ever seen. This we are now to consider: and it will indeed be found profitable to mark,

I. The wonderful transaction here recorded—

God issued a command to Abraham to offer up his son—

This was such a command as was sufficient to confound his reason, and to excite in his mind a doubt whether it could proceed from a God of truth and love. The account is given us in the 22nd chapter of Genesis, where all the circumstances that attended it are recorded. Abraham had a son given to him in his old age, when neither he nor his wife, according to the common course of nature, could hope for any progeny. This son was constituted the appointed medium for bringing into the world "the Seed, in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed." Yet this son was Abraham to take, and with his own hands to offer him up a burned-offering to the Lord.

Upon the delivery of this command, we might suppose him almost of necessity to say: "Can this proceed from God? Can he not only take away thus the life of an innocent youth, but require me, the father of that youth, to be his executioner? Surely the suggestion comes rather from Satan, who seeing that this youth is to be the progenitor of the Messiah, the Redeemer of the world, would take advantage of my desire to please God, and make me his instrument to defeat the purposes of the Almighty, by destroying the very person to whom the promises are made." But he had no doubt whence the voice proceeded; and therefore

This command he instantly set himself to fulfill—

He "conferred not with flesh and blood:" he listened not to the dictates of carnal reason, nor consulted for a moment the judgment of his wife; but addressed himself to his arduous duty with readiness, with perseverance, and with a fortitude that was invincible. "He rose up early in the morning, and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and cleave the wood for the burned-offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him, Genesis 22:3."

But so distant was the appointed place, that he reached it not until the third day. What a time was here for meditation and reflection! and what conflicts may we suppose him to have experienced in his soul between parental love and duty to his God! Yet he persevered: yes, when the beloved youth, seeing in his father's hands the knife that was to slay the sacrifice, and the fire that was to consume it, put to him the touching question, "My father, behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burned-offering?" still he maintained his resolution; and, waving any direct answer to it, proceeded to the place.

There, no doubt, he revealed the matter to his son, who acquiesced in the Divine appointment; and then, having laid the wood in order, and bound his son, raised the knife to inflict the fatal wound. With what more than human firmness must he have been endowed, to execute an act so revolting to all the feelings of his nature, and so likely to transmit his name with infamy to the remotest posterity! How was it that he acquired strength to perform the act? We are told,

In the execution of it he was animated and upheld by faith—

To this principle his obedience is expressly ascribed: "By faith he offered Isaac." Mere reason would suggest to him, that, in destroying his son, he would annihilate the hopes of the whole world, founded as they were on the progeny that would hereafter spring from his loins. But by faith he was so persuaded both of the truth of God in his promises, and of his power to accomplish them, that he hesitated not to obey the Divine mandate; assured that, though his son were slain and burned to ashes, God would rather raise him up to life again than allow one jot or tittle of his word to fail.

What though no instance of such an interposition had ever yet existed? that was no reason that it would not exist, if it were necessary to the performance of the Divine promises. Indeed an interposition little short of that, had already existed in the very birth of Isaac, who had been given to him, when neither he nor Sarah could, according to nature, have any hope of an offspring: and as Omnipotence had given that son in accomplishment of a promise, so the same Almighty Power both could, and should, restore him even from the dead.

Nor was he in this respect disappointed of his hope: for, in the moment his hand was lifted up to slay his son, God arrested his arm, and forbade the execution of his purpose, accepting the will for the deed, and accounting that as actually done which in an instant of time would have been irrevocably done, if the same authority that enjoined it had not interposed to prevent it: so that Abraham is always spoken of as having actually offered up his son; and as having, "in a figure, received him again from the dead."

Now, as in this transaction there are several different points to be attended to, so will there be a corresponding diversity in,

II. The instruction to be derived from it—

We may learn,

1. From his trial, the use and intent of trials—

God is said to have "tested Abraham." But we are not to understand from this that he did anything with a view to lead Abraham to the commission of evil: in that sense "God never tempts any man: and if any man be drawn to the commission of sin, it is only through the influence of his own indwelling corruptions, James 1:13-14." But God gave him this command, in order that it might be seen, both by Abraham himself and by the world at large, whether he had grace to execute it.

God, in all his dispensations towards the Jews in the wilderness, had the same object in view, as Moses informed them at the commencement of their journeying in the wilderness, Exodus 16:4, and afterwards reminded them just previous to their entrance into Canaan, Deuteronomy 8:2. He warned them also that at all future periods they must be on their guard not to be drawn aside from Jehovah by persons pretending to a divine authority, even though they would work miracles in confirmation of their word, or utter prophecies that would eventually come to pass; for that God would allow such impostors to arise, in order to put their fidelity to the test, and to give them an opportunity of evincing what was in their hearts, Deuteronomy 13:1-3.

God himself indeed needed not for his own information such events; for he knew what was in man, whether it was brought forth into act, or not: but they themselves could know it only by seeing the actual operation of their own principles: and therefore, for the comfort of some, and the humiliation of others, he allowed their principles to be brought to the test, and afforded by his own dispensations an occasion for their internal graces or weaknesses to display themselves, 2 Chronicles 32:31.

It is for the same end that God at this day suffers obstacles of various kinds to be put in the way of his people; he does it, that their faith may be tried; and that, if it stands the trial, redoubled benefits may accrue unto them, 1 Peter 4:12-13. Know then that these trials, which are to so many an occasion of falling, are intended of God to be to you an occasion of approving your fidelity to him.

The prospect of some advantage, or of the gratification of a forbidden appetite, presents itself to you: and by it God says, "Now, which will you prefer—my honor, or your own lust? Look to it, that you be steadfast in your obedience to me."

In like manner, when persecution arises because of the word, or when any who profess godliness makes shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience, it is all permitted by God, as far as you are concerned, on purpose to detect your hypocrisy, if you are unsound at heart; or to evince the steadfastness of your faith in him.

Make then this improvement of every temptation, that you may come out of it as gold from the furnace, and prove by means of it "the sincerity of your love, 2 Corinthians 8:8."

2. From the graces which carried him through it, the different offices of faith and fear—

The particular end of this temptation was to discover whether Abraham truly "feared God, Genesis 22:12;" and God acknowledges that that point was by the obedience of his servant clearly ascertained. Now by "fear," is meant such a reverential awe of the Divine Majesty, as swallows up all other considerations, and determines us to fulfill God's will at all events. It annihilates all other fear, and constrains the soul to reply to its persecutors, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, you judge; for I cannot but proceed in my duty to him, though the whole world would combine to oppress me, Acts 4:19-20."

But fear alone would be ineffectual to prevail in so great a warfare: therefore faith comes to its aid; and presents to the mind the promises of God; the promise of effectual aid in the conflict, and of an abundant recompense after it. Without this support, our spirit would soon fail: but under an assurance that God will fulfill his word, we are enabled to go forth "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might," and to defy the whole universe to "separate us from the love of Christ." The two would always be united; the one to operate as a stimulus, and the other as an encouragement. If either are lacking, our obedience will be very imperfect: it will want that holy reverence which we would ever maintain even in the midst of our most exalted joys, or that filial confidence which so peculiarly pleases and honors God.

See then, brethren, that, however difficult the service is which God requires of you, it be performed resolutely and without delay. Let no consideration under Heaven weigh with you, any more than the dust upon the balance, in opposition to any known command. And while you labor to obey God's precepts, hold fast his promises with a confidence that nothing can shake. Listen not to any carnal reasonings, however specious they may be, when once you know what the Word of God requires. Duty is yours: outcomes are God's. Labor you to execute your part; and leave him to fulfill his, in his own way, and in his own time. Let it suffice for your encouragement, that "he is faithful who has promised;" and, that "what he has promised he is able also to perform."

3. From the outcome of his trial, the benefit of approving ourselves faithful to our God—

"By this act of his he was justified." As a sinner, indeed, he had been accepted by God forty years before, as soon as ever he believed in that promised "Seed who was to descend from him, and in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed," and in

that sense he was justified by faith alone, Romans 4:3-5; Romans 4:9-11; Romans 4:20-22. But James says truly, that "he was justified by works also, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar, James 2:21-23;" for by that act he was justified in his own conscience, and justified before the whole world.

A tree may be good: but how shall it be known to be good but by its fruit? It is then only perfect when it is laden with fruit, and thus demonstrated to be good. Just so, Abraham, though previously pardoned and accepted by his God, was then proved and evidenced to be a righteous character, and in a state of acceptance with God, when by this astonishing act of obedience he displayed the reality and efficacy of his faith. From that time he was honored with that glorious appellation, "The friend of God," and, for his further encouragement, God confirmed all his promises to him with an oath, Genesis 22:16; that by these two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, he might have the stronger consolation. Nay more, his Isaac, whom, in his mind and purpose, he had sacrificed, was now restored to him: and O! to what unspeakable advantage! What delight would he henceforth feel in a son so given, and so restored to him as from the dead!

Just so, shall we find it in vain to sacrifice anything to the Lord? Shall we not, in proportion to the greatness of our sacrifices, and the willingness with which they have been offered, have an evidence in our souls that we are in favor with God? Will not the very exercise of such grace demonstrate to us the truth and efficacy of the grace we have received? And, when we have shown such love to God, can we entertain any doubt of God's love to us? Shall we feel any difficulty in concluding, that, if we have so chosen and loved God, "he has first chosen and loved us, John 15:16. 1 John 4:10."

Moreover, God will give unto us the witness of his Spirit, assuring us that we are indeed his children, and his friends, Romans 8:16. 1 John 3:24. This is what Paul has plainly taught us to expect. He tells us, that "tribulation works patience; and patience, experience; (that is, an evidence arising from trial, such an evidence as the gold has of its purity after having stood the trial of the fire,) and experience, hope; and hope makes not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who is given unto us, Romans 5:3-5."

Fear not then, any of you, to sacrifice your very Isaac to the Lord, if called to it. The trial may be painful at the time, but "it shall be to your praise and honor and glory, as well as unto the praise and honor and glory of your God, at the appearing of Jesus Christ, 1 Peter 1:7."

4. From the typical aspect of the whole, the transcendent love of God to man—

It is said, that "Abraham received Isaac from the dead in a figure." Many interpret this expression as importing that the whole of this history was a type or figure of our redemption by Christ. Whether that is the true import of the expression or not, I can have no doubt but that the whole transaction was typical of that most astonishing and incomprehensible mystery, the gift of God's only-begotten Son to "die for our sins, and to be raised again for our justification."

Behold, then, the love of God in this! Do we admire the obedience of Abraham to the Divine command? O! what shall we say of the love of Almighty God, who, without any necessity on his own part, or any solicitation on ours, gave his only-begotten Son, not to die by a wound which inflicted pain only for a moment, but under the curse due to sin, even to the sins of the world? From all eternity did he ordain this sacrifice; and never drew back from his purpose.

When his Son entreated with strong crying and tears to have the cup taken away from him, it was not removed; but was given him to drink, even to the dregs. With his own hand too did the Father inflict the fatal wound: yes, "it pleased the Lord Jehovah to bruise him! Isaiah 53:10." For Isaac, the Lord accepted a substitute, a ram caught in the thicket: but no substitute was found for the Lord Jesus Christ, seeing that he himself was the substitute for a guilty world: and, in token that his sacrifice had made a full atonement for sin, he was raised from the dead, and exalted to Heaven, to carry on and perfect there the work which he had begun on earth.

What shall we say to this love? The height, the depth, the length, the breadth of it, how unsearchable! how utterly incomprehensible! Turn then your eyes from Abraham to Abraham's God. Or, if you look at Abraham at all, let it be not so much to admire, as to imitate, his obedience. "He saw by faith the day of Christ, and seeing it, he rejoiced;" and counted no sacrifice too costly with which to honor him.

Your views of Christ, and of the Father's love in him, are incomparably clearer than ever Abraham's were: and therefore, if it is possible, your obedience would be proportionably more prompt, more self-denying, and more firm. Let then every lust be sacrificed to God without reserve, and every interest too that may stand in the way of your duty to him. So shall you be children of Abraham indeed, and be acknowledged the friends of God by him, who will reward every man according to his works.

"By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward."

IT is a great advantage to us to be conversant with the Holy Scriptures, not only because from them we learn the principles of religion, which can be derived from no other source, but because we see in them examples which have upon them the stamp and impress of God's approbation, and which therefore we cannot presume to disapprove. Had any individual of the present day acted as Moses did in the instance before us, we should, I doubt not, have all agreed in condemning him as inconsiderate, enthusiastic, and unwise. Not knowing his motives, or not giving him credit for them, we could not have formed a correct judgment of his actions: but we are sure that the choice which Moses made, however absurd it might appear to those more immediately connected with him, was truly commendable. In bringing it before you, I shall endeavor,

I. I shall endeavor to explain Moses' choice—

Two things must here be noticed:

1. Moses' conduct—

He was, next to Pharaoh, the first man in the whole land of Egypt, having been adopted by Pharaoh's daughter as her son, and being regarded as such by Pharaoh himself. All the pleasures, the riches, and the honors that man could possess, with the exception only of the imperial diadem, were within his reach, or rather he was in the actual enjoyment of them. Yet the whole of these did he renounce: and not at a season when by reason of youth he was unable to form a just estimate of them, or by reason of old age was incapable of enjoying them, but in the very prime of life, at the age of forty, when he had arrived at full maturity both of body and mind, Exodus 2:11. Acts 7:23; and when, from "being learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, Acts 7:22," he was able to relish them with a zest, which a vulgar and uninstructed mind knows nothing of, and which nothing but refinement can bestow. All these he sacrificed voluntarily and with a determined purpose, "refusing" to be recognized any longer under the august character of Pharaoh's daughter, and choosing rather to appear in his own proper character as a child of Abraham.

While Moses was in this exalted station, his brethren according to the flesh were suffering under the most grievous oppression. To unite himself with them, was to subject himself to all the reproach and cruelty under which they groaned. Yet he acknowledged them as his kindred: and voluntarily participated with them in their lot: descending thus at once from the highest eminence in the kingdom, to the lowest state of degradation and infamy.

To obtain a just view of this conduct we must notice,

2. The principle from which it proceeded—

We are told that he acted thus "by faith." By faith, he saw that the Hebrews were exclusively "the people of God;" and that, as such, whatever they might endure from man, they were and must be happy; since God, the God of the whole earth, was their God, and esteemed them as his own peculiar treasure. He saw too, that the reproach that was cast upon them was "cast upon them for the sake of Christ," in whom they professed to believe as their future Messiah, the Savior of the world. Had they chosen to intermarry with the Egyptians, and become one people with them, they would have suffered nothing from Pharaoh, but would have fared as the rest of his subjects. But, holding fast their regard for Abraham as their father, and their expectation of Christ as to spring from one of his descendants, they exposed themselves to all the injuries which an envious, cruel, and despotic monarch could inflict: so that their reproach was properly "the reproach of Christ," Christ himself being the object of it, and suffering it, as it were, in the person of his people. See Acts 9:4. Colossians 1:24.

He saw yet further, that the afflictions which they endured for Christ's sake would in due time be recompensed; and, that all who participated in their sufferings, would partake also of their reward. As the patriarchs looked by faith to a heavenly city, and a heavenly country—so Moses looked to a heavenly reward; in the prospect of which he was willing to forego all that this world could give him, and to sustain all that his most potent and malicious enemies could inflict upon him. Indeed in this view he esteemed reproach to be "riches," "great riches," yes, "greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt!"

But as the wisdom of this conduct may be doubted,

II. I shall endeavor to vindicate Moses' choice—

It may be thought that this measure was unnecessary, inexpedient, and absurd, but:

1. Moses' choice was necessary—

Circumstanced as he was, it befitted him to act as he did. He was, I grant, greatly indebted to Pharaoh's daughter: and he was bound to regard her with all the duteous affection which belonged to the relation into which he had been adopted by her. But his duty to the God of Abraham was paramount to every other: and he would have sinned, if he had merged his fidelity to God in his regards for any creature whatever. All the pleasures which he had enjoyed, however innocent in themselves, were "pleasures of sin," as long as he continued to acknowledge the God of the Hebrews as his God, and the faith of the Hebrews as his faith. The neglecting to confess his God was tantamount to denying him: and, if he continued any longer to deny God, he could expect nothing but to be denied of God in the day of judgment. The measure therefore which he adopted was not unnecessary, but absolutely necessary, both for his peace in this world, and his happiness in the world to come.

2. Moses' choice was expedient—

It might be supposed, that if he had continued, like Joseph, at the head of the Egyptian government, he might have mitigated their sorrows, even though he would never be able to effect their release. But he had a secret intimation from God, that the time of their deliverance drew near, and that he was to be the instrument by whom they would be delivered. And so strong was this impression upon his mind, that he engaged in the work rashly and prematurely, without any direction from God; and thereby reduced himself to the necessity of fleeing to a foreign land, to avoid the punishment to which his own unwarrantable temerity had exposed him, Acts 7:24-29.

The question in his mind was, What duty to his God required? and he was not at liberty to calculate then on matters of expediency, or to weigh in the balance of carnal reason the possible or probable issues of different events. His duty was to obey God; and to leave to God to save his people in his own time and way, according to his own infallible and eternal counsels.

3. Moses' choice was wise—

Moses looked beyond the concerns of time, and acted with eternity in view. He knew that his pleasures, riches, and honors, however great they were, were only "for a season;" and that the afflictions to which he was about to subject himself, were also "for a season" only; whereas the recompense which his sacrifices would insure him, was eternal. What comparison then could there be between these things? Or what room was there for hesitating one moment which he would prefer? If he gained the whole world, what would it profit him, if he lost his own soul? Or if, by sacrificing the whole world, his soul would be saved, what reason could he have to regret the sacrifice? His choice then was that which sound wisdom dictated, and true piety inspired.

In truth, this is no other choice than what all the Prophets and Apostles in their respective ages have approved. David "would rather be a door-keeper in the house of his God than dwell in the tents of ungodliness, Psalm 84:10;" And why? Because, as he tells us in another psalm, "A little that a righteous man has, is better than the riches of many wicked, Psalm 37:16;" better in its possession, better in its operation, better in its end.

Solomon was of precisely the same mind, Proverbs 15:16-17.

Paul, like Moses, actually "suffered the loss of all things, and accounted them but rubbish, that he might win Christ, Philippians 3:8." Having made a sacrifice of everything, so far was he from feeling himself impoverished by his loss, that, "when he had nothing, he accounted himself as possessing all things, 2 Corinthians 6:10;" and actually "took pleasure in all his necessities and distresses, from a consideration of the benefit which would accrue from them to himself, and the glory to his Lord and Master, 2 Corinthians 12:9-10."

Peter confirms this view of the subject most fully, and in terms too which are peculiarly applicable to the case before us: for he declares, that the sufferings of God's people are "Christ's sufferings;" that from them arises much honor to God, and much benefit to the soul; and that they are rather to be accounted grounds of joy, than occasions of sorrow and regret, 1 Peter 4:12-14. To these I will only add the testimony of our Lord himself, who, in the epistle to the Church of Smyrna says, "I know your works, and tribulation, and poverty; but you are rich, Revelation 2:9."

After such testimonies as these, we cannot but approve the conduct to which our text refers.

From this subject then we may see,

1. How erroneous are the views of worldly men!

The men of this world set a high value on the things of time and sense, while sin appears in their eyes but a light and trivial evil. By them, suffering is more dreaded than sin: and the loss of an opportunity of honoring God, is of no account in comparison with the loss of great honors and great emoluments. They will strain every nerve to combine the irreconcilable services of God and mammon: and, if the one or the other must be sacrificed, they will hold fast their pleasures, their riches, and their honors, instead of parting with them for the Lord. "To forsake all and follow Christ," is to them a hard lesson, which they cannot, and will not, learn.

But the example of Moses must be followed by us all, so far at least as our circumstances are similar to his. We must all confess Christ openly before men. We must all unite ourselves to his people, and take our portion with them. Whatever cross may lay in our way, we must take it up cheerfully, and bear it after him, "going forth to him outside the camp, bearing his reproach, Hebrews 13:13."

We are not indeed of necessity called to renounce the highest distinctions: because they may be held, and the most important offices in the state may be executed, in perfect consistency with our duty to God; as no doubt they were by Daniel. But if the hope of acquiring eminence, or the fear of losing it, deters us from the performance of any duty, or lead us to a compliance with any sin, we are then called to take the decided part that Moses did, and to forsake all for Christ.

Let us then not seek great things either for ourselves or our children: or, if we possess them, let us not seek our happiness in them, but in God alone. If we possess not his favor, though we had kingdoms in our possession, we are unquestionably poor: but if he is our God, then, though bereft of everything else, we are unquestionably rich!

2. How blessed they are who live by faith!

It is true that the whole of their life is foolishness in the eyes of unconverted men: and they must of necessity meet with many reproaches and persecutions for the truth's sake. But, notwithstanding all that they are, or can be, called to endure for righteousness' sake—the very worst of their portion is better than the best of the portion of ungodly men. The best that the world can give, is its treasures: and the worst that the believer can receive, is its reproaches and persecutions. Yet is the reproach which the believer sustains for Christ's sake, greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt.

How superior then must the believer's portion be in the eternal world! If the believer in a dungeon is richer, and happier, than the unbeliever on a throne—then what must his portion in Heaven be, when compared with the unbeliever's in Hell!

Be not dejected, then, you who are despised or persecuted for Christ's sake, but by faith view your privileges, and expect your reward. Our blessed Lord has set forth the worst of your portion, and pronounced you in the midst of all "blessed." And he has set forth the best of the unbeliever's portion, and denounced nothing but "woes" against him in the midst of all! Luke 6:20-26.

Take but eternity into your estimate of things, and have respect unto the recompense of your reward in Heaven; then will every sacrifice be small, every suffering light, every service easy. In such a frame you will rejoice to suffer shame for Christ's sake, and account death itself, though of the most violent and cruel kind—a subject of desire rather than of fear, of blessedness rather than of sorrow! Philippians 2:17.

#2327

FAITH SEEING THE INVISIBLE GOD

Hebrews 11:27

"He endured, as seeing him who is invisible!"

NOT any one of all the catalogue of worthies in the Old Testament, not even Abraham himself, stands higher than Moses; who, when possessed of all that rank and affluence could confer on man, abandoned it all, that he might participate in the lot of his oppressed and persecuted brethren. He was assured, indeed, that God would compensate to him all the losses which he sustained; and "he had respect to the recompense of that reward." But he would not have been able to maintain his stand as he did, if he had not found a present support from God.

On his first attempt to deliver Israel, about forty years before, he had failed, partly through impetuosity, in killing the Egyptian, and partly through fear, in fleeing from the grasp of his enraged enemies. But now he maintained his steadfastness, and executed his commission with undaunted courage; because he saw, by faith, that God who is invisible to the eye of sense: "he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible!"

This remarkable expression will lead me to show,

I. The peculiar faculty with which believers are endowed—

By nature, they possess no other faculty than is common to the unregenerate world: and to represent piety as proceeding from, or as indicative of, a new sense, is to open a way for the grossest wild enthusiasm, or rather for the entire exculpation of all who do not possess it: for, a man who never possessed the sense of seeing or hearing could contract no criminality whatever by acting as one who was blind or deaf. Yet, if I may be allowed to follow the paradoxical expression of my text, the believer has a faculty peculiar to himself, a faculty of "seeing" an object that is invisible, even "God himself, who is invisible."

Believers do see the invisible God—

God, it is true, is, in his essence, invisible: "he dwells in the light which no man can approach unto; and no man has seen him, or can see." Yet faith brings him so powerfully before the mind of believers, that they may be said to "see" him; because they are as much assured of his presence, as if they beheld him with their bodily eyes. We all know the effect of glass of different forms; either as magnifying an object, so as to make it visible, notwithstanding its smallness; or as bringing it near to us, notwithstanding its vast distance, within the reach of our visual organs. I mean not to say that there is any just comparison between these artificial aids and faith; but, when we consider what we ourselves can effect by such helps, we may, without any great difficulty, imagine the power which God himself has given to faith.

They have a realizing sense of his presence with them—

It is manifest that Moses saw God with him, just as Elisha "saw the chariots of fire and horses of fire" that encompassed him. Thus does every believer, in proportion as his faith is lively and operative, view God present with him.

God is with his people, as a witness, to observe their conduct.

He is with them, as a protector, to deliver them from danger.

He is with them, as a provider, so that, "though lions lack and suffer hunger, those who serve him shall lack no good thing."

He is with them, too, as a comforter, who will make their consolations to abound above all their afflictions.

He is with them, as a rewarder will he recompense into their bosom all that they either do or suffer for him.

In all these views, Moses, no doubt, beheld him: and to the very end of time will he thus reveal himself to all his believing people.

This being their exclusive privilege, I will proceed to state,

II. The advantage they derive from it in the divine life—

From this realizing view of the Divine presence, believers obtain,

1. Firmness in acting—

Moses was undaunted by the menaces of Pharaoh, Exodus 10:28-29. Moses warned Pharaoh, that all the first-born of Egypt, even of Pharaoh's own household, would die that very night; and that the very courtiers around the throne would come bowing to him, and entreating him with all the children of Israel, to depart out of the land: and that then he would go, whether Pharaoh would consent to it or not, Exodus 11:4-8.

Such is the firmness which a sense of the Divine presence will give to every believer. Whoever it be that threatens him, or whatever the threat contain, his answer will be, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, you judge: for we cannot but do the things which God has required of us, Acts 4:19-20."

Thus it was that faith operated in the Hebrew Youths. In vain was the furnace lighted before them: they could not be diverted from their purpose to serve the Lord. Their reply to the enraged monarch was decisive: "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto you, O king, that we will not serve your gods! Daniel 3:17-18."

Trials to the same extent are not at this day experienced among us: but there will be enough to prove the courage of all who profess to serve the Lord: and while the unbelieving are intimidated and turned back, the true believer will "endure, as seeing him who is invisible."

2. Composure in suffering—

It was no grief to Moses that he had given up all the treasures of Egypt, or that he had undertaken to "suffer affliction with the people of God." "The yoke of Christ to him was both light and easy." And thus it is to every true believer. The Apostles, when beaten for their fidelity to Christ, "rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his sake, Acts 5:41." And Paul and Silas, with their feet in the stocks, and their backs torn with scourges, "sang praises to God at midnight! Acts 16:25."

Thus, in all cases where a man has a realizing sense of the Divine presence, the cross which he has to bear is rather a ground of glorying than of complaint, Galatians 6:14, and causes him to "rejoice and leap for joy, Matthew 5:12." The light of God's countenance lifted up upon him, infinitely more than counterbalances any bodily pains; so that, however his afflictions may abound, his consolations outweigh them all.

3. Confidence in conflicts—

Moses, as we have seen, had no doubt about the outcome of the contest between him and Pharaoh. And to every true believer this will be a self-evident truth: "If God be for me, who can be against me? Romans 8:31." Extremely animated is the prophet's description of this state of mind in Isaiah 50:7-9, "Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame. He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me! It is the Sovereign LORD who helps me. Who is he that will condemn me? They will all wear out like a garment; the moths (the weakest creature in the universe) will eat them up."

To this effect Paul speaks at large, defying all the creatures in the universe to separate him from the love of Christ, Romans 8:33-39. So, let the weakest of true believers be able to say, "I have set the Lord always before me;" and he may confidently add, "Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved! Psalm 16:8."

Let me now address,

1. The timid—

"Who are you, that you would be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forget the Lord your Maker, Isaiah 51:12-13." Is God not present with you, as well as with others? Or, "Is his ear heavy, that he cannot hear; or his hand shortened, that it cannot save?" Dishonor him not by unbelief. Consider how awful will be the fate of "the fearful and unbelieving, when they shall take their portion in the lake of fire and brimstone, Revelation 21:8;" and "fear not him who can only kill the body, and after that has no more that he can do; but fear Him who can destroy both body and soul in Hell: yes, I say unto you, Fear him! Luke 12:4-5."

2. The enduring saint—

How was God glorified in Moses, when he thus braved the wrath of Pharaoh, and took on him the charge of carrying the whole nation of Israel to the promised land! His extremities were great: but was he ever forsaken? Was not the sea opened for him; and manna rained down from Heaven; and water given him from the stricken rock? Go forward then; and know, that "your strength also shall be according to your day, Deuteronomy 33:25." Your trials may succeed each other, like the waves of the sea: but "he who endures unto the end, the same shall be saved! Matthew 24:13."

#2328

MOSES' FAITH IN RELATION TO THE PASSOVER

Hebrews 11:28

"By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel."

When people speak upon the comparative excellencies of faith and works, they are very apt to overlook the relation which they bear to each other: whereas there is no true faith which is not productive of good works; nor are there any works truly good, which do not proceed from faith as their root and principle. "Everything that does not come from faith, is sin, Romans 14:23"

Supposing that they could exist separately, the preference might justly be given to good works: because they are the end, while faith is only the means to that end. Detach from each other the root and fruit of a tree; and no one will hesitate to prefer the fruit. But they cannot be separated; they are to each other as the cause and effect: and in proportion as any one values good works, he ought to value faith, as their originating and productive cause.

True it is that there are works which are reputed good, and which may be done by an infidel or a heathen: and these, imperfect as they are, are certainly better than a barren and inoperative faith: but works that are truly good can proceed from faith alone: and the peculiar excellence of faith is, that it is the spring and source from whence all good works proceed; and from whence they will naturally proceed, as its genuine fruit and offspring.

It is on this account that the Apostle accumulates in the chapter before us so many instances of a living faith. A person ignorant of true Christianity would expatiate only upon the works: but the Apostle traces the streams to the fountain-head; and fixes our attention upon that faith from whence they flowed.

In considering the faith of Moses as recorded in the text, we shall mark,

I. The particular act by which it displayed itself in him—

God had determined to destroy the first-born both of man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt, with the exception of those belonging to his own oppressed and afflicted people. But when the destroying angel would be sent forth to execute this judgment, how would the Hebrews be distinguished by him? And how would he know where to strike, and where to forbear?

For the preservation of his people God appointed peculiar means—

The whole account is given us in the twelfth chapter of Exodus. A lamb was to be killed by every family of the Hebrews. Its blood was to be poured forth into a basin, and to be sprinkled with hyssop upon the lintel and the side-posts of their doors; (not upon the threshold; for that sacred blood was not to be trampled on by any,) and the flesh of the lamb was to be eaten, (not raw, or boiled, but roasted with fire,) with bitter herbs, and with certain forms, which it is not to our present purpose to specify. The blood so sprinkled was to serve to them as a pledge of their security, and to the angel as a token that he was to pass over that house which was so protected. And in remembrance of this deliverance, the ordinance so instituted was ever after to be called the Passover.

These means Moses used in faith—

He gave the necessary directions to the Jewish people, who instantly carried them into effect. In this both Moses and the people showed the power of faith. Moses doubted not but that in the space of a few hours God would inflict the threatened vengeance on all the first-born of Egypt: nor did he doubt but that the simple means proposed would prove effectual for the preservation of the Hebrews. He did not attempt to station any sentinel at the door of one single family for the purpose of calling the attention of the angel to the blood that had been sprinkled; but with perfect confidence addressed himself to the observance of the ordinance that had been appointed, having no thought that any other precaution was necessary, nor any fear that the destroying angel would through ignorance or inadvertence exceed the commission he had received.

And these means proved effectual—

At midnight the judgment was executed throughout all the land of Egypt, so that there was not a single house wherein the first-born was not dead, even from the first-born of Pharaoh himself to the first-born of the captive that was in the dungeon. But of the first-born belonging to Israel, not one was hurt, "the destroyer had not touched so much as one of them."

Without dwelling unnecessarily upon this peculiar act, by which faith displayed itself in Moses, I shall proceed to notice,

II. The corresponding act by which it is to show itself in us—

The whole human race, as transgressors of the law, are liable to the wrath of an avenging God. But God has appointed means of safety to all who will make use of them in faith. He has sent his own Son to die as a sacrifice for sin; and has appointed him to be the only means of our preservation.

We are to seek deliverance through him, precisely as the Hebrews did through the paschal lamb—

This is told us by Paul, who says, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us, 1 Corinthians 5:7," thus identifying the Lord Jesus with the paschal lamb as the type, of which He is the great antitype.

The first thing we have to do, is to sprinkle our souls with his blood. There is no other protection than this for any human being. We may bring all the good works which ever were wrought by any mortal man, and they will not avert the stroke of divine justice. No means will suffice, but those which God himself has appointed. Whether we see any suitableness in the means or not, they are to be used, and used in faith. Nothing is to be substituted as more conducive to the end; nothing to be added, to increase the efficacy of this simple ordinance. The Lamb of God is slain: his blood is poured forth: we are by faith to sprinkle it on our souls, assured that, when we have put ourselves under that safeguard, "there can be no condemnation to us, Romans 8:1;" but that, "Christ will be to us as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, Isaiah 32:2." If we attempt to substitute anything for this, or to add anything to it, we destroy its efficacy altogether, and render it of no avail, 1 Corinthians 3:11. Galatians 5:2-4.

