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Alexander

# FAITH:

TREATED IN

A SERIES OF DISCOURSES.

JAMES W. ALEXANDER, D. D.



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## P R E F A C E

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DURING the years 1856 and 1857 Dr. Alexander delivered to his congregation at intervals a series of discourses on Faith. These he intended to enlarge and throw into the form of a treatise, and had actually made arrangements for its publication, when his failing health prevented its accomplishment. Knowing that the author had expended much labour in the preparation of these discourses, and believing that they clear up many difficulties connected with the subject, I now present them to the public just as they were delivered.

Although much is lost in the arrangement,

and in the absence of matter which Dr. Alexander intended to have incorporated, yet enough remains to authorize their publication. I have added one or two discourses of a more general character, to bring the volume to a convenient size.

S. D. A.

NEW YORK.

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I.

THE RIGHTEOUS ADVOCATE FOR SINNERS.

## THE RIGHTEOUS ADVOCATE FOR SINNERS.

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1 JOHN ii. 1.—And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

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OUR translators have left some words in their original Greek and Hebrew form. Such are *Amen*, *Selah*, *Hallelujah*, *Baptize*, *Baptist*.

In some instances this was done on account of the want of an exact equivalent. One of these words, which has no answerable term in English, is the very term here rendered *Advocate*. This Greek word, of frequent occurrence, and great preciousness, sometimes means one who takes up his client's cause, to carry it through by pleadings and acts, an *Advocate*; sometimes one who goes forth to make peace

between two parties, beseeching for an offender, an *Intercessor*; sometimes one who stands by the sinking sufferer, uttering words of consolation and strength, a *Comforter*. All these offices concur in Jesus Christ, who is our Advocate to urge our cause—an *Intercessor* to make our peace—our *Comforter* to fill us with joy; and hence one might almost wish the text had said, “If any man sin, we have a *Paracletos* with the Father.”

Now, though this name of love is also given to the Holy Spirit, there is something delightful in regarding both the adorable Son and the Spirit as standing towards us in this same benignant relation of manifold good. In our mind's apprehension of Divine consolation, there need be no nice discriminating between the work of the Son and the work of the Spirit, for when the Lord Jesus comforts, it is by the hand of the *Comforter*. Far different, however, is the work here ascribed to Christ as our *Paraclete*. Here he transacts, not in us, but for us; not on earth, but in heaven; not with creatures, but with God. The topic presented to us is THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AS

OUR MEDIATOR AND HEAD, ACTING ON OUR BEHALF ABOVE, IN VIRTUE OF HIS PERFECT RIGHTEOUSNESS.

You will at once be struck, on examination, with the strong contrast in the text between sin and righteousness. It is I the sinful one: it is Jesus Christ the righteous. And this has a bearing which cursory readers and superficial theologians are apt to overlook, being indeed the solution of the main difficulty to mankind. This is clearly and fully before the mind of the apostle John, whose characteristic it is, as a thinker and writer under Divine guidance, to unite depth of meaning with childlike plainness of words. His truths are solid and precious as the diamond, while they are no less simple and pellucid.

I. Consider the case thus: If there were no such thing in the world as *consciousness of sin*, the vast structures of all religions for procuring pardon and peace would tumble down or moulder away. It is sense of sin that troubles mankind. It is a pronouncing and punishing Conscience that anoints priests, declares fasts,



keeps lents, rears altars, and sacrifices hecatombs. It is the self-accused sinner who cries, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and how shall I bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with yearlings? will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgressions, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" Mic. vi. 6. YES, many have replied, and vainly endeavored to offer the richest and bloodiest oblations to escape the intolerable sting of sin in the conscience. So much worse is pain of mind than pain of body, that pagans and papists do most willingly endure and even will inflict on themselves any degree of suffering, from hunger, whips, hot iron, knives, ingenious and continued tortures, in order to get rid of the more direful inward furies of an evil Conscience. Under Christianity relief is afforded, but (mark it) only through Christian means. Christ cures this inward fever and frenzy; but only in those who drink of his fountain. The consciousness of sin, with its accompanying pain, sometimes dull and sub-

dued, but always ready on provocation, or at the dying hour, or in eternity, to become poignant and agonizing, exists in all men; and whenever the thought has become explicit, whenever the soul has come to comprehend itself, it leads up to the idea of God as holy and as offended. Nor is this internal principle ever eradicated. It belongs to man as man; and it stings and wounds and curses sinful man as sinful man. And when religious transformation takes place, though there be a new nature, there is no new faculty; and Conscience abides on the vicarious throne as truly in heaven as in hell. The intermediate realm of the present life affords abundant scope for the work of Conscience, both in the righteous and the wicked. None are wholly pure: all are either wholly or partially unclean. As early as the first century this holy Apostle found reason to guard against the shallow conceit of sinless perfection, i. 8: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins (a prompting of Conscience when led up to the Lawgiver and Judge) he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse

us from all unrighteousness." Consciousness of impurity begets repentance, and so confession, and so cleansing. "If we say (he adds) that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and his truth is not in us." Words which strikingly convey that truth we have been asserting, and which deserve our careful consideration.

Any proposition introduced by the holy writer with such unwonted and startling language must be of singular moment. Any error that would make the Lord a liar is an error not only to be forsaken, but guarded against and abhorred. This error is the alleging that we have not sinned. The doctrine of sin is fundamental. This dark side of the contrast is always present, like the background of the painting, or, still more exactly, the chaos out of which order and light emerge. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. The preaching of every apostle, nay, the entire Christian system, proceeds upon this. There is no such thing as becoming a true Christian by a process of making that which is not quite good, to grow gradually better. It is day out of night. There

must be a thorough clearing away of every self-righteous figment, before the first stone of the gracious edifice can be laid. In this we discern the reason why Paul, as a master workman, in his great epistle to the Romans, begins his sweeping process by utterly demolishing every ground of merit, and clearing away out of sight every pretence of Gentile and of Jewish righteousness. And we seem to behold him, after the completion of this herculean task, and cleaning of this Augean stable, proclaiming, "But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith might be given to them that believe." Gal. iii. 22. Corresponding to which is the secret operation of God in the heart, by which he turns doctrines into experience, the doctrine of sin into the experience of conviction; and thus he leads the soul to feel its utter condemnation and absolute need of help from without. However deeply a man may feel the discontent of a worldly life, and how much soever he may desire religion, as a new and better means of comforting himself, he has as yet done nothing, unless he has known himself to be a sinner. In truth, this is the very thing and only thing, for

which the Lord Jesus Christ first reveals himself. All other and lesser benefits are but so many results. That which the sinner wants, is to be freed from his sin. This was the single charm which made the Gospel welcome to thousands, both Jews and Gentiles, at its first publication. The beautiful picture given by Neander in his *Memorabilia* is not overdrawn. Dire eclipse was over the nations by reason of sin. Athens and Alexandria had reared thoughtful minds, opened their vision to the likeness of virtue, lifted them up to behold the goodly and unattainable prospect, and then dropped them far down into the depth of the ocean. When a conscience-smitten and heart-sick philosopher, like him of the *Clementina*,\* had come wan and panting, out of the round of rites, penances, mysteries, necromancies, schools, and systems, to the Church; which he delighted in, which filled him with rapture, and which was sweetly symbolized by his baptism, it was the rising of a new luminary on his midnight of Sin. And the operations of light in the natural world are not more constant than the operations of God's Spirit in