We must also feast upon the flesh of this great Sacrifice, in token of the full confidence which we have in our safety through him, and as the means of deriving fresh supplies of strength from him. How strongly has our blessed Lord himself inculcated this truth, "Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, you have no life in you, John 6:53-56." We must eat it indeed, "with the bitter herbs" of repentance, and "with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth, Exodus 7:8 with 1 Corinthians 5:8." But we must eat it as "a feast," yes, as "a feast of fat things, Isaiah 25:6;" and we shall then find it a source of all needful strength unto our souls, Isaiah 25:4.

We shall then find in him the same security—

Of all the first-born that belonged to Israel, the destroyer "touched not" so much as one. And who ever perished, after having fled to Christ for refuge, and sprinkled their souls with his atoning blood? In what instance did the destroyer ever overlook the sign, or the sign prove an ineffectual guard against his uplifted arm? If Christ is "an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world," and his blood is able to cleanse from all sin, then may all trust in him as "able to save them to the uttermost; nor shall anyone that trusts in him be ashamed or confounded world without end."

Here then we see, in a striking point of view,

1. In what an awful state they are who neglect the Gospel of Christ!

The people of Egypt, unconscious of the impending judgment, or unconcerned about it, retired to rest as secure as usual. But at midnight, when they were all asleep, it came upon them; so that "there was a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt: for there was not a house where there was not one dead, Exodus 12:30." In that instance the cry was among the survivors.

But among ourselves, when persons are summoned to their great account, there is no apprehension excited, lest they would have fallen as monuments of God's wrath. We mourn the loss of them as relatives; but as for the vengeance that may have seized them in the midst of their security, we think not of it.

But of the thousands that are daily swept away, how fearful is the doom of the generality! What shrieks, what cries are uttered by them on their first entrance into the presence of their God! Could we but hear one of them, O how would it pierce our inmost souls! Yet, if we did hear it, our terror would operate with no more abiding effect, than did that of the Egyptians; who no sooner found that the Israelites were "entangled in the land," than they pursued after them with the most vindictive wrath to destroy them.

But, beloved, know that the judgments of God will be executed, whether you believe it or not. Your presumptuous security will avail you nothing. What did it avail the antediluvian world? Did not the deluge come the very same day that Noah entered into the ark? and did not all experience the fate which they had been warned to expect? Yes; every day and hour brought it nearer to them: and in like manner "your judgment also lingers not, and your damnation slumbers not, 2 Peter 2:2-5." Awake then from your slumbers, you foolish virgins, before the Bridegroom comes: and as you know not at what hour he will come, lose not another in fleeing from the wrath to come, and laying hold on eternal life!

2. How happy and secure they are who truly believe in Christ!

Realize to yourselves one moment the different states of the Israelites and the Egyptians on that night, when the angel was spreading death and destruction all around him. Behold the consternation that pervaded all the families of Egypt; and then look within the houses of the Hebrews, and behold their serenity and joy. O what a contrast! And all through the influence of faith!

So it is at this hour with those who truly believe. They know what judgments are coming on the whole world of the ungodly: they know, that they themselves deserve them, as much as any other persons whatever: they know that nothing which they can do can avert the stroke of Divine justice: but they know that God has appointed means of safety: they know that, however inadequate according to our vain conceits the means may be to the end, they are, and shall be, effectual to all who use them in faith: they are conscious that they have used them; and that they renounce every other ground of hope, and place their dependence solely on the blood of the Paschal Lamb.

They are feasting too from day to day on the flesh of that Paschal Lamb; and they have no wish but to cast off the yoke of Egypt, and to prosecute their journey to the promised land.

The peace which others have, if it may be called peace, is owing to their disbelief of their danger: but the peace of the godly arises from their view of the sufficiency of Christ to save them, and of the faithfulness of God to all who hope in his promised mercy.

Take then my beloved brethren, the Israelites for your example. Take them at that precise moment, with "their loins girt, and shoes on their feet, and staffs in their hands, and eating their sacrifice in haste," ready at any instant to obey the Divine mandate, and to go forth to Canaan under the Divine guidance and protection. Then shall you be Christ's disciples indeed: and then "shall you eat, while others are hungry; and drink, while others are thirsty. Then shall you rejoice, while others are ashamed; and sing for joy of heart, while others cry for sorrow of heart, and howl for vexation of spirit, Isaiah 65:13-14."

To the people of Israel this day was enjoined to be observed even to the latest generations as the most memorable day in the whole year. And well might that night be termed, "a night to be much observed unto the Lord, Exodus 12:42." Methinks, the annual return of it, to those who bore in remembrance the mercies then given to them, could not fail of filling their souls with the most lively joy, since then, and not until then, was their deliverance complete.

But what was their redemption when compared with that which we have experienced, and which was completed as on this day, when our Lord and Savior rose from the dead? Until then, he himself lay a captive in the grave: but then he triumphed over all his

enemies, and "led captivity itself captive."

If you say, 'True, but my enemies still live and are mighty; and they still follow me, and will reduce me again to my former bondage.' Fear not; for though they will follow you, they shall not prevail against you; and shall only follow, in order that God's power may be the more magnified in their final destruction. Assert then your liberty: go forth under the Divine protection: harbor no unbelieving fears.

Is there a sea before you? It shall open, and afford a dry path for your feet.

Is there then nothing but a dreary wilderness before you, where you will be exposed to all manner of dangers and necessities? Fear not; for "you shall dwell on high—your house of defense shall be the munitions of rocks. Bread shall be given you, and your waters shall be sure—your eyes too shall behold your King in his beauty; they shall behold the land also that is very far off! Isaiah 33:16-17."

Are you laden with any measure of Egyptian gold? Bring it forth with you, and consecrate it to the service of your God. It was with that, that Moses furnished the tabernacle of old: and God will make use of your talents also, whatever they may be, for the enriching of his sanctuary, and the advancement of his glory.

Come then, you who know the value of redemption, and pant after perfect liberty; and behold the Paschal Lamb, now already roasted by the fire of God's wrath, and set before you, as it were, on the table of the Lord. There is the very Paschal Lamb: come feast upon it with love and gratitude:

eat it, and be satisfied:

eat it, and be strengthened:

eat it, and live for evermore!

Christ himself invites you, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood, has eternal life; and I will raise him up to the enjoyment of it at the last day: for my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed!"

#2329

THE WALLS OF JERICHO THROWN DOWN BY FAITH

Hebrews 11:30

"By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days."

HOW men could be affected by any principle, is easy to be conceived; because the human mind is susceptible of the strongest impressions from everything that is submitted to its consideration. But what connection any principle can have with inanimate creatures, does not at first sight appear.

Take the principle of love, for instance. We may love the flowers which are growing in our garden: but any farther than our love operates to secure attention to those flowers, they will be altogether unaffected by it.

There is a peculiarity in the principle of faith which does not attach to any other principle whatever; namely, that it has respect to God, and calls forth his power; and is therefore capable of influencing everything, whether in Heaven or earth. A surprising effect of it is mentioned in reference to the walls of Jericho, which, through its powerful operation, were thrown down.

In speaking of faith as illustrated by that event, we shall be led to notice,

I. The distinguishing properties of faith—

Wherever a living faith exists in the soul, it will approve itself by,

1. A patient observance of the appointed means—

The means appointed for the capture of that fortress were certainly very peculiar. The Israelites, who were encamped against it, were to walk in procession around it seven successive days in perfect silence; the trumpets only blowing. On the seventh day, they were to go round it seven times, and then to shout; and at the precise moment that they shouted, the walls were to fall, and open for them a free passage into the city. These means they used. They did not pour contempt upon them as unsuited to the end: nor did they grow weary in the use of them: nor did they attempt to add anything to them. They felt that it was not for them to question the wisdom of God's appointments, but to obey them: and therefore they followed implicitly the Divine command in Joshua 6:1-16, and "marched around the city seven days."

Such is universally the operation of true faith. God has appointed means for the salvation of the soul. He requires that we would repent of all our past sins; that we would believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as having offered an atonement for sin; and that we would give up ourselves to Christ, to be washed by his blood, and to be renewed by his Spirit.

In order to further this work within us, he has prescribed means to be used by us both in public and in private.

In public, we must attend on his ordinances; because, as he is peculiarly honored by them, so he is pleased to make them in a more especial manner the channels of his gracious communications to our souls.

In private, we must read his blessed word, and meditate upon it, and pray over it; and, through the influence of his Spirit, endeavor to mortify the whole body of sin. We are not to be questioning the use and efficacy of these means, but to use them in obedience to our God. True faith will not say, like Naaman, "Are not Abana and Pharpar better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them and be clean? 2 Kings 5:12." but it will go to Jordan, according to the direction given, and expect the blessing only in the use of those ordinances which God has prescribed.

2. A confident expectation of the promised end—

At the appointed time the Jewish army "shouted," not doubting but that they would see the predicted event accomplished, Joshua 6:20. In all the instances of faith recorded in this chapter, this is a very prominent feature. Noah believed that he would be saved in the ark. Abraham believed that Isaac would be restored to him even from the dead.

Thus it is at this day. Faith never questions either the power or veracity of God: it assures itself, that "he is faithful who has promised;" and that what he has promised he is "able also to perform." It is not from the means that faith expects the end; but from God, in and by the means. The adequacy of the means to the end comes not within its contemplation. If a posterity, innumerable as the stars of Heaven, is promised to Abraham and Sarah, they consider not their own advanced age, but believe, that the promise, however improbable according to the course of nature, shall be fulfilled. Though the promise, after it was first given, was deferred for twenty years, they still hold fast their faith, and expect its accomplishment in due season.

Thus shall we also, whatever difficulties may arise in our Christian course, expect a successful outcome, assured that "none who come to God through Christ shall ever be cast out," and that "of those whom the Father has given to Christ, not one shall ever be plucked out of his hands."

This is the very description which the Prophet Isaiah gives of faith as to be exercised under the Christian dispensation: "It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God! we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation. For in this mountain (the Church) shall the hand of the Lord rest; and Moab (the representative of all the Church's enemies) shall be trodden down under him, even as straw is trodden down for the dunghill: and he shall spread forth his hands in the midst of them, as he who swims spreads forth his hands to swim: (making the very resistance of his enemies the means of advancing his own glory:) and he shall bring down their pride together with the spoils of their hands: and the fortress of the high fort of your walls (be they even as strong as those of Jericho,) shall he bring down, lay low, and bring to the ground, even to the dust! Isaiah 25:9-12.

In addition to the properties of faith, our text leads us to notice,

II. The sure effects of faith—

If exercised to the end without wavering, faith will surely issue in,

1. The believer's triumph—

Down fell the walls of Jericho at the appointed moment, and its garrison became an easy prey to the Jewish army.

What is there which the believer cannot effect under faith's influence? "If he has but faith as a grain of mustard-seed, he can remove the most deep-rooted mountains with a word, or plant a mulberry-tree in the depths of a tempestuous ocean." Nothing can stand before persevering faith. Mountains of guilt, though so high as to reach unto the heavens, are "cast by it into the very depths of the sea! Micah 7:19." Lusts, though deeply rooted as Hell, shall be plucked up! Romans 6:14 Ezekiel 36:25-27, and the tender plants of divine grace have stability, and growth, and fruitfulness amidst all the storms and tempests, whether from without or from within, that can disturb and agitate the soul! Hebrews 13:9. 1 Peter 5:10.

Does Satan summon all his forces to withstand its power? He finds the believer inaccessible to his assaults, Ephesians 6:16. 1 John 5:18, and is put to flight before him, James 4:7; and in a little time "he shall be bruised under the feet" of the least and weakest of God's people! Romans 16:20. "All things are possible to him who believes," because his faith brings down Omnipotence to his aid; so that, though earth and Hell combine against him, he sets them at defiance, and is "more than conqueror over all! Romans 8:37."

See this exemplified in the combat of David and Goliath. In the eye of sense, it was impossible for David to succeed. In the eye of faith, it was impossible for him to fail. The outcome is well known: the stripling slew the giant, and cut off his head with his own sword. And so shall the weakest stripling among the soldiers of Christ prevail, making the very weapons of his adversaries the means of advancing and completing his own triumphs.

2. The glory of God—

The whole land of Canaan trembled at this event, just as they had before done at the report of all the wonders which had been wrought in Egypt, Joshua 2:10-11 with 6:27. Had anything been left for the Jewish army to execute, the glory might, in appearance, have been shared by them: but when nothing but a shout proceeded from them, the work was manifestly the Lord's alone.

And thus it is that God will work in behalf of all who trust in him. He makes the measure of our faith, the measure of his blessing; saying to us, "According to your faith, be it done unto you." It is owing to our lack of faith that we behold so few manifestations of his power and grace: "He does not many mighty works among us, because of our unbelief, Matthew 13:58." But where faith is in exercise, he honors it with peculiar approbation, passing by all other graces that are combined with it, and commending faith alone: "O woman, great is your faith!" "Your faith has saved you; go in peace! Matthew 15:28. Luke 7:50."

Faith is the grace which, above all others, honors God; and, as "those who are strongest in faith give most glory to him, Romans 4:20," so to those who exercise it he will not fail to give the brightest discoveries of his glory: for what he said to Martha, he says to every one of us, "Said I not unto you, that, if you would believe, you would see the glory of God! John 11:40." Yes, he does say it, and will fulfill it, not only in the progressive triumphs of his grace, but in the ultimate and everlasting possession of his glory!

Men may deride our expectations, as it is probable the men of Jericho, after a few days, did the harmless processions of the Jewish army: but God will in due time make bare his arm, and gain himself the glory and the victory.

We will now endeavor to improve this subject,

1. In a way of caution—

Everyone imagines that he has saving faith. But, if we come to inquire into the objects and grounds of men's faith, we find it for the most part, nothing but presumption. They expect Heaven; but not in the way of God's appointment, but in some way of their own, which he has never prescribed. Instead of repenting deeply of their former sins, and fleeing to Christ for refuge, and living in the constant observance of public and private ordinances, according to God's command; they are supine and careless, as if nothing at all was to be done by them as evidential of their faith.

Now I would ask, what would have been the outcome, if the Jewish army had proceeded on this plan? Suppose they had said, 'We think it absurd to look for the destruction of this fortress by faith alone: we will form a trench round the city, and batter it down with the implements of war:' would they have succeeded? Or suppose they had said, 'We will expect the city to fall, as God has said; but to what purpose are these repeated processions? We shall spare ourselves that fruitless trouble, which will only expose us to the derision of our enemies.' Or suppose they had said, 'We will use the appointed means; but in order to make success doubly sure, we will form a trench, which shall both add to our security, and prevent their escape.'

Do we imagine that on any one of these plans they would have been crowned with success? We feel no hesitation in saying, that they would have been disappointed of their hope; because they proceeded not according to the commands of God. Yes, we doubt not but that the wrath of God would have broke forth against them, as it did on Uzza, because David in carrying up the ark was inattentive to the order that Moses had prescribed, 1 Chronicles 15:13.

Know then that, however confident our expectations of Heaven are, they will end in disappointment, if we presume to alter, or neglect, or add to, the means which God himself has ordained.

I beg you all to consider this—you especially, who have never yet repented in dust and ashes; you who have never given yourselves to reading, and meditation, and prayer; you who are not yet prostrating yourselves at the foot of the cross, and relying on Christ as your only hope. I beseech you to consider, how awfully you delude your own souls, while you promise yourselves the enjoyment of the heavenly Canaan.

The same too I must say to those, who, while they profess to rely on Christ, are making their own works either a joint ground of their hope, or a warrant for their faith in Christ. Your victory can be gained only in the way that it was gained at Jericho—you must use all the means which God has enjoined, without either taking from them or adding to them: but you must expect success from God alone, and be content that he alone be glorified.

2. In a way of encouragement—

Many are discouraged because of their own extreme weakness, and because, though they have diligently used the appointed means, they seem not to have advanced at all, or to have any nearer prospects of success. But what if Israel had yielded to such discouragements, and ceased from their labors before their work was done? True it is, that the precise time for the interposition of Jehovah was made known to them; but it is concealed from you: nevertheless it is as much fixed in the Divine counsels with respect to you, as it was to them: and "in due season you shall surely reap, if you faint not."

What if you are unequal to the task; was not the sound of rams' horns, and the shout of the people, weak? Only be content to be weak, and you will then be strong; because "God will perfect his own strength in your weakness." See how God himself chides—yet supports your fainting mind, Isaiah 49:24-25. And see what a frame of mind, though in the midst of all your conflicts, you are privileged to possess, Isaiah 50:7-9.

Follow then the advice which God himself gives you; and, "though walking in darkness, stay yourselves upon your God." And, if still unbelieving fears arise, chide yourselves, like David, and say, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God! Psalm 43:5."

In a word, let this saying sink down into your ears, and animate and sustain your souls, "Believe in the Lord your God, so shall you be established; believe his prophets, so shall you prosper! 2 Chronicles 20:20." Only go on a little longer in a patient continuance in well-doing, and the victory is yours; and glory, and honor, and immortality are yours also!

#2330

RAHAB CONCEALING THE SPIES

Hebrews 11:31

"By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient."

FAITH is usually considered merely as an assent to testimony; human faith having respect to human testimony, and divine faith having respect to divine testimony. Hence the subject of faith is supposed to lie within a small compass. But there is not a more comprehensive subject within the whole circle of man's duties: for while faith has respect to everything which God has spoken, it operates in everything which man does.

The chapter before us shows how inexhaustible the subject is. Faith was the one principle by which all the saints there enumerated were influenced: and in every distinct instance its operations were widely different: so that, though in appearance the same subject is brought under discussion, it is presented to us in so different a light as to assume a new character.

In considering the fate of Rahab, we shall be led to show,

I. To what did Rahab's faith have respect—

The whole account of Rahab is continued in the second chapter of Joshua: and to that chapter we must refer as forming the groundwork of this discourse. It will there be found, that, though she was an inhabitant of Canaan, and had in her earlier life been notoriously dissolute, she was now a believer in the God of Israel. What she had heard of him had fully convinced her, that he was the only true God. This she openly avowed to the spies whom she had received: "The Lord your God, he is God in Heaven above, and on earth beneath! Joshua 2:11." But it was not in a mere general way that she acknowledged Jehovah: she had just and distinct views of him; and had respect to:

1. His purposes as sure—

She knew that God had "given to Israel the land" of Canaan for their inheritance, verse 9; and that his purpose respecting it would infallibly be accomplished. As the Creator and Governor of the universe, he had a right to dispose of everything in it: and, having transferred the land to Israel, he would surely invest them with the possession of it.

Thus will true faith present God to our view as a mighty Sovereign, who orders everything both in Heaven and earth. It will reveal him to us as having shown distinguishing favor to his peculiar people, in that, while he has passed by the angels who sinned, and left the greater part of mankind also in utter darkness—he has revealed to them a Savior, yes, and "revealed him in them" also as the hope of glory Galatians 1:16. He has also prepared an inheritance for them from the foundation of the world, even the heavenly Canaan; and called them to take possession of it as his special gift, through the merits and mediation of his Son Jesus Christ, Romans 6:23. The manner of taking possession of it also he has ordained, even by faith in Christ; by whose blood they shall be justified, and by whose Spirit they shall be renewed. All this will faith regard as unalterably fixed in the Divine counsels; so that those who possess the first-fruits here, shall infallibly reap the harvest of salvation in the eternal world, 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14.

2. His perfections as unbounded—

While she was convinced that his power was irresistible, she, though of an accursed race and of an abandoned character, had no doubt but that God's mercy would extend even to her, if she sought it with her whole heart. Hence of her own accord she received, and hid, the spies; and dismissed them in peace, in hopes that she and her family might be spared: and all the security she required was an oath in Jehovah's name, that no evil would be inflicted on her, when the threatened vengeance would be poured out on all others.

And is she not here also an example to us? Yes! by faith we must survey him in all his glorious perfections: we must view him as a God of all grace, whose mercy is infinite; who delights in the exercise of mercy; who "waits to be gracious" to the very chief of sinners, "keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin," and following them with this tender expostulation, "Turn, turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?" "As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he would turn from his wickedness and live."

To this our faith would have especial respect; because it is our great encouragement to seek his face. To know that "the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse from all sin;" that "whoever comes to God by him shall never be cast out;" and that "where sin has abounded, grace shall much more abound;" to know this, I say, and to realize it by faith, is the richest consolation which a broken-hearted sinner can enjoy!

At the same time we should, like her, assure ourselves, that "God's counsels shall stand, and that he will do all his will!" We should bear in mind the records of his former interpositions, and from them be convinced that "there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord, Proverbs 21:30." Theoretically indeed we do acknowledge this: but how few feel it practically! How few are so impressed with the idea as to despair of escaping his wrath, but by casting away the weapons of their rebellion, and laying hold on his offered mercy!

But this part of our subject will come more properly before us, while, in our further investigation of her faith, we show,

II. How Rahab's faith operated—

From the instance to which the text directs our attention, we see:

1. Rahab's faith operated in a way of holy fear—

Rahab did not merely participate in the terror which had seized all the inhabitants of Jericho, a terror that served only to harden their hearts, but a fear associated with a consciousness of her demerits, and a determination to seek for mercy.

Until this holy fear is wrought within us, there is no true faith in our souls. The very first work of the Holy Spirit is "to convince us of our sins;" to show us our desert and danger; to make us sensible that "we are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Until we are brought to the condition of those on the day of Pentecost, who "were pricked to the heart," and with a deep sense of their guilt and misery cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"—there is nothing done effectually towards our conversion to God, nothing that can give any hope of the salvation of our souls.

2. Rahab's faith operated in a way of intense desire—

Her desire of mercy swallowed up every other consideration. She forgot all which passes under the name of patriotism, conceiving that she had a prior and a paramount duty to the God of Israel. So sure was she that God's purposes would be fulfilled, that she did not for a moment imagine that any efforts of hers to destroy the spies would at all avail for the protection of her countrymen. She saw that this was an opportunity afforded to her for the preservation of her soul; and, if she let it pass unimproved, she would only involve herself in the ruin that could not possibly be averted. She therefore sided with Jehovah and his people against those who were related to her according to the flesh; and determined at the risk of her life to cast in her lot with the people of the Lord.

Thus should we also postpone every consideration under Heaven to the honor of God and the salvation of our souls. The love of our country is confessedly an important duty, as the love of our parents also is: but when our duty to God stands in opposition to the wishes or interests of our earthly superiors—the line of duty plainly is to serve God whatever the outcome. The direction given to the Church under the character of a spouse, is this: "Hearken, O daughter, and incline your ear; forget also your own people, and your father's house; so shall the King have pleasure in your beauty: for he is your Lord God: and worship Him, Psalm 45:10-11." Our Lord's declaration to his followers is plainer still: "If any man comes to me, and hates not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yes and his own life also—he cannot be my disciple, Luke 14:26." The kingdom of Heaven is a pearl, for which faith will part with all in order to possess it.

3. Rahab's faith operated in a way of unreserved obedience—

Every direction that was given to her, she readily complied with; and in no instance departed from the terms on which alone she was encouraged to expect mercy. Nor will anyone who truly believes that he shall be an object of sparing mercy, account any of God's commandments to be grievous. His determination through grace will be to be found in God's appointed way, fulfilling all righteousness, and "walking in all the statutes and ordinances of the Lord blameless."

One particular commandment given to her I will here notice as of more than ordinary importance, namely, that of binding the scarlet line in her window, as the memorial of her faith, and the means of her preservation. Had this been neglected, she had perished with the rest of her countrymen: but by this her safety was secured.

There is a corresponding command given to everyone that desires to obtain mercy, which above all he will be anxious to obey, namely, that of believing in Christ, 1 John 3:23, and "abiding in him," as the branch abides in the vine, John 15:4-7. The injunction to abide in him is repeated four times. Faith will teach him, that, if he is not found in Christ, the sword of divine vengeance will surely cut him off, as that of the destroying angel did the first-born, whose doors were not sprinkled with the blood of the paschal lamb.

In a word, as soon as true faith is formed in the soul, the one inquiry will be, "Lord, what will you have me to do? Acts 9:6," and from that time the believer's desire will be to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

In the account given of her faith, we see,

III. What Rahab's faith obtained—

1. A deliverance from that destruction which came on all her unbelieving neighbors—

In Jericho nothing that breathed was left alive, with the exception of Rahab and her family: but to them the promised mercy was given. And who that believes in Christ shall perish? Against the unbelieving world the deluge of God's wrath will prevail, and sink them all without exception into everlasting perdition. But to those who are in Christ, no evil shall accrue. They are in the true ark, against which the winds and waves shall beat in vain. In the great day of the Lord, there will be a separation made between the sheep and the goats; nor shall one of either flock be found through any mistake confounded with those whose nature so widely differs from his own. Not a lamb shall be found among the goats; nor a goat among the sheep. Each will have the portion assigned him by the Judge of all—the unbelievers in the lake of fire and brimstone; the believers in the regions of eternal bliss. Among "the chaff that shall then be burned up with unquenchable fire," not the smallest grain of wheat shall be found! Amos 9:9.

2. A portion among the chosen people of the Lord—

This is particularly noticed in the subsequent history of Rahab: she was incorporated with Israel, and made a partaker of all their privileges, Joshua 6:25. Just so, though we have been aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, we shall be saved by the blood of Christ, as soon as we believe in him; and from being "strangers and foreigners shall become fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God, Ephesians 2:12-13; Ephesians 2:19." Look through the Holy Scriptures, and see all that belongs to the saints, either in this world or the next—and you will read only the catalogue of your own possessions! For "all things are yours, when you are Christ's, 1 Corinthians 3:22-23."

3. The transcendent honor of being brought into the nearest relation to Christ himself—

Who would have thought that this poor Canaanite, of an accursed nation, and once of an abandoned character, would be chosen of God to be an instrument of bringing into the world the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Savior of the world? Yet so it was: Salmon, one of the progenitors of Christ, married her: and their son Boaz married Ruth, the Moabitess, from whom descended in an immediate line Obed, Jesse, David.

Will the parallel hold good here also? Shall we, on believing in Christ, become thus intimately united with him? Yes, and far more intimately; for she, as his ancestor, was one with him only corporeally; whereas by faith we become "one spirit with him, 1 Corinthians 6:17." As relating to the flesh, we are no nearer to him than others; but as relating to the spirit, "we are members of his body, Ephesians 5:30."

From this subject then we learn:

1. How sovereign God is in the dispensation of his gifts!

Of all that were in Jericho, we do not read of any others to whom true faith was given. Others, like the devils, believed, and trembled; she alone "believed unto righteousness." It is pleasing to reflect, that, among the most avowed enemies of God—there may be some hidden ones, whose heart God has touched with true repentance, though their views of salvation are very indistinct; and who shall be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus; while millions, who have enjoyed the brighter light of the Gospel, will be cast out into outer darkness!

It is a rich consolation also to know, that the most abandoned sinner in the universe is not beyond the reach of mercy; but that, as God's grace is his own, and he distributes it as he will, we may all without exception look to him for mercy with a full confidence of acceptance through the Son of his love. Let any one that is discouraged through a sense of his own unworthiness, remember Rahab, and, like her, cast himself upon the mercy of the God of Israel.

2. How certainly faith shall avail for the salvation of the soul!

We are told by James, that "Rahab was justified by her works, James 2:25." But can anyone suppose that the mere act of receiving the spies, and dismissing them in peace, formed her justifying righteousness before God? Assuredly not! for it was attended with great infirmity, seeing that she had recourse to falsehood to conceal her conduct, because she knew not how to trust in God to protect her from the consequences of it, Joshua 2:4-6. But, as imperfect as her works were, they evinced the sincerity of her faith, and proved her to be indeed in a justified state before God. If then a faith, so obscure as her's was, and so imperfect in its actings, justified her before God—then let no one doubt but that a full affiance in the Lord Jesus Christ shall assuredly bring him into a state of acceptance with God, and ultimately prevail for the salvation of his soul.

3. How certainly faith will be productive of good works!

It is in confirmation of this sentiment that James adduces the examples of Abraham and of Rahab as justified by their works. He is showing that faith without works is dead; and that their works proved them to be possessed of a living faith.

Undoubtedly her faith was, as we have before observed, not very distinct, though we doubt not but that it was afterwards enlarged, as her knowledge of the Mosaic writings increased. But indistinct as it was, it wrought, and powerfully too, yes, so powerfully as to outweigh every other consideration that could operate upon her mind.

And thus it will do in everyone who is truly saved. It will work, and effectually too, to overcome the world, 1 John 5:4, and purify the heart, Acts 15:9. If then it does not evidence itself by such fruits as these, let us not imagine that we are possessed of true saving faith; for if it does not work thus, our faith is no better than the faith of devils!

Whoever then professes to be savingly interested in "the grace of God which brings salvation," let him learn from it, what it invariably teaches to all who have received it: "to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world, Titus 2:11-12." If any have this hope in him, let him walk as Christ walked, and "purify himself even as he is pure, 1 John 2:6; 1 John 3:3."

#2331

THE POWER OF FAITH

Hebrews 11:32-35

"And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection."

THIS is a surprising chapter altogether. Respecting faith, as a principle, the generality of men think but little. Indeed, a considerable degree of prejudice exists against it in the minds of many; as though it were a mere fantasy, which tended to discourage all human efforts, and to generate delusions in all who give themselves up to its influence. But the account here given of it is truly surprising.

The Apostle himself seems to have been at a loss for utterance on so vast a subject. The instances of it which he had enumerated, and those which crowded upon his mind, almost overwhelmed him: "What shall I more say? for the time would fail me to declare" all that my recollection suggests to me.

That we may enter in some little measure into the Apostle's views of this divine principle, let us consider,

I. How marvelous are the records faith—

We will not go to the instances above recited; for then indeed the time would fail us: nor will we enter at all minutely into those which are heaped together in my text; for then also it would be impossible for us to do justice to them in one discourse. I will only, and as briefly as possible, call your attention to,

1. The persons enumerated—

These are not placed in the order of time in which they lived; for Barak was before Gideon, and Jephtha before Samson, and Samuel before David. The Apostle mentions them just as they occurred to his thoughts: as he did also the facts to which he afterwards refers: for they also are promiscuously specified, without any reference to the persons whom he had mentioned, or the times at which the events themselves occurred. But they all afford most astonishing instances of the power of faith.

Gideon, with only three hundred men, and with no other weapons than trumpets, and pitchers with lamps concealed in them, and these broken, with a shout, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon," with no other weapons, I say, than these, prevailed over all the hosts of Midian! Judges 7:7; Judges 7:19-22 with 8:10.

Barak, with no more than ten thousand men, subdued an immense army, of whom not so much as one was left alive, Judges 4:6-16.

Samson also, when the Spirit of God came upon him, slew thirty Philistines, and one thousand more with the jaw-bone of a donkey, and three thousand more at his death, Judges 14:19; Judges 15:15; Judges 16:27-30.

Jephtha, too, under the same divine influence, subdued the Ammonites Judges 11:23-33.

As for David, his victories were numberless.

And Samuel, though not a warrior, showed himself strongly under the influence of faith, 1 Samuel 12:16-25.

Just so, did Elijah, and Elisha, and many other prophets in their season.

If it is asked, in what respect were these examples of faith? I answer, All these exploits were done in obedience to a divine impulse, and in dependence on God's promised aid.

But, without dwelling on the acts of these individual worthies, let us notice, rather, what my text leads us to,

2. The acts specified—

Who would imagine that faith would ever possess such powers as are here ascribed to it? Who would suppose that by it men would "put to flight mighty armies," and "subdue whole kingdoms?" Yet this has been done, and done by faith also: for all the kingdoms of Canaan were subdued by Joshua's faith; as were the surrounding kingdoms of Moab, and Syria, and Edom, with many others, by the faith of David.

And who would think that this principle would prevail to shut the mouths of lions; yes, and to quench the violence of fire, so that a furnace heated to the utmost extent of man's ability, would not be able to singe a hair of a person's head? Yet was the former of these done by the faith of Daniel; as was the latter, by the faith of his three companions, Shadrach, Meshech, and Abed-nego.

Even to the raising of the dead has this availed: for, through the exercise of it, Elijah raised the son of the widow of Zarephath, 1 Kings 17:17-24, and Elisha raised the son of the Shunamite woman, 2 Kings 4:18-37.

Now of these things I say, they are utterly incredible: and, in declaring them, I seem to demand an assent that is perfectly unreasonable. For, how would it be that such a hidden principle of the mind would ever enable a man to work such miracles as these? Truly, the whole account seems to be nothing but "a cunningly-devised fable," that yet can impose on none who give to it one moment's consideration. But it is true, and the very truth of God.