\* *Denkwürdigkeiten.*

the world of grace ; for the soul destined to be saved is invariably brought first to pain for his sinfulness, and then to hungerings and thirstings for the removal of sin. And in this longing the subject does not always, perhaps does not often, distinguish the longing for pardon from the longing for purity, justification, and sanctification. The poor sick child that tosses in hot fever on your bosom, yearns for health, for rest, for ease, for water, for the heaven-provided fount ; it makes no nice inquiries of the pathologist. The poor sin-sick soul is dying for the one gift which the New Testament calls Righteousness. Every one who has ever come to the good Physician knows the burning wish. Every heathen sage, like Cyprian and Justin, went through what had previously been the experience of every Hebrew apostle, such as John or Saul. There runs through all the Gospel as the deep base of a harmony this consciousness of sin, which we discovered at the first view of the text as the gloomy part of its important contrast. And the aged and beloved disciple, always a minister of love, and always sorrowing to give even necessary pain, approaches the bed-



side of his patients with looks and words of unusual pity, as fearing to uncover the wound which he must probe. His desire is for their holiness: "My little children, these things write I unto you that ye sin not." This is the great and blessed end, sinlessness, like that of the sinless One. "This," says CALVIN, "is not only a summing-up of what goes before, but, so to speak, a *recapitulation* of the whole Gospel, that we *should cease from sin.*" And when the soul has proceeded thus far in experience, and breaketh for the longing which it hath to be loosed from the loathsome and gigantic foe, which wrestles with it only to defile and poison, the news it hails on bended knees is Glad News, for it is GOSPEL.

II. In those four or five verses which precede the text, you have observed the concession, that even TRUE DISCIPLES SIN, a most mortifying yet familiar fact. And the lesson before us is introduced with particular reference to the case of sinning believers, who do the evil that they hate. The sequence of thoughts is this: 1. All commit sin, i. 10. 2. It is dreadful to

commit sin. 3. *If*, nevertheless, we sin, there is one who is sinless: "IF ANY MAN SIN, THERE, IN THE COURT ABOVE, IS JESUS CHRIST, WHO NEVER SINNED." Ah! here again is a contrast; but methinks we have called one out of the hemisphere of night into the hemisphere of day. It is good to transfer our observation from sin to righteousness, from earth to heaven, from self to Jesus. Observe, while the principal figure offered to our gaze is Christ, it is Christ in a particular position. Our help and relief under conscience of sin is to be sought in contemplating the Lord our Saviour, not in the antemundane glory when incarnation was only in decree; not in the foreshadowings of patriarchal or Mosaic times; not in humility on earth; not even dying on the cross or sleeping in the tomb of rock; but as entered "into heaven himself, now to appear in the presence of God for us," Heb. ix. 24; a wonderful commentary on the words, "We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." This heavenly work of our Redeemer belongs not to the humiliation, but the exaltation. Both are priestly acts of our great and only Priest; but one was below and the



other is above; one was transient, the other is perpetual; one was payment of debt, the other is demand of release; one was at the bloody altar in the outer court, the other is in the most holy place, within the veil, before the resplendent glory of the ark. Both concern our sin; both concern Christ's righteousness: but in divers respects. Our sin was expiated by the passion and death: it is removed by the appearance of our Surety for us in intercession. Christ's righteousness was in one of the principal parts procured by the oblation of his own holy will in acts of obedience and suffering on earth; it is gloriously set forth, in the sight of God and the universe in heaven, as an abiding and everlasting merit and ground of our acceptance to and continuance in favour. The ancient priesthood, by a succession of men transacting with Jehovah in behalf of sinners, was constantly interrupted by death, but Jesus, as Paul declares, "is able to save unto the uttermost all who come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us," vii. 26. The chain of unstable priests is summed up in one who is immutable. We have an altar whereof they

have no right to eat who serve the sanctuary. We have a sacrifice, not of beasts, but of the Lamb of God. We have a tabernacle, model pattern, and antitype of that tent in the desert. We have a vail, embroidered over its dark blue web with constellations, and dividing the court of earth from the Holy of holies in heaven. We have a High Priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perpetual tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not in this building. "A High Priest" (adds Paul) "who is set on the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens, a minister of the sanctuary and the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man." Heb. viii. 2. The eye of the ancient sinner in the camp of Israel, as he stood at the altar, was wistfully fixed on the High Priest as he was lost from sight on the great day of atonement, within the holiest of all. The eye of the modern sinner, under grace, is equally fixed on the apostle and High Priest of our profession, whom the heavens have received, &c., the Paraclete, who pleads for us by all the beseeching and constraining merits of his life and death, before the throne of the heavenly grace. And

blessed is the moment, when, after long and fixed looking at itself and its sins, the soul is drawn to look at the sinless One above! Here within, there is no righteousness; there above, is all righteousness. I am all sin; He is without sin. If I sin, my advocate never sinned, and he is there with the Father. Thus the faith of the sinner lays its emphasis on the phrase, Jesus Christ the righteous.

Now, in order that the doctrinal basis of our confidence may be firmly settled, and that we may escape the weakness of some, whose religion is all sentiment, gust, and emotion, without any substraction of truth, let us consider for a few moments, *how it is that the consciousness of sin is relieved by the view of a heavenly Advocate and Sponsor, who is sinless, Jesus Christ the righteous.*

Even in the most vague and general view of the subject, one must perceive that he who comes before the Sovereign, to intercede for rebels must be purged from rebellion himself. He who comes into court to answer for offenders, must be free from offence himself. He who undertakes for sinners, must be without sin:

for who could answer for him? Looking more nearly, we perceive the peculiar nature of this mediatory transaction; that it was intended to relieve this grand difficulty of the universe; *i. e.*, how a just God can pronounce the ungodly heirs of heaven. That which the world of sinners had lost and could never produce by itself, is conformity to God's will, and satisfaction of God's law. That which the inspired apostles represent our Redeemer as procuring and offering is this very conformity and satisfaction; in other words, righteousness. It is common for those who have not gone deeply into the theology of salvation, to ascribe the justification of the sinner exclusively to the death of Christ. And it is true that the innocent bloodshedding and cruel death of our holy Lord was the chief proof of his love, and the culminating point of the redemptive process. Yet neither this nor all the other unutterable sufferings of our Saviour can be said to constitute the whole of that righteousness through which we are made righteous. For when we come to examine the aspect under which this suffering is exhibited in Him, we find it to be a mode of obedience. "He was obedient

unto death, even the death of the cross." The enduring of penalty was high obedience. The essence of all obedience is the loving oblation of the subject will to the Supreme Will. This oblation of love, this subjugation of will, was indeed signally manifested in the garden and on the cross. But it was manifested elsewhere. It was manifested always. The whole life of the sinless One, from Bethlehem to Golgotha, was one offering-up of himself in voluntary self-renunciation unto God as the surety of sinners. The entire circle of acts, words, and thoughts, of sentiment, habit, and disposition, was pure and perfect. The obedience included conformity to precept and endurance of penalty. In both, the Lord Jesus Christ offered, in the sight of all holy beings, and of God, an example of immaculate and infinitely illustrious holiness. And such is the righteousness which he ever presents before the throne of the majesty on high. It is because he is thus pure and glorious, that he can be a prevalent advocate. His plea is unanswerable. That the excellencies of Christ are the excellencies of one person, while the host of sinners is beyond numbering, need

cause us no scruple. The original Surety, who failed in the probation was one. "Therefore, as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so, by the righteousness of One, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life: for as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous." Romans v. 18, 19. Enhanced as is the intrinsic merit by the infinitude of nature and the divinity of person, it outshines what would be the joint splendor of all creature-righteousness; even though all creatures had been holy, and men and angels had never fallen. The eye of Him who is so holy that the heavens are unclean in his sight, dwells with acquiescence, approval, and divine delight, on such a spectacle of impersonated righteousness; and the sinner's heart is satisfied that God can now be just and yet the justifier of the ungodly that believeth in Jesus. Hear the *precept*, "My little children, these things write I unto you that ye sin not." Hear the *relief*, "and if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ" who never sinned! "Such a



High Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens." Heb. vii. 26. Behold him, as he stands for us, within yonder vail! The adumbration of this in the type was truly affecting and impressive to ancient Israel. Among all the sacred orders of the most tasteful Gentiles, there was no personage so majestic as Aaron and his successors. Upon his brow was the plate of pure gold, lettered with the engravings of a signet: HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD. Fit emblem of Jesus Christ the righteous. None but the possessor of this "holy crown of pure gold" can fitly approach the King in his glory. Upon Aaron's breast was the twelfefold pectoral, with rows of sculptured gems, bearing the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Thus our "forerunner" is for us entered, even Jesus, made a High Priest forever, thus he bears the names of his people next his heart. For their sakes he became man; for their sakes he obeyed and died; for their sakes he intercedes and reigns. All his acts as Elder Brother are sponsorial and vicarious; and his very sanctity flows down from them. Mark this in

his prayer when near Gethsemane, John xvii. 19, "And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth." This is good news for sinners. If we sin, our Paraclete is sinless; if we are guilty, God looks on us in "Jesus Christ the righteous." Justification by faith is justification by the righteousness which faith appropriates. You are never further from being accepted, O beloved sinner, than when you are most vehemently stirring and struggling to fabricate a righteousness of your own. Desist, for the achievement is impossible. You have groaned under the load of sin, and have wrought hard to make yourself better, but without success. The stone which you roll to the steep mountain top, continually rebounds upon you. The outward reforms which you sometimes effect only serve to show you how unreformed is the inward principle. Within you is nothing which can appease that wrathful conscience. No amount of zeal for external service and legal obedience can atone for past sin, or purchase future happiness. These fruitless endeavors are like those of the Jews, whose condition was such a grief to Paul. "For



they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God: for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness unto every one that believeth." Romans x. 3, 4. Endeavors to cope with sin in inflaming conscience, on any principles of mere natural strength, is like fighting against the rage of fire with one's naked hands. Attempts to cover up the lacerations of the heart and smother the remorseful pang, are always futile. "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my moaning all the day long." "I said I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." Ps. xxxii. 3, 4. Bring out, then, the long-concealed distress. Give over the effort to live without pardon and without peace. Disclose the heavy secret and unbosom thyself to God. Confess judgment, and own the case to be blacker than thy worst enemy ever charged. Go down on thy knees, yea, lie prostrate in the dust, as the leper, the publican, the chief of sinners. But O, do not vitiate those sorrows, nor turn those tears into poison, by gauging, weigh-

ing, and testing them, as if a certain amount of humbling would purchase a certain amount of peace. No! This were only to change the denomination of your tendered payment. Open the soul at once to the great truth. There remains no payment to be made. The Surety hath paid all and cancelled all. The salvation is without money and without price; that is to say, we are saved by grace. Ask not whether you have been convinced enough, whether you have mourned enough, whether you have repented enough; as if you were bound to be convinced, to mourn, repent so much, before you could have a title to believe. Your title to believe is the infinite veracity of God in offering Christ and his salvation to the chief of sinners. Believest thou this? Look upwards and see heaven opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God. Forget thyself, forsake thyself, with all thy merits, all thy strivings, all thy tears, all thy repentings; yea, even more and harder, forget thy short-comings, thy iniquities, thy hardness of heart, thy unbelief; flee away from it all, and leave all far behind thee while thou dost fix thine eyes upon the Advo-

cate with the Father. Look unto him and be saved! This is the beloved Son, in whom the Father is well pleased. Grant that you have sinned to the extent of utter condemnation, so as to be lost in unrighteousness; he who pleads is Jesus Christ the righteous. The argument which he wields is his obedience unto death. As it pleased the Lord to bruise him, so it pleases the Lord to grant him the travail of his soul. Believest thou this? Believe on Jesus Christ the righteous, and thou shalt be righteous. Dare you close with the offer? Dare you make a venture, on God's word in promise, and Christ's heart in pledge? Nay, it is no venture, but the infallible certainty of God. The Judge is ready, the Surety is ready, the righteousness, the pardon, the adoption, the kiss of peace, all are ready, except thy lingering, doubting, self-righteous, self-destroying soul!

II.

SPIRITUAL ILLUMINATION.

## SPIRITUAL ILLUMINATION.

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2 COR. iv. 6.—“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

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IF we compare the record of inspiration in the Scripture with the equally divine record of grace, in the experience of the heart, we shall arrive at this satisfactory conclusion with regard to the enlightening influence which precedes Faith. The soul is in widely diverse states, as to vision of truth, before and after the mighty and creative call. That effectual summons marks a dividing point and all-important juncture. Before that moment, the mind is dark, and has no right and adequate apprehension of divine truth in its spiritual quality, especially the truth concerning the person and grace of

Christ. After that moment, light having been given to the understanding, there is spiritual vision of the truth, which thus becomes attractive, credible, and influential. This change is due to a direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the nature, transfusing grace, implanting life, and opening the mind to believe the truth. Such is the doctrine, and its close connection with saving faith will be obvious at every step of our progress. Now, my brethren, for the orderly examination of this great enlightening change, it appears to me that no plan can be simpler than to follow the order of time, and consider, *first*, the darkness which precedes the act of renewing grace, and *secondly*, the light which follows it. This is the method which we observe in the investigation of any change in the natural world. This is the order of scriptural representation, Eph. v. 8: "For ye were sometime darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord." And both states are distinctly presented in their succession in the text.

I. We must briefly consider the state of darkness. "God, who commanded the light to

shine out of darkness." A more powerful figure of illustration could not be employed. The mind goes back to the sublime days of creation; to periods when no sun, moon, or stars beamed upon our chaotic globe, and then to the moment when light was born out of dread obscurity. Such was the utter darkness of the unrenewed soul; such is the work of grace.