Nor will it appear incredible, if we duly consider the way in which faith operates. It is God himself who engages to do the thing: and faith calls into action his Almighty arm (and with him all things are possible). So that, inasmuch as faith, insures his effectual aid, it may be truly said, that "all things are possible to him who believes."

But let us further notice,

II. How diversified are the operations of faith—

There is nothing to which it may not be applied, and nothing for which it will not equally avail. Faith will alike enable us,

1. To do anything—

By it has "righteousness been wrought," in its utmost extent. Not only has political righteousness been given for the government of kingdoms, as to Asa, Hezekiah, and Josiah; but moral righteousness, in a degree never produced by any other principle under Heaven. Where do we find such holy characters as those recorded in the Scriptures? Yet it was faith which made them what they were: and faith, in proportion as it exists in the soul, enables every child of God to resemble them. The weakest of the human race shall "out of weakness be made strong;" and prevail, not only over men, but over all the powers of darkness also, Romans 8:37. Ephesians 6:16. James 4:7, if only he relies on the promise of the faithful God. His faith, though it were only small as a grain of

mustard-seed, would be abundantly sufficient for all the powers that the occasion called for, Matthew 17:20.

2. To obtain anything—

By faith "have promises been obtained;" even such as, according to human expectation, could never have been fulfilled. To Abraham and Sarah was the birth of a son delayed, until there remained not the smallest probability of its accomplishment, nor a possibility, according to the course of nature. And David's establishment on the throne of Israel was as unlikely, according to man's estimate of things, as any event that could be conceived. But never, in any single instance, did a promise, apprehended by faith, fail him who relied upon it, Joshua 23:14. Take, then, the promises of God (no matter how great they are, or how small); and only rely on them, and plead them before God in prayer; and sooner shall Heaven and earth pass away, than you be disappointed of your hope. "You may ask what you will," provided only it be contained in a promise, and "it shall assuredly be done unto you."

3. To suffer anything—

It is scarcely to be conceived what sufferings men have inflicted on the people of God. Of these we have many instances mentioned in the verses after my text, verse 36, 37. But, perhaps, the instance more immediately referred to in my text is one recorded in the book of Maccabees, respecting a woman and her seven sons, who endured all that the cruel tyrant Antiochus could inflict upon them; and refused all his offers of deliverance; having an assured prospect of a recompense from God, even an eternal recompense, which would infinitely outweigh all that it was in the power of man to grant, 2 Maccabees verse 7.

Similar instances we have had in our own favored land, in the days of popish persecution: and God alone knows to what any of us may yet be called, before we die. But, if faith will enable men to bear up under such sufferings as we read of in the Scriptures of truth, how much more will it qualify us for sustaining the common evils of life; yes, and enable us to "glory in tribulation," so far as God shall see fit to subject us to its assaults.

To all this I may add,

III. How extensive its benefits—

There is not a blessing to the body or the soul, for time or for eternity, which faith will not secure.

1. Do we not need pardon?

There is not a sin of which we may not obtain forgiveness, if we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, "whose blood cleanses from all sin." The declaration of an inspired Apostle is, "All who believe are justified from all things, Acts 13:39."

2. Do we not need peace?

"Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, Romans 5:1;" yes, by "believing in this unseen Savior, we may rejoice in him with a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory, 1 Peter 1:8."

3. Do we not need holiness?

Every part of holiness will faith supply. It will "work by love," and "overcome the world," and "purify the heart, Acts 15:9." It is by faith only that we can "behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ:" and by that shall we be "changed into his image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord, 2 Corinthians 3:18."

4. Do we not need glory?

Never shall the believer die;
never shall he perish;
never shall he come into condemnation;
John 3:16; John 11:25-26.

Eternal life is his, both in title and in the actual commencement; and it shall be his in the great day of Christ's appearing. Then shall that be said to you, as it was to blind Bartimaeus, and to her who washed her Savior's feet with her tears; not, 'Your importunity, or your penitence, has saved you;' but, "Your faith has saved you, go in peace."

Now, let me press upon you a due improvement of this subject. Concerning faith, I would say, strive,

1. To ascertain the existence of saving faith—

True is that declaration of the Apostle, "All men have not faith, 2 Thessalonians 3:2." Nor is it true of those only who professedly reject the Gospel, but of multitudes also who profess to have received it. It was to such that Paul addressed those words: "Examine

yourselves, whether you be in the faith: prove your own selves, 2 Corinthians 13:5." You are not to imagine that a mere assent to the Gospel is the faith that is required of you. Saving faith is a divine principle in the soul—a principle productive of such fruits as were brought forth by the worthies enumerated in this chapter. In order to ascertain whether your faith is genuine, read the chapter carefully; and, after every successive instance of faith, inquire how far it has operated the same change in you. In truth, if we compare our experience with that of the saints of old, the best among us, instead of valuing himself upon his faith, will find reason to doubt whether he has yet attained any faith at all.

2. To appreciate the importance of saving faith—

Lightly as men in general think of faith, there is no principle whatever that is of such importance to the soul as that. Love, indeed, is in some respects greater than faith; but it must be remembered, that faith is the root from which alone true love can spring. Where faith is lacking, there can be no union with Christ, and consequently no Christian grace: for "without Christ we can do nothing." "Without faith, whatever we may do, it is impossible to please God, verse 6;" and, consequently, without faith we can have no hope of eternal life. How solemn are those words which our blessed Lord commissioned his disciples to proclaim throughout the world! "Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature: he who believes and is baptized, shall be saved; and he who believes not, shall be damned! Mark 16:15-16." Know then, that, in this subject, life and death are set before you: and that, as in this world, so to all eternity, "According to your faith it will be unto you."

3. To obtain an increase of faith—

Very remarkable is the answer given by the disciples to an injunction which they had received relative to the forgiving an offending brother. When he told them, that if a brother would offend seven times in a day, and as often repeat his acknowledgments, they would renew to him their pardoning grace, they said, "Lord, increase our faith! Luke 17:5." But what had faith to do with this? One would rather suppose that they would have said, "Lord, increase our love." But their request argued a juster view of divine truth. They did indeed stand in need of love; but it could spring from nothing but faith; and would infallibly be produced by faith: and hence they presented the fittest petition that it was possible for them to offer. Let the same petition, then, proceed continually from your lips. Unbounded are your calls for this divine principle; and the more you excel in faith, the more will you excel in every Christian grace.

4. To have faith as the one governing principle of your life—

It is "by faith you are to walk," "by faith to stand," by faith to live continually: as the Apostle says, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me, Galatians 2:20." You have seen how wholly the saints of old gave themselves up to its influence: go and do likewise; that, having lived by faith, and "died in faith," you may receive "the promise which God has promised you, even eternal! life, verse 39."

#2332

GOD'S ESTIMATE OF HIS PEOPLE

Hebrews 11:38

"Of whom the world was not worthy!"

THESE words are introduced in a parenthesis; and are intended to obviate an objection, which might weaken, if not make void, the foregoing statement. The Apostle has been insisting upon the operations and fruits of faith; and has adduced a great variety of instances in which its power has been displayed.

Those who wrought such stupendous works by the power of faith might be supposed to be objects of high and deserved admiration; but those who suffered so many things under its influence might be thought to have merited their afflictions: whereas, in truth, the world itself, even that very world by which they were so persecuted, was not worthy of them.

Let us consider,

I. God's record concerning them—

It is obvious that there is an immense difference between God's estimation of his people, and that in which they are held by the ignorant and ungodly world.

The world accounts the saints as unworthy of itself—

This appears from the manner in which the world uniformly treats the saints. In the days referred to by the Apostle, multitudes of the saints were tortured on account of their piety; many "had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yes, moreover of bonds and

imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth, verse 35-38." And these are the persons to whom this testimony is given, that "the world was not worthy of them."

In the days of Christ and his Apostles, the same enmity against vital godliness displayed itself continually. Our blessed Lord, though confessedly without spot or blemish, he was "despised and rejected of men:" his whole "nation abhorred him," and combined to demand his crucifixion; preferring even a murderer before him. His Apostles too, as he himself had forewarned them, were "hated by all men for his sake," and were counted as "the filth of the earth and the off-scouring of all things," precisely as the godly in the days of Jeremiah had been before them. Compare Lamentations 3:45 with 1 Corinthians 4:13. Paul was certainly not behind any in wisdom or piety; yet of him was it said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth; for it is not fit that he would live! Acts 22:22."

And is it not thus at this time also? I appeal to all, Whether the very circumstance of a person being zealously devoted to the service of his God does not uniformly bring a stigma upon his character, so that, even though he would be the most active, and benevolent, and blameless of mankind—he will be regarded as weak and noxious in that particular? If from peculiar circumstances a man of piety is led to take a prominent part in the diffusion of true religion, I ask: Will not the world account him unworthy of their esteem, their company, their protection? Let the opprobrious names which are given to such characters, and the contempt with which they are treated, and the injuries which with impunity are inflicted on them, determine this point. He can know little either of the opinions or conduct of those around him, who does not see, that at this hour, no less than in former times, "those who are born after the flesh persecute those who are born after the Spirit;" and that "the enmity of the serpent's seed against the Seed of the woman" is as strong as ever!

But, while the world thus accounts the saints unworthy of itself,

God, on the other hand, pronounces the world unworthy of them—

God regards the saints as "his peculiar treasure above all people upon the face of the earth." In his estimation they are as lights in a dark world, and as "salt" which keeps the great mass of the ungodly from utter putrefaction, Matthew 5:13-14. Nay further, he sends them as leaven to diffuse piety all around them, Matthew 13:33, and to impart to others the blessings which they themselves have received. But the world is unworthy of them: for they know not their value; and are regardless of all the advantages which they might derive from them; yes, they are insensible of the benefits which they are daily receiving from them; and they requite all their kindness with nothing but hatred and contempt.

We have not time to enter minutely into these different particulars: yet we must not pass them over without a few words to elucidate and confirm them.

Go back to the days of the Apostles: see in what light those distinguished servants of God were regarded: see at what a low rate all their labors were appreciated in every city, not of Judea only, but of the whole world. What benefits might the people in every place have received, if they would have listened to the instructions and followed the examples of those holy men!

Just so at this day might they be benefitted by the saints and ministers of the Lord, so far at least as those saints and ministers are themselves conformed to the doctrines and examples of the primitive saints? Indeed the world is, though unwittingly, benefitted by the saints in a very high degree: for by them the tone of morals is raised, wherever they come: and a multitude of institutions for the temporal and spiritual welfare of mankind are set on foot. Institutions, which would never have been carried forward, if the zeal and piety of the godly had not led the way, and the envy and jealousy of the careless been provoked to tread in their steps. The Societies for the Diffusion of the Holy Scriptures, for sending forth Missions to the Heathen, for the Conversion of Jews to Christianity, and for the Education of the Poor, abundantly illustrate this truth.

How far the words of our Lord respecting Jerusalem are applicable to the present day, I pretend not to say: but in that day, the tribulation that came on Jerusalem was greater than had existed since the beginning of the world, insomuch that "if those days of trouble had not been shortened, no flesh would have been saved: but for the elect's sake those days were shortened Matthew 24:21-22." And if only ten righteous men had been found in Sodom, both that city, and all the other cities of the plain, would have been spared. Who can tell then what judgments would be poured out upon the ungodly world, if the saints by their piety and their prayers did not stay the hand of an avenging God, Genesis 19:22.

But how these benefits are requited, it is needless to observe. Suffice it to say, that God's estimation of his saints is the same as ever; and his declaration concerning them is, that "the world is not worthy of them."

Let us then proceed to state,

II. The opinions with which this record should inspire us—

It should teach us,

1. To disregard the indignities that are cast upon us—

Man has his "day:" but God has his also: and in the prospect of the ultimate decision of an infallible Judge, it would be a small matter to us to be judged of man's judgment, 1 Corinthians 4:3. When men pour contempt upon us, we should say as our blessed Lord, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." In reference to the persecutors of that immaculate Lamb, the Apostle says, that "through ignorance they persecuted him," and that, "if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." So, if men really knew what God has done for his chosen people, and how "precious their blood is in his sight," they would not venture to oppose them in the way they do.

Men are beguiled by their own prejudices: they persuade themselves that piety is hypocrisy; and that, to diffuse it, is to "turn the world upside down:" and, in opposing it, "they think they really do God service." Towards them therefore we would feel pity, rather than resentment: and on our own account we would feel nothing but exceeding joy; since we only participate in the lot of God's chosen people, Matthew 5:11-12, and are rendered conformable to the example of Christ himself! 1 Peter 4:13.

2. To adore and magnify our God, who has so distinguished us—

Who is it that has made any of us to differ from the world around us? 1 Corinthians 4:7. Truly, "he who has wrought us to the self-same thing is God, 2 Corinthians 5:5." In ourselves we were no better than others: we were "dead in trespasses and sins," like all around us; and were "children of wrath, even as others." But he pitied us, "he looked upon us while lying in our blood, and bade us, Live! Ezekiel 16:5-6."

O how should we bless and adore him for such amazing love! "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we would be called the sons of God! 1 John 3:1." Let us enter into the full spirit of these words of the loving and beloved Apostle: and let us never cease to call on "all that is within us to bless" and magnify our adorable Benefactor, Psalm 103:1-3.

3. To walk worthy of our high and heavenly calling—

"What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conduct and godliness!" Has God called us to glory and virtue? Has he made us "a peculiar people on purpose that we would show forth both the praises and the virtues of him who has called us? 1 Peter 2:9." Let us then "walk as befits saints," and "walk as befits the Gospel of Christ."

If we profess to have received such mercies at the Lord's hands, the world has a right to expect that we would surpass them as much in real excellence, as we do in the privileges of which we make our boast. "What do you more than others?" is a question which they have a right to ask, and to which we ought to be able to return a satisfactory answer. Yes, our very lives should supersede the necessity of a verbal answer; we should be "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men."

If indeed the world be not worthy of us, let them see their inferiority by our lives; and be constrained from what they behold in us to acknowledge, that "the righteous is more excellent than his neighbor." If the difference between them and us be so immense as the Apostle represents it to be, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, then let us labor to comply with his direction, and to shine before them with all the splendor of a holy people, "Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe! Philippians 2:14-15."

4. To exert ourselves in bringing others to a participation of the benefits which we enjoy—

"Our light is not to be put under a bed, or under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that all around us may receive the benefit." The importance of this in relation to the blessings of civilization is generally acknowledged: and is it less important in reference to the blessings of salvation? Let everyone of us then say with the Church of old, "Draw me, and we will come after you;" that is, if God draws me, I will not come alone, but will draw all I can along with me. If men despise our efforts, and show an utter disregard of the blessings which we hold out to them, let it only stir us up to augmented zeal, and plead with us the more powerfully to exert ourselves the more in their behalf. Let us expostulate with them, as the prophet does, "Why do you spend money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which satisfies not? Harken diligently unto me, and eat that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." And then, if they requite your labors only with hatred and persecution, determine through grace, that you "will gladly spend and be spent for them, though the more abundantly you love them, the less you are loved."

#2333

THE ADVANTAGES ENJOYED UNDER THE CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION

Hebrews 11:39-40

"These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect."

WHEN we hear or read of the saints of old, we excuse our lack of resemblance to them, from the idea that they were more highly favored than us; and that it would be unreasonable to expect from us of these later days, such high attainments as they made by reason of their peculiar and more exalted dispensation. But this excuse is altogether founded on a mistake: for the disparity between their dispensation and ours is altogether in our favor, as we are expressly told in the passage before us; which will naturally lead me to show,

I. What good things God has given to his people of old—

1. He gave them exceeding great and precious promises—

The promise given to Adam in Paradise was gradually unfolded by successive revelations, until there was such a body of prophecy as exhibited the Savior with the utmost possible precision. His person, work, and offices were all set forth so minutely; that, if the detached prophecies were collected and arranged, there would be found in the Old Testament as just a representation of him as in the Gospel itself. These formed a ground of hope to the Lord's people, who were thus instructed to look to their Messiah as:

"their Prophet, like unto Moses," to instruct them;

their Priest, after the order of Melchizedek, to make atonement for them;

their King, who, sitting as on David's throne, would reign over them, and in them, for evermore.

2. He enabled them to live by faith upon these promises—

Faith, in whoever it is found, is the gift of God: and it was richly bestowed on many, as appears from the chapter before us. We are even astonished at the strength with which it was exercised in many instances, and at the realizing views which it gave of invisible things to those in whom it was found. The instances recorded of it the preceding context are still the brightest patterns for the imitation of the Christian Church.

3. God testified his acceptance of their faith so exercised—

This is noticed in the beginning of this chapter, and again repeated at the close of it. God testified his acceptance of their faith by invariably accomplishing those objects which he had encouraged them to expect, so that in no single instance was any one believer ever disappointed of his hope. However hopeless or even impossible the events might appear according to the judgment of man, every difficulty vanished, and every expectation was fulfilled, as soon as ever the faith of his people had been sufficiently tried, and the time for God's interposition was arrived.

He further testified his acceptance of it by the witness of his Spirit in their souls. There can be no doubt but that they enjoyed in their souls a peace flowing from their affiance in God, and a sense of his love shed abroad in their hearts, together with an assurance of his approbation in the day of judgment. This appears from their "looking for a city which has foundations, and a heavenly country," as "the recompense of their reward;" and from their refusing deliverance from present trials in full expectation of "a better resurrection" to life eternal. And what a testimony has he given in the record which is contained in this chapter; a record which will transmit their names with honor to the end of time!

But, that we may form a just estimate of our blessings, I will proceed to show,

II. What "better things he has provided for us" under the Christian dispensation—

Certainly our privileges are far superior to theirs, for:

1. We have in possession that Savior whom they only looked forward to in the promise—

The first advent of Christ was held forth to them as an object of faith and hope, just as his second advent is held forth to us. But the promise relating to his first coming is now fulfilled. We have seen him accomplishing every prophecy, and performing in himself all that was shadowed forth in the infinitely diversified types of the ceremonial law: and we have, in this very circumstance, such a proof of his Messiahship, as no considerate and candid person can withstand. We have heard all his gracious instructions relative to the way of life; and have already seen his kingdom established in the world. We have seen "the stone that was cut out without hands, becoming a mountain, and filling the whole earth!"

What an unspeakable advantage is this! If Abraham rejoiced when he saw only by faith, and very indistinctly, the days of the Son of man—then what reason have we to rejoice in having this adorable Savior fully revealed in all his beauty, and excellency, and glory! Well does our Lord himself bless his believing people, saying, "Blessed are your eyes which see the things which you see, and hear the things which you hear, Luke 14:23-24."

2. We have in perfection, those blessings which they enjoyed only in their commencement—

They knew not what solid peace was: their sacrifices, however rich and abundant, could not impart this blessing: they were rather "remembrances of sin," than real expiations; and "could make no man perfect as pertaining to the conscience." "The law made nothing perfect; but the bringing in of a better hope did, Hebrews 7:19."

Their access to God was that of a servant, who keeps at a distance; our access to God is that rather of a child, who comes to the very bosom of his father, Ephesians 3:12.

Their communications from God were as darkness, in comparison with the light which we enjoy, 1 Corinthians 2:9-10. 1 John 2:8. The prophets themselves did not understand their own prophecies, as we do, 1 Peter 1:12. Not even John the Baptist, who pointed out Jesus as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world," had such just conceptions of him as we have: in this respect "even the least believer that is to be found in all the kingdom of God, is greater than he."

All, not excepting even the Apostles themselves, until the day of Pentecost, had a veil upon their hearts, so that they could not behold the glory of God in the face of their Divine Master. "But we, with open and unveiled face, behold, as in a looking-glass, the glory of the Lord, and are changed by it into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord, 2 Corinthians 3:18."

In the view of these glorious advantages, I would yet further draw your attention to them in a way,

1. Of solemn inquiry—

What report does God, and what report does conscience, give respecting us? Are we walking in the footsteps of the saints of old, even of those saints, who "by faith obtained a good report?" We are not to imagine that, while faith wrought so powerfully in them, it will have no visible influence on us. Be assured, that its operation is the same in all ages.

Let me then ask: What effects it has wrought in us? Take the examples of Noah, of Abraham, and of Moses, as set forth in the preceding part of the chapter, and see what resemblance we bear to them. How inferior to them are we in our practice, notwithstanding the superiority of our advantages! Have we not reason to blush and be ashamed at a review of our past lives, and at our misimprovement of the advantages which we enjoy?

2. Of affectionate admonition—

If ever you would "be made perfect," you must both live by faith, and "die in the faith." To be "walking by sight, when you should walk by faith only," will surely bring you to a far different end from that which you desire and expect. Oh! "listen not to flesh and blood;" but obey sincerely, and without reserve, the commandments of your God. Set before you the invisible God, who marks all your ways, and tries your very thoughts and heart. Set before you also the invisible realities of the eternal world, the glories of Heaven and the miseries of Hell; and consider which of them is the portion prepared for you. What a lamentable thing will it be in the day of judgment to see such a one as Rahab, an accursed Canaanite and a harlot, admitted into the kingdom of Heaven, and you yourselves cast out! I beg you to avail yourselves of the advantages which you enjoy; and let them not outcome in your heavier condemnation.

The promise of Christ's second coming to judge the world will as surely be fulfilled, as that of his first coming to save the world has been. And if you look forward to that event, and to the everlasting separation of the righteous from the wicked, O think "what manner of persons you ought to be in all holy conduct and godliness;" and "be diligent that you may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless."

#2334

CHRIST'S PERSEVERING DILIGENCE

Hebrews 12:1-2

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

WHEN we read the history of the Jews as recorded in the sacred volume, we in general feel no other interest in the events related concerning them, than we do in those which are handed down to us by the historians of Greece and Rome. But, allowing for some

local and circumstantial differences, the same things are transacted among ourselves; and the records which we read may serve as a looking-glass wherein to see all that is now passing in the world.

The saints of old, even from righteous Abel to the end of the prophetic age, were called to a life of suffering, and by their sufferings were made perfect. Thus also "must we go through much tribulation in our way to the heavenly kingdom;" and fill up the measure of sufferings which is allotted to us in this valley of tears.

The Apostle having given us a long catalogue of worthies, who had approved themselves faithful unto death, and had thereby "obtained a good report," exhorts us to follow their example, and more especially the example of our blessed Lord himself.

In this passage are contained,

I. An exhortation to run our race—

All of us are called to "run our race with perseverance"—

There is a course marked out for us by God himself: nor can any one err from it, who duly attends to the directions given him in the Holy Scriptures. In this course we are to run. We are not left at liberty to choose a path for ourselves: the race is "set before us," and to that we must strictly adhere.

But we cannot hold on in it without much and continual exertion. Many are the difficulties that obstruct our way: sometimes our path is steep and slippery; and sometimes it is rough and thorny. Often are we wearied in it and ready to faint before our course is half finished. And frequently those who ought most to aid and encourage us, exert themselves to the utmost to impede our progress. But our duty is to run our race "with perseverance;" to hold on until we arrive at the goal, in spite of all our external trials, or inward weakness; and "by patient continuance in well-doing, to seek for glory and honor and immortality." To run well for a season will avail us nothing: we must "endure unto the end, if ever we would be saved."

To this we would be stimulated by the consideration of the many witnesses that surround us—

The saints who have gone before us, having finished their course with joy, are represented as being spectators of our conflicts, and witnesses to us that our persevering efforts shall be crowned with success. In both of these views, the consideration of them is calculated to refresh our spirits, and to quicken our languishing exertions.

Conceive "a cloud," or multitude of departed saints, and more especially of those who ran together with us; conceive them looking upon us with eager solicitude, rejoicing when they behold us rapidly advancing, and ready to weep over us, if at any time they see us on the decline; conceive them crying out to us:

"Press forward; remember me; I once endured the same trials; I, like you, was ready to faint; but, through grace, I held on: and at last I obtained the prize. Hold on then a little longer, and the crown of righteousness is yours, "be not weary in well-doing; for in due season you shall reap, if you faint not!"

I say, let us dwell on this thought; and surely, if ever men running in a race were encouraged by the acclamations of their friends, much more shall we by such animating considerations as these.

Together with this earnest exhortation, the Apostle gives us,

II. Directions to ensure success—

1. We must put away whatever obstructs our progress—

They who are about to run a race need not be reminded of the importance there is to cast off all unnecessary weight, or any long garment which may impede their motion. But in running our spiritual race we are apt to be forgetful of this obvious and necessary caution.

Many things there are which operate as a burden to weigh down our spirits; and to exhaust our strength. How often do the cares or pleasures of the world divide our attention, enfeeble our efforts, and prevent our advancement in the divine life!

There is in every one some "sin that more easily besets him," and which, like a flowing robe, diminishes his race in the service of his God. What sin this is, we would be careful to inquire. It will in general be found to be some inward lust that is constitutionally wrought into us—or some evil, incident to our situation, our company, or our employment. Whatever it is, whether:

pride,
or passion,
or covetousness,
or impurity,

or sloth,
or intemperance,
or unbelief,
or impenitence,
or self-righteousness,
or self-dependence
—we must "put it away."

Whatever tends to divert us from the path of duty, or to hinder us in it, must be sacrificed, if we would "so run as to obtain the prize!"

2. We must direct our eyes to Jesus Christ—

Jesus is here proposed to our view both as our successful example, and as our almighty friend. Never had any other person such a difficult course to run: nor could any other ever have persevered in it. The cross he bore was heavier than we can possibly conceive: nor was the ignominy of it less than the pain: but "he endured the cross and despised the shame:" he looked to "the joy that was set before him"—

the joy of glorifying his heavenly Father,
the joy of delivering a ruined world,
the joy of being forever the acknowledged author of their salvation,
and in the prospect of having all this consummated, he disregarded all his trials and difficulties, he even "longed to be baptized with his bloody baptism," and continued with unabated ardor until he could say, "It is finished!" and until, in consequence of his victorious career, he was exalted to the "right hand of the throne of God!"

How should we be encouraged by the sight of this our successful pattern! For what are our trials in comparison with his? How richly too are his exertions recompensed, even as ours also shall in due time be, in the full possession of the prize that was set before him!

But the Apostle directs us to look unto Jesus also as our almighty friend. It is he who marked out for us our course, who called us forth to run in it, who holds out to our view the prize, who sits as umpire to award the prize to every one that wins it, and who will bestow it on us with his own hand. He is moreover "the author and the finisher of our faith;" from him proceeds that faith whereby we are stimulated to engage in the race, and that whereby we are enabled to persevere in it to the end. Let us then look at him, and see how sufficient he is to renew our strength, and how interested he is in crowning our efforts with success.

There is a peculiarity in this direction which we must by no means pass over. The Apostle tells us not merely to look unto Jesus, but, in so doing, to look away from everything else. We are apt to look:

at our own weakness,
at our trials and afflictions,
at the length and difficulties of our way,
at the strength and number of those who are endeavoring to cast us down,
or at anything that tends to discourage us.

But we should look off from all these things, and keep our eyes steadily fixed on Jesus as our pattern, and our friend—and then our difficulties will appear as nothing; and we shall proceed cheerfully in an assured expectation of the prize! 1 Corinthians 9:26.

ADDRESS—

1. To those who have never yet begun to run—

Were it optional with you whether you would have any interest in this race or not, we might leave you to your choice: but you are of necessity entered upon the lists, and must have all the shame and misery of failure, if you run not so as to obtain the prize. The loss of Heaven is not the sole consequence of your sloth. For if you are not judged worthy of the felicity of Heaven, then you will receive the doom of the wicked and slothful servant in the torments of Hell! Consider then how much time you have lost, how little may yet remain, and what an arduous race you have to run; and begin immediately, while yet the prize is in your view, and Jesus is ready to assist your feeble efforts!

2. To those who are halting, or turning aside out of the course—

Many "run well for a season, and yet, after all, are hindered, Galatians 5:7" from pressing forward to the goal. Inquire, my brethren, whence it is that such a lamentable change has taken place in you? What is there that will compensate for the loss of the heavenly prize? It were better far to part with every weight, and every encumbrance, whether friends, or interests, or pleasures of whatever kind, or even with life itself, than to be diverted from your course, or to be retarded in it. Be assured that, as "he who puts his hand to the plough, and looks back, is not fit for the kingdom of Heaven"—so neither can he be, who halts in his Christian race. May God

enable you to resume your labors! and know for your encouragement, that, if persisted in, "they shall not be in vain in the Lord! 1 Corinthians 15:58."

3. To those who are resolutely hastening toward the goal—

Doubtless you are sometimes ready to faint—but look at the cloud of witnesses that are gone before you: look at Jesus in particular, that bright example of all righteousness, and that gracious helper of all his followers. Look too at the prize, the joy that is set before you; and "have respect unto the recompense of reward," how richly will that repay you for your persevering exertions!

Methodists you are now come within a short distance of the goal, and thousands of God's dear children, though invisible to you, are looking on, and standing ready to bless your success. Press on then a little longer, "forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth unto that which is before Philippians 3:13-14." So shall you "finish your course with joy," and "receive the crown of righteousness from the hands of Jesus, your righteous Judge! 2 Timothy 4:7-8."

#2335

CHRIST'S PATIENCE UNDER SUFFERINGS

Hebrews 12:3

"Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

THINGS are good or evil in this life chiefly by comparison. The happiest of men in this world, are unhappy in comparison with those who are in Heaven. The most miserable of men in this world, are happy in comparison with those who are in Hell. This reflection will be of great service to us in estimating our own state. It is not indeed expedient that we would compare ourselves with those who appear in a more prosperous condition than ourselves (unless for the purposes of humiliation and self-abasement), lest we would be led to envy them, and to repine at our own lot. But it will be highly advantageous to us frequently to view the wants and sufferings of others, in order to extirpate every murmuring thought, and to stimulate our own souls to gratitude and thanksgiving.

A sight of the Lord Jesus in particular cannot fail to produce in us the best effects; since all that we are called to endure for his sake, is as nothing in comparison with what he patiently and willingly endured for us!

In the text we have this very direction given us, and for this express purpose. The Apostle, in what he wrote for the comfort of the afflicted Hebrew Christians, reminds us,

I. That the soul is apt to faint under heavy trials—

The people of God are taught to expect trials from an ungodly world; and to make their sufferings an occasion of joy and glorying. But,

Even the most eminent saints have fainted under their trials—

In the Scriptures we have the weaknesses of God's people, as faithfully recorded as their virtues. And there is scarcely a saint who has not on some occasions shown himself weak as other men.

Jacob, in despondency, cried, "All these things are against me Genesis 42:36."

Moses, by his intemperate and hasty expressions, provoked God to exclude him from the earthly Canaan, Numbers 20:10-12.

Job cursed the day of his birth, and accused even God himself of cruelty and oppression, Job 3:3; Job 10:3; Job 16:12-14.

David said it was in vain to serve God; and called all who had ever testified to the contrary, by the name of liars, Psalm 73:13-14; Psalm 77:4; Psalm 77:7-9; Psalm 116:10-11.

Elijah, through the dread of Jezebel, begged of God to put an end to his life, 1 Kings 19:4.

Jeremiah lamented that he had ever been born; and complained that God himself was to him "as a liar, and as waters that fail, Jeremiah 15:10; Jeremiah 15:18."

All of these were very distinguished characters, and yet, in circumstances of peculiar trial, they lost that composure of mind which it was their duty, and their privilege, to possess.

And who among us has not on many occasions betrayed the same weakness?

We have borne up with fortitude perhaps against some trials, which have been light and transient. But how have we sustained those trials which were heavy, complicated, and of long continuance? When our troubles have arisen from those who were our avowed enemies, we have endured them manfully. But when they have come from a quarter that we did not expect, or from a quarter from whence we had reason to expect nothing but support and consolation, how have we endured them then? If some near relative, or a friend that was as our own soul, have been the immediate cause of our affliction, and our enemies have been those of our own household—have we not given way to complaint and murmuring? Yes, have not our very spirits failed by reason of vexation, insomuch that we could find scarcely any comfort in life.

If we have not been turned from the faith, like those who were afraid to confess Christ, John 12:42, have we not been diverted from the path of duty, and been led to manifest a vindictive spirit instead of overcoming evil with good? Let this then suffice to show us how weak we are, and how much we need the supports and consolations of the Gospel.

But in the text the Apostle informs us,

II. That a view of Christ's patience under his sufferings will afford us most effectual relief—

Many are the consolations which the Gospel administers, by pointing out to us the author and the intent of our trials, together with the benefits resulting from them. But there is no source of comfort so great as that which the consideration of Christ's sufferings opens to us.

The contradiction of sinners which Christ endured was astonishing indeed—

Consider the unreasonableness with which he was opposed, when, notwithstanding the myriads of miracles that he wrought, his enemies were continually demanding more signs, and pretending a lack of evidence as the ground of their unbelief.

Consider the obstinacy with which he was rejected, when his victory over the devils was ascribed to a confederacy with them; and Lazarus himself was made an object of murderous resentment, because his restoration from the grave was the means of converting some who were more open to conviction.