He must be a careless reader of the New Testament who has not observed how everywhere the native condition of man is depicted as one of error, obscurity, ignorance, and even blindness. So constant is this representation, that if we deny or overlook it, we must fail of doing any justice to the transformation which ensues. In this sense, as in many others, the Gospel brings "light to them that sit in darkness." It is scarcely necessary to inform you, that this is not what we commonly mean by ignorance. No worldly science will supply this defect. The wisdom we are looking for is hidden "from the wise and prudent," and revealed to babes. The darkness in which the ungodly grope may coexist with the brightest attainments of civilization, and the consummate lustre



of taste. The soul may be all light except in its spiritual chamber, its holy of holies, and here may be all blackness. It is very important for persons of all classes to comprehend this distinction between natural and spiritual ignorance. Men may have all knowledge and philosophy, and yet the "preaching of the Cross" may be to them "foolishness." We see it every day. This was the very career of human degeneracy;—"the world by wisdom knew not God." 1 Cor. i. 21. The objects which the unrenewed eye cannot take in are spiritual objects. For "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." The objects themselves are luminous and lovely; they are presented in clearness of revelation; but they are presented to the blind. Men of enlightened and cultivated powers as to every other field, wander in this, without attention, interest, or distinct knowledge. This is the history of the Gospel in every age: "if our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of



them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel should shine unto them." 2 Cor. iv. 4.

These are strong words, but they are those of the Holy Ghost; and no words are too strong to represent the absence of all spiritual light in most of those who live amidst the clear shining of Christian day. It is an incantation, and the illusory process is ascribed to the evil one. Part of the malady, and its most fearful symptom, is that the blind man does not know that he is blind. "Are we blind also?" asked the indignant Pharisees, John ix. 40, when Jesus pointed out this dazzling consequence of his light on proud minds. Sinners may be addressed as was Laodicea, Rev. iii. 17: "and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind." Complete experience is on the part of those only who have been in both conditions, and who, with eyes newly opened, look back to the day when they were without sight. And they marvel how they could remain so long without impression from the truth.

Most obviously, we look for no change in

the object of knowledge : that abides essentially unaltered forever. God and Christ vary not. The same truth is objectively presented to the believer and the unbeliever. Both read the same characters. Both hear the same messages. Both crucified robbers beheld the same cross betwixt them. All heaven and all hell shall concentrate their gaze on the same Jesus on the day of doom. Yet the apprehended object differs widely. The object is seen divinely. Every object is seen, whether literally or metaphorically, according to the optical condition of the seeing organ. The failure may amount to total absence of vision. He sees nothing. It is there, but not for him. The sun is on high, and in meridian, but these are sightless balls which he rolls. This is the condition of the unrenewed man in the presence of glorious and heavenly realities. Following out the resemblances between natural and spiritual taste, we might liken his heedless ignorance to that of a boor, straying unaffected among the galleries of Florence, Dresden, or Rome. He sees, indeed, with that outward organ which he has in common with beasts—the matter and the form of

sculptures and paintings ; and this may be compared to what the natural man beholds of religious verity ; but the higher beauty and conformity, whether tasteful or moral, are unseen. The horse sees the mountain or the lake, as well as his master. You can imagine a wretch so brutalized by passion and base indulgence as to recognize in the purest beauty only a bait for appetite. Every object presented to the cognition of human mind is apprehended under the forms and conditions belonging to that mind. The rapturous clash of instruments and voices in the Messiah of Handel is to some only a chaos of noise. Having ears, they hear not. Why should it be otherwise in the spiritual world ? It is not otherwise. You are surrounded by glories which you do not appreciate. There are qualities, relations, beauties, sublimities, to which you are dead. You hear others around you talking of things which you see not. Ah ! the god of this world has made you blind. Not to dwell more than a moment, let me ask what see you of the evil of sin, the beauty of holiness, the impersonation of infinite excellence in Christ, the misery of your defiled and

helpless condition, the wrath that is to come, or the free offer of abounding grace made to you by God in Christ? As to all these things, is not the citation from the prophet applicable to you? Matt. xiii. 15: "For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."

It has been mooted in the schools of theology whether the fall has depraved the understanding, and whether the unregenerate man, as such, sees the truth less clearly or fully than the regenerate man. But surely any one's philosophy must strangely canton off the mind into discerptible faculties, and grossly ignore the unity of the human spirit, if it conceives of a fallen creature wholly unfallen in his understanding. Whatever Scripture says of this great change lays a mighty emphasis on the clearing of intellectual apprehension. We do not, therefore, hold that the more truly and adequately the sinner beholds God, the more he

hates him. The very view of God which he has is vitiated. The clear view of THE GOD THAT IS would be transforming. In point of fact, it is this very view which actually transforms; as numerous Scriptures show. Ungodly men are void of the true knowledge of God in Christ. Paul explains the enmity of those who murdered Jesus to this cause, in a passage which settles the question, 1 Cor. ii. 7: "For we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." Unregenerate men know not this wisdom. If they knew this wisdom, (we may argue with Paul,) they would be rightly affected. Mind and heart are both wrong. As has been declared to you, a certain sort of seeing they have, but not of the objects, as they are, in their spiritual grace and loveliness. And I will observe by anticipation, the human mind is so constituted, in regard to the influence of light on its actings, that as conviction infallibly ensues on received demonstration, so faith infallibly follows upon clear and full spiritual knowl-

edge. The "vail is done away in Christ." 2 Cor. iii. 14. The reason why any man remains in enmity is given by John, 1 John ii. 11: he "is in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness (*ἡ σκοτία*) hath blinded his eyes." And such is the deplorable condition of many who are coolly speculating on their own wretched midnight. But we cannot longer dwell on the state of darkness.

II. We must next consider THE STATE OF LIGHT. "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." This is a most comprehensive passage, carrying all heaven in its bosom, but we are concerned with it now only in a particular aspect. Mark attentively its grand assertion, made in the name of believers: "*God hath shined in our hearts.*" Like that of John: "The true light now shineth." This is divine illumination. Consider the result of this ray; it is knowledge. There is a communication from God not merely of feeling, frame, mood, disposition, or heart, but of knowl-



edge. This irradiation is "to give the light of knowledge." To the intellect or knowing power of man, this is of course the primal gift. It is the boon of the understanding to know, and of the spiritual understanding it is the heaven. "This is eternal life, to *know* the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."

Now, it only remains to inquire what is known. What is the object of this science? What truth is worthy to invoke this Divine intervention? The answer is distinct: THE GLORY OF GOD; a phrase which in Hebrew idiom brings along with it ideas of surpassing light, such as transfigured the High Priest within the veil when it radiated from the cherubic propitiatory throne. Such splendor demands a curtain or a mirror, to dim and modify the blaze of godhead, and this has been afforded in the humanity of the Son of God. From amidst the central and consuming disk of insufferable deity there smiles and weeps on us a brother's countenance. It is "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Our eye confronts not the absolute godhead, but the mirrored and subdued glory of incarnation. For "we all,



with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." Such is briefly an exposition of the latter clause of our text. Here we have vividly portrayed the second state of the convert, or that of "light in the Lord." This is a great contrast, which is most marked in abrupt conversions, like that of Paul himself, whose history furnishes us with a lively type at that juncture when Ananias put his hands on him, and "there fell from his eyes as it had been scales." Acts ix. 17. All language fails to convey internal transformations, but experience identifies the various scriptural statements, as indicating precisely what has happened to the believer himself. A voice has said, "Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." Old things are passed away, behold all things have become new. As when a voyager long familiar with our northern stars, but for days confined to his berth with illness, suddenly emerges on some fair tropical night, and, standing on deck, gazes into the deep dark blue of a new heaven, with twinkling

constellations, and salutes the Southern Cross. Nay, it is a transporting from a dark to an illumined planet, as in that word, Col. i. 12, 13: "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the Kingdom of his dear Son;" in which you cannot fail to observe that the Kingdom of God's dear Son is the inheritance of the saints in light. The same eye which just now saw nothing, sees all things; not fully, not clearly, yet really. Let the soul stand still amid the spiritual panorama and see the salvation of God. Thus in the beautiful dioramic exhibitions of art, we have sat in darkened chambers, awaiting some exquisite dissolving view, and have seen magical apparitions of cities, lakes, and Alps, growing brilliant upon the canvas. It was all there before. What has been added? My brethren, *it is* LIGHT! God's chosen metaphor is best. It is Light. The FIAT LUX has been uttered. God, who commanded light to shine on chaos hath shined in our hearts. The things which were lately un-

seen now stand forth radiant. Sin is the dreadful sombre background; Christ, on the Cross, is the heavenly centre of the scene. In that dying face shines all the fulness of the godhead bodily. It was all there before, objectively, but in darkness. Light has broken in, "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of HIM: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye might know what is the hope of your calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints." Eph. i. 17, 18. Light is thrown on a magnificent object which was late in obscurity. And the lovely image of God, from being a dead statue, opens his lips and says to thee: "I am the Light of the World: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." John viii. 12.

Students of Scripture learn, day by day, what a manifold wisdom lies wrapped in the vocabulary of Inspiration, in which every figure, phrase, or illustration is the best possible. For the heavenly act here intended no metaphor would serve but that of illumination. Of all God's creatures, one of the most glorious, as he

who has lost it will tell you, is LIGHT. It was well called the shadow of God. It is truth materialized. It is the indispensable condition of seeing; every thing else may be present, object, organ, sensation, but if there is no light, there is no vision. Light makes known to us form, color, and beauty. In truth, we see nothing but light; since all we call visible objects are only so much light reflected to the eye. How easily, therefore, Light represents Truth; especially the absolute, infinite, and eternal Truth. "God is Light, and in him is no darkness at all." He is the first supreme, essential object of spiritual vision; but he is such an object only to the absolute Reason; *i. e.*, only to himself God is eternally both knowing and known. The mind is plainly made to receive truth, as the eye to receive light. To an intelligent spirit we conceive no other way of God's communicating himself than by communicating truth, and himself as truth. Hence most naturally proceeds the figure of radiation or illumination. The divine way of communicating himself as truth is by the Word, *λογος*, so called as being revealing Reason, manifestative light: into this deep

and precious mystery we may not now inquire. "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men, and the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness received it not." Some, however, receive; and thus we are brought back to the very point from which we diverged. The act of God, by which the passage from the first state to the second is accomplished, is an act which may best be described as the giving of *light*.

Let me flatter myself, beloved, that no indulgence of mine in the language of figure has misled any to suppose the interposition of any medium, whether of ray or ether, to be materially present between the thinking substance and the objective truth. Most lamely and feebly we try to clamber up this ladder of words to the heights of God. Sometimes we use one round, and then we leave it for one higher, and at length ascend above them all. When God gives light, that which he operates is wrought in and upon the thinking subject, the mind. Hence the other scriptural emblem. God's touch gives light to a blind eye; in other words, gives sight, or enables it to see. The faculty is awakened. There is visual power

where there was none. The nerve that was dead is alive; what the old English of our Bible calls "quickenings." By another figure it is named "calling." God "hath *called* you out of darkness into marvellous light." 1 Pet. ii. 9. All these modes of representation go to indicate that the faculty of vision is a gift of God's grace, and product of his immediate power, and not merely a new and unprompted activity of the hitherto unquickened nature.

Now, the progress of our experimental investigation constrains us to look at the scriptural connection between God's sovereign renovating act and LIGHT. It is not a pulpit trope, nor a metaphysical vagary, but a connection set forth in biblical statements, too often recurring to be accidental or unimportant. We have seen the apostle John's identification of *light* and *life*. We have seen in juxtaposition the new light and the new life. 1 John i. 1. The Christ who had been subjected to their senses was "the Word of life." "THE LIFE was manifested and we have seen it, (*i. e.*, it is *Light*, for only light is seen.) Then, in verse 2, it was "with the Father," as in John i. 1, "The Word was



with God." Now, this identity of light and life is instructive and comforting. There is light, there is life, in the Word; there is truth, and there is a new nature by effectual calling. Peter affirms the like instrumentality of truth. He who has this light, this truth, this Divine eternal Word, has regeneration, 1 Peter i. 29: "being born again (here is regeneration) by the Word of God, (here is the *Logos* as communicative of truth,) which liveth and abideth forever." (Here is the eternity of the divine truth or Word, so communicated.) A wretched darkling, under conviction of his sin and sorrow for the same, is astray in a waste, howling wilderness. The path of deliverance is right before him, but he dares not advance his foot one step lest he plunge over a precipice. Either by degrees, or all at once, a wide-spread light addresses itself to the eye, and every thing is clear. Now, the result would be precisely the same if the traveller were blind, and his sight were suddenly restored. Both figures are used in Scripture. In both what is vouchsafed is vision. In both it is the Spirit of God who acts. In both, God "shineth in our heart to give the



light of the knowledge of his glory." It is the waking up of a new nature, a quickening, a new birth, a renovation, a regeneration, an effectual call from darkness to light. If the text teaches any thing, it teaches that bold doctrine of the Reformation champions, that the first touch is that of God. While he does no violence to freedom; while he conducts his greatest marvel in new creation according to the laws he has impressed on the human mind; while he draws by the bands of a man; while he allows the soul to move agreeably to vision of truth,—it is God who begins. It is the same God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, that hath shined in our hearts. In the first motion our hearts have no activity. The irradiation is of God. Of God's part in the spiritual birth, we cannot be conscious. Our consciousness takes knowledge of a lower plane, or of our own acts and states; but of the instant result we are instantly conscious. The blind eye is turned towards the benignant surgeon; it sees not the hand, or the couching-needle; but it looks and sees the countenance of love. The acts of God are graciously mysterious, es-

pecially in the birth of a new nature. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." John iii. 8. Yet the results are visible and momentous. It is, however, of great importance to warn every young Christian that experiences so far removed from those of common life cannot be adequately reported in words or comprehended in definitions. The very simplicity of the acts forbids this. That which is unique baffles comparison. The difficulty is not peculiar to this subject, nor to matters of religion. It inheres in many parts of the world of intellect and even of sense. Try a few instances: Give a perfect definition of Truth. Explain to one who never felt it the feeling of love. Give a deaf man some notion of harmony. Describe light to one born blind. How, then, can you hope, by any art of cunning language, to represent what is peculiar to spiritual apprehension of truth? Experience only can set it beyond all mistake; and experience, guided by the Word, will distinguish it as simple cognition from all those emotional

consequences which color it, and sometimes seem to be included in it, but which really follow it as effects in the order of nature.