Consider the malice with which he was persecuted. Incessantly did his enemies labor to ensnare him, and seek to take away his life. And, when they had a prospect of effecting their purpose, there was no method, however infamous, which they did not use to accomplish their wishes. With what inveteracy did they suborn false witnesses; and, on the failure of that device, compel the judge by clamors and menaces, to give sentence against him!

Consider the cruelty with which he was put to death. They might, one would have thought, have been satisfied with seeing his back torn, and even ploughed up, with scourges. But their cruelty was insatiable; for, even when he was nailed to the accursed tree, they ceased not to mock and insult him, and to add by their indignities a tenfold poignancy to all his anguish.

Yet, notwithstanding the contradiction of sinners against him was so great and unparalleled, he endured it all with patience, never fainting, never wearied, until he expired under the accumulated load.

A due consideration of Christ's sufferings will keep us from fainting under our sorrows—

What are our sorrows in comparison with his? The utmost we have met with is a little contempt and ridicule, or perhaps the loss of some worldly interests or prospects. "We have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin, verse 4;" and anything short of that should be deemed unworthy of our notice. How slight are the aggravations of our sufferings in comparison with his!

If we do not deserve such treatment from man, have we not merited infinitely worse from God? But he was altogether spotless; nor could either men or devils lay anything to his charge.

Perhaps we have endeavored to do some good to those who now hate and revile us: but he came from Heaven for the salvation of those who hated him; yes, and subjected himself to the power of his enemies, on purpose that he might effect their reconciliation with God. If then he patiently endured such things for us, should we faint when called to endure some light afflictions for him? Surely we would rather rejoice that an opportunity is afforded us of testifying our love to him, and of approving ourselves faithful to his interests.

We may improve this subject,

1. For our humiliation—

How should we be ashamed of our readiness to shrink from the cross, and to complain when it is laid upon us! What if we would be called to lay down our lives for Christ, as thousands have been before us? How would we endure that trial? "If we have run with the footmen and they wearied us, then how shall we contend with horses? If we are wearied in a land of peace, then how shall we do in

the swelling of Jordan? Jeremiah 12:5." Let us remember, that "he who hates not his own life, (when it stands in competition with his duty) cannot be Christ's disciple." Let us then never fear the face of man, Isaiah 51:7-8; Isaiah 51:12-13; but whenever we are tempted to betray the cause of Christ, let us reflect on the example he has set for us, and "arm ourselves likewise with the same mind, 1 Peter 4:1."

2. For our encouragement—

Some variation in our frames we must expect: but we must never allow a desponding thought to lodge within us. Be it so; our sufferings are very great: then we are the more conformed to the example of our blessed Lord. And shall not this thought console us? And if we walk in his steps, shall we not soon be with him where he is? Let us then be content to "fill up the measure of his sufferings," and to follow him in his appointed way. Thus shall we, like him, "be made perfect through sufferings; and, having suffered with him for a little while, be also glorified with him to all eternity! "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us! Romans 8:18"

#2336

AFFLICTIONS, THE FRUIT OF GOD'S LOVE

Hebrews 12:4-13

"In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. "Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed."

Persecution for righteousness' sake is what every child of God must expect: and when faith is in lively exercise, it will be sustained without murmuring. This is amply shown in the preceding chapter, Hebrews 11:35-38. But when faith languishes, the trials which believers are called to endure will appear almost insupportable. Such was the state of many of the Hebrews to whom the Apostle wrote: they were in danger of becoming weary and faint in their minds through the greatness and long continuance of their sufferings. On this account, Paul, having shown them the power of a living faith to support them, brings before them a variety of considerations,

I. For their consolation and support—

The patience of Christ under his sufferings is beyond all comparison the strongest incentive to resignation under ours; since ours fall so infinitely short of his. This the Apostle first propounds for their consideration; and then goes on, in the words which we have just read, to offer other suggestions, which also are of great weight for the reconciling of the mind to trials, of whatever kind they are. From them we also, when bowed down with affliction, may learn to support them manfully, for,

1. Our afflictions are far less than we have pledged ourselves willingly to endure—

The very terms on which we come to Christ are, that we shall be ready to die for him at any time, and in any way, that he shall see fit. We are plainly warned by our Lord himself, that, if we will not lay down our life for him, we cannot be his disciples, "If we love our lives, we shall lose them: but, if we lose them for his sake, then shall we find them to life eternal." But, what is the loss of temporal good, when compared with that of life? Be it granted that, like the Hebrews, we have suffered much, Hebrews 10:32-34; yet our persecutors have stopped far short of what they might have inflicted; and may, for ought we know, be yet permitted to inflict: "We have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin."

Instead therefore of complaining of the heaviness of our trials, we have reason rather to be thankful for the lightness of them. And, if we faint when they are so light, how shall we support them when they come upon us with unrestrained force? "If we have run with footmen and they wearied us, then how shall we contend with horses? Jeremiah 12:5." In our "strivings then against sin" and Satan, let us prepare for yet greater extremities: and, when we are prepared for the worst that can come upon us, then will all which stops

short of that appear light and easy to be borne.

2. Our afflictions are the fruits of God's paternal love—

God had exhorted his people under the Old Testament dispensation to regard their trials in this view, as sent by a loving Father to his children; and to receive them with truly filial gratitude, "neither despising them," as though they came only by chance, "nor fainting under them," as though they had been sent in anger, Proverbs 3:11-12.

The Apostle fixes our attention particularly on the tender and affectionate terms under which our God addresses us, "My son, despise not." And we would not overlook such endearing expressions, which, if duly attended to, would reconcile us even to the most afflictive dispensations. The truth is, that man is only an instrument in God's hands: and that the very afflictions which men lay upon us for our excess of piety—God lays upon us for our defects, or for the further advancement of his work within us.

Paul's thorn in the flesh was ordained of God to prevent his being too much elated by the revelations which had been given unto him, 2 Corinthians 12:7. Our state in this world is a state of discipline: we are yet children, and need correction on account of our manifold errors and faults. It is by correction that we are gradually brought to the exercise of true wisdom.

This is found universally among men; insomuch that there is no wise father who does not occasionally correct his child. A man, who sees children that are unconnected with him acting amiss, takes no notice of them, but leaves to others the painful office of correcting them: but his own children he corrects, because of his peculiar interest in them, and his love towards them. Would we rather that God would disregard us as bastards, that have no real relation to him? Should we not much rather be dealt with by him as his beloved children, in whose welfare he takes the deepest interest?

Whatever then be our affliction, corporeal or mental, personal or domestic; or with whatever view it may be inflicted on us by others, let us view the hand of a loving Father in it, and say, with Eli, "It is the Lord; let him do what seems good to him, 1 Samuel 3:18." Let us "hear the rod, and him who has appointed it, Micah 6:9;" and endeavor to make a just improvement of it for the good of our souls.

3. If we have submitted patiently to the rebukes of our earthly parents, much more should we submit to those of our heavenly Father —

Earthly parents do not always correct so justly or so temperately as they ought; their rebukes being sometimes little else than an ebullition of their own evil tempers: yet we have submitted to their corrections without presuming to arraign the wisdom, the justice, or the love that inflicted the chastisement upon us. This is a part of that honor which children were by God's law enjoined to pay those who were the fathers of their flesh; and which, if they obstinately refused to pay, they were, by God's own appointment, to be stoned to death, Deuteronomy 21:18-21.

This submission is due in an infinitely higher degree to Him who is the Father of our spirits: and, if we refuse it to him, a far worse death assuredly awaits us in the world to come; for he never inflicts any evil upon his redeemed children but for our greater good, even that we may become in a greater degree "partakers of his holiness."

On the other hand, to obedient children there was a peculiar promise of a long and happy life; a promise doubtless fulfilled to multitudes in former times, and frequently accomplished now. But to those who meekly submit to the Divine chastisements, it shall be fulfilled in the Canaan that is above, even in the regions of blessedness and glory for evermore. Shall we then refuse to the corrections of our heavenly Father, that submission which we paid to our earthly parents? "Shall we not much rather be in subjection to him, and live?" Surely this is our truest wisdom, and our highest privilege.

4. Our sufferings, however grievous they may appear at the time, are all sent for our eternal good—

While we have the feelings of humanity, chastening, of whatever kind it be, cannot but be grievous to us at the time. But after it has produced its proper effects, "it yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby." At first, tribulation works impatience: but, when the soul has been well disciplined by a continuance or recurrence of it, a better temper is produced; and, through the sanctifying operations of the Holy Spirit upon the soul, a different process is produced; and "tribulation works patience, and patience experience, and experience hope; even a hope that makes not ashamed, Romans 5:3-5."

Shall we complain of dispensations which are sent for such an end? Shall the vine complain of the pruning knife, which cuts only with a view to increase its fruitfulness? Shall the vessel complain of the furnace into which it is put in order to effect its fitness for the Master's use? Let us then look to the end; and we shall never repine at the means which Infinite Wisdom has ordained for the attainment of it.

If we are "in heaviness through manifold temptations, let us not forget that there is a fit occasion for them; and that the trial of our faith, which is infinitely more precious than that which purifies the gold, will be found to the praise and honor and glory of our God,

and to our own also, at the appearing of Jesus Christ! 1 Peter 1:6-7." If we are "made partakers of his holiness," we shall never complain of the means which were used to bring us to the attainment of it.

5. Walk so as to encourage others by your example—

The influence of example is far greater than we are ready to imagine. Peter, in order to avoid the displeasure of the Judaizing Christians, had recourse to dissimulation. (Here I may observe that if an Apostle swerved so grievously from the path of duty, through his carnal reasonings, who has not reason to take heed lest he also fall?) And what was the effect which this had this on others? "The whole Church dissembled with him; insomuch that even Barnabas himself was carried away with their dissimulation, Galatians 2:13-14."

On the other hand, see the effect of good example in the Apostle Paul. He was imprisoned for the truth's sake, and retained his fidelity undaunted, and undiminished; insomuch that "his bonds for Christ's sake became a matter of notoriety through Caesar's palace, and in all other places. And what was the effect of this? We are told, that "many of the brethren in the Lord waxing confident by his bonds," and by what they heard of his fortitude in supporting them, "were much more bold to speak the word without fear," so that "the Gospel was furthered" by the very means which its enemies used to obstruct its progress, Philippians 1:12-14.

Similar effects will, in a greater or less degree, follow from our conduct under our afflictions. There are in every place many who may be considered as "lame," who will be stumbled and weakened, and discouraged, if they see us faint. While, on the other hand, they will be encouraged and emboldened to go forward, if they behold us adhering resolutely to the path of duty, and supporting manfully the trials which are come upon us. Let us then think of the probable effect of our conduct upon those around us. Let us think how much good or evil we may do, according as we approve ourselves to God, or not, in the discharge of our duty. There is a high mark which we would pursue, even that which the Apostle prayed for in behalf of the Colossians, to be "strengthened with all might, according to God's glorious power, unto all patience, and long-suffering, with joyfulness—giving thanks unto the Father who has made us fit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, Colossians 1:11-12."

Do not think that such an aim as this would betray any arrogance in you: for Timothy was but a youth, and yet was directed to be an example, not to the world only, but to believers also, in everything that was good, 1 Timothy 4:12; and it is the duty of every one, whether a minister or not, "so to let his light shine before men, that all who behold it may be led to glorify their Father who is in Heaven, Matthew 5:16." In a word, let us all endeavor so to walk, that we may say with the Apostle Paul, "Whatever you have heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you! Colossians 4:9."

The Apostle having instructed the Hebrews in the true nature and end of their sufferings, suggests some further considerations,

II. For their direction and guidance—

These also we shall consider as addressed to us; and in correspondence with them we would say to all sufferers of the present day,

1. Yield not to dejection—

Troubles, whether felt or feared, are apt to depress the spirits, and to enervate the whole man. This we see depicted in strong colors in the Prophet Ezekiel. "Sigh," says God to him, "Sigh, O son of man, with the breaking of your loins, and with bitterness sigh before their eyes. And it shall be, when they say unto you, Why do you sigh? that you shall answer, For the tidings: because it comes: and every heart shall melt, and all hands shall be feeble, and every spirit shall faint, and all knees shall be weak as water Ezekiel 21:7."

But it should not be thus with us, whatever be the trials with which we have been visited, or with which we may be menaced: for they all are ordered by a wise and gracious God, who controls and limits all according to his own sovereign will, and without whose permission not a hair of our head can be touched. Our enemies, unconscious of their dependence on him, plot and threaten our destruction. But see what the Psalmist says concerning them: "The wicked plots against the just, and gnashes upon him with his teeth: but the Lord shall laugh at him! Psalm 37:12-13," as a poor, impotent, and malignant worm, that exists only through his forbearance and tender mercy!

Now, I ask, shall God laugh at him, and we cry? Shall we not rather set the poor impotent worm at defiance? But see what the Psalmist further adds: "The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of upright conduct." And what is the outcome of all this? "Their sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bows shall be broken, Psalm 37:14-15." "Say not then, A confederacy, like those who are crying out, A confederacy; neither fear their fear, nor be afraid: but sanctify the Lord Almighty himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread: and he shall be to you for a sanctuary, Isaiah 8:12-14."

And when others would alarm you with the supposed power of your persecutors, let your answer be, "The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord's throne is in Heaven! Psalm 11:1-4."

The greatest of all your adversaries, even Satan himself, could not so much as enter into the swine without permission: how then shall he, or any of his confederates, hurt a child of God without God's permission 1 Peter 3:13. You may laugh them all to scorn, and shake your head at them, Isaiah 37:22; for, with God on your side, there are a million times "more for you than against you." Only "be strong in the Lord, Ephesians 6:10," and you will be more than conqueror over all.

2. Swerve not from the path of duty—

Fear, and unbelief, and impatience "will make our ways crooked, Isaiah 59:8;" and the contrivances to which under their influence we shall have recourse for the purpose of avoiding difficulties, will augment our difficulties a hundred-fold. The way to "make straight paths for our feet," is simply to fulfill the will of God, and leave outcomes to him.

If Daniel and the Hebrew Youths had set themselves to consider how they might avoid the trials with which they were threatened, they might have attained their end, it is true; but they would have involved their souls in the deepest guilt. They followed the straight-forward path: not moving to the right hand nor to the left, to avoid the fiery furnace, or a den of lions. This was right: And this is the very direction given to us also by God himself: "Ponder the path of your feet; and let all your ways be established: Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left; remove your feet from evil, Proverbs 4:26-27."

Adopt this then as the principle from which no consideration under Heaven shall induce you to depart, "I must obey my God;" and, if the whole world combines to divert you from it, let your reply be, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge you."

This will deliver you from endless perplexity. This will make your every path both clear and straight. "If your eye is evil," and the film of carnal hopes or fears be upon it, then "your whole body will be full of darkness:" but "if your eye be single," and you have no purpose but to serve and honor God, then "your whole body will be full of light Matthew 6:22-23," and your steps will be directed in a way wherein you shall neither err, nor stumble.

#2337

THE NECESSITY OF HOLINESS

Hebrews 12:14

"Follow after holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

THE Gospel, while it brings us into a state of reconciliation with God, enjoins us to maintain peace with man. This is rendered difficult, not only by the evil dispositions that are exercised on account of daily occurrences, but more especially by the enmity which exists in the hearts of the generality with respect to religion; in reference to which our Lord himself said, "I come not to send peace on earth, but a sword." Much however may be done by means of patience, meekness, and forbearance; and it is our duty to sacrifice anything, except truth and a good conscience, for the sake of peace.

But our duty to God is paramount to every other consideration: therefore the Apostle, exhorting the Hebrews to "follow peace with all men," adds immediately, "and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:" the import of which is, that we may fail in obtaining peace, however earnestly we may seek it; but holiness we may, and must, attain at the peril of our souls; for without it no man shall see the Lord.

We shall,

I. Ascertain the nature of holiness—

Holiness is a conformity of heart and life to the revealed will of God. But, to enter more fully into the subject, it implies,

1. That we love the whole will of God as revealed in his word—

There is nothing that more truly characterizes a Christian than this: it draws a line of distinction between him and all other persons upon earth. The self-righteous Pharisee, and the most refined hypocrite, have secret objections against the law of God; they think its precepts too strict, and its sanctions too severe. They would be glad if it left them somewhat greater latitude. They would be content that it would forbid gross outward sins, and insist on the performance of outward duties: but that it would call for continual self-denial, that it would require brokenness of heart and contrition for the most secret offenses, and demand the utmost exertion of all our faculties in the service of our God, this appears too much; they would wish for an easier way to Heaven.

But a person who possesses the smallest measure of true holiness, is the very reverse of this. He loathes himself for not complying

more perfectly with the demands of the law; but he never condemns the law as too strict; he would not have it require one jot or tittle less than it does. He even admires and loves it for its purity; he says with David, "The commandment of the Lord is pure, therefore your servant loves it." He acknowledges it to be not only "holy, and just—but good" also, and calculated to make every one happy that obeys it. And though he cannot obey it perfectly, he can truly say, "I delight in the law of God after my inward man!" Yes, the language of his heart is, "O that my ways were made so direct, that I might keep your statutes."

2. That we live in no allowed deviation from the will of God as revealed in his word—

We mean not to say, that a Christian experiences no deviations from the law of God; (for, alas! he is conscious of many) but he does not allow them. Others will obey the will of God as far as will consist with their interests and reputation; or with the exception of some bosom sin; but there will always be found, in insincere persons, some secret lust for which they plead, and in reference to which they say, "Pardon your servant in this thing."

But true holiness admits of no reserves, no limitations, no exceptions: and he who possesses it will stop short of nothing that God has commanded. He may do what is wrong, either through ignorance or temptation; but he will not persist in it: he will endeavor to mortify the whole body of sin. He will no more allow himself in secret sins, whether of omission or of commission, than he will commit the greatest enormities. Like David he says, "I esteem your commandments concerning all things to be right; therefore I hate every false way;" that is, I love the ways of duty, so that I would walk in them even if there were no reward; and I hate the ways of sin, so that I would shun them, though I were sure never to incur punishment.

3. That we actually grow in a conformity to the will of God as revealed in his word—

Sanctification is a progressive work. A child of God arrives not at full stature but by degrees: he is constantly growing in grace: the spring bloom gradually advances to the autumnal fruit. There may indeed be seasons wherein he may appear to decline, or may really suffer a declension: but if he have the grace of God in his heart, he will revive, and return to God with more fervor and steadfastness. Nor will he ever think he has already attained, or is already perfect; but "forgetting the things that are behind, he will reach forward unto that which is ahead."

This is in no respect the case with others. They are satisfied with their present state: they are not conscious of their defects; and therefore they feel no longings for higher attainments. They don't grow, but are like a painted picture upon the canvass; while the true Christian "grows up into Christ in all things as his living head," and, like the sun in the firmament, "shines brighter and brighter unto the perfect day."

Having in this description of holiness, marked the lowest degree of it that exists in a true Christian, we proceed to,

II. Show the grounds on which holiness is necessary in order to salvation—

If we were not able to assign any reason for God's determination, it would be quite sufficient for us to know, that he has issued his decree. It is not for us to dispute, but to submit, saying, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right!"

But there is one obvious ground on which the necessity of holiness is indisputable, namely, that in the very nature of things it is impossible without holiness to enjoy the Divine presence.

If Heaven were a place suited to a carnal mind, and afforded the gratifications which unregenerate men desire, then indeed unholy men might find such happiness there, as in their state they are capable of receiving. But Heaven is a holy place; the habitation of a holy God: it is filled with myriads of holy men and angels, who are exercising themselves incessantly in the holy employments of praise and adoration. What then would there be in that place suited to the taste of an unholy man?

Could those whose hearts were defiled with sin, and who had never been purged from its guilt by the atoning blood of Christ, find pleasure in the presence of God, who, being omniscient, could not but discern their state, and, being holy, could not but regard them with abhorrence? Would not a consciousness of his holiness and power terrify them, and a recollection that he had once cast innumerable angels out of Heaven, appal them? Could they delight in the society of the glorified saints whom they so little resemble, or find communion with them in exercises, which were here their burden and aversion?

We are fully assured, that "as the tree falls, so it lies;" that "he who is unjust, will be unjust still, and he who is filthy, will be filthy still." If it has not been the one desire of our hearts to honor and enjoy God; if secret fellowship with him in our chambers, and social fellowship with him in the public assembly, have been a mere task, and not the delight of our souls—then how can we suppose that we would instantly find a delight in these things in Heaven? How could we endure to spend an eternity there in employments which we loath? We are told, that there is a "fitness for the inheritance of the saints, Colossians 1:12;" and that we must have that fitness before we could enjoy the Divine presence, if we were admitted into it.

Christ must be precious to us now, if we would find him so in the eternal world: and we must account it our supreme felicity to enjoy

him now, if we would hereafter join the chorus of saints and angels, in ascribing "Salvation to God and to the Lamb for ever."

In short, holiness, real holiness of heart, is as necessary to the enjoyment of the Divine presence, as a taste for music, or literature, is for the company and employments of musical or literary men.

As we soon grow weary of things which we do not desire, and prefer any other employment that is more suited to our inclination and capacity, so most assuredly must it be in Heaven, if our natures be not changed: we shall remain for ever destitute of those qualities which constitute our fitness for the heavenly inheritance, and consequently be for ever incapable of participating in the joys of Heaven.

This may at least be sufficient to illustrate the declaration in the text; perhaps we may add also, to vindicate it. Not that any declaration of God is to be judged of by the reasons which fallible men may assign in vindication of it: his word is the same, whether we believe it or not; nor shall one jot or tittle of it ever fail.

This subject cannot but suggest to our minds the following reflections:

1. How few are there that will eventually be saved!

Take the foregoing explanation of holiness, and compare it with the state of all around us; how awful the contrast! But God is true; and his word respecting the unholy shall surely stand. Let us "seek then, yes, strive to enter in at the strait gate, and to walk in the narrow path." Let us "follow" holiness with all our might: Whatever we may think, it is in that way alone that we can behold the face of God in peace.

2. How needful is it that we should seek holiness in a right way!

The generality are extremely ignorant respecting the manner in which holiness is to be obtained: they have an idea that they must acquire it by some exertions of their own: whereas they should seek it from Christ, through the operation of his Spirit in their hearts. They should first seek to be united to him by faith, as scions to the stock of a tree, or as a wife to her husband. These are the very means prescribed by our Lord, John 15:4-5 and by Paul, Romans 7:4; then, by virtue derived from him, they will be made fruitful in good works, and be "changed into his image in righteousness, and true holiness."

#2338

THE DANGER OF DESPISING OR DISHONORING THE GOSPEL

Hebrews 12:15-17

"See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears."

The riches of the Gospel are unsearchable, and freely imparted to all who seek them by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet they quite mistake the nature of the Gospel, who imagine it to be inconsistent with solemn warnings. It offers everything freely; but it does not dispense with the exertion of human efforts. It promises everything fully; but not in such a way as to supersede the need of care and watchfulness on our part. In fact, it abounds with warnings and exhortations, to which we must take the utmost heed; and by attending to which we are to secure the blessings which it holds out to us.

Nothing can be conceived more consolatory than all the foregoing declarations, that sufferings of whatever kind, and especially those inflicted on us for righteousness' sake, are permitted by our heavenly Father for our good, and shall be overruled by him for the advancement of our best interests. At the same time we are warned, that "without holiness, radical and universal holiness, no man shall see the Lord." And we are cautioned to "look diligently," lest, by coming short of the requirements of the Gospel, we fail to attain a possession of its blessings.

The caution here given us is two-fold:

I. Not to come short of the Gospel in embracing it—

By "the grace of God" I understand "the Gospel of the grace of God," or that "grace of God which brings salvation." And by "missing the grace of God," I understand, a falling short of it: the first part of our text being exactly parallel with that expression in the fourth chapter of this epistle, "Let us fear lest, a promise being left to us of entering into his rest, any of you would seem to come short of it, Hebrews 4:1." Now we may come short of the Gospel:

1. By not submitting to its humiliating doctrines—

The Gospel views all men as in a lost and perishing condition. Its provisions are made for all mankind without exception. It knows nothing of persons so good as not to need salvation, or of persons so bad as to be beyond the reach of the salvation which it provides. It requires all to view themselves as "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; and counsels them to come to the Lord Jesus Christ for eye-salve that they may see; for gold that they may be enriched; and for garments that they may be clothed, Revelation 3:17-18." It allows none to bring any price in their hands, but requires them to receive everything "without money and without price Isaiah 55:1."

Nor does it merely require this of men at their first conversion: it prescribes the same humiliating system to the last hour of our lives. Whatever our attainments are, we must renounce them all in point of dependence, and place our whole dependence on the Lord "Jesus Christ for wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

We must have no more in ourselves than the branch of a vine has; but must receive everything from the stem into which we have been engrafted, John 15:5. We must "receive everything out of the fullness that is in Christ, John 1:16," and must "live altogether by faith in the Son of God, who has loved us, and given himself for us, Galatians 2:20."

But all this is very humiliating. Proud man does not like to be brought so low, as to depend wholly on another, and not at all on himself. We wish to have something of our own whereof we may boast. And to be reduced to a level with the vilest of the human race, so as to acknowledge ourselves as much indebted to Divine grace as they, is a humiliation to which we cannot endure to submit. Could we be saved in a way more congenial with our own feelings, we would be satisfied: but when it is said, "Wash and be clean," instead of accepting the tidings with gratitude, we spurn at them like Naaman, and go away in a rage! 2 Kings 5:10-13.

To this however we must "submit, Romans 10:3;" for there is no other way of salvation for any man, Acts 4:12. 1 Corinthians 3:11; and, if we will not come to Christ upon his own terms, we must remain for ever destitute of the blessings he has purchased for us, Romans 9:30-32.

2. By not obeying its self-denying doctrines—

Though the Gospel gives salvation freely, it does not leave us at liberty to neglect good works. On the contrary, "it teaches us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." Indeed, the sanctification it requires of us is as offensive to our carnal and worldly hearts, as the humiliation it imposes on us is to our pride. The object of the Gospel is not merely to save men from death and Hell, but to bring them back to a state of holy allegiance to their God, such as Adam experienced in Paradise. For this end it requires us to give up ourselves as living sacrifices unto God, and to be as entirely dedicated to his service as the burned-offerings were, which were wholly consumed on the altar, Romans 12:1. It enjoins us "neither to live unto ourselves, nor die unto ourselves;" but both in life and death to be altogether at the Lord's disposal, for the accomplishment of his will, and for the promotion of his glory, Romans 14:7-8.

Now to this measure of holiness we have by nature a deep and rooted aversion. We have many earthly and sensual appetites, which plead for indulgence: and when we are required to "cut off the right hand, and pluck out the right eye," and to "be holy as God himself is holy," we reply, "This is a hard saying, who can bear it?" To "mortify our members upon earth," and to "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts," is a work, which, as the very terms in which it is expressed intimate, is painful to flesh and blood: and to be told that without this we never can be Christ's disciples, is most grating to our ears! Galatians 5:24. But nothing less than this will suffice for the approving of ourselves upright in the sight of God.

I beseech you then, brethren, to "look diligently" to this matter, and not to come short of what the Gospel requires of you; for if you do not comply with both its doctrines and its precepts, you can never partake of its privileges and its blessings.

But respecting this Gospel, we are further cautioned,

II. Not to dishonor it after we have embraced it—

We are in danger of dishonoring it:

1. By heretical opinions—

It is to these chiefly, though not exclusively, that I suppose "the root of bitterness" to refer. The expression is adopted from the Old Testament, where Moses cautions the Israelites against any "root among them bearing gall and wormwood," and operating to the production of idolatry, Deuteronomy 29:19. Such sprang up very early in the Christian Church; even as Paul forewarned the elders of Ephesus to expect: "I know this, that after my departure shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them, Acts 20:29-30." Some there were who

blended the Mosaic rites with the Gospel; others, who "denied the resurrection, saying that it was past already;" others "denied the Lord who bought them:" and great was "the trouble," and extensive the defilement, which these heretics occasioned in the Church of Christ, Galatians 5:7-10. 2 Timothy 2:10-18. 2 Peter 2:1-2.

Such teachers there have been ever since in the Church, even to the present hour: and there is need of the utmost care that we be not drawn aside by any of them "from the simplicity that is in Christ, 2 Corinthians 11:3." Nothing can be more simple than the Gospel, when it is received in a humble child-like spirit. It requires nothing but a life of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and a life of love both towards God and man for his sake. The whole is comprehended in those words, "faith working by love."

But men are fond of making the Gospel a theater for disputation; and they care not how far they divert the minds of their followers from "the truth as it is in Jesus," if only they may but prevail upon them to receive their dogmas. This is the true root of all the heresies which have distracted and defiled the Church of God in all ages.

But be on your guard, brethren, lest any such "root of bitterness" spring up among you. It is well called "a root of bitterness," for nothing that ever yet divided the human race has caused more "bitterness" than that which calls itself religion, but which, in fact, is only some partial or erroneous view of religion, which conceit has propagated, and bigotry enforced.

2. By ungodly practices—

Grievous have been the falls of many who have professed religion; and shocking have been the scandals which have at times prevailed in the Christian Church. Evils, which prevailed among the ignorant and licentious Gentiles, were indulged, and vindicated, by them after they had embraced the Gospel of Christ; and many, like profane Esau, bartered away the inheritance of Heaven for some worthless perishable good.

Thus it is at this day. Many things are pleaded for, which are as opposite to the holy nature of the Gospel as "fornication" itself: and the vanities of time are yet daily exchanged for the glories of eternity. In vain are we reminded how bitterly Esau at last bewailed his error; or how fruitless were his efforts to remedy the evil he had committed. We see nothing in his example which speaks to us; nor have we any ears for the instruction it conveys to us. The influence of temptation is too strong for us: our earthly and sensual hearts will plead for gratifications which the Gospel of Christ does not allow: and thus multitudes relinquish all the blessings of eternity, through their undue attachment to the things of time and sense.

But let not such be found among you. It is melancholy to see that Demas, after being twice united with Luke in the salutations of Paul, would be found, "through love to this present world," "making shipwreck of the faith and of a good conscience." But such instances occur in every age of the Church: and it requires continual watchfulness over our own hearts, and over each other also, to prevent the more frequent recurrence of similar apostasy. To all then I would recommend the example of Paul, who "kept his body under, and brought it into subjection, lest, after having preached to others, he himself would become a cast-away, 1 Corinthians 9:27."

The solemn hint with which our text concludes, will furnish us with matter suited to enforce the preceding subject—

1. Think what will before long be your views of your present conduct, if you neglect the cautions which have been now suggested—

Lightly as Esau once thought of his birthright, he saw at last that it was worthy to be "sought," yes, to be "sought carefully" too, and that "with tears." And what will be your views of Heaven when you are lying on a bed of sickness, or, at all events, the very instant that your soul enters upon the invisible world? Will an obedience to the Gospel then appear so hard a condition, that all the glory of Heaven could not recompense you for complying with it; or the mortification of some forbidden lust so insupportable a task, that Hell itself, with the indulgence of that lust, was a better portion than Heaven with the mortification of it? No! the pangs of Esau will be your pangs, when you find how bitter are the consequences of your folly, and how irreversible the doom that has been pronounced!

Not that repentance, provided it had been genuine, would have been unavailing for Esau as far as related to his eternal state. Isaac had, though unwittingly, conferred the rights of primogeniture on Jacob; and he would not reverse his word, notwithstanding all the bitter cries with which Esau importuned him to do so. And this is what is meant, when it is said, that Esau "found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears."

Had he repented before God, he might have obtained pardon with God: as we also may do, through our Lord Jesus Christ. But, if we do not turn to God through Christ with our whole hearts, we shall find before long the door of mercy shut against us, and in vain implore admission to that bliss which now we have despised! Luke 13:24-27.

2. Yield to the Gospel, without delay, the obedience which it requires—

Infinite are the blessings which it offers to us. And what are the sacrifices which we are called to make? Be they ever so difficult or self-denying, they are not worth a thought in comparison with "the grace that shall be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus

Christ." The wise merchantman parted with all for the pearl of great price. You do the same: and determine through grace, that whatever it may cost, you will not come short of it by refusing to make the sacrifices, or suffer either men or devils to rob you of it!

#2339

THE TRANSCENDENT EXCELLENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION

Hebrews 12:18-25

"You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned." The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear." But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in Heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from Heaven."

IN explaining the Holy Scriptures, it is often requisite that we carefully bear in mind, not only the immediate context, but the whole scope of the book in which any particular passage occurs. This is of the first importance in considering several expressions in the Epistle of James, and it is important in the passage before us.

The general scope of the Epistle to the Hebrews, is to encourage the Jewish Christians to hold fast their profession in the midst of all the persecutions they endured. And the principal argument used for their encouragement is, the great superiority of the Christian religion above that which they had renounced. In the foregoing part of the epistle, this subject is treated at large: and, in the words which we have read, there is a kind of recapitulation of it, purposely introduced, in order to confirm the Hebrews in a steady adherence to the faith which they had embraced, and to show them the dreadful danger of departing from it.