But, supposing this divine illustration to have been vouchsafed to the soul, what has this to do with faith? There is a spiritual knowledge, a new and peculiar apprehension of the truth. But is this *Faith*? The question is important and delicate, and the reply should be well considered and diligently weighed. Before offering a categorical answer, there are some general remarks which will serve to clear not only this, but many kindred subjects. The operations of the mind in regard to objective truth are very recondite and very rapid. This is true, even of those which are most familiar and simple. Thoughts, emotions, and choices, which are successive, may seem to our consciousness to be simultaneous. As the ray of light and the ray of heat, to use popular phraseology, enter by the same aperture at the same instant, so a perception and an emotion may be undistinguishable in time, and yet one may be the cause of the other. The final cause of such rapid succession is occasionally discoverable. I

behold a ferocious wild beast beside my bed—I am filled with terror. Safety is promoted by such constitutional fears; and such fears to be useful, must follow instantly upon the mental apprehension. It is this which causes, and, of course, precedes the fear, yet no measurable time can be interposed between them. Hundreds of similar examples might be gathered from every field of human knowledge and sensibility. The cases are innumerable, where, in the order of time, two mental acts, states, exercises, or phenomena present themselves to us as synchronous, when one is as really the cause of the other as the entrance of light is the cause of vision. And this has a direct bearing on the subject of spiritual apprehension, as connected with saving faith. In the happy experience of the renovated soul they may seem to be one and the same; an undivided look at Jesus Christ, dying and drawing sinners to himself. We might even go further: though we have no prism to divide the ray, many colors go to form this look of the new creature; not only faith, but hope, love, and joy. Yet these seemingly inseparable rays may be distinguishable.

There is no faith where there is no knowledge. There is no evangelical faith where there is no spiritual knowledge. Wherever spiritual knowledge is present, there is genuine faith, by a necessity of nature and grace. It is not necessary for the redeemed soul to determine the names or effect the analysis of these acceptances of truth. Yet, in strictness of philosophical language, spiritual knowledge is distinct from Faith, and precedes it. By knowledge, the object is furnished which is received by faith as true. The divine ray breaks on the face of Jesus, making it luminous; this is Knowledge; the soul recognizes in it the face of its Saviour; this is Faith. But this will become more clear when we come to treat of the nature and the object of faith itself.

The statements of doctrine which have occupied us in this discourse touching the spiritual knowledge which precedes faith, may be summed up in few words. Since the fall, man comes into the present life destitute of any clear, just, and adequate knowledge of divine things, and this his ignorance being derived from a depravation of his entire nature, including the intellec-

tual faculty, is not removed by any natural discipline or accomplishment in worldly science. This darkness, while it remains, is an effectual preventive of all right views, feelings, and determinations. To remove this, and to communicate to the soul just apprehensions of divine realities, God is pleased to intervene in the case of his people by a direct and instantaneous act terminating on the mind itself, and empowering it to see. This act is previous to all saving exercises, and is of God's sovereignty. Though known only by its effects, it gives life, and in giving life, gives the power of spiritual vision. It is variously represented as giving sight to the blind, and as giving light to an eye in darkness. This spiritual illumination takes place at the new birth. The instrument employed by the sovereign Spirit in all the acts, believings, feelings, and volitions of the soul so regenerated, is TRUTH. The renewed mind beholds divine objects in a new and indescribable manner, in their self-evidencing brightness, in their beauty, loveliness, and glory, so as to appreciate, taste, and relish them, and in a certain as yet imperfect degree discern them as they are. This



new and spiritual cognition, which cannot be represented to such as possess no experience, comprises all the circle of revealed truth, and all the objects of the spiritual interest; but in its first actings it more especially fixes on and takes in the glory of grace in the face of Jesus Christ, which object it now, for the first time, apprehends. Under the enlightening of the Holy Ghost the mind most particularly views with apprehension and interest the truth that God is reconciled to it through this Redeemer. And all this apprehension or cognition of the new creature is preparatory to saving faith, from which, when both are in high measure, it cannot be distinguished.

But what, my dear hearers, is doctrine without experience? The mountain spring is but a mockery of the man athirst, unless its cool crystal stream be tasted? The sun is nothing, unless its ray be seen or felt. Have you made any appropriation of the truth revealed? Has this great luminary ever risen upon your benighted soul? You know something of the cloud, the obscurity, the tempest—but what do you know of any brightness of grace, breaking



through those lowering skies? Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. Cry aloud to him who giveth liberally and upbraideth not. Let your request be, "Lord, that I may receive my sight!" The grace, the glory, are ready to break through. See you not already the dawn of a light, which is the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ? Fix your eyes there. Let Jesus Christ be the one object. Follow up each leading ray. Sigh and pant for nearer vision. There is but *one object* for the convinced sinner, and that is the dying Jesus. It is before you. HE, he is before you! That veil of incredulity hides one whose hand is already reaching towards you to give sight. Oh! be persuaded of his love; see him as he is; accept him as Saviour, Teacher, Master. Make our hearts glad by receiving a grace offered through the medium of a broken ministry, and the honor will be all his; for let me close with the entire contexture of the passage: "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine

out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light and the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the exercise of the power may be of God, and *not of us!*" Amen.

III.

THE NATURE OF FAITH.

## THE NATURE OF FAITH.

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MARK i. 15. — “Believe the Gospel.”

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THERE are times when it seems to the Christian preacher almost a mockery to present himself again and again before large assemblies, with arguments which produce no conviction, and entreaties which are gravely set aside. It would be otherwise if the discourses we delivered were mere entertainments of the hour, as, indeed, they have come to be considered by many. But if they convey messages from God himself, on the most important interests of the hearer, and with a design of producing immediate action, then this neglect and apathy are strange. One might wonder how men could bring themselves to hear for so long a time

voices which they do not mean to heed. On other subjects, he who listens to reasoning is prepared either to admit or deny; and, if the matter is one of practice, to act accordingly. Convince a man that the adventure in which he has placed his property is hazardous, and he flies to withdraw it. Show him that his house is tottering overhead, and he props it, or leaves his abode. Point out to him some angry symptom in his disease, and he repairs to regimen and physic. Make it clear that a political leader is corrupt, and he abandons him. These results follow with unvarying certainty, wherever the conviction or persuasion is complete. We might almost say that action follows assent, in these cases, as certainly as assent follows demonstration in a geometrical theorem. If, on hearing that his mercantile enterprise is hollow, your friend adheres to it, you ascribe it to disbelief of your statement. If he still sleeps under the nodding roof, you are sure he thinks it sound. If he neglects the cough or the hectic, it is, you say, because he cannot believe it threatening. And if he remains a zealous follower of party-chieftains whom you denounce, he must withhold

faith from what you say. But in religion all this is reversed. He hears, and hears a thousand times, that God is angry with the wicked every day; that the soul that sinneth shall die; that he who believeth not shall be damned; that of those who are ashamed of Christ here, Christ himself will be ashamed in the Judgment; that God has sent his Son to be the Saviour of his soul; that the offer will not be made forever; that the day of grace is about to close; and that, in an hour when he thinketh not, death may transport him to eternal woe. All this he hears. It is the very habit of his life so to hear. He deliberately makes a business of coming, at least once a week, to the presence chamber of God, to hear God renew an offer of terms, which he as deliberately makes up his mind to postpone or reject. Great threatenings come to him on the part of God, enough to make the ears of every one that heareth them to tingle. But by a calculation of chances on which he would not stake a penny, he assures himself that he may face the risk. The voice of God, fairly expounded, as he professes to admit—for we now leave infidels out of consideration—calls

loudly and peremptorily for him to leave one path of life and enter another. This voice he has distinctly heard uttering these things all his life. But by none of these declarations, arguments, warnings, or invitations, has he, in the slightest degree, been moved to practice. Professing to believe that which he so hears, he acts in point-blank opposition to it. Such is the paradoxical condition in which the majority of hearers, in the lands of the Gospel, allow themselves to remain, and it is this which is the main discouragement of the Christian ministry.