Hence, in elucidating this passage, we shall have occasion to show,

I. The transcendent excellence of the Christian dispensation—

The circumstances which took place at the giving of the law, are all particularly and distinctly referred to, compare verses 18-21 with Exodus 19:14-25; and they exhibit in very striking characters the nature of the law itself. The law was never given in order that the people might rest in it, or expect life from it; but that they might be made to know and feel their need of that better covenant which God would make with them under the Gospel dispensation. Instead of bringing men to God, it kept them at the greatest distance from him, not a soul being allowed to touch the mount on which he revealed himself, nor so much as a beast touching it without having instant death inflicted on him. Instead of producing anything like filial love and confidence, it inspired only fear and terror, and, as the Apostle says, "tended to bondage, Galatians 4:24." Even Moses himself said, "I exceedingly fear and quake." Instead of offering life to any one, it was altogether "a ministry of condemnation and death, 2 Corinthians 3:7; 2 Corinthians 3:9."

Now, says the Apostle, you who have received the Gospel are not come to such a dispensation as that, "you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, Romans 8:15;" but you have come,

1. To a better place—

Mount Sinai differed not from any other mount: it might be seen and touched like any other place. But not so the mount to which those who believe in Christ are come: "they have come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem," a place not visible to mortal eyes, nor like to any place which mortal hands have formed: it is a place formed by Almighty God for his own immediate residence, and for the fullest manifestations of his glory.

2. To a nobler society—

Angels indeed were present at the giving of the law: but the Jews had no communion with them: they were only God's agents for augmenting the terror of the scene, Acts 7:53 with Psalm 68:17. Their whole tribes were there convened: but it was only that they might all be filled with the same dread of God's wrath, and be made to unite in that urgent request, that God would speak to them no more by an audible voice, but only through Moses as a mediator, Deuteronomy 5:22-28.

But those who believe in Christ "have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in Heaven. You

have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a New Covenant." Yes, the glorified saints and angels all belong to the same blessed assembly to which believers are now called: and "God, even as a Judge," is no longer to them an object of dread, because they know that he at the same time is their Father: and they have "Jesus as their Mediator" with him; and "the New Covenant" as the rule according to which they shall be dealt with by him. Here all is no longer fear and terror, but peace and joy.

3. To far more exalted privileges—

Moses, the morning after the giving of the law, offered burned-offerings; with the blood of which he sprinkled both the book of the covenant which had been made with the people, and the people themselves, saying, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you concerning all these words, Exodus 24:4-8." But what did this covenant avail them? The very blood with which it was ratified served only to testify against them as violating their own engagements, and making void every promise contained in it.

But the blood of sprinkling to which the Christian is come, effectually removes from him all his sin, and prevails for his perfect reconciliation with God.

The blood which Abel offered in sacrifice, received a visible and most honorable token of God's acceptance of it, Hebrews 11:4; but, however blessed that external testimony was, it was not worthy to be compared with that internal "witness of the Spirit," with which believers in Christ are sealed; which assures them of their adoption into God's family, and their everlasting fruition of his glory: it seals them, not for a time only, but unto the day of redemption; and is to them, not a seal only, but a pledge and foretaste of Heaven itself! Ephesians 1:13-14. The very same eternal love which "elects them to obedience," elects them also to this "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ, 1 Peter 1:2."

The Apostle, however, not content with exhibiting thus the transcendent excellence of Christianity, proceeds to point out,

II. The indispensable necessity of paying to the Christian dispensation the attention it requires—

The warning which he gives to the Hebrews is most solemn, "See that you refuse not him who speaks:" and the argument with which he enforces it is most awful, "for, if they escaped not who refused him who spoke on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him who speaks from Heaven."

Hear then the warning—

Look into the history of the Hebrews: see what became of those who refused obedience to the Sinai covenant: they perished; even that whole nation perished, (of those at least who had attained the age of full maturity,) with the exception of two. For one single transgression of it, was Moses himself excluded from the earthly Canaan, Deuteronomy 32:50-51. The extreme severity of the law against any willful and presumptuous violation of its commands, is again and again held forth as a warning to us under the Gospel dispensation, and particularly in the epistle before us: "If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation? Hebrews 2:2-3." So again, "He who despised Moses' law died without mercy, under two or three witnesses: of how much more severe punishment, suppose you, shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant with which he was sanctified an unholy thing, and has done despite to the Spirit of grace? Hebrews 10:28-29." Well may such warnings as these sink down into our ears, and make us tremble at the thought of disobedience to the Gospel covenant!

Acknowledge also the justice of it—

Think how the Christian covenant has been delivered: not by a terrific voice, uttered from a cloud by a Being that was invisible, but by the Lord Jesus Christ himself descending from the highest heavens to make it known to us in the mild accents of love and mercy.

Think too of its contents. To what does it call us, but to a conformity with the holy angels, and the spirits of the just made perfect? It brings us into favor with God, precisely as they are. It invites us to begin their employments now, and even on earth to participate in their bliss. It makes every provision for the end: it offers pardon, and peace, and righteousness, and glory—to all who by faith will lay hold upon it. Say then, what do not they deserve who refuse to listen to invitations like these? Truly, we cannot but acknowledge, that, if the judgments denounced against the disobedient Israelites were just, much more must the heaviest judgments that can ever be inflicted upon us be just, if we refuse to listen to Him who speaks to us with such astonishing condescension and grace.

We must not omit to notice, that the Apostle here takes for granted, respecting every true Christian, that he is thus come to Mount Zion.

Permit me then, in conclusion,

1. To make this a matter of inquiry—

Have you indeed come thus to Mount Zion? Have you turned your backs on Mount Sinai, from a deep conviction that you are condemned by the law, and have no hope at all but from the gracious provisions of the Gospel? Have you obtained an insight into the nature of true religion, as consisting in a communion with God and with the heavenly hosts, and an actual participation of the mind, the spirit, the blessedness of Heaven? Ah! how rarely is Christianity viewed in this light! It is regarded rather as a mere system of restraints enforced with terror, than as a pledge and foretaste of the heavenly bliss! I beg you, not to imagine that you have ever yet set out aright, if you have not thus passed from Mount Sinai unto Zion, and from Moses unto Christ!

2. To address you under the supposition which is here made—

I will suppose, that "you have come unto Mount Zion." Yet much would I guard you, as the Apostle did the Hebrews, against yielding to any species of temptation that may deprive you of the blessings to which, according to your Christian profession, you are entitled. It is no uncommon thing for persons to make shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience, even after they have for some time maintained, in appearance at least, an upright walk and conduct. But beware lest you be in any way hindered in running the race that is set before you: difficulties you must meet with, both within and without: and it is well that you do meet with them; for how else shall your fidelity to God be tried?

But ask yourselves, what any of the holy angels would do if they were in your place? Or what any of the spirits of the just that are now made perfect would reply to those who would either by menaces or allurements attempt to turn them from God? You cannot doubt. Be then like them, to whose society you are brought, and with whom you are to dwell through everlasting ages: and as you are already come to the very gate of Heaven, see that "an entrance into it is ministered unto you abundantly through Jesus Christ our Lord."

#2340

ABEL'S SACRIFICE AND CHRIST'S COMPARED

Hebrews 12:22-24

"But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."

AS the Christian dispensation differs widely from that of Moses as to the manner in which it was promulgated, so does it most essentially differ with respect to the spirit and temper which it is calculated to produce in the minds of men. The terrors of Mount Sinai were suited to impress the Jews with a servile fear; as their whole system of rites and ceremonies was to keep them under bondage. But the mild genius of the Gospel introduces us at once to peace and liberty. In the passage before us the Apostle exemplifies this remark in many particulars; the last of which demands our attention at this time. We propose to show,

I. The efficacy of Abel's blood—

By "the blood of Abel" we are not to understand his own blood, but the blood of his sacrifice—

The generality of commentators indeed explain this as relating to Abel's blood, which cried for vengeance against his murderous brother, Genesis 4:10. But to commend the blood of Christ in this view, would indeed be no commendation at all. The history of Abel informs us, that he offered one of the firstlings of his flock in addition to the same kind of offering as Cain brought. This is well proved by Dr. Kennicott, in his dissertation on Cain and Abel, manifesting thereby not merely his obligations to God as a creature, but his conscious guilt as a sinner, and his faith in that Lamb of God, who was to take away the sin of the world, Hebrews 11:4. That sacrifice of his was honored with very peculiar tokens of God's acceptance. Perhaps fire might be sent from Heaven to consume the sacrifice. See instances of this, Leviticus 9:24. 1 Kings 18:38. 1 Chronicles 21:26 and 2 Chronicles 7:1; and may therefore fitly be referred to as illustrative of the sacrifice of Christ.

It spoke to him who offered it very excellent things—

Had not the marks of God's favor been such as were most desirable, Cain would not have so cruelly envied his brother for the attainment of them. But they manifestly declared to Abel the acceptance of his person, and an approbation of his service. What could be more delightful than such a testimony to a pious soul? Had life itself been the price of such a blessing, it had been well bestowed.

But the excellence of Abel's sacrifice is far surpassed by,

II. The superior efficacy of Christ's sacrifice—

The blood of Christ is here, as in other places, 1 Peter 1:2, called "the blood of sprinkling"—

There is in this place an allusion to the sprinkling of blood on the book and on the people, when God made his covenant with the Jewish nation. Compare Exodus 24:6-8 with Hebrews 9:18-22. The blood of Christ is sprinkled upon us, when we enter into covenant with God; and it binds God, if we may so say, to fulfill to us his promises, while it binds us on the other hand to obey his precepts.

Christ's sacrifice speaks to us incomparably better things than the blood of Abel—

Great as the expressions of God's love to Abel were in consequence of the sacrifice which that righteous man had offered, they were not to be compared with those which we receive through Christ. There was no inherent virtue in his sacrifice; its efficacy was derived from the relation it bore to Christ; and the blessings enjoyed by means of it, were rather typical than real. The continuance of God's favor to him was to be secured only by a constant repetition of the same sacrifices; nor could he obtain a full and perfect peace of conscience even by their means, Hebrews 9:9; but Christ, by his one sacrifice of himself, has perfected forever those who are sanctified Hebrews 10:14. Besides, whatever Abel's sacrifice spoke, it spoke to him alone: whereas the blood of Christ speaks to the whole world, and proclaims acceptance to all who will trust in it for salvation. Thus, while the good things which the blood of Abel spoke, were only typical, temporary, and personal; those which the blood of Christ speaks, are real, permanent, and universal.

Nor will our concern in this matter appear unimportant, if we consider,

III. The interest which the believer has in Christ's sacrifice—

Every believer "comes to" this blood of sprinkling—

The efficacy of the Redeemer's blood is not a matter of speculation, but of experience, to every true Christian.

As Moses and the Israelites "came to" Mount Sinai in order to make a covenant with God, so do we come to the blood of sprinkling.

They came as persons redeemed by God out of the house of bondage. We come as redeemed from death and Hell.

They came to take God as their God, and to give up themselves to him as his people. We come with precisely the same view.

They offered sacrifices and were sprinkled with the blood, in token that they deserved to die, and could be cleansed only by the blood of atonement. We come in the same manner to the blood of Christ.

They looked through the typical sacrifices to him who was in due time to be offered. We look to him, who in due time was offered for our sins upon the cross.

In coming thus to Christ we experience all the efficacy of his blood—

Were we afar off? We are now brought near to God, Ephesians 2:13.

Were we enemies to God? We are now reconciled to him, Colossians 1:20.

Were we condemned for our iniquities? We are now justified, Romans 5:9.

Were our minds filled with a sense of guilt and a dread of punishment? Our hearts are now sprinkled from an evil conscience, Hebrews 10:22, and enjoy peace with God, Romans 5:1.

Were we strangers to communion with God? We now have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, Hebrews 10:19.

Were we enslaved by evil habits? We are now purged from dead works to serve the living God, Hebrews 9:14.

Did a sentence of eternal misery await us? We now look forward to the fruits of an eternal redemption, Hebrews 9:12; Hebrews 9:15.

Such is the interest that the Christian has in the blood of sprinkling; and in this sense it may be said of every believer, that he is "come to" it.

APPLICATION—

1. Let us inquire whether we have indeed come to the blood of sprinkling—

It is not every nominal professor, who has approached God in this way: "all are not Israel who are of Israel." The outward form indeed which was observed by Moses is not required under the Christian dispensation; nor need we feel his terror, in order to obtain

his comforts. But we must seriously draw near to God, sprinkling ourselves, as it were, with the blood of Christ, and professing our entire reliance upon that for our acceptance with him.

Yes, we must go to God in the very spirit and temper in which Abel offered his sacrifice; not merely thanking him with pharisaic pride, as Cain may be supposed to have done; but smiting on our bosoms like the Publican, and imploring mercy for Christ's sake.

Have we done this? Or rather, are we doing it yet daily? On this depends our happiness, both in this world and in the world to come.

If God at this moment gives us the witness of his Spirit in our consciences that this is indeed our experience, let us rejoice in such a testimony, and be thankful for it. But if our consciences condemn us, O! let us delay no longer, but instantly sprinkle ourselves with that precious blood, on account of which he will speak peace unto our souls.

2. Let us endeavor to fulfill the obligations which this blood entails upon us—

When Moses sprinkled the Jews, and read to them the book of the covenant, they said, "All that the Lord has said will we do, and be obedient!" O that there may be in us also such a heart—such a heart, I mean, not merely to promise, but to perform our promises! Certainly this is the end for which Christ shed his blood; he died, not merely to bring us to the enjoyment of privileges, but to lead us to the performance of our duties, "he gave himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works." Let us then strive to walk worthy of our high calling; and let "the love of Christ constrain us to live unto him, who died for us and rose again!"

#2341

GOD TO BE SERVED WITH REVERENTIAL FEAR

Hebrews 12:28-29

"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire!"

THE Christian world are little aware how much we are indebted to the holy Apostles, or rather to God, by whose inspiration they wrote, for the light which they have thrown upon the prophecies of the Old Testament. To this hour would we have been almost as much in the dark respecting the import of them as the Ethiopian Eunuch was, if God had not sent us persons authorized and empowered to unfold their true meaning.

The passage which that Gentile proselyte was reading when Philip joined himself to his chariot, was as clear as any part of Isaiah's prophecies: yet, when asked by Philip, "Do you understand what you read?" he replied, "How can I, except someone guides me, Acts 8:28-31." Just so, we would have still been at a loss to know of whom the prophets spoke in numberless passages, Acts 8:34, if God had not raised up holy men to give us the desired information.

Let us take for instance, the prophecy which is cited by the Apostle in the verses before our text. It is taken from the Prophet Haggai, and is adduced by Paul in order to confirm his preceding declarations respecting the superiority of the Christian dispensation above that of the Jews. And we may well suppose that an uninspired Jew, if conversant with the Scriptures, would have understood the passage as referring to the Messiah, Haggai 2:6-7. The construction which he would have put upon it would probably have been to this effect: 'God shook the earth when he established the Mosaic dispensation: but, when he shall introduce the Messiah himself, he will do it with far greater convulsions of universal nature.'

But let us see the explanation of it which the Apostle has given to us: He first somewhat alters the words, in order to make them express more fully the mind of God in them; and then he gives us this interpretation of them: "The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things--so that what cannot be shaken may remain, Hebrews 12:27" Thus he shows us that not any convulsion of nature was intended, like that which took place at Mount Sinai: the total removal of the whole civil and ecclesiastical polity of the Jews was predicted, in order to make way for the immovable and everlasting kingdom of the Messiah.

Then, on the passage thus explained, he founds this exhortation: "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire!"

The points to be especially noticed in this passage are,

I. The privilege which all true Christians have received—

"They have received a kingdom which cannot be shaken." They have received it:

1. As that to which they are to submit—

The Lord Jesus Christ is he of whom Jehovah has said, "Yet I have set my King upon my holy hill of Zion, Psalm 2:6." And "his kingdom admits of no change." The dispensation which had been introduced by Moses, "waxed old, and vanished away;" but that which Christ has established is ever "new, Hebrews 8:13." "His dominion," says the prophet, "is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom is that which shall not be destroyed, Daniel 7:14." Men and devils will no doubt combine for its destruction: but "the gates of Hell shall never prevail against it, Matthew 16:18."

To this kingdom all true believers belong. They once were vassals of the god of this world: but they have been "translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son!" Their language now is, "Other lords besides you have had dominion over us; but by you alone, will we make mention of your name Isaiah 26:13." Into the name of Christ they have been baptized; and to his service have they willingly devoted themselves; engaging to fulfill his will, and even to lay down their lives, if need be, for his sake.

2. As that which they are to inherit—

All the blessings of this kingdom are theirs: and it is administered altogether for their good. The King himself has each Christian's interest in view, as much as if he had not another subject in his realm to occupy his attention! Their enemies are all restrained, and shall all, not excepting Satan himself, before long be bruised under their feet. All the protection which they can need, and all the provision which their souls can desire, are secured to them: "they dwell on high; their place of defense is the munition of rocks: their bread is daily given to them, and their water is sure Isaiah 33:16."

Nor can these be moved, any more than the kingdom itself can. Neither time nor chance can impair the blessings themselves, or rob them of the enjoyment of them. The pardon, the peace, the holiness, the glory, are theirs—not for time only, but for eternity! And this is the portion, not of some few favored individuals only, such as Prophets and Apostles, but of every believer, however poor, however unworthy.

To the whole body of believers, without exception, it is said, "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom! Luke 12:32." Hear this, you who are poor in this world; and survey the riches to which God has chosen you! James 2:5. In respect of your earthly state, you may be said to be "upon a dunghill: but God has taken you thence, to set you among the princes! 1 Samuel 2:8." "You have received a kingdom:" "Christ has appointed to you a kingdom, even as his Father has appointed unto him a kingdom, Luke 22:29;" and has ordained that "you shall sit with him upon his throne, as he sits on his Father's throne, Revelation 3:21;" you may be "beggars," as it respects temporal possessions; but you are "kings Revelation 1:6;" and respecting all of you, Jehovah himself says, "I know your poverty; but you are rich! Revelation 2:9."

Let not any, however, be so elated with their privilege as to overlook,

II. Their duty as connected with it—

"We must serve God with reverence and godly fear"—

Privilege and duty are so connected that they can never under any circumstances be separated from each other; and any attempt to separate them will infallibly outcome in our ruin. A kingdom has been given us, it is true: and "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." But you must "serve God," and serve him too "with reverence and godly fear." We must not presume upon his mercy, or take occasion from it to indulge in carelessness and supineness. We must never forget with what a God we have to do. "He is a great God, and greatly to be feared!"

Though his dispensations are altered, he himself is not altered: "He is a consuming fire" now, as much as he was in the day that he proclaimed his law from Mount Sinai: and he must still "be had in reverence by all those who are round about him Psalm 89:7." True, indeed, we are not now to "fear and quake before him," as the Israelites, and Moses himself, then did: for "he has not given us the spirit of bondage again to fear, but a Spirit of adoption, whereby we may cry: Abba, Father! Romans 8:15;" but still we must "stand in awe of him, Psalm 2:11; Psalm 4:4," and fear to offend him, knowing that "he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity without the utmost abhorrence of it, Habakkuk 1:13." In whoever willful sin is found, he will visit it with fiery indignation; and most of all in those who profess themselves his servants, Amos 3:2. "If we regard iniquity in our hearts, he will not hear us," or acknowledge us. We must seek to "be holy, as he is holy;" and "perfect, as he is perfect:" and the circumstance of our having been "sealed by him unto the day of redemption," is a reason why we should be more than ever careful, not either by word or deed, and, if possible, not even by a thought, to "grieve his Holy Spirit, Ephesians 4:30." Our labor would be to have "our every thought brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, 2 Corinthians 10:5." It is in this way alone that we can serve God "acceptably:" and in this way alone that we can prove our title to the kingdom which we profess to have received.

For strength to do this, we must seek his grace from day to day—

We have no strength in ourselves even for a good thought, 2 Corinthians 3:5, "Without Christ we can do nothing, John 14:5." But there is a fullness of grace treasured up in him; and out of his fullness must we continually receive those supplies of grace which we stand in need of, Colossians 1:19 with John 1:16. We must not be satisfied with such a measure of grace as may suffice to bring us to God: but must labor for such a measure as may enable us to serve him, and to "serve him acceptably" to the last hour of our lives. Especially must we seek:

a meekness of spirit,
a humility of mind,
a tenderness of conscience,
a purity of heart,
a hatred of sin, an abhorrence of ourselves on account of sin,
a holy desire to please God,
a love to his will,
a delight in his service, and
an utter contempt even of life itself, in comparison with his honor and glory.

But these are attainments which he alone can give. Therefore we must cry day and night unto him for more and more grace, and must labor for them only in a dependence on his Spirit.

To this state of mind we must be brought by the consideration of the unbounded mercies bestowed upon us: "Having received a kingdom," we must thus seek his grace, and thus labor joyfully to fulfill his will: for so the Apostle elsewhere teaches us: "I beseech you by the mercies of God that you present yourselves a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, as your reasonable service, Romans 12:1."

The concluding declaration in our text deserving more especial notice, I will draw your attention to it,

1. To augment your thankfulness for the Gospel of Christ—

We see how terrible the presence of God was when he appeared as a consuming fire upon Mount Sinai. But how much more terrible is it in that world where he is inflicting vengeance both on men and devils as the monuments of his wrath! Yet that is the view of him which we would have had to all eternity, if the Lord Jesus Christ had not interposed to effect our reconciliation with him, and to restore us to his favor. Can we reflect on this, and not adore that blessed Savior, who "bore our sins in his own body on the tree," and "died, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God!"

Think for a moment of that place which he has "ordained of old, the pile whereof is fire and much wood, and the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, does kindle it, Isaiah 30:33." Think of the state of the souls which are confined there, all of them drinking "of the wine of God's wrath, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation, and tormented with fire and brimstone, having no rest, and the smoke of their torment ascending up for ever and ever! Revelation 14:10-11." And then let us ask ourselves, "Who among us can dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings! Isaiah 33:14."

Truly, if we would more habituate ourselves to consider the justice, and holiness, and majesty of our God, we would know no bounds to our gratitude for the work of redemption: our every thought would be thankfulness, and our every word be praise!

2. To preserve upon your minds a holy dread of sin—

Still must it be said, as in the days of old, "The Lord your God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God! Deuteronomy 4:24;" and we would never for a moment lose sight of him under that character. It is fit that he would be jealous, and allow no rival in our hearts. In harboring any unhallowed lust, we are as great enemies to our own happiness as we are to his glory. He would have loved us less, if he had given us any reason to hope for impunity in the ways of sin.

Be then jealous over yourselves with a godly jealousy, lest there be found in you anything which is displeasing in his sight. Let your conscience be tender even as the apple of your eye: and if but a mote come upon it, let it not abide there for a moment; but weep it away with tears of penitential sorrow, and wash it away with the blood of Christ, which alone can cleanse you even from the smallest sin!

Bear in mind, that what you are in respect of holiness, that you are in the sight of God: and recollecting, that "his eyes are as a flame of fire," and that "he weighs, not your actions" only, but "even your spirits" also, "be diligent that you may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless! 2 Peter 3:14."

COMPASSION TO THE DISTRESSED INCULCATED

Hebrews 13:3

"Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering."

IN the first ages of Christianity persecution raged to a degree that we at this time have little conception of: chains and imprisonment were a common lot, especially among those who were active in the service of their Lord. The loss of all things was also frequently added to the other trials of the saints; so that their afflictions were greatly multiplied and exceeding heavy. At such a season, it was incumbent on every member of the Church to compassionate the distresses of his afflicted brethren, and by a participation of their burdens to lighten their pressure, and to alleviate the sorrows occasioned by them. To this they might well be stimulated by the consideration that they themselves were constantly exposed to the same trials, and might soon need the same relief which they were administering to others.

Through the goodness of God we know but little of these trials. The persecutions of the present day amount to little more than contempt and hatred, and in some few instances a little outward opposition to our worldly interests. Still however there are afflictions of other kinds in abundance to which we all are subject; and under which it befits us all to manifest the tenderest compassion towards each other, not knowing how soon it may become our own lot to need the sympathy which we ourselves have exercised. In this view, the exhortation in our text deserves the attention of every man. Let us notice in it,

I. The duty inculcated—

Compassion towards our suffering fellow-creatures is a duty universally acknowledged. If the household of faith are entitled to a preference in our regards, as certainly they are, Galatians 6:10, our benevolence is not to be restricted to them: it is to be exercised generally towards all the sons and daughters of affliction; and that too in a way of,

1. Tender sympathy—

We should "remember them that are in bonds" or afflictions of any kind, not with a transient sigh, or a few customary expressions of condolence, but "as actually bound with them," and as being ourselves partakers of their sorrows. We can read of the desolations and ravages of war, or of the miseries occasioned by storms and tempests—and pass them over almost without any emotion, and in a few minutes utterly forget them. If we felt aright, we would enter into all the troubles of the sufferers, just as if we ourselves were in their very state and condition.

Paint to yourselves the anguish of shipwrecked mariners, expecting every moment to be their last: or, if their feelings may be supposed to be so acute as not to be capable of being transfused into the bosom of one who is not exposed to such perils, conceive of persons immured in dungeons, or racked with pains and destitute of all needful support; or contemplate the widow bereaved of all that she held dear in this world, and of all that she relied on for the support of herself and her helpless offspring. I say, conceive of sorrows as brought home to your own bosom, and as experienced in your own soul—and then you will see how you ought to realize in your minds the miseries of others, and to pant for an opportunity to relieve them.

2. Fervent prayer—

"Intercession," we are told, "should be made for all men;" but more especially should it be so in behalf of those, whose troubles render them objects of more than ordinary compassion. James says, "Is any sick among you, let him call for the elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick: and, if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven him, James 5:14-15."

You well know how a man will plead with God for the wife of his bosom, or for his beloved child, whose death he apprehends to be fast approaching. Thus would we enter into the distresses of others also, and would plead with God in their behalf. David did thus even in behalf of his very enemies: "When they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth, and I humbled my soul with fasting, Psalm 35:13;" and in this way should we also make our prayer unto God, in the hope that he will interpose effectually in their behalf, and bestow on them the blessings which it is not within the power of any finite creature to impart.

3. Active services—

We are not to say, "Be warmed, and be filled; and at the same time withhold" from our brethren the aid which we are able to bestow, James 2:15-16; such compassion as that is mere hypocrisy. Our Lord tells us in what way our sympathy would display itself, "I was hungry, and you gave me food; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in; naked, and you clothed me; I was sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came unto me, Matthew 25:35-36." All indeed have it not in their power to exert themselves to the same extent: some have more leisure time, and more ability, than others: but all can do something for their poor neighbors: some friendly service they can render; some word of comfort they can speak: and what they cannot

administer in their own persons, they may procure through the instrumentality of others.

At all events, if it is only a cup of cold water that we can bestow, it should be given with a zeal and tenderness that shall evince the strength of an internal principle, and the wish that our means were more adequate to the occasion.

The proper example for us to follow, is that of the Macedonians, of whom the Apostle testifies, "Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints, 2 Corinthians 8:2-4." This is the point to be aimed at: there must first be a willing mind: and, where that is, God will accept the offering, however small, 2 Corinthians 8:12.

Such is the duty here inculcated. Let us now attend to,

II. The consideration with which it is enforced—

When the Apostle says, "Do this," as being yourselves also in the body, he must be understood as intimating,

1. That we ourselves are exposed to the same afflictions as others—

And this is true respecting every living man. No one is exempt from trouble. If any man was ever justified in saying, "I shall die in my nest," it was Job. Yet behold he, with all his wealth and power, was in a few days reduced to the most abject state that can be imagined. There are ten thousand sources of affliction which God may open, and cause our souls to be deluged with it in an instant. Our bodies may be racked with disease, or our hearts be overwhelmed with domestic troubles. Or, while all external things are prospering, our souls may be so bowed down with a sense of sin, and so agitated with a dread of God's judgments, that we may hate our very existence, and "choose strangling rather than life." Indeed whoever he is that thinks with David, "My mountain stands strong, I shall not be moved;" he may expect, that God will speedily "hide his face from him; and that trouble shall before long come upon him," as the punishment of his iniquity.

2. That what measure we mete out to others, we may expect to have meted out to ourselves—

Mankind at large feel a far greater disposition to exert themselves in behalf of a man of active benevolence, than they do for one whose regards have terminated on himself alone. But it is not on the good dispositions of men that we are called to rely. God himself has engaged, that what we do for others, he will accept as done to himself; and "that what we lend to him, he will repay us again." Very remarkable are his promises to this effect: "Blessed is he who has regard for the weak; the LORD delivers him in times of trouble. The LORD will protect him and preserve his life; he will bless him in the land and not surrender him to the desire of his foes. The LORD will sustain him on his sickbed and restore him from his bed of illness, Psalm 41:1-3."

The language of the Prophet Isaiah is yet stronger still: "If you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail, Isaiah 58:10-11." Here Almighty God himself is pledged to recompense into our bosom the kindness which we show to others: and "he will recompense it in full measure, pressed down, and running over."

If then we would have consolations ministered to us in our troubles, let us labor to impart them to our afflicted brethren: for "what we sow, we shall reap;" if we supply the wants of others, God will supply ours, Philippians 4:14; Philippians 4:19; and if "we cast our bread upon the waters, we shall be sure to find it after many days."

For your direction in reference to this duty, we beg permission to offer the following hints:

1. Do not undervalue the grace of charity—

It is too often overlooked, not only by the world at large, but also by many who profess godliness; who imagine that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is all that is needful for their best interests. But let me say, that, whatever faith a man may have, "if he has not love also, real, active, self-denying love, he is no better than sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." Only recollect how great a stress James lays on "visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction," when he declares, that "pure and undefiled religion" mainly consists in such offices; and you will never be satisfied until you attain this heavenly disposition, nor ever think that you can exercise it too much.

2. Do not overvalue it—

If you put your own benevolence in the place of Christ, and rely on that to purchase the remission of your sins, you will then indeed build on a foundation of sand. Know, that however much you may abound in acts of benevolence, "you are still unprofitable servants, who have done only what it was your duty to do." If you really seek the glory of God in what you do, your services will

come up with acceptance before him, and they will be to him as a sweet fragrance. But you must never forget that "your goodness extends not to God," nor can confer any obligation upon him. On the contrary, the more you do for him, the more you are indebted to him; because "all your power either to will or do what is good, is from him alone." "It is not you that do it, but the grace of God that is with you."

3. Endeavor to abound in charity more and more—

See the character of holy Job: "Whoever heard me spoke well of me, and those who saw me commended me, because I rescued the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to assist him. The man who was dying blessed me; I made the widow's heart sing, Job 29:11-13." O what a lovely character was that! What a bright resemblance of the Savior, "who went about doing good!"

Dear brethren, set this example before you, and strive to imitate it to the utmost of your power. Thus will you shine as lights in the world; and thus "fulfilling the law of Christ, Galatians 6:3," you will ensure his approbation in the day of judgment, Hebrews 6:10. 1 Timothy 6:17-19.

#2343

GODS PROMISED PRESENCE, AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO DUTY

Hebrews 13:5-6

"Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

THE end of Scriptural knowledge is Scriptural practice. Hence the Apostle closes all his epistles with practical exhortations. The argumentative part of this epistle terminated at the close of the preceding chapter. This chapter begins with some particular exhortations suited to the Hebrews at that time. The advice contained in our text is suited to the Church in every state and every age: and the encouragement with which it is enforced, gives it a more than common interest. In truth, it is the promised presence and assistance of God, which is our great incentive to every duty; since without his aid we can do nothing, but with it we can effect whatever God himself requires of us.

Let us consider,

I. The promise here recorded—

The promise was originally given to Joshua: but in our text it is represented as spoken to each of us. And in this light it ought to be viewed: for it was not given to Joshua as a mere isolated individual, but as the head of God's people, whom he was conducting into Canaan: and between them and us there is a close resemblance: they were about to conflict with many enemies, whom they must destroy, before they could possess the promised land. Just so, we also must sustain many conflicts before we can attain the full enjoyment of the heavenly Canaan. To us therefore there is the same need of the promise, as to Joshua; and to us also is there the same right and title; seeing that it was spoken for the encouragement of all God's Israel to the end of time.