Can we reasonably suppose that persons who hear in this manner believe what they hear? Does that indolent assent, or rather that passive inability to disprove, or that apathy which will not wake up enough to deny, deserve the name of faith? We have seen how the question should be answered in secular and common things. The principle is the same in the things of God. That truth which has no influence is not credited; that man who is moved to no correspondent purpose or volition by what is said, has no faith. We know how



common it is for men to persuade themselves of the reverse. According to their own statement, they *do* believe the scriptural record, sincerely and firmly. Their conviction, persuasion, belief, assent, or credence, is honest and immovable. And if you press the matter a little further and they are willing to be examined, they allege that there is no defect in their belief, but only in their feelings. They believe all that is said from the Word, but their belief does not move the affections and the will. Let us illustrate by familiar example: You rush into a chamber at midnight—arouse your friend—tell him the house is in flames and the only stairway ready to sink in ruin—and assure him he has but a moment to escape for his life. He replies, with a pleasing smile: Yes, I am aware of it, but somehow it makes no impression on my feelings, and affords no motive to my will. On the presentation of such a case, you pronounce the man either to be mad, or to have no faith in what you say. This is just the case of men and women who sit in God's house and hear that without being born again, they cannot see the kingdom of God, and nevertheless remain stupid

and impenetrable. Why not in these instances declare that they do not believe what the preached Word conveys? Why not deny that they have faith?

As matter of fact, we must acknowledge that there is a prevalent reluctance to give this solution. There must be reasons why it is disagreeable to admit the charge of disbelieving God. And yet, if such unbelief exists, most assuredly it ought to be charged home upon the conscience, and recognized not only as a misfortune, but a sin.

Many fogs and mists have been gathered around these familiar operations of all human minds, by the ingenious speculations of philosophic theology. Angry controversies have often been maintained during generations about the definition of terms which express states or acts of which we are hourly and directly conscious. Simple phenomena have thus been made complicated, and humble souls have not seldom been perplexed. If faith, about which we are now speaking, were so inscrutable, undistinguishable, and complex a product of our activity as many suppose, we might have expected

numerous and most guarded definitions of it in the Scriptures. As faith is the instrument of salvation, we might expect that so doubtful an act of the soul would be set forth by numerous distinctive tests. If the faith of true experience is so utterly diverse from all the believings of mankind about all other things, we might confidently look for certain marks of difference. On the contrary, often as believing, belief, and faith are mentioned in the Scriptures, they are always introduced as if with a presumption that the words are to be taken in their ordinary sense. This gives us much reason to conclude that evangelical faith is a simpler thing, and more familiar to us every day, than theologians sometimes teach. The fear of such theologians is, lest faith shall be made so easy, and so little diverse from common natural acts of men, that careless and unconverted sinners will flatter themselves that they have faith when they have none. They therefore interpose numberless cautions, to prevent mistake as to faith. They sedulously distinguish various kinds of faith. They refer faith to various so-called faculties or powers of the soul; the nomenclature of which

faculties varies with every system. They dissect the act of faith into several parts, nicely following one another, and of which no one must be wanting, or the faith is spurious. And they succeed in hopelessly confounding some, and landing others on the unscriptural conclusion that faith is something different from believing, or accepting truth as true.

One singular consequence of such refinements is this: As I should be sure of my being safe if I were sure I believed, the most interesting of all questions is, Do I believe? But if faith is so recondite and difficult of discovery, then the very question which is to decide the other is the hardest of all. And multitudes puzzle and distract themselves with unavailing and unanswerable inquiries as to the sorts of faith, and which sort is theirs; as to the ingredients of faith, and which ingredient is wanting, a species of mental anatomy of which we find no example in holy Scripture.

That unreconciled and irreligious persons have no faith in divine truths which concern their own state and the objects of evangelical Christianity, is sufficiently plain from their lives.

It must, however, be our present task to make evident the very obvious and simple notion which the Scripture gives of Faith. The word is perpetually and in the most childlike manner introduced, as just meaning persuasion of the truth. When a statement is true to me, when I see it, not merely as intelligible, but as true, then I have faith. In other words, I believe it. Faith is belief: belief is faith; both import accepting that which is presented *as true*. Truth and Faith are therefore correlative terms.

The *objects* of faith are vastly different; and this gives origin to innumerable varieties of believing. That is, the mind behaves itself differently in view of one truth believed, and of another truth believed; yet the mind's operation is the same. My hand may grasp an empty nutshell or the great diamond, but the act of grasping is the same. My believing thoughts may light on the truth that the thermometer is at 60°, or that the day of judgment has arrived. How vastly different the contingent phenomena! Yet the belief, as belief, is one and the same. This may account for the hurtful error of those who have suffused the colors which come

from the object over the eye that beholds it, and thus have made as many faiths as there are orders of things believed. In every possible instance, when I have faith, I hold somewhat to be true. The immediate consequences may vary. The same proposition believed may carry very different emotions to different hearts. Tell one man that the post has arrived, and he is indifferent; but his next neighbor rejoices—it brings news of his long absent son; a third is speechless with horror, for it comes with tidings of his ruin. The proposition believed being the same, two men may believe it with different intensity, for faith has degrees. But still the simple essential act of faith is one with which we are perfectly familiar, and of which we are conscious every hour. Let us see this for ourselves in Scripture. “Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed.” John xx. 29. Here the truth accepted is that the person before Thomas is the very Jesus who was crucified. A train of other believings followed this. God says to Abram, “Thy seed shall be as the stars in yonder heavens.” “And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to



him for righteousness." Gen. xv. 6. "If ye believe not that I am he [said Jesus] ye shall die in your sins." Here the truth to be accepted is that Jesus is the Messiah, the fundamental fact of Christianity. So 1 John v. 1, "Whoso believeth that Jesus is the Messiah, is of God." In none of these cases is there any room for the person so believing to go back into his mental operations, to examine the *nature* of his believing acts. A truth is presented as an object of faith, and he is persuaded of this truth, it is certain to his apprehension. He believes and knows that he believes. Or rather, he knows *what* he believes; for the importance of the object entirely takes away his mind from the act of believing.