The promise that God "will never leave us nor forsake us," imports that:

1. God will be ever with us, in the operations of his providence—

There is nothing in the whole universe which is not under God's sovereign control. "Not even a sparrow falls to the ground" without his special appointment: and "the very hairs of our head are all numbered." Circumstances indeed may occur which may cause us to tremble for the outcome of them: but he will so overrule them all, as to "make them eventually work together for our good, Romans 8:28." We may be reduced almost to despair; and may be ready to say with the Church of old, "The Lord has forsaken and forgotten us! Isaiah 49:14;" but he will before long force us to acknowledge that such fears were the fruit only of "our own infirmity, Psalm 77:7-10;" and that the very things which we complained of as "against us," were no other than his appointed means for accomplishing all his gracious designs towards us, Genesis 42:36.

Our dangers may be as imminent as those of Israel at the Red Sea; but that shall be the time for Him to open for us a way to escape from them. Our needs may be as urgent as those of Israel afterwards in the wilderness; but that shall be the time for giving us manna from Heaven, and water from the rock. The time for any interposition may seem to have actually elapsed; but still "in the mount the Lord it shall be seen," precisely as he was when he arrested the uplifted arm of Abraham, and restored his Isaac to his embrace. "The vision may tarry; but never beyond the appointed and the fittest time, Habakkuk 2:3."

2. God will be ever with us, by the communications of his grace—

These are necessary for us, and must be renewed to us day by day: and if for one moment they be suspended, we must inevitably fall. But God will not withdraw from his waiting and praying people. He may indeed allow temptations to arise, such as shall threaten to plunge us into irremediable ruin; and he may even permit Satan for a time to prevail against us; but still he will not utterly forsake us; but will restore our souls, and make our very falls subservient to the augmenting of our humility and watchfulness throughout the remainder of our lives, and to the qualifying of us for warning, and exhorting, and comforting others with increased effect, Luke 22:31-32.

So also he may permit our trials to abide; and, though entreated by us ever so much, may not see fit to remove them. But "his grace shall be sufficient for us," and shall be the more magnified in us, in proportion as our conflicts are severe, and our victories conspicuous, 2 Corinthians 12:7-9.

He may, for wise and gracious purposes, hide his face from us; but it shall be only for a little moment, that the riches of his grace may be the more abundantly displayed in the subsequent manifestations of his love and favor, Isaiah 54:7-10. If it is asked, why he will thus continue his loving-kindness to them? We answer, "For his own sake," and because "he changes not, Malachi 3:6. James 1:17. Romans 11:29;" as it is said, "He will not forsake his people; because it has pleased him to make you his people, 1 Samuel 12:22."

That this promise may produce its due effects, let us consider,

II. The use we should make of this promise—

Innumerable are the benefits to be derived from it: but we shall specify only two. This promise should encourage us to discard, as unworthy of us:

1. All inordinate desires—

This promise should cause us to, "Keep our lives free from the love of money and to be content with what we have." We should desire nothing which God has not seen fit to give us, nor murmur at anything which he has ordained for us. For, what can we lack that is truly good for us, or what can we have to complain of, while he is with us?

Would any worldly good add to our happiness, or give any security to us for its continuance?

Would treasures, however great, be a richer portion than he?

Would the loss of them be felt, if it led us to seek more entirely our happiness in him?

"When he gives quietness, who then can make trouble, Job 34:29." If we have but the light of his countenance lifted up upon us, nothing can augment, nor can anything diminish, our bliss.

Many of these Hebrews had "taken joyfully the confiscation of their goods:" and thousands in every age have been able to testify from their own blessed experience, that "as their afflictions have abounded, so also have their consolations abounded by Christ, 2 Corinthians 1:5." Let us only possess "the Lord for the portion of our inheritance and of our cup; and have that lot maintained to us;" and however small our portion be as it respects this world, we shall have reason to say, "The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places, and I have a goodly heritage, Psalm 16:5-6."

2. All anxious fears—

The ungodly imagine that they can prevail against the Lord's people: but they are no more than an axe or saw in the hands of him who uses it: they can do no more than our God and Father is pleased to do by them, Isaiah 10:15.

Now who will tremble at a sword that is in his father's hands? If indeed our God were ever weary, or absent, or disinclined to interpose for us, or if the creature could effect anything without his special permission—then there would be some reason for fear: but when he is as "our shade upon our right hand;" when he is as "a wall of fire round about us, and the glory in the midst of us, Zechariah 2:5;" whom shall we fear? "Who can have access to harm us, 1 Peter 3:13-15," if we are hidden under the shadow of His wings? "If he is for us, then who can be against us? Romans 8:31."

Whatever confederacies then may be against us, whether of men or devils, we need not fear: in Him, as our sanctuary, we may deride their efforts, and defy their malice, Isaiah 8:12-14. The holy Psalmist has shown us what should be the state of our minds:

Psalm 56:1-4, "Be merciful to me, O God, for men hotly pursue me; all day long they press their attack. My slanderers pursue me all day long; many are attacking me in their pride. When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will

not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?"

Psalm 56:9-11, "Then my enemies will turn back when I call for help. By this I will know that God is for me. In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise--in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

Learn then,

1. Of what importance it is to treasure up the promises in our minds and hearts—

The promises of God are our great support under trials, and at the same time our great encouragements to fulfill our duty; since they assure us of all needful aid, both for the sustaining of the one, and the performance of the other. It is by them that we are enabled to cleanse ourselves from sin, 2 Corinthians 7:1; and by them to attain the image of God upon our souls, 2 Peter 1:4. Let us then lay hold of them; and, to whoever they may have been spoken in the first instance, appropriate them to ourselves. Let us rest upon them, and plead them before God, as Jacob did, Genesis 28:15 with 32:12; and know that "in Christ they are all yes, and amen! 2 Corinthians 1:20," as unchangeable as God himself!

O what a treasure does that man possess who has laid up in his mind the most comprehensive promises of his God! He can be in no trouble, wherein he has not abundant consolation; and in no need, wherein he has not an adequate supply. O beloved, let the word of Christ, and the promises of your God, "dwell in you richly in all wisdom." God will never violate his promise, "Heaven and earth shall pass away; but not one jot or tittle of that promise shall ever fail! Matthew 24:35."

2. How truly blessed is a life of faith—

What a source of misery to mankind is a covetous and discontented spirit! What a prey are they to trouble, who have no refuge from the cares and fears which agitate the ungodly world! But faith in God is a perfect antidote to them all. It assures us of our God ever near at hand to help and support his believing people. See how the promise in our text is introduced: it is there suggested as sufficient to counterbalance the loss of everything, however desirable, or the apprehension of everything, however formidable.

It is suggested, in order to inspire us with a confidence which nothing can intimidate: "We may boldly say, The Lord is my helper; I will not fear what man can do unto me." Think of an angel sent down to sojourn here: what would either the acquisition or loss of riches affect him? Or would any confederacies either of men or devils concern him? He would feel as satisfied and as secure as if he were in Heaven itself. This then is the tranquility which we also, according to the measure of our faith, are privileged to enjoy. Let us then "know in whom we have believed." Let us "cast all our care on him who cares for us! 1 Peter 5:7." And let us so realize the promises of our God, as to know that nothing ever shall, or ever can separate us from his love!

Psalm 46:1-3, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. Selah"

Romans 8:38-39, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord!"

#2344

THE GLORY OF CHRIST

Hebrews 13:8

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever!"

The creature is frail and changeable, but the Lord Jesus Christ is from eternity to eternity the same.

I. The immutability of Christ—

(This may be treated under the five several heads here specified.)

II. Our duty in relation to him—

1. Seek above all things the knowledge of him—

The preaching of Christ is all our duty, Acts 3:20; Acts 8:5; Acts 9:20; and to acquire the knowledge of him is your duty, John 17:3. Philippians 3:7-8.

2. Guard against everything that may divert you from him—

Hold fast the instructions which have led you to Christ, verse 7; but on no account listen to "strange doctrines" that would lead you from him, verse 9. Whoever is taken from you, Christ remains; and you must "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart." But beware of false teachers, such as there are and ever have been in the Church: for, whatever they may press upon you, there is nothing that deserves your attention but Christ crucified, 1 Corinthians 2:2.

3. Improve to the uttermost your saving interest in him—

Seek to realize everything that is spoken of Christ, and to make him your all in all. John 1:16. Galatians 2:20. Colossians 3:1-4.

In this present earthly state, wherein the affairs both of individuals and of nations are liable to continual fluctuation, the mind needs some principle capable of supporting it under every adverse circumstance that may occur. Philosophy offers its aid in vain: the light of unassisted reason is unable to impart any effectual relief: but revelation points to God; to God, as reconciled to us in the Son of his love: it directs our views to him who "changes not;" and who, under all the troubles of life, invites us to rely on his paternal care.

Every page of the inspired writings instructs us to say with David, "When I am in trouble, I will think upon God."

Are we alarmed with tidings of a projected invasion, and apprehensive of national calamities? God speaks to us as to his people of old, Isaiah 8:12-14, "Do not call conspiracy everything that these people call conspiracy; do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread, and he will be a sanctuary."

Are we agitated by a sense of personal danger? that same almighty Friend expostulates with us, Isaiah 51:12-13, "Who are you, that you would be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be as grass, and forget the Lord your Maker?"

Are we, as in the present instance, afflicted for the Church of God? has God taken away the pastor, who "fed you with knowledge and understanding?" Is there reason to fear, that now, your "Shepherd being removed, the sheep may be scattered," and "grievous wolves may enter in among you, not sparing the flock; yes, that even of your own selves some may arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them, Acts 20:29-30." Behold! such was the state of the Hebrews, when this epistle was written to them: and the Apostle, studious to fortify them against the impending danger, exhorts them to remember their deceased pastors, following their faith, and considering the blessed way in which they had terminated their life.

Moreover, as the most effectual means of preserving them from being "carried about with any strange doctrines," different from what had been delivered to them, he suggests to them this thought, That Jesus Christ, who had been ever preached among them, and who was the one foundation of all their hopes, was still the same; the same infinitely gracious, almighty, and ever-blessed Savior! "Remember," says he, "them which have had the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the Word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conduct: Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever."

These last words were chosen by your late worthy minister, as his subject on the first day of this year, and, as I am informed, were particularly recommended to you as your motto for this current year. On this, as well as other accounts, they seem to claim peculiar attention from us: and, O that the good Spirit of God may accompany them with his blessing, while we endeavor to improve them, and to offer from them such considerations as may appear suited to you, under your present most afflictive circumstances!

Your late faithful, loving, and much beloved pastor is no more: he who was, not in profession merely, but in truth, "a guide to the blind, a light of those who were in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, and a teacher of babes." He who for so many years spent all his time, and found all his delight, in imparting the knowledge of salvation both to old and young; he, I say, is taken from you; and your loss is unspeakably severe.

But is all gone? No. He who formed him by his grace, raised him up to be a witness, and sent him to preach the Gospel to you for a season, remains the same; he has still "the fullness of the Spirit," and can send forth ten thousand such laborers into his vineyard, whenever it shall please him. Though the creature, on whose lips you have so often hung with profit and delight, is now no more—yet the Creator, the Redeemer, the Savior of the world is still the same; Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever. He is the same:

in the dignity of his person,
in the extent of his power,
in the virtue of his sacrifice,
in the tenderness of his compassion,
and in fidelity to his promises.

Jesus Christ is the same in the dignity of his person—

The terms "yesterday, today, and for ever," are expressive of a true and proper eternity: they do not import merely a long duration, but an existence that never had a beginning, nor shall ever have an end. In this view they are frequently applied to Jehovah, to distinguish him from any creature, however exalted he might be. When God revealed his name to Moses, that name whereby he was to be made known to the Israelites, he called himself I AM: "say to them, I AM has sent me unto you:" and John expressly distinguishing the Father both from Jesus Christ, and from the Holy Spirit, calls him the person "who is, and was, and is to come."

Now this august title is given repeatedly to Jesus Christ, both in the Old and New Testament. The very words of our text evidently refer to the 102nd Psalm, where the psalmist, indisputably speaking of Jehovah, says, "You are the same, and your years shall have no end." And lest there would be the smallest doubt to whom this character belongs, the author of this epistle quotes the words in the very first chapter, Hebrews 1:12, insists upon them as immediately applicable to the Messiah, and adduces them in proof, that Christ was infinitely superior to any created being, even "God blessed for evermore." Our Lord himself on various occasions asserted his claim to this title: to the carnal Jews, who thought him a mere creature like themselves, he said, "Before Abraham was, I AM!" And when he appeared to John in a vision, he said, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty! Revelation 1:8." Behold then the dignity of our Lord and Savior! "His goings forth have been from everlasting, Micah 5:2;" he was set up "from everlasting; from the beginning, or before ever the earth was, Proverbs 8:23." We must say of him, in the words of David, "From everlasting to everlasting you are God!"

And is this a matter of small importance? Does the Christian feel no interest in this truth? Yes, is it not the very foundation of all his comforts? He may be deemed a bigot for laying such a stress on the divinity of Christ: but having once tasted the bitterness, and seen the malignity of sin, he is well persuaded, that the blood of a creature could never have availed to expiate his guilt, nor could anything less than "the righteousness of God" himself, suffice for his acceptance in the day of judgment.

Know then, believer, that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever: he is the eternal and immutable Jehovah! He is worthy of all your love, of all your trust, of all your confidence. You need never be afraid of thinking too highly of him: when you "honor him as you honor the Father," then you regard him in the manner that befits him: when you bow the knee before him, and confess him as your Sovereign Lord, then you most effectually glorify God the Father, Philippians 2:10-11.

Remember then, under all the trying dispensations you may meet with, and, most of all, under the bereavement which you are now so bitterly lamenting, that he in whom you have believed, is an all-sufficient Savior; and that when you look to him for any blessing whatever, you may cry with confident assurance, "My Lord, and my God."

The ministers of the Church "are not allowed to continue by reason of death." That tongue which lately was "as a tree of life," under the shadow of which you sat with great delight, and the fruit whereof was sweet unto your taste, now lies silent in the tomb. Our departed friend has experienced that change, which sooner or later awaits us all. He will before long experience a still further change, when "his corruptible shall put on incorruption, and his mortal shall put on immortality;" when his body, that now lies moldering in the dust, shall be "raised like unto Christ's glorious body," and "shine above the sun in the firmament for ever and ever!" He is not today what he was yesterday: nor shall be for ever what he now is. This honor of eternal, immutable self-existence, belongs not to the highest archangel; for though the angels may be subject to no further change, it was but yesterday that they were first created. To Christ alone belongs this honor; and "with him there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

Jesus Christ is eternally the same in the extent of his power.

We are informed, both in the psalm from whence the text is taken, and in the first chapter of this epistle, where it is cited, that Jesus Christ was the Creator of the universe, "You, O Lord, in the beginning have laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of your hands." And from the first moment of its existence he has "upheld it by the word of his power." In the days of his flesh, he still exercised the same omnipotence: "Whatever the Father did, that did the Son likewise."

On ten thousand occasions he wrought the most stupendous miracles, and showed that every created being was subject to his will. He not only cleansed the lepers, and caused the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and the lame to walk, but he raised the dead, cast out devils, and controlled the very elements, saying to the wind: Be still! And to the waves, Be calm! Nor, in this, did he act as one that had received a delegated authority; but as one who had an essential, and unalienable light to exercise universal dominion.

Though, as man, he acknowledged subjection to his Father, and, as mediator, spoke and acted in his Father's name, yet, in all his miracles, he put forth a virtue inherent in himself; he made his own will the rule and measure of his conduct, and stamped the impression of divinity on all his actions. And is he not still the same? What he was yesterday, will he not also be today, and for ever?

Is there any disorder of the soul that he cannot heal?

Are there any lusts so raging that he cannot calm them; or so inveterate that he cannot root them out?

Cannot he who formed the crude and unformed chaos into order and beauty, create our souls anew?

Cannot he who said, "Let there be light, and there was light," transform our corrupted hearts into the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness?

Cannot he who "triumphed over all the principalities and powers" of Hell, "bruise Satan under our feet also?"

In short, "is there anything too hard for him?" No! He is still the same: he, to whom "all power in Heaven and in earth has been committed," still holds the reins of universal government, and "orders all things after the counsel of his own will."

What comfort may this afford you under your present affliction! It pleased him for a season to set over you a faithful pastor, by whom he has called hundreds into his fold, and "turned multitudes from the error of their ways." But though your honored minister was the instrument, he was only an instrument; he was but "an axe in the hands of him who hews therewith," an "earthen vessel in which was deposited the heavenly treasure," and by whom Christ communicated to you his "unsearchable riches!" "The excellency of the power was altogether Christ's."

Has the power ceased, because the instrument is laid aside? "Is the Lord's ear heavy, that he cannot hear? Is his hand shortened, that he cannot save?" O remember, that though the stream is cut off, the fountain still remains; and every one of you may go to it, and "receive out of your Redeemer's fullness, grace upon grace."

That same almighty arm that raised him up to be a faithful witness for the truth, that enabled him to despise the pleasures and honors of the world, and to devote himself wholly to the great work of the ministry—can do the same for his successor. You well know, that he, whose loss we bemoan, was not always that able and excellent minister that he afterwards proved to be. Be not then hasty, if all things be not at first agreeable to your mind:

exercise meekness, patience, forbearance,

seek to obtain nothing by force or faction,

let the whole of your conduct be conciliating, and worthy of your Christian profession.

Above all, continue constant in prayer. Beg that "the Lord of the harvest, who alone can send forth faithful laborers into his harvest," will pour out in a more abundant measure his grace upon him, who by the good providence of God is about to take the charge of you. I do not say that God will at all events grant your particular requests; but this I say with confidence, that your prayers shall not fall to the ground; and that, if God, on the whole, will be most glorified in that way, your petitions shall be literally fulfilled, and "the spirit of Elijah shall rest on Elisha."

Christ is ever the same in the virtue of his sacrifice.

Though he was not manifested in human flesh until four thousand years had elapsed—yet his sacrifice availed for the salvation of thousands during the whole of that period. The sacrifice, which Abel offered, did not obtain those distinguished tokens of divine acceptance on account of its intrinsic worth, but because the offerer looked forward by faith to that great Sacrifice, which in the fullness of time was to be presented to God upon the cross, even to him, who, in purpose and effect, was the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

As for all other Old Testament sacrifices, they had no value whatever, but only as they typified that "one offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." When we see the high-priest and the elders of Israel putting their hands upon the scape-goat, and transferring to him all the sins of the whole congregation of Israel, that they might be carried into the land of oblivion, then we behold the efficacy of Christ's atonement. It is not to be imagined that the blood of bulls or of goats could take away sin. No, in every instance where the conscience of a sinner was really purged from guilt, the pardon was bestowed solely through "the blood of him, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God."

And is not that, which throughout all the Mosaic dispensation, and from the very beginning of the world, availed for the remission of sins, still as efficacious as ever to all who trust in it? Or shall its virtue ever be diminished? Could David, after the commission of crimes, which "make the ears of every one that hears them to tingle," cry, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow!" And may not the most abandoned sinner now hope for mercy through "the blood of sprinkling?"

Could Saul, that blasphemer, that injurious and persecuting zealot, say of Christ, "He has loved me, and given himself for me!" Could he say, "I obtained mercy, that in me, the chief of sinners, Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to those who shall hereafter believe on him to life everlasting?" And shall any one be left to doubt whether there be hope for him? Surely we may still say with the same confidence that the Apostles declared it in the days of old, "We have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: he is the atoning sacrifice, not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the world: through him all who believe shall be justified from all things: the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin."

How sweetly have many of you experienced the truth of these declarations, when your dear minister has been insisting on this favorite topic, and "Christ has been set forth crucified, as it were, before your eyes!" How many of you, while lying at Bethesda's

pool, have embraced the opportunity afforded you, and plunged beneath that water to the healing of your souls! Some others perhaps among you have been long hesitating, as it were, upon the brink, and doubting and questioning your right to wash in it: ah! chide your unbelief: know that "the fountain was opened for sin, and for impurity."

Look not so much at the malignity of your sins, as at the infinite value of Christ's atonement! And under every fresh contracted guilt, go to the fountain, wash in it, and be clean! Let there not be a day, if possible not an hour, wherein you do not make fresh application to the blood of Jesus: go to that to cleanse you, as well from "the iniquity of your most holy things," as from the more heinous violations of God's law; thus shall "your hearts be ever sprinkled clean from an evil conscience," and your "conscience itself be purged from dead works to serve the living God."

There are some of you indeed, it is to be feared, who have hitherto disregarded the invitations given you, and are yet ignorant of the virtue of this all-atoning sacrifice—you have unhappily remained dry and destitute of the heavenly dew, which has long fallen in rich abundance all around you. How long you may continue favored with such invitations, God alone knows: but O that you might this day begin to seek the Lord! He who once died on Calvary, still cries to you by my voice, "Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else!" Now then, obey his voice: say to him, "Draw me, that I may come unto you; draw me, and I will run after you." Thus shall you be numbered among those who are redeemed to God by his blood, and shall join, to all eternity, with your departed minister, and all the glorified saints, in singing, "To him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever, Amen!"

It will be a further consolation to us to reflect that Jesus Christ is the same in the tenderness of his compassion—

It was Christ who led the people of Israel through the wilderness, and who directed them by his servant Moses. This appears from the express declaration of Paul. We are told that the Israelites "tempted God in the desert, saying: Can he give bread also, and provide flesh for his people?" And Paul, speaking of them, says, "Neither tempt the Lord, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of the destroyer, 1 Corinthians 10:9."

Now the tender compassion which Christ exercised towards his people in the wilderness, is made a frequent subject of devout acknowledgment in the Holy Scriptures. Isaiah says, "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bore them, and carried them all the days of old, Isaiah 63:9. Moses himself, who both experienced and witnessed God's compassion, describes it in terms as beautiful as imagination can conceive. Deuteronomy 32:9-12, "For the LORD's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance. In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye, like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions. The LORD alone led him."

In order to enter fully into its meaning, it will be proper to observe, that the eagle, when teaching her young to fly, flutters over them, and stirs them up to imitate her; she even thrusts them out of the nest, that they may be forced to exert their powers; and if she sees them in danger of falling, she flies instantly underneath them, catches them on her wings, and carries them back to their nest. In reference to this it is added, "Like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions. The LORD alone led him." Can anything present a more beautiful idea to the mind? Can any image whatever more forcibly impress us with admiring thoughts of Christ's tenderness and compassion?

Such was Jesus in the days of old: and is he not the same at this day? Will he not still "carry the lambs in his bosom, and gently lead those who are with young?" Can we produce in the annals of the world one single instance, wherein he "broke the bruised reed, or quenched the smoking flax?" Has he not invariably "brought forth judgment unto victory," and "perfected his own strength in his people's weakness?" Who among us has ever "sought his face in vain?" With whom has he ever refused to sympathize? Will not he who wept with the sisters of the deceased Lazarus; will not he who had compassion on the multitude because they were as sheep not having a shepherd; will not he who wept over the murderous and abandoned city, now weep over a disconsolate widow, a deserted people, and especially over those, who have "not known the day of their visitation, and whose eyes have never yet seen the things belonging to their peace?" Is he become an "High-priest that cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities;" or that, notwithstanding he has been "in all points tempted like as we are, has no disposition to support his tempted people?"

Unbelief and Satan may suggest such thoughts to our minds; but who must not attest that they are false? Who is not constrained to acknowledge, that "he is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger, and of great mercy?"

Here then again let the drooping souls rejoice! You, who are poor in this world, have lost a friend; a kind, compassionate friend, who, "according to his ability, and often beyond his ability," exerted himself to relieve your needs. You, who are of a broken and contrite spirit, ah! what a friend have you lost! How would the departed saint listen to all your complaints, and answer all your arguments, and encourage you to look to Jesus for relief! What a delight was it to him to "strengthen your weak hands, and confirm your feeble knees, and to say to your fearful hearts, Be strong, fear not, your God will come and save you!" You, "afflicted and tossed with tempest, and not comforted," whatever your distresses were, surely you have lost a brother, "a friend that sticks closer

than a brother."

But though his benevolent heart can no more expand towards you, "has your Lord forgotten to be gracious? Has Jesus shut up his tender mercies?" No! to him you may still carry your complaints: he bids the weary and heavy-laden to come unto him: he "has received gifts," not for the indigent only, but "for the rebellious." Nor shall one of you be "sent empty away." Whom did he ever dismiss, in the days of his flesh, without granting to him the blessing he desired? So now, if you will go unto him, he "will satiate every weary soul, and replenish every sorrowful soul." He "will give you beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, that God may be glorified!"

The last observation we proposed to make, was that Christ is the same in his fidelity to his promises—

We have before shown that he led his people through the wilderness: he had promised to cast out all their enemies, and to give them "a land flowing with milk and honey." And behold, Joshua, at the close of a long life, and after an experience of many years, could make this appeal to all Israel: "You know in all your hearts, Joshua 23:14, and in all your souls, that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spoke concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing has failed thereof."

The same fidelity did Jesus manifest, while he sojourned upon earth. The Father had committed to him a chosen people to keep: and Jesus with his dying breath could say, "Those whom you gave me I have kept, and none of them is lost." He promised to his disconsolate disciples, that he would pour out his Spirit upon them; and that the Comforter, whom he would send, would far more than compensate for the loss of his bodily presence: and how speedily did he perform his promise!

Thus, in every succeeding age, have his people found him faithful. He has "given exceeding great and precious promises" to his Church, not one jot or tittle of which have ever failed. Those who have rested on his word, have never been disappointed. Enthusiasts indeed, who have put their own vain conceits in the place of his word, and have presumed to call their own feelings or imaginations by the sacred appellation of a promise, have often met with disappointments; nor can they reasonably expect anything else. But those who rest upon the clear promises of the Gospel, and wait for the accomplishment of them to their own souls, "shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end."

Let any creature upon earth "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," and shall he be left wholly destitute with respect to temporal comforts? No! he perhaps may be severely tried for a season; but before long he shall have "all needful things added unto him."

Let a lost sinner "whose sins have been of a scarlet or crimson dye," make application to the Lord for mercy; and shall he ever be cast out? No, provided he comes simply trusting in the Savior's righteousness.

Let any seek deliverance from the snares of Satan, by whom he has been led captive at his will; and shall he be left in bondage to his lusts? Most surely not, if he will rely on Him who has said, "Sin shall not have dominion over you, because you are not under the law, but under grace."

Now it may be, that many of you have been promising yourselves much spiritual, perhaps also some temporal, advantage, from your deceased minister. And behold! in an instant, all your hopes are blasted. The creature, though so excellent, proves in this respect but a broken reed. But if you will look to Christ, you cannot raise your expectations too high: he is the same yesterday, today, and forever. You may rely on him, for body and for soul, for time and for eternity: he will be to you a "sun and a shield; he will give you both grace and glory; nor will he withhold any good thing from those who walk uprightly." If he sees it necessary that for a season you would be "in heaviness through manifold temptations," he will make your trials to work for good; and "your light and momentary afflictions shall work out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Only commit your souls to him in well-doing, and he will "keep you by his Almighty power, through faith, unto salvation."

In the improvement which we would make of this subject—

We beg permission once more to notice the words that immediately precede the text, "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith, Hebrews 13:7" We may appear indeed, in this, to draw your attention from Christ, and to fix it on the creature. But we shall still keep in view our main subject; and at once consult:

the scope of the context,
the peculiarity of this occasion,
and the feelings of your hearts.

First then, Remember him who has had the rule over you, and has preached unto you the Word of God. Surely I need not say much to enforce this part of the exhortation: he is deeply engraved on your hearts, nor will the remembrance of him be soon effaced from your minds. Many of you would have "even plucked out your own eyes and have given them unto him," if by so doing you could have

conferred upon him any essential benefit. Yes, I doubt not, there are many in this assembly that would gladly, very gladly, have laid down their lives in his stead, that so great a blessing as he was, might yet have been continued to the Church of God. It cannot be but that the poor must long remember their generous and constant benefactor. Many of the children too, I trust, whom he so delighted to instruct, will remember him to the last period of their lives. Above all, the people who looked up to him as their spiritual father, to whom they owed their own souls, will bear him in remembrance. They will never forget "how holily, justly, and unblamably he conducted himself among them," and how "he exhorted and comforted and charged every one of them, as a father does his children, that they would walk worthy of God, who has called them unto his kingdom and glory!" Deservedly will his name be revered in this place for ages; for "he was a burning and a shining light;" and had so uniformly persisted in well-doing, that he had utterly "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men," and made religion respectable in the eyes of the most ungodly.

Let me proceed then in the next place to say, "Imitate his faith." What his faith was, you well know. Christ was the one foundation of all his hopes. He desired "to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, but that which is by faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." And as he trusted in no other for his own salvation, so he preached no other among you. He had "determined, like Paul, to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Every discourse he preached tended immediately or remotely to glorify Christ among you. If he preached the law, it was that, as a schoolmaster, it might lead you to Christ. If he insisted upon obedience, it was, that you might "glorify Christ by your bodies and your spirits which are Christ's." In short, Christ was, as well in his ministrations as in the inspired writings, "the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the first and the last!"

Were he preaching to you at this moment, I am persuaded he would have no other theme; yes, if to the end of the world he were continued to preach unto you, you would hear of nothing but Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever! It was this which made his ministry so acceptable unto you. It was this which God rendered useful to the conversion and consolation of multitudes among you. By faith in Christ he lived, and in faith in Christ he died. Almost the last words he uttered were these, "Weep not for me; I am very happy, I die in the faith of the Lord Jesus."

I have been anticipated in one remarkable circumstance which I had intended to mention to you; and I am unwilling to omit it now, because there may be some here who were not present this morning. Indeed it is so applicable to my subject, and so illustrative of the character of your dear pastor, that I may well be excused if I repeat what you have already heard.

That blessed man, though he possessed a very considerable share of human learning, valued no book in comparison with the Scriptures: when therefore he found his dissolution approaching, he desired his dear wife to read a portion of the Word of God: she immediately read to him, first the 23rd Psalm, and afterwards the 8th chapter of Proverbs. In the last, verse but one of that chapter, she came to these words, "Whoever finds me, finds life, and shall obtain favor of the Lord." Immediately, without waiting for her to conclude the chapter, he cried, "Stop, stop! now shut the book; that is enough for me." Blessed man! he had sweetly experienced the truth of those words; he had found life in Christ Jesus; he had obtained favor of the Lord; and he knew that he was going to dwell with his Lord forever! Such was his faith. He held fast Christ as his "wisdom, his righteousness, his sanctification, and his complete redemption." He made "Christ his all, and in all."

But while he trusted in Christ alone for his justification before God, no man living ever more forcibly inculcated the necessity of good works, or, I may truly add, practiced them with more delight. He was also a firm friend to the Established Church, and inculcated on all occasions submission to the constituted authorities of this kingdom. He considered obedience to the powers that be, as an essential part of his duty to God. He looked upon earthly governors as ministers ordained of God; and inculcated obedience to them as a duty, "not merely for wrath, but also for conscience sake."

As then you have been followers of his faith and practice while living, so be imitators of him now that he is withdrawn from you: "be followers of him, as he was of Christ." And be careful, "not to be carried about with divers and strange doctrines," but "hold fast what you have received, that no man take your crown." If there be any here, who have never yet been "partakers of the like precious faith with him," O that I might this day prevail with them to "become obedient to the faith!"

My dear brethren, you will assuredly find that the only means of holiness in life, or of peace in death, or of glory in eternity—is, the knowledge of Christ! "There is no other name under Heaven given among men whereby we can be saved" from sin and misery in this world, or from everlasting destruction in the world to come! There is no other name, I say, but the name of Jesus Christ. I must therefore entreat you now to reflect on those things which hitherto you have heard without effect; and I pray God, that the seed, which has lain buried in the earth, may spring up speedily, and bring forth fruit a hundred-fold.

I add now in the last place, "Consider the end of your departed minister's conduct." You have heard how peaceful and resigned he was in the prospect of death, and what an assured and glorious hope of immortality he enjoyed. "Mark the perfect man," says David, "and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace:" this you have seen verified in him. But carry your thoughts a little further, and follow him within the veil. Behold him:
united to that blessed assembly of saints and angels,

freed from the bondage of corruption,
arrayed in the unspotted robe of his Redeemer's righteousness,
crowned with a royal diadem,
seated on a throne of glory,
tuning his golden harp, and with a voice as loud and as melodious as any saint in Heaven, singing, "Salvation to God and to the Lamb!"

Is there so much as one of you that can think of this, and not exclaim, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"

Let the thought of these things, my brethren, encourage you to persevere. The conflict cannot be very long; but how glorious the triumph! Consider this, I beseech you; that you "may fight the good fight of faith, and behave like men." Go on, "strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus;" and doubt not but that you shall find the grace of Christ as sufficient for you as it has been for him; and that what Christ has been to others in former ages, he will be to you, the same yesterday, today, and for ever!

#2345

CAUTION AGAINST FALSE DOCTRINES

Hebrews 13:9

"Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them."

Truth lies not on the surface, but must be sought after with diligence. This is true in every science; but most of all true in religion.

In all other sciences, only intellectual powers are required. In religion, there must be integrity of heart, and a sincere desire to practice, as well as to know, the will of God.

To other knowledge there is no obstruction from within: if only there be a sufficiency of information and of capacity to comprehend it, truth will make its way into the mind of those who seek it. But to the progress of religious truth there are many obstacles in the heart of man; many prejudices, many passions, many interests present a barrier to obstruct its entrance into the soul: and these must be in a great measure removed, before the light of truth can break through the clouds which intercept its rays.

Yet in one respect religious truth is of easier attainment than any other: for to the acquisition of it great intellectual powers are not necessary: nor is special learning necessary. All that is needed is a humble, teachable spirit, that will seek instruction from God, and receive with child-like simplicity all that God has spoken in his word. Such a one, provided he seeks with diligence, and with a determination of heart to fulfill the will of God as far as he can learn it, will assuredly be guided into all truth.

But that very simplicity of mind which is necessary to the attainment of truth, subjects a person, if he is not much upon his guard, to be imposed upon by those, who, "by fair speeches, deceive the hearts of the simple." Against such teachers Paul felt it necessary to caution his converts frequently, Romans 16:17-18; since, though agents only of the prince of darkness, they put on the appearance of angels of light, 2 Corinthians 11:13-15. Against such he here cautions the Hebrew Christians, entreating them to bear in mind what they had been taught by those who had been over them in the Lord, and not to allow themselves to be turned aside from the truth which they had received.

In the words here addressed to them, we see,

I. A caution given—

There were, even in the apostolic age, "many vain-talkers and deceivers, and especially among the circumcision, who by their subtle disputations subverted whole houses, Titus 1:10-11," and "caused the way of truth to be evil spoken of, 2 Peter 2:1-3."

In this day likewise there are not lacking teachers of a similar description, who bring forward some favorite notions of their own, "in order to draw away disciples after them, Acts 20:29-30." Against these we must at all times be on our guard, lest at any time we be "carried away":

1. By legal doctrines—

It was against these more particularly that the Apostle here cautioned the Hebrews. The great scope of his epistle was to show that the rites and ceremonies, on which the Jews laid so great a stress, were abrogated, and superseded by a better dispensation. And the strange doctrines hinted at in the text are put in immediate connection with "foods, (such as were enjoined or prohibited under

the Mosaic dispensation,) which had not profited those who had been occupied therein." To such an extent were the ceremonies of the law insisted on by some, that they affirmed that no one could be saved without a strict observance of them, Acts 15:1. Colossians 2:16. Thus they perverted the Gospel of Christ, by uniting with the blood of Christ another ground of dependence for our justification before God, Galatians 1:7.

And though Judaism is not now insisted on as it then was, there is the same disposition in men to combine something of their own with faith in Christ, as a joint ground of their hope. Men are still as averse as ever to a free salvation that is all of grace. They would have it to be in some measure "of works;" not aware, that it must be wholly either of works, or of grace, Romans 4:4; Romans 11:6. They do not see that the very instant any works of ours are admitted as meriting salvation, either in whole or in part, salvation is no more of grace, and man has to all eternity a ground of boasting before God, Romans 3:27.

Be on your guard then that you be not carried away by such legal statements as too commonly prevail even in the present enlightened age: for it is not necessary to go to Papists in order to hear such doctrines: they are still heard among us, notwithstanding this error formed the chief ground of our separation from the Church of Rome, and of our protesting against their fatal heresies. But know that, if you add anything to the work of Christ as a joint ground of your hope, you make void the Gospel of Christ, and must inevitably and eternally perish! Romans 9:30-33 and Galatians 5:2; Galatians 5:4.

2. By Antinomian doctrines—

To these also there is a reference in the preceding context. Many converts, and especially from among the Gentiles, had but very imperfect views of that holiness which the Gospel enjoins. The great degree of criminality which attaches to fornication and adultery, was, through the influence of opinions imbibed in their Gentile state, but indistinctly seen: and hence, for the purpose of rectifying their views, the Apostle shows them, that, though marriage was honorable in all, having been ordained by God himself, that species of sin which they were disposed to justify, was most dishonorable, and most offensive in the sight of God, "who would judge both adulterers and the immoral" with the utmost severity, verse 4. Many indeed would plead for such indulgences; as we see in the Ephesian Church: but Paul, warning the Ephesian converts, says, "Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things comes the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience! Ephesians 5:5-6. Revelation 2:14; Revelation 2:20."

Thus at this time also there are persons who teach, that the law is not a rule of life to believers; and that Christ's righteousness being perfect, they have a sanctification in him, and need not seek to have any sanctification in their own souls and lives. From a professed zeal for the honor of Christ, they would set aside all need of personal holiness, and bring men to their heavenly inheritance without putting them to the trouble of seeking a fitness for it.

But this is an awful delusion. It is very specious indeed, because it pretends to exalt the honor of Christ: but, in reality, it greatly dishonors him, inasmuch as it makes him, not a friend of sinners, but of sin; which, if unmortified and unsubdued, would incapacitate the sinner for the enjoyment of Heaven, even if he were admitted there, Revelation 21:27.

But be on your guard against this doctrine also, a doctrine foreign to the whole tenor of Scripture, from the beginning to the end; a doctrine most injurious to God's honor, directly repugnant to the great end for which Christ came into the world; (which was "to save his people from their sins, Matthew 1:21;") and utterly subversive of the whole work of the Spirit in the souls of men, Ezekiel 36:25-27. 1 Peter 1:2. Whatever stress we may lay on the work of Christ, (and we cannot possibly rely too much or too simply upon it for our justification before God,) it is an unalterable truth, that "without holiness, (real, personal, universal holiness,) no man shall see the Lord, Hebrews 12:14."

3. By erroneous doctrines of whatever kind—

It were endless to attempt to enumerate all the heresies which have arisen, and are yet found in the Christian Church. Some are entirely subversive of Christianity itself, being nothing less than "a denial of the Lord who bought us, Jude verse 3." Others are founded upon some truth which is carried to excess, and held to the exclusion of other truths which are equally important in their place. Of this kind are the tenets of those who fiercely contend for human systems, whether Calvinistic or Arminian, taking only partial views of divine truth, and wresting every passage of Scripture which seems to militate against their favorite scheme. The truth is, that the way of salvation, if we will only submit to be taught of God, is very plain and simple: it is all comprehended in these few words, "Faith working by love." But if, instead of taking the plain declarations of Scripture for our guide, we will refine upon them, and invent modes of speaking which are widely different from them, and insist upon our own subtleties as if they were the very Word of God himself—then it is no wonder that heresies arise, and divisions ensue. But against all dogmas of man's invention we would be on our guard. In order to our preservation from them, we have in our text,

II. An antidote recommended—

We should seek to be "established with grace;" or, as that expression imports, we should be established in the Gospel; (for that is the grace to which Jewish ceremonies are opposed, and it is "the grace wherein we stand, Romans 5:2.")

1. As a revelation of grace in itself—

It is so; it is so altogether.

The whole plan, as devised by Almighty God, was formed in his eternal counsels without any reference to human merit, or to any recompense which the whole universe could ever confer.

It was undertaken by the Son, purely from his own love and mercy, to die in the place of sinners, and to expiate their guilt by his own blood.

The Holy Spirit also engaged to apply that redemption to God's chosen people, and to bring them to the possession of all its blessings by his sovereign and all-sufficient grace.

All was the free gift of God to man: and there is not a Christian in the universe who must not say, "By the grace of God I am what I am!"

Now to be established in these views is a grand preservative against error of every kind: and a man well grounded in them is incapable of being moved by all the artifices of the most subtle deceivers. Tell the man that he does not deserve the wrath of God; or that he may save himself by the merit of his works; or that, if he cannot save himself entirely, he may in part, by some good works and righteousness of his own; you may perplex him perhaps, especially if he is unaccustomed to weigh the arguments of sophists; but you can no more convince him, than you can persuade him that he is an angel, or that he is able to create a world. He has within himself the witness of the truths which he maintains; and as complete a consciousness of his need of the Gospel, and of its suitableness to his necessities, as he has of his need of food for his body, and of the suitableness of food to recruit his strength.

Hence, as a security against their being beguiled by enticing words, the Apostle says to the Colossian Church, "As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord—so walk in him, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith as you have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving, Colossians 2:4; Colossians 2:6-7."

2. As a dispensation of grace to the soul—

The same covenant which says, "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sins will I remember no more," says, "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, Jeremiah 31:33-34. Hebrews 10:16-17." It even engages to do this so effectually, that, notwithstanding all their outward temptations and inward corruptions, they shall never finally depart from God, Jeremiah 32:38-41. In this light then should the Gospel be viewed, namely, as a provision for the "turning of men, not only from darkness unto light, but from the power of Satan unto God." For this end is "all fullness of grace treasured up in Christ," that "out of it all his people might receive," and that "the grace so conferred may be sufficient for them."

Now if once we are established in this view of the Gospel, we may bid defiance to all the sophistries that would relax our obligation to holiness. We shall see that holiness is the grand constituent of salvation, inasmuch as it is the restoration of God's image to the soul, even of that image which alone can fit us for the enjoyment of his presence, and without which we must remain everlasting objects of his utter abhorrence. Indeed, if once we are established in this grace, all the subtleties of controversialists will lose their power. We shall see that a perfect conformity to God's likeness is the only thing which we need to be concerned about; and the only end for which even the purest principles are of any value. This well fixed in the mind, our walk will be steadfast; nor, however violent the assaults of heretics may be upon us, shall any of them prevail to "carry us away."

We are yet further called to notice,

III. The recommendation enforced—

"It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace." Yes truly, "it is a good thing," for it brings:

1. Peace into the soul—

Those who are tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, or who are entering deeply into controversies of any kind, are for the most part strangers to peace. They are distracted and disquieted, and frequently "filled with envy, and strife, and railings, and evil surmisings," and all manner of unhallowed dispositions, 1 Timothy 4:3-5. Their very contentions are for the most part not so much for truth, as for victory.

But the man whose heart is established with grace, dwells, as it were, in the higher regions of the air, where he is not subject to those storms and tempests which agitate our lower world. His mind is kept in perfect peace, because it is fixed, trusting in the Lord. He is content to be ignorant of things which God has not revealed; and to let people entertain different opinions from himself on matters of doubtful disputation. He knows assuredly, that, while his faith in Christ is firm and operative, he cannot materially err;

and that "he shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end."

2. Stability into the life and conduct—

He leaves others to enter into controversies; he is concerned only about the maintenance of the divine life in his soul. Others are espousing different opinions, and joining with different parties; and some are running the whole round of Christian profession, one day holding communion with one Church or people, and another day anathematizing them as heretics and fanatics.

But the Christian who is established with grace, moves on in one even tenor, and makes his profiting daily to appear. He grows in grace, he makes visible attainments in holiness, "he runs with patience the race that is set before him." Like the sun in its course, he diffuses blessings all around him: and, having finished his course, he sets, to rise in another hemisphere, where he shall shine with undiminished luster for ever and ever! Matthew 13:43.

ADDRESS—

1. Do not be ignorant of the Gospel of Christ—

It is quite a mistake to imagine that, because there is a great diversity of sentiment upon some points, there is nothing certain: for on the points which are of fundamental importance, all true Christians are agreed. They are all agreed:

1. that we are guilty, helpless, and undone;
2. that it is in and through the Lord Jesus Christ alone that any human being can be saved;
3. that we need his righteousness to justify us, and his grace to sanctify our corrupt nature;
4. that whatever attainments in holiness any man may reach, he will still be indebted to the free, and sovereign, and undeserved grace of God for all from first to last!

Get the knowledge, the practical knowledge of this; and all will be well. You may clearly see that much human learning is not necessary for this: on the contrary, human learning, if unsanctified, is rather an impediment to this, especially if it is relied upon, as it too often is, as a sufficient instructor, and a safe guide, 1 Corinthians 1:18-21. There is no safe guide but the Holy Spirit: and "he often reveals unto babes and sucklings the things which are hidden from the wise and prudent, Matthew 11:25." The way to seek divine knowledge, is to study the Holy Scriptures with humility and prayer, and in dependence on the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, Proverbs 2:1-6; and if you do so study them, you shall "be guided into all truth," and "be made wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus."

2. Do not be satisfied with indistinct and shallow views of the Gospel—

There are in the Gospel "heights and depths" that can never be explored. We may not indeed have different truths brought to our view: but the same truths will be brought with ten-fold clearness and power to the soul. It is the same sun which lights us amidst the gloom of winter, and in the height of summer: but how different are the sensations it excites, and the effects it produces! Yet of these feelings and these effects the peasant is as sensible as the greatest monarch upon earth. Know then your privilege, every one of you, and seek the enjoyment of it: and let every one of you labor and pray, that "his light be as that of the sun, which shines more and more unto the perfect day, Proverbs 4:18."

#2346

THE CHRISTIAN'S ALTAR

Hebrews 13:10

"We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat."

Christianity itself is simple, comprising two points:

1. Our fall in Adam.
2. Our recovery by Christ.

Yet it admits of an endless diversity of statement and illustration. The Mosaic institutions especially, which were intended to shadow forth the Gospel, supply an inexhaustible fund of observation for the elucidation of it. The Jews gloried in their law, and were with great difficulty brought to renounce their reliance on it for salvation. But from the law itself we borrow those very illustrations which

place in the strongest possible view the superiority of the Gospel. Their altar, for instance, was their great medium of access to, and of communion with God. But the Apostle, guarding them against an undue respect to outward observances, tells them, that we, we Christians, have an altar far superior to theirs, "an altar, of which those who serve the tabernacle, have no right to eat."

From these words, I shall take occasion to show:

I. The pre-eminence which we, under the Gospel dispensation, enjoy—

The Jews had two altars; the altar of incense, and the altar of burned-offering. It is of this latter alone that we shall have any occasion to speak at this time. On this altar they offered all their sacrifices; certain portions of which were consumed upon the altar, and the remainder was left for the subsistence of the priests, Numbers 18:8-19. 1 Corinthians 9:13; on which account "they had no inheritance in Israel, seeing that the Lord was their inheritance, Numbers 18:20-21."

On some occasions, particularly that of the peace-offering, the offerers themselves also partook, and had by far the larger share, Leviticus 7:11-21. But when any sacrifice, the blood of which was carried within the veil, was offered, no one was allowed to eat of that: it was wholly burned outside the camp, while the tabernacle was standing; and outside the city, when the temple was built, Leviticus 6:30; Leviticus 16:27; and, in order to fulfill this type, our blessed Lord, who offered himself a sacrifice for the sins of the world, suffered outside the gates of Jerusalem, verse 11, 12.

Now, his blood was carried within the veil; he himself, as our High-priest, bearing it there for us, Hebrews 9:11-12. Yet of his sacrifice may we all partake, provided we truly believe in him: but to those who yet serve the Jewish tabernacle, is all participation of this altar forbidden: the altar and the provision derived from it are the exclusive portion of those who believe in Christ.

Now then the question arises, "Why cannot those who serve the Jewish tabernacle, partake of this altar?" The answer is plain: they are conversant only with shadows, now that the substance is come; and by adhering to their ritual observances, prove to demonstration, that they do not believe in Him, who, by the sacrifice of himself, has fulfilled and abrogated them all. Even under the Jewish dispensation, the offerers derived no spiritual benefit from their sacrifices, any further than they looked through those sacrifices to Christ. How then can they derive any benefit from Christ, whom they pertinaciously reject?

Conceive, for a moment, what those who partook of the Jewish altar professed. They professed, that they were sinners, deserving of God's righteous indignation: that they desired reconciliation with their offended God (for "they must bring their offerings with their own hands, Leviticus 7:29-30."): they must also "lay their hands upon the head of their sacrifice," to show that they transferred their guilt to him, Leviticus 4:4; Leviticus 4:15; Leviticus 4:24; Leviticus 4:33. It was in the due observance of these rites that they became partakers of the altar: and if they had neglected their duty in these respects, they would have derived no benefit from the altar, or from the sacrifices that were offered upon it.

Now these are the very things which are to be done by us under the New Testament dispensation. We must view the Lord Jesus Christ as the appointed Sacrifice; and bring him to the altar, and transfer our sins to his sacred head, and found all our hopes of acceptance on him alone. But this is what a Jew, who is yet resting on the observance of his legal ceremonies, can never do; and, consequently, he can never, while continuing in his error, partake of the benefits of the Gospel salvation. Our blessed Lord has declared this in the plainest terms: "If you believe not that I am He, you shall die in your sins!"

Seeing, then, that we Christians exclusively enjoy this high privilege, let us contemplate:

II. The duties arising from it—

In fact, this is the proper foundation of all our duties: for, though it is true that we are bound to serve God as our Creator, yet, under the Christian dispensation, we would receive a still higher impulse from all the wonders of redemption: "Being bought with a price, we should glorify God with our bodies and our spirits, which are his, 1 Corinthians 6:20." But, to speak more particularly, have we access to this altar?

1. Let us live upon that altar—

The priests subsisted altogether on the provisions which were derived from the altar. Now we all, if we believe in Christ, are "kings and priests unto God:" there is no difference in this respect between male and female; all are "a royal priesthood;" and all are entitled equally to a full participation of the Redeemer's sacrifice: "The life which we now live in the flesh, we are to live altogether by faith in the Son of God, who has loved us, and given himself for us! Galatians 2:20." There must be no depending on our works. While living upon Christ, we must "show forth our faith by our works;" but our works must proceed from life already received, and by strength derived from Christ. It is from life, and not for life, that all our works must be performed.

2. Let us present all our offerings upon it—

There was nothing presented to God, except the first-fruits, Leviticus 2:12, without a memorial of it being burned upon the altar. The

part which was there consumed was God's share; of which he, as it were, partook with the offerer: from whence it is called "the food of the offering made by fire unto the Lord, Leviticus 3:11."

Now, whatever we have to offer unto God, our prayers, our praises, our alms, verse 15, 16, our whole selves, Romans 12:1, we must lay it upon that altar. Never can it ascend up to God as a sweet savor, unless it is laid upon Christ, and ascend from him inflamed with fire that came down from Heaven. "It is the altar that sanctifies our every gift, Matthew 23:19;" and hence Peter gives us this plain direction, "To whom coming," that is, coming to Christ as "the living foundation-stone" of God's spiritual temple, "you also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ, 1 Peter 2:4-5." O! let us ever remember, that neither our persons nor our services can ever be accepted by God in any other way than this.

3. Let us invite the whole world to a participation of it—

There is no bar to our admission to it, but unbelief. The very murderers of our Lord were invited to accept the benefits of our Lord's sacrifice. It matters not whether we have been Jews or Gentiles; if only we come to Christ, we shall find acceptance through him: for he has told us that "none shall ever be cast out who come unto God by him." Let us proclaim this to the very ends of the earth, that "from the rising of the sun, even to the going down of the same, God's name may be great among the Gentiles; that in every place incense may be offered to him, and a pure offering, Malachi 1:11;" and that "all flesh may see the salvation of God, Luke 3:6."

Let me now address a few words,

1. To those who place an undue reliance on these advantages—

Many imagine, that because "they have access to God through Christ, Ephesians 3:18," they shall, of necessity, find acceptance with God. But there must be a suitableness in the sacrifices which we offer to him. What if men had offered to God "the torn, the lame, the sick; would God have accepted it at their hands? Malachi 1:13-14." No! nor will he accept us, if we do not offer to him such sacrifices as he demands: they must be "holy, if we would have them acceptable, Romans 12:1." There must be in us a penitent and contrite spirit, Psalm 51:17; and if this be lacking, our every sacrifice will be abhorred: "He who kills an ox, will be as if he slew a man; and he who sacrifices a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; and he who offers an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood, Isaiah 66:2-3." Let us then examine well our motives, our principles, our manner of drawing near to God; that He who searches the heart, and to whom the inmost recesses of it are open, Hebrews 4:13. The sacrifices were not only flayed, but cut down the back-bone, to be inspected, may approve of us as "Israelites indeed, in whom is no deceit."

2. To those who are endeavoring to improve them aright—

I have said that your offerings must be holy. But be not therefore discouraged; as though you, on account of your imperfections, could never find acceptance with God: for "God knows whereof you are made, and remembers that you are but dust:" and, as under the law, if a man were poor, and unable to bring a lamb for a trespass-offering, God permitted him to bring two turtle-doves, or two young pigeons, "such as he could get," (repeating it no less than four times, that he might bring such as he could get, Leviticus 14:22; Leviticus 14:30-32.) Yes, if for a free-will offering he condescended to accept even "leavened bread, Leviticus 7:13," and a mutilated beast, Leviticus 22:21-23, say, who among you needs to be discouraged?

Nay, I will even ask, who among you has sincerely, however imperfectly, offered himself up to God, and not found some token of his acceptance, and some manifestations of his love, in his own soul? Doubtless, as the Levites, when dedicating themselves to the Lord, were first sprinkled with the water of purifying, and then shaved their flesh, and washed their clothes, and then offered their sacrifice, Numbers 8:7-8; Numbers 8:21; so should you, as far as possible, put off the old man, and put on the new, while you are coming to Christ for pardon and acceptance. But for real efficiency in holiness, this mode must be reversed—you must first lay hold on his promises of mercy, and then "cleanse yourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God, 2 Corinthians 7:1."

Nevertheless, I still ask, have you not found God ever ready to hear and to accept your prayers? It is remarkable, that though a peace-offering was to be eaten on the day that it was presented, yet, if it were offered as a free-will offering in consequence of a vow, it might be feasted upon by the offerer both on that day and on the day following; though by no means on the third day, Leviticus 7:15-16. So I will ask, whether the savor of your religious exercises has not often abode upon your soul long after the hour in which they were presented unto God? If it continues not a third day, it is to teach you, that you are not to live upon your frames and feelings, but to be continually presenting yourselves to God afresh. Take then this encouragement from the Lord; and let the fire never go out upon your altar, and the altar never lack a sacrifice to ascend up with a fragrance of a sweet smell before your God, Ephesians 5:2.

THE BURNT-SACRIFICES TYPICAL OF CHRIST

Hebrews 13:11-13

"The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore."

SUCH is the proneness of men to superstition, that they need to watch with care, lest, after having once shaken off its fetters, they are again subjected to its dominion. The Hebrew Christians in particular were liable to be drawn aside from the simplicity of the Gospel: their fond attachment to the law of Moses, seconded by the subtle arguments of Judaizing teachers, exposed them to continual danger.

Hence the inspired author of this epistle cautioned them against returning to their former bondage. And, lest they would be led to think, that by renouncing the law of Moses, they deprived themselves of the blessings which were procured by their sacrifices, he tells them, that this was by no means the case; yes, that, on the contrary, they were partakers of a better altar, to which the adherents to Judaism had no access; and that the very ordinances in which the Jews trusted, pointed out this truth in a clear and convincing manner; for not even the high-priest himself was permitted to eat of the sacrifices whose blood he had carried within the veil. Whereas every true Christian was permitted to eat of that sacrifice which alone could atone for sin; and therefore, so far from there being any necessity for them to revert to Judaism in order to partake of the Jewish sacrifices, the Jews themselves must be converted to Christianity in order to obtain the full benefit even of those sacrifices which they themselves had offered. This seems to be the true scope of the passage as connected with the context.

To illustrate this more fully, we shall point out,

I. The correspondence between the death of Christ, and the ordinances whereby it was prefigured—

The most minute particulars of the death of Christ were typified under the law, but we shall fix our attention at present on that only which is specified in the text.

The sacrifices on the great day of annual expiation were to be burned outside the camp—

The sacrifices on the great day of atonement were distinguished far above all others, and accompanied with circumstances of peculiar solemnity. Their blood was carried within the veil, and sprinkled upon the mercy-seat, as the means of propitiating the incensed Deity, and of obtaining pardon for the sins committed by the whole nation through the preceding year. A part of most other sacrifices belonged to the priest who offered them: but of this sacrifice, not the smallest portion was to be preserved for the use of man: all, except the fat which was consumed upon the altar, was carried outside the camp (in later ages, outside the city of Jerusalem) to be destroyed by fire, Leviticus 6:30; Leviticus 16:27. Probably this was intended to exhibit God's indignation against sin, and to show how utterly they must be consumed by the fire of his wrath.

But the words before us reflect a light on this ordinance, which it is of great importance to observe. The burning of the whole of these sacrifices showed that no legal services whatever could entitle a person to partake of them: not even the high-priest himself, who carried their blood within the veil, had any privilege beyond the poorest and basest of the people. They could obtain a saving interest in them only by faith; nor could he taste of them in any other way: though his services were the most sacred, and his access to God far more intimate than any other person, or even he himself at any other period, could enjoy—yet had he no more part in this atonement than every other person might have by the exercise of faith.

Consequently those who, under the Christian dispensation, would trust in the sacrifice of Christ, would participate in the benefits, from which the high-priest himself would be excluded, if he rested in the outward services without looking through them to the great, the true atonement.

Agreeably to this typical ordinance, our Lord suffered outside the gate of Jerusalem—

The death of Christ was that which the annual sacrifices typically represented. He died for sin, and, after he had offered himself upon the cross, entered into Heaven itself with his own blood, there to present it before the Father on our behalf: and it was by this means that he "sanctified," or consecrated to himself, a peculiar people, who would for ever enjoy the virtue of his atonement.

But, in order that his death might produce the full effect, it was necessary that it would be conformed in every respect to the ordinances whereby it had been prefigured. Hence it was accomplished "outside the gate" of Jerusalem; so strictly did it accord with the most minute particulars that had been before determined in the Divine counsels.

Whether there was any mystery couched under this event, we cannot absolutely determine. We would not indeed have discerned perhaps anything particular in it, if light had not been thrown upon it by an inspired writer. But, as we are certain that this event was a completion of the pre-existing ordinance, it is not improbable that it might have some further signification. While it shows us to what a degree "Christ became a curse for us," it may also intimate, that the virtue of his sacrifice was not to be confined to those who were within the pale of the Jewish Church, but rather to extend to those who were without it, even to the whole Gentile world.

The exhortation, which the Apostle grounds upon these circumstances, leads us to point out,

II. The conformity which Christians also are to bear, both to the law and to him who fulfilled it—

Doubtless, everything which Christ has done for us, entails on us an obligation to conform ourselves to his mind and will.

But the circumstances before considered, suggest to us some appropriate and important duties:

1. We must renounce all legal hopes, that we may depend on Christ alone—

The particular injunction to go forth to Christ outside the camp, intimates, that we must turn our back upon all the legal services, and trust alone in that sacrifice which he offered outside the gate. The importance of this observation would be more strongly felt by a Hebrew convert, who was assailed with arguments respecting the obligations of the Mosaic law.

But it is, in reality, no less important to us: for, if we do not trust in the blood of bulls and goats, we are ever ready to substitute something in the place of Jesus, as the ground of our confidence. But services, of whatever kind, whether ceremonial or moral, must be renounced in point of dependence. They must not even be blended in any degree with the atonement of Christ, as though the performance of them could procure a saving interest in this. We must be "justified by his blood," and by that alone. If Paul himself desired to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, Philippians 3:9, much more must we. Let us remember then what, not the Gospel only, but even the law itself, speaks to us on this subject; and let us look for a participation in the great Sacrifice, not for, or by our works, but by faith alone.

2. We must forsake all worldly lusts, that we may walk with Christ—

What a perfect deadness to the world did Jesus manifest, when he went forth to the place of execution, giving up himself to that accursed death, from which he could have been so easily delivered! The world had nothing that could fascinate him: its cares, its pleasures, its honors, its society—were all alike indifferent to him. He had only one wish—to fulfill his Father's will, and finish the work he had been commissioned to perform. In turning his back on that devoted city, he felt no regret, except indeed for the blindness and hardness of the people's hearts.

Thus must we come out of the world which lies in wickedness: we must be "crucified to the world, and the world must be crucified to us, Galatians 6:14." "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," must be abandoned as objects of indifference, as objects of abhorrence. The things that are dearest to flesh and blood, if they stand at all in competition with Christ, are to be hated and forsaken! Our former companions, if they will not travel with us in the heavenly road, are to be left behind; for "what communion has light with darkness, or a believer with an unbeliever? Therefore, says God: Come out from among them, and be separate, 2 Corinthians 6:15; 2 Corinthians 6:17." Even father and mother, and wife and children, yes, and our own lives also, are to be of no account with us, Luke 14:26, if they interfere with our duty to God, or retard the execution of his commands.

3. We must submit to all indignities, that we may resemble Christ—

This is the principal point to which the text refers. Jesus, when carrying his cross from the city to Mount Calvary, was an object of universal execration. Thus, in a measure, must we also be, if we will be his disciples. The world will hate, revile, and persecute us, as soon as ever we become his faithful adherents. "If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, so will they those of his household." But we must not be deterred from our duty by these things: we must "follow our Lord outside the camp, not only bearing his reproach," but esteeming it our riches! Hebrews 11:26, and rejoicing that we are counted worthy to suffer shame for his sake! Acts 5:41.

He has told us beforehand, that "in the world we shall have tribulation," and that, in proof of our attachment to him, we must "take up our cross daily and follow him." Expecting this therefore, we must "count the cost;" that, if we are treated "as the filth of the world and the off-scouring of all things," we may, like him, "endure the cross and despise the shame, Hebrews 12:2." Nor would it ever seem hard to us to go in the path which he has trodden before us. On the contrary, to be conformed to him would be our highest ambition: "for if we suffer with him for a time, we shall reign also with him, 2 Timothy 2:12" in glory for evermore.

THE CHRISTIAN'S PORTION

Hebrews 13:14

"For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come!"

Accustomed as we are to expect a future state of existence, we scarcely ever reflect on the source from which we have attained the knowledge of such a state. It was not from reason that we derived it; for the wisest philosophers of Greece and Rome could arrive at no certainty respecting it: it is "the Gospel which has brought life and immortality to light," and has thereby given us an unerring standard, by which to try every occurrence, of whatever kind.

From a view of eternal realities, we learn neither to indulge undue delight in what is gratifying to our feelings; nor, on the other hand, to yield to dejection under the pressure of what is painful. We learn simply to approve ourselves to God; and to look for his approbation in a future world, as a recompense for all that we can either do or suffer for him in this present life. This thought reconciled the Apostle to shame and reproach for his Redeemer's sake; for he knew that "here he had no continuing city: but he sought one to come;" and regarded the possession of that as an ample reward for all that man could inflict upon him.

The words before us will lead me to show,

I. The transitoriness of earthly things—

We have nothing durable in this life—

If anything could have been expected to continue, it would have been the city of Jerusalem: because it was, beyond all others in the universe, "the city of God," and because "its foundations were like the great mountains." But that was soon to be destroyed, so that not one stone would remain upon another that would not be thrown down. And, with the city destroyed, the whole civil and religious polity of the nation would be dissolved. Thus it had been with the great empires which had successively been established in Chaldea, Persia, and Greece: and thus, in due season, it would be with Rome also, though it was now the mistress of the world. Even this globe itself, and all which it contains, shall before long be burned up with fire, and utterly dissolved; so that nothing under the sun can be considered as of abiding continuance.

This is a matter of daily experience to us all—

We may know but little either of history or prophecy; but who does not with his own eyes behold the transitory nature of everything around him? The seasons come, and pass away; and in like manner the generations of men vanish from the earth in quick succession. It was but the other day, and those who are now in the meridian of life were children: and in a few more days they will be swept away, to make room for others who shall hereafter arise. Since the beginning of the present year, how many have been removed into the eternal world! And before the expiration of another year, how many, who are now in health, will be taken to their long home! Truly, we are like the shadow of a cloud sweeping over the plain; and soon shall vanish, to be seen no more!

This will account for,

II. The portion which the Christian desires—

For him a continuing city is prepared—

God himself has prepared it for him! Yes, God himself has built it: and its foundations are laid so deep, that nothing can ever shake them, Hebrews 11:10; Hebrews 11:16. To that city the Christian is already so far come, that he is entitled to all its privileges; and has, in a state of actual preparation for him, a mansion, in which he is to dwell for ever, Hebrews 12:22 with John 14:2-3.

In comparison with that city, all earthly edifices are unworthy of a thought. Not only are its walls and its foundations inconceivably superior to all that man can construct, but the very light that lightens it is altogether different: for, instead of needing the rays "of the sun or of the moon, the glory of God lights it, and the Lamb is the light thereof! Revelation 21:10-23."

To this he constantly directs his steps—

He is careful to inquire his way thither, and to prosecute his journey towards it every day he lives. Like the Patriarchs, he considers himself as a pilgrim and sojourner here: and, like them, whatever difficulties he meets with in the way, he presses forward, determining not to turn aside, or stop, until he has arrived within its gates! Hebrews 11:13-16. He looks to it as the rest that remains for him; nor will he ever relax his labors, until he has attained it, Hebrews 4:1; Hebrews 4:11. In this he may be clearly distinguished from all other persons. Others are desirous of finding somewhat of a present portion: but "he seeks one to come," and makes it the

one great business of his life to secure it.

This subject may be improved,

1. For our conviction—

If this is practical Christianity—then how little have we lived like Christians! We have been ever ready to take up our rest in this world; and for the most part have sought for nothing beyond it. The things of time and sense have had as much effect upon our minds as if they had been of lasting continuance; while the things of eternity have been disregarded, as though they had been altogether transient.

Were it not that we see this conduct all around us, we would scarcely conceive it possible that rational beings would act so irrational a part. Let us lay it to heart, and humble ourselves before God; and "set our affections henceforth on things above, and not on things below."

2. For our consolation—

We may, in the course of our pilgrimage, be oppressed with many troubles: but they are all of short continuance; whereas, the happiness which we have in prospect will abide with us forever. This consideration makes every affliction appear light and momentary, 2 Corinthians 4:17-18; more especially when we reflect that "tribulation is the way to the kingdom;" and that we are, like our blessed Lord himself, to be "made perfect through sufferings."

3. For our direction—

Bear in mind the emptiness and vanity of earthly things, and learn to sit loose to them, "letting your moderation be known unto all men Philippians 4:5." In the use of them, be temperate; and, in the lack of them, be patient and resigned, 1 Corinthians 7:29-31. And set before you "the prize of your high calling," as those did who contended in the Grecian games. Keep it ever in view; and stop not until you have fully attained it. Then shall you have the approbation of your Judge; and before long be received into the bosom of your God!

#2349

THE SACRIFICES TO BE OFFERED BY CHRISTIANS

Hebrews 13:15-16

"Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise--the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

The Jewish yoke was very heavy; and the observance of the Mosaic rites was burdensome in the extreme. From that we are happily delivered. Yet have we an altar upon which we are to attend, and sacrifices which we are bound to offer. Our altar indeed is very different from that of the Jews: as the Apostle has said in the preceding context, "We have an altar, of which they have no right to eat who serve the tabernacle, verse 10." Of their own altar they did partake; the greater part of all the sacrifices being allotted them for their support, Numbers 18:12-13. But even under that dispensation, an intimation was given them, that, when the great offering, which their sacrifices typified, would be presented, they could have no part in it. The offerings which were presented by them for the expiation of sin, were burned outside the camp; no part of them being appropriated to the use of the priests, Leviticus 6:30; Leviticus 16:27.

And such is the sacrifice which was offered by our Lord Jesus Christ for the sins of the world, when he suffered outside the gates of Jerusalem; of which therefore those who continued under that dispensation could not participate. We alone, who renounce all dependence on the works of the law, and found all our hopes on the atonement which Christ has offered, can eat of this altar, and enjoy the benefits which by his meritorious death and passion he has purchased for us.

Again, though of other sacrifices the priests might eat, they might on no account eat the blood: that must be poured out even to the last drop, Deuteronomy 12:23-25. But of our sacrifice, we both eat the flesh and drink the blood: and it is only by so doing that we can obtain eternal life. Indeed on that body and blood we are to feed continually—it is the daily feast of our souls: as our Lord has said, "My flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed, John 6:53-55." Having been offered by our Lord Jesus Christ himself on the altar of his Deity, (for he is at once the Altar, the Sacrifice, and the Priest,) it is accepted for us: and it is both our duty and our privilege to eat of it. But while we thus partake of this altar, we must ourselves offer sacrifices upon it, even "our whole selves, as living sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ, Romans 12:1." To present these is,

I. Our duty—

Two kinds of sacrifices we are to offer, those:

1. Of praise to God—

Praise is most justly due to Him from all his creatures; but more especially from those who have been favored with a revelation of his will, and with the ordinances of his grace. The Jews, as dark as their dispensation was, were infinitely indebted to God for it, Romans 3:2. But infinitely greater are our obligations to him for the fuller manifestations of his mercy to us in Christ Jesus, and for that better covenant of which Jesus is the Surety and the Mediator: "We therefore should offer to our God the sacrifices of praise continually." We should do it, not only at the appointed seasons of morning and evening, which in a lax sense may be called "continually, Exodus 29:42," but throughout the whole day: not indeed in the way of a formal service, but in the frame and habit of our minds, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. This by the prophet is called "the calves of our lips, Hosea 14:2," and, in our text, "the fruit of our lips;" because, as calves and first-fruits of the earth were offered in sacrifice under the law, so are praises under the Gospel dispensation. Under both dispensations, the duty of acknowledging our obligations to God, and our dependence on him, is the same: and therefore, as the Jews confessed both the one and the other by their offerings, so are we to do in ours, "giving thanks to his name."

But it is by Christ alone that our offerings can come up with acceptance before God: for, as the Jews were not at liberty to offer sacrifice any where but upon the altar in Jerusalem, Deuteronomy 12:13-14, so neither can we present to God any sacrifice but on this altar, the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone can sanctify our gifts, and render them in any respect worthy of God's acceptance, John 14:6. Of this it befits us to have as distinct a conception as the Jews themselves had; and never for a moment to approach our God without a deep conviction upon our minds, that in Christ alone can either our persons or our services be ever pleasing in the sight of our God, 1 Peter 2:5.

2. Of beneficence to man—

This also is a duty incumbent on us. God has so ordered in his providence, that there shall always be some who shall stand in need of assistance, and others, who, as his almoners, shall be enabled to dispense the benefits which are required, Deuteronomy 15:11; that by a free exercise of benevolent affections there may be such a measure of equality produced, as may best subserve the interests of the whole, 2 Corinthians 8:14-15 with Exodus 16:16-18. Hence, "to do good, and to share what we have," is an employment in which we would be daily occupied, each of us according to our ability. The poorest, as well as the richest, should, as far as God has enabled him, find delight in this duty, 2 Corinthians 8:2-4; 2 Corinthians 8:12.

Nor should we ever be so engaged in exercises of devotion, as to forget that we have duties to our fellow-creatures, which, in their place, are of equal importance with devotion itself. We may find it good to be on Mount Tabor: but we must not protract our stay there, when there is work to be done by us in the plains below, Matthew 17:1-5. The duties of the second table must not be overlooked, any more than those of the first: nor can any measure of delight in God, ever justify us in neglecting the offices of love to man.

Liberality to the poor, especially when offered upon this altar, the Lord Jesus Christ, is as pleasing to God as any other offering whatever. Such was Paul's view of the support which he had received from the Christians at Philippi; which he represents as "a fragrance of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, and well-pleasing to God, Philippians 4:18." But this also must be offered only through the Lord Jesus Christ: if presented as in itself good and acceptable, it would be rejected of God with as much abhorrence as the bribe of Simon Magus was by the Apostle Peter, Acts 8:18-20.

The direction given by God himself, and which must never in any case be forgotten, is this, "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto God and the Father by him, Colossians 3:17."

But that which in one view is our duty, in another view is,

II. Our privilege—

In this view the injunction in our text is introduced: "We have an altar, of which the Jews, while so continuing, have no right to eat:" "therefore" let us enjoy our high privileges, and offer our sacrifices continually upon this altar. And truly, to offer these sacrifices is a most inestimable privilege: for,

1. We may all present them in our own person—

This the Jews could not do: they must come to the priest, and put their sacrifices into his hands: and he alone could offer them upon the altar. But we who believe in Christ, are "a kingdom of priests:" among us there is "no distinction of male or female, bond or free; but we are all one in Christ Jesus, Galatians 3:28;" "we are all kings and priests unto our God, Revelation 1:6;" "the veil of the temple

was rent in two;" we all "have access unto God through Christ, Ephesians 2:18," "even into the holiest of all, by that new and living way which he has opened for us, Hebrews 10:20-22."

Now let us only conceive what were the feelings of the Jews when they saw their high-priest on the day of annual expiation go within the veil into the presence of Jehovah, even to his mercy-seat, on which he dwelt in the Shechinah, the symbol of his more immediate presence: how highly privileged would they consider him! and how happy would they have accounted themselves, if that honor had been given to them!

But you, beloved, need not envy even the angels themselves: for through Christ you may go, every one of you for himself, "unto God as your exceeding joy," and may "lay hold of him," and commune with him, and hear his voice, and taste his love, and receive into your souls the communications of his grace and peace. It was not of himself alone, but of all the godly without exception, that John affirmed, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, 1 John 1:3."

Learn then, brethren, to appreciate this privilege aright: and let the thought of it encourage you to draw near unto your God continually, and to present to him such sacrifices as the occasion may require.

2. We may be perfectly assured of God's acceptance of them—

There is an excellency in our sacrifices which there was not in those which were offered by the Jewish priests: theirs were of no value at all, but as "shadows of good things to come:" in themselves they were "carnal ordinances," deserving of no better name than "weak and beggarly elements Galatians 4:9 and Hebrews 7:9;" and, if not offered with a suitable frame of mind, they were altogether hateful to God, even as hateful as the cutting off of a dog's neck, or the offering of swine's blood, Isaiah 1:11-14; Isaiah 66:3.

But where does God ever speak in such degrading terms of our sacrifices? "Whoever offers me praise," says he, "glorifies me, Psalm 50:23;" and, "a cup of cold water offered to a disciple for his sake, shall never lose its reward, Matthew 10:42." The two are by God himself brought into a comparison thus: "Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay your vows unto the Most High, Psalm 50:13-14;" "to obey is better than sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of rams, 1 Samuel 15:22."

Besides, the altar on which we present our offerings sanctifies everything that is put upon it. Leaven was expressly forbidden to be offered on the Jewish altar, Leviticus 2:11; yet in a sacrifice of thanksgiving, or of the first-fruits, it might be offered, Leviticus 7:11-13; Leviticus 23:17. So shall "the fruit of our lips," and "the first-fruits of our substance" be accepted, Proverbs 3:9-10, notwithstanding any imperfection with which they are offered, if only they are presented through Christ with a humble and contrite spirit: for Christ, our great High-priest, who is our altar, is also "our Advocate with the Father;" and "the incense of his prayers ascends with every sacrifice which we offer, and ensures the acceptance of it before God, Revelation 8:3-4."

Who with such an assurance as this, would not wish to present his sacrifices unto God daily, and without ceasing?

3. We all have liberty to eat of our own sacrifices—

This liberty, in reference to some sacrifices, was conceded to the offerers under the Jewish law, Deuteronomy 12:5-7; but to us it is conceded in every offering which we can present. Do we offer the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving? "Our mouth shall be filled as with marrow and fatness, while we praise our God with joyful lips, Psalm 63:5." Do we offer our mite for the relief of his indigent and distressed people? Hear how he speaks of it: "If you deal your bread to the hungry, and bring the poor that are cast out to your house; if, when you see the naked, you cover him, and hide not yourself from your own flesh; then shall your light break forth as the morning, and your health shall spring forth speedily; and your righteousness shall go before you; and the glory of the Lord shall be your reward." And again, "If you draw out your soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall your light rise in obscurity, and your darkness be as the noon-day: and the Lord shall guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and make fat your bones: and you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not, Isaiah 58:7-11."

I appeal with confidence to all: When did you ever present any offering, whether of gratitude to God or love to man, upon this altar, and not feed richly on it yourselves? When did not fire descend from Heaven into your soul, to testify of God's acceptance of your offering? Or when did you not, after such an offering, depart, "filled and satisfied with the fatness of his house, Psalm 36:8." At no period did he ever dismiss you, without "satiating your weary soul, and replenishing your sorrowful soul, Jeremiah 31:25." Abound then in these sacrifices, and it shall be well with you; for you shall eat of them richly both in time and eternity, Isaiah 3:10. 1 Timothy 6:17-19.

ADDRESS—

1. To the wretched votaries of this world—

What a wretched and worthless altar have you! And what costly offerings are you daily presenting upon it! Your time, your talents, your very souls, you are sacrificing upon that altar! You would weep over the devotees who cast themselves under the wheels of the car of Juggernaut: why do you not weep over yourselves, when, with all your light and knowledge, you are acting a part not less infatuated than they?

Compare your state with that of the true Christian. He lives only to serve, and honor, and exalt his God: but you live only to please the world, and to gratify yourselves. He accounts nothing too great to sacrifice unto Jehovah—you will not sacrifice one lust, or interest, for him. To the world, and to self, do you devote your every hour, your every thought. And while you have eaten of your altar, which of course you have done, what have you done but "fed upon ashes, while a deceived heart has turned you aside, so that you could not deliver your soul, or say, Is there not a lie in my right hand, Isaiah 44:20."

And do you suppose, that, while you are partaking thus of the world's altar, you can partake of the Lord's also? Assuredly not: "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils—you cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils, 1 Corinthians 10:21;" "you cannot serve both God and Mammon, Matthew 6:24." I call you then to consider what will be the outcome of a worldly life: for "if you love the world, whatever you may imagine, the love of the Father is not in you, 1 John 2:15-16." Let me entreat you then to go to your God, and to present to him that prayer of David, "Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked works with those who work iniquity; and let me not eat of their dainties, Psalm 141:4." For be assured, that, if you do not devote yourselves to God through Christ in this world, then you can never dwell with him in the world to come.

2. To the friends and worshipers of the Lord Jesus Christ—

What a blessed employment is yours! A life of praise to God; and a life of love to man! What more can you wish for? What can add to your happiness, except it be an increase of grace to live more than ever unto God? Look at the angels around the throne: methinks, you have already invaded their office, and entered upon their bliss. Are they ever praising God? That is your employment day and night. Are they "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister unto those who shall be heirs of salvation, Hebrews 1:14." That also is your daily work, who are "doing good unto all men, and especially unto those who are of the household of faith, Galatians 6:10." Go you on then in this blessed career: and abound daily more and more. And know that, as by the neglect of your duties "you may suffer loss in Heaven, 1 Corinthians 3:15," so by abounding in all the fruits of righteousness, you may augment your blessedness in Heaven, and obtain through Christ "an abundant entrance" into the realms of bliss! 2 Peter 1:10-11.

#2350

THE DUTY OF CHRISTIANS, AND THE RESPONSIBILITY OF MINISTERS

Hebrews 13:17

"Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you."

MAN, as a social being, has duties to the society of which he is a member: and of these duties he must be reminded, no less than of those which are purely personal. The Church of Christ is one great family, Ephesians 3:15, in which, as in every other family, order must be observed, by the exercise of power in those who preside, and a submission to it among those who are placed under their direction. The government that shall be exercised in it is appointed by God himself; who has invested his ministers with power to rule, and has required of their people a submission to their authority.

But as, on the one hand, there has been among some who have presided an unscriptural usurpation of authority, very different from that which God ever committed to them; so, on the other hand, there is among others a very unscriptural disregard of that authority which is legitimate, and which every minister of God is bound to exercise in that society over which he presides.

For the due administration of order and good government in the Church, the Apostle, having finished his directions respecting personal duties, proceeds to give one, which more immediately relates to our social fellowship, but which is of the greatest consequence to the welfare of that family of which we are members.

In calling your attention to this apostolic precept, I shall have occasion to set before you,

I. The duty of people towards their minister—

A shepherd naturally presides over his flock: and so must a pastor of God's Church exercise rule over that flock which he feeds, over which the Holy Spirit himself has constituted him an overseer, Acts 20:28." Not that civil power was ever delegated by God to his ministers; that exclusively belongs to the civil magistrates, Romans 13:1-6. If the Lord Jesus Christ, when appealed to as an

arbitrator in relation to civil rights, said, "Who made me a ruler and a arbiter over you, Luke 12:13-14," then much less can any claim of temporal authority belong to those who are called by him to the administration of affairs which are purely spiritual. Yet is there power given to ministers:

1. As ambassadors from God—

August as this title is, we claim it as of right belonging to us: for though we would by no means exalt ourselves, it befits us, and is our bounden duty, to "magnify our office, Romans 11:13." We come from God to you, and proclaim to you in his name the terms on which he will forgive your past rebellion, and receive you to his favor. It is in the very place of Christ that we stand, when we entreat you for his sake to be reconciled to God, 2 Corinthians 5:20.

The word which we preach to you is God's, and by you "it must be received, not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the Word of God, 1 Thessalonians 2:13." If our testimony be rejected, it is not man, but God himself, whom you reject, Matthew 10:40-41. 1 Thessalonians 4:8. See also 1 Samuel 8:7. Doubtless, you must judge how far the voice of the minister accords with the Word of God: for it is to that extent only that you are bound to pay any attention to it. So far are you to be from receiving the word of man implicitly and without examination, that you are required of God himself "not to believe every spirit, but to test the spirits whether they be of God, 1 John 4:1;" and to "prove all things, and hold fast that only which is good, 1 Thessalonians 5:21." But when "the word which is delivered to you is that only which your minister has himself received from the Lord, 1 Corinthians 15:3," then must you obey it as much as if it was delivered to you by God himself in an audible voice from Heaven.

Now then we hesitate not to declare, that all which we preach unto you respecting your fallen state, and the necessity of your believing in Christ as the appointed Savior of the world, and of your giving up yourselves to him "in body, soul, and spirit, to be sanctified wholly" to his service—is the very truth of God revealed in his Gospel. And while we affectionately entreat, we do also authoritatively enjoin, your acceptance of it, and your submission to it: and we affirm, that, if you reject this Gospel, you do it at your peril, and with a certainty of incurring God's everlasting displeasure! Hebrews 2:3. 1 Peter 4:17-18.

2. As stewards over his family—

This also is a character belonging to us, 1 Corinthians 4:1, and a character with which a measure of authority is of necessity connected, Luke 12:42. Under that character we must, at the peril of our own souls, be faithful to you, and to our God, whose servants we are, 1 Corinthians 4:2. Whatever we judge to be the portion most requisite for your spiritual health, that we must administer, whether it be instruction or exhortation, consolation or reproof. We must no further seek to please you, than will be for your real welfare, Romans 15:2; if we go beyond this, we cannot be servants of Jesus Christ, Galatians 1:10.

Of course, in the exercise of discipline, there will be some things which will be more clear, and some which will be of a more dubious character. In those which are clear, and where the Word of God has precisely marked the course to be pursued, the submission of the people to the sentence of the minister should be willing and unreserved: and in those which, though not expressly defined by God, are necessary for the maintenance of order, a willing deference would be paid to the judgment of him on whom the great responsibility rests, and to whom authority has been committed by God himself for the good of the whole, 2 Corinthians 10:8; 2 Corinthians 8:10. 1 Timothy 5:17. "Not that ministers are to be lords over God's heritage, 1 Peter 5:3," or to "have dominion over the faith" of any man, 2 Corinthians 1:24; but still, even in dubious matters, a degree of submission is due to them, that order may be observed, and the affairs of the Church be well administered for the good of the whole, 1 Corinthians 16:15-16. This is the kind of rule which a parent exercises in his family; and in a spirit of paternal love must it be exercised by ministers in the house of God, 1 Timothy 3:5.

These observations will acquire additional weight, if we attend to,

II. The considerations with which this duty is enforced—

Two considerations are here urged, as motives to a cheerful acquiescence in the duty prescribed:

1. The return due to them—

Ministers have taken upon themselves to seek to the uttermost the spiritual and eternal welfare of those who are committed to their care: and, when duly impressed with the importance of their office, they "watch for souls as those that must give account." When they undertake this office, they know, that if any perish through their neglect, the blood of those who perish will be required at their hands, Ezekiel 3:17-21; Ezekiel 33:7-9. Under this fearful responsibility, "they watch for souls," trembling lest, through their ignorance, or sloth, or cowardice, any have the truth withheld from them, or the means of salvation unprofitably dispensed to them. They feel their insufficiency, 2 Corinthians 2:16, and are ready at times to regret that ever they made themselves answerable to so solemn an extent. But a "dispensation having been committed to them, they know that a woe attends them," if they discharge not their office with fidelity and diligence, 1 Corinthians 10:16-17.

Now then I ask, Is nothing due from you to such friends and benefactors? When they, from love to your souls, and from an ardent desire to impart unto you the blessings of salvation, make "themselves your servants for Christ's sake, 2 Corinthians 4:5," renouncing all worldly cares, pleasures, and advantages, and consecrating all their time and talents exclusively to you, is there no love, no respect, no deference to be shown to them? This, I am sure, is not God's judgment respecting them: for he requires, that "you esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13;" and if you refuse them this tribute, you are guilty of gross injustice to them, and of vile ingratitude to God, whose commission and authority they bear.

If you suppose that their living of the altar is a sufficient recompense, I must observe, that there is scarcely a faithful servant in all the Church of God who might not turn his talents to a far better account, if financial emolument be the standard by which his recompense is to be estimated. As for the "shepherds who feed themselves, and not the flock," I speak not of them: I leave them to their own fearful responsibility, Jeremiah 23:1-2. Ezekiel 34:1-10. Zechariah 11:17; but of faithful pastors, I affirm, that, if they could have the whole world for their hire, they would despise it all in comparison with one soul, whom they may present to God as begotten by their ministry and saved by their efforts, 1 Timothy 4:16 with 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20.

I say, then, you are debtors to them to a great amount: if they have been your spiritual fathers, you owe them your own souls Philemon verse 19; and if they are only your instructors, yet, as watching with all tenderness and fidelity for your souls, their griefs and their joys should be the griefs and the joys of you all, 2 Corinthians 2:3.

2. The benefit accruing to yourselves—

Daily do they go to God, to give up, as it were, an account of the stewardship committed to them: and this they do either with joy or grief, according as they find success or disappointment in their ministerial labors. See what grief Paul experienced when his people walked disorderly, 2 Corinthians 2:4; and, on the other hand, with what ecstatic joys he was filled, when they walked worthy of their high calling, 1 Thessalonians 3:9-10.

So it is with every minister, in proportion as he approves himself faithful to his God. And how deeply are your interests involved in these exercises of your minister's soul! When he sees you disobedient to the word, and regardless of his paternal admonitions, how do his hands hang down, and his spirit sink within him! Truly, it is "with grief," and "with groanings," (as the word imports,) that he goes to his God from day to day. And the whole of his ministry, in its ardor, in its unction, in its whole character—is lowered, when he has to labor among a proud, a worldly, a contentious, a gainsaying people! His mouth is stopped; and, instead of finding an enlargement of mind, and a liberty of utterance towards them, he is constrained rather to speak only in tears of anguish, Philippians 3:18, and, as it were, in the groans of one that is travailing in birth, Galatians 4:19.

On the other hand, in what tender strains did the Apostle address those who had received his word with power, and evinced its influence by a holy and heavenly conduct! He was among them "as gentle as a nursing mother; and was so affectionately disposed towards them, that he was willing to impart to them, not the Gospel only, but his own soul also, because they were so dear unto him, 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8." How would words, proceeding from him in such a strain, "distill as the dew," and penetrate their inmost souls! And when he felt such enlargement of heart towards them, what corresponding feelings would be generated in their souls, 2 Corinthians 6:11-13.

Such then are still the feelings of faithful ministers in this day. They experience either straitness, or enlargement, according as their people evince a disposition that befits the Gospel, or a state of mind tending to obstruct its influence. And therefore, if you seek nothing but your own "profit," you should, by a loving, submissive, and obedient spirit, encourage the efforts of your minister, and impart comfort to his soul.

But it is not to the present world only that this consideration must be confined. For though it is true, that a glorified soul can feel no grief, any more than God himself can—yet, for the purpose of impressing our minds, this idea may be predicated of them, as well as of him. And O! think of the joy with which they will present to God their obedient children in the last day, Isaiah 8:18. Philippians 2:16, and the grief with which they will appear as "swift witnesses" against such as were intractable and disobedient, Malachi 3:5. Truly, their griefs will be "unprofitable indeed to you," when the very word which they have spoken to you will be found only "a savor of death" unto you, and the means of your more aggravated condemnation, 2 Corinthians 2:15-16.

Allow then a word of exhortation—

How long we shall stand in our present relation to each other, God alone knows: but this we know, that I must give up an account to God of my labors, as you also must of your improvement of them. O that I may be found faithful! and may you also so improve my ministry, that I may give up an account of you with joy, and not with grief! Imagine not your work done, when you have heard the word delivered to you. In reality, both your work and mine is then but just begun. We must watch for each other, and each of us for ourselves. And O! may you never have occasion for that painful reflection, "How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof, and have not obeyed the voice of my teacher, nor inclined mine ear to those who instructed me, Proverbs 5:12-13." And may I so watch, and so labor, that, like the Apostle himself, I may "be pure from the blood of all men, Acts 20:26."

CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLES IMPROVED IN PRAYER

Hebrews 13:20-21

"May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

IN reading the epistles of Paul, we cannot but observe how continually he begins and ends them with prayer. At the same time, we cannot but be struck with the extraordinary fullness and grandeur of his prayers. In truth, there is in them, for the most part, such a vast accumulation of profound matter, that it is extremely difficult to obtain anything like an adequate comprehension of them. His prayers in the epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, are pre-eminently distinguished in this view. But that which I have now read, if not equal to the others in grandeur, is extremely interesting, on account of the richness and variety of matter contained in it. In unfolding it to your view, I shall notice,

I. His representation of the Deity, whose blessings he implores—

The very name which he here assigns to God is deserving of particular notice—

Under the Old-Testament dispensation, Jehovah was more generally called "The Lord Almighty;" but, under the New Testament, he is commended to us rather under the endearing character of the "God of Peace." Between him and us a reconciliation has been effected, by the mediation of his dear Son: and so perfect is that reconciliation, that nothing but love is felt in his bosom towards us. In truth, every one of his attributes finds in this mystery its sublimest exercise; so that he is altogether a "God of Peace;" not having any more of adverse feeling towards us, than if mercy had been his only attribute.

But what has he done to assure our souls of "peace?"

To death and the grave had Jesus been consigned as our Surety and our Substitute. And, if he had continued in the grave, however we might believe that he had undertaken for us, we could have no assurance that his sufferings had been accepted in our behalf. But Jehovah, having "brought him again from the dead," has given us a proof, that what the Lord Jesus has done and suffered for us, has been effectual for our complete redemption: Now we see, that "that great Shepherd of the sheep," who "had laid down his life for them," is re-invested with his office, which during his imprisonment in the grave seemed to have been suspended; and "all power is given to him," to "save to the uttermost" all who are brought into his fold, and committed to his care.

Now we know, that whatever they need for protection, for sustenance, for healing—shall assuredly be imparted to them in the hour of need, Ezekiel 34:11-16; Ezekiel 34:23-24;" "the lambs shall be carried in his bosom; and he will gently lead those who are with young, Isaiah 40:11;" and of those entrusted to him, he will lose not so much as one, John 17:12; no power in the universe shall ever pluck them from his hands, John 10:27-30.

In all that he has done for us, he has had respect to his own covenant-engagements—

Here I wish you to mark distinctly the exceeding fullness of the Apostle's mind; and the vast accumulation of important truth, which, apparently without any necessity, he brings together, for the purpose of more deeply impressing our minds, and more largely unfolding to us the great mysteries of redemption. Here he traces up everything to a covenant; a covenant made from all eternity between the Father and the Son, and in due season ratified and confirmed with the Redeemer's blood. In that covenant, the Son of God engaged to assume our nature; and in that nature, to expiate our guilt by his own obedience unto death. The Father promised to accept his vicarious sacrifice, and to give him a people who would be his joy and his glory through eternal ages. In accordance with this covenant, Christ had laid down his life: and in agreement with it, the Father had now raised him from the dead, and empowered him to perfect the work he had undertaken.

What a field of mysterious information is here opened to our view! Everything connected with our salvation is traced up to an everlasting covenant. Is God reconciled to us, and become a "God of peace?" Has he, under this character, "raised from the dead the Lord Jesus?" Has he, for the accomplishment of his gracious purposes, invested his dear Son with "the pastoral office," and committed us to him as "his sheep?" All has been effected in conformity with an everlasting covenant, and from respect to that blood by which the covenant was confirmed.

Does not all this, at the same time that it opens to us the most mysterious truths, give us an assurance which nothing else could convey? Yes, truly: for if the Lord Jesus were to allow one of his sheep to be plucked out of his hand, or the Father were to refuse to

impart to us one atom of what the Savior has purchased for us, the covenant itself would be broken. But that covenant cannot be broken: and therefore every one who believes in Christ, may be assured, that God is to him a "God of peace;" and that the reconciliation which has been effected shall never finally be dissolved.

Let us now mark,

II. The blessing itself which he solicited—

Here also is a singular accumulation of words to convey what might have been stated in a much shorter space. But the Apostle's mind was so full, that he could not but dilate upon the subject which so strongly engaged his thoughts. His general request was, that God would make them holy, and enable them to please Him who had so mercifully accepted them to his favor. But,

1. He first expresses the extent of his desire for them—

"This," says he in another place, "is my wish, even your perfection, 2 Corinthians 13:9." He would have us "perfect in every good work." The whole soul has been so disorganized, in relation to all spiritual things, that it is incapable of rendering to God the obedience due to him. Hence he prays, that we may be "fitted," by a renovation and concentration of all our powers, for the execution of God's holy will. He would not have us to render any partial services, but a perfect and entire obedience. He would have us engage "in every good work," of whatever kind it be; without regarding either the difficulty of performing it, or the danger to which the performance of it may expose us.

We would know no authority but God's; no standard but God's: his will would be both the rule and the reason of everything that we do. And who that views God as reconciled towards him in the Son of his love, would wish to curtail any one duty, or to reduce the standard which is here proposed? I am sure, that a knowledge of God, as a "God of peace," cannot fail of engendering in us the desires here expressed by the holy Apostle, or of stimulating us to the attainment of a perfect conformity to the Divine will.

2. He next suggests the only means by which that desire can be accomplished—

It is "God who must work in us both to will and to do." Without the operation of his Holy Spirit in us, we cannot even think a good thought. Hence the Apostle prays, that God will "work in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight." In addition to holy principles instilled into our minds, there must be powerful energies imparted to our souls: for, as soon might a body, every joint of which was dislocated, perform the common offices of life, as we with our fallen powers effect the will of God in all holy obedience. We must not hope "to please God" by anything undertaken in our own strength. Nor indeed, however it be wrought in us, can anything come up with acceptance before God, except "through Jesus Christ." His blood must cleanse our very best actions from the defilement that attends them; and his intercession must obtain for them the favor of our God. Except as coming before him in this way, God could not look upon the very best action of the best of men: "He is of purer eyes than to behold" with delight any service that we can render, until it has been purified and presented by Christ himself. And I wish you to notice how carefully the Apostle strives to impress this upon our minds, where a common writer would never have thought of suggesting any such idea.

You will notice, also, how full of gratitude the Apostle is to that Savior who has thus reconciled us unto God, and procured for us the acceptance of our unworthy services. In truth, the Apostle can scarcely ever mention Christ without expatiating upon his excellencies, and offering to him some ascription of praise. Here, apparently without necessity, the Apostle adds, "To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever! Amen." And who among us has not his soul attuned to this divine and heavenly strain? Who, in the view of him as reconciling us to God, and as executing towards us the office of a Shepherd, and as procuring for us God's favorable acceptance both of our persons and our services; who, I say, does not add his "Amen" to this; and desire, from his inmost soul, that all "glory and dominion" may be given to Him by all his creatures, both in Heaven and earth!

From the whole of this subject we may learn,

1. What we should aspire after—

We can scarcely conceive anything more comprehensive of real holiness, of holiness in its utmost possible extent, than the words before us. This is what the Apostle desired in behalf of all the Christian Church: and this is what every Christian would aspire after for himself. Beloved brethren, indeed Christianity does not consist in notions of any kind. Doubtless its foundation is laid on truths revealed by Almighty God: but it must have a superstructure, a superstructure high as Heaven itself; for "our conduct must be in Heaven," where our Savior Christ is gone before. I beg you, do not attempt to lower the standard of God's requirements. Let your labor be for "every good work;" your rule, "his revealed will;" your delight, "whatever is pleasing in his sight:" desire nothing less than this; and aim at nothing less: but seek to be "holy as God himself is holy," and "perfect as God himself is perfect!"

2. How it is to be attained—

It is not by any worldly principles that such holiness can be acquired: it is by a discovery and reception of evangelical truth, even by

the Gospel only: and the more fully that Gospel is understood, the more influential shall we find it on our hearts and lives. It banishes servile fear: it establishes the dominion of gratitude and love: it stimulates to high and noble exertions: it renders suffering itself a ground of joy, when sustained in the cause of our adorable Lord and Master. It even assimilates us to Christ himself.

What was there which he did not do to effect a reconciliation between God and us? And what will not his followers do to express their love to him? Behold Paul: "For the knowledge of Christ, he accounted all things but dung and dross." He was ready to die at any time, and in any manner, for the sake of Christ. In like manner will the saving knowledge of Christ operate on us also. Let this, then, be remembered by us, that Christian principle alone will lead to Christian practice. And in order to our advancement in the divine life, let us seek to know Christ: for then only shall we be conformed to his image, when we behold his glory, and the glory of God the Father shining forth in him!