But there is a variation of the phrase in such New Testament passages as speak of believing *on* Jesus Christ. These are numerous. In them all, a Person is the object of the believing; and in a particular aspect and relation. We believe on Christ, when we are persuaded that he is such as he claims to be, and such as the Scriptures present and offer him. We apprehend him, and recognize him as the Saviour of



sinner, and as able and willing to save us. He who is thus persuaded concerning the Lord, need not vex himself as to the metaphysical character of his mental acts. The more he believes, the less is he likely to ask what is believing. Faith is a kind of inward seeing. He who sees a beautiful countenance does not much pause to inquire into the process of vision. That countenance fills his eye. In like manner, he who believes on Jesus as his Redeemer, is taken up with that countenance of love. The object of faith occupies the field of vision. For the time, reflex acts, such as "Is this the right sort of faith?" are impossible; for the mind cannot look inward and outward at the same instant. And no man's salvation depends on his believing that he believes. At Cana, the disciples "believed on him." The Jews who saw Lazarus raised by Jesus "believed on him." "He that believeth on the Son of God, has the witness in himself."

Nothing is harder than to describe in words the simplest acts of the soul. Suppose one had never loved, how would you choose words to convey the notion? Yet you love, and know

that you love. We may try manifold phrases. Faith is the whole soul according and assenting to the truth and embracing it. Faith is admitting and receiving the revelation. Faith is apprehending the true as true, the beautiful as beautiful, the good as good. Faith in Christ is persuasion that Christ is a Saviour. The soul receives and rests upon him alone for salvation as offered in the Gospel. It is not a process, divisible into parts and stages; but an outgoing of the whole soul, to the object, at one time, and, so to speak, by one outlet. It is not wisely determined by some to be an intellectual act solely; because the simplicity of the believing subject is affirmed as much by true philosophy as by Scripture. When Jesus Christ, dying in love for sinners, and radiant with Gospel grace, is full before the soul, so as to appear somewhat as he is, an Almighty and infinitely willing Redeemer, true to his word, then the sinner believes, receives him, has power to be a child of God; though, at the moment, nothing is further from his thoughts than any analysis of this believing. After all, nothing but experience can fully explain what faith is. *Believe and Know.*

In comparing faith with knowledge, we touch a question which has agitated all the schools from Alexandria downwards. Assurance of truth, certitude, is the same, by whatever process it may be arrived at. But in some cases it comes by *intuition*, in some cases by *reasoning*, and in some cases by reliance on *testimony*. This last is more properly *faith*, and this shows how faith is connected with persons. We may regard this explanation as two-fold: (1.) I believe the testimony of him who is true. I believe the testimony of God, who is infinitely true. A child is assured that the angle in a semicircle is a right angle, or that the surface of a sphere is equal to the convex surface of a surrounding cylinder, because his father tells him so. This is *faith* in its stricter sense. The child becomes a man, and is assured of the same geometrical propositions by irrefragable process of demonstration; this is *knowledge by proof*, though we name even this assurance belief, in common parlance. The child, from being a man on earth, becomes a higher intelligence in heaven, and sees the same relations of lines and surfaces, by insight; this is

*intuition.* The things are so and so in Eternal Reason. God sees all things thus, and hence we never speak of God as believing or as reasoning. In his own infinite Truth he eternally, and with open face, beholds all truths. We are inquiring into the mode of arriving at assured certainty of truth. Most of our certainty, even in common life, is from testimony. Not five in this house have ever seen the GREAT DESERT. Not one in ten has ever seen the SOUTHERN CROSS. Few of us have ever seen the planet MERCURY. None of us have ever seen the planet NEPTUNE. As to these certainties, we believe the testimony of trustworthy persons, even where sight and demonstration are possible. Such, I say, is the case in a great number of common things. But this is in the first instance the only way in which we can acquire certain assurance of what transcends human intuition and experience; such as Creation, Redemption, Future Glory. And as none but God, or, what is the same thing, God's messenger, can command our credence on such heads, we come to our persuasion of these truths by simple faith in him who is credible. Faith, receiving such testimony,

admits GOD AS TRUE. Faith, receiving such testimony, admits the Lord Jesus Christ AS TRUE. Jesus Christ is pre-eminently the Word, the Revealer, the "True Witness." We accredit him as such. Observe, here, how much faith has a personal character. You believe one thing because a man has proved it to you ; this man you may despise and hate, as a liar and a blasphemer. You believe another thing, because your beloved, honoured, pure, trustworthy friend has witnessed it. Mark the difference. Here is faith. You believe on him, as well as what he utters. (2.) But we may proceed a step further. Not only do we behold Christ as a true Witness, and so believe in him, in general, but we behold him as *communicating certain truths concerning himself*, and so believe on HIM, in particular. We might believe on Gabriel in the former and minor sense, as did she who was blessed among women ; or as the other Marys believed the other angel testifying of Christ. But Christ himself we believe, testifying concerning himself ; and this is in the high and peculiar sense to *believe on him*, and to believe in his name. He comes to us to tell us who he is,

and what he hath wrought, and we believe it, and so believe on him. Doubly, therefore, faith becomes a personal matter, and lays hold of a personal Jesus. First, because I rely on his personal truth, and consequently believe his message; and, secondly, because the message which I believe from his blessed lips concerns his own person.

Yet, while we have made this advancement towards a more explicit understanding of our own experience, we have not, I trust, lost the clew which guided our first steps of investigation, nor added any new complexity to faith. From beginning to end, we have found it to be believing, or acceptance of truth. Oh! my beloved hearer, how speedily would this matter be cleared up to you if this moment Almighty Grace were to make the Son of Righteousness arise upon your soul! Here you have been sitting in darkness, and with painful effort rolling your sightless orbs towards the point where light is shining. A blind man, having no more experience of daylight than you have of Grace, may learn, and reason, and talk about rays and their reflection and refraction, the humours of the



eye, and the impression on the retina; he may, like Sanderson, the friend of Newton and professor at Cambridge, invent and communicate demonstrations in Optics, but one thing is lacking: he has no notion of light, he does not see. One instant of faith would drive you away from all your disputings. One view of Jesus Christ, dying and drawing sinners to himself, would make the subject plain. And it is my inward conviction of this which leads me to draw your thoughts away so much from the manner of believing to the object believed; to induce you, if possible, to ask less How is the act of faith defined and distinguished? and more What am I to believe? What is the plan of salvation? Who is the Son of God? In what does his righteousness consist? What is Truth? The object of faith, in its widest generality, is all revelation. "By this faith a Christian believeth to be true, whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God himself speaking therein." Confession of Faith, chap. xiv.\*

\* As an example, Heb. xi. 3, "through Faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear."



But the great achievement of faith is its justifying the sinner; great because of its result, salvation; and great because of its object, the Lord Jesus. And as this is the momentous affair of life, with every man who ever has awakened to his misery in sin; all earnest and importunate inquiries concerning faith have respect to that faith which justifies. Now, we only carry out principles already laid down, when we say, this is no new kind of believing, so far as the mental act is regarded. All that it has of peculiarity belongs to its origin, its object, its degree, and its consequences. He who believes to the saving of his soul, accepts the truth concerning Jesus Christ. Previously "convinced of his sin and misery, and of the disability of himself and all other creatures to recover him out of his lost condition," which conviction is belief in these truths, he receives and rests upon Christ and his righteousness, for pardon, acceptance, and life. This language is metaphorical and inadequate. But the soul that has been in the midnight and then all at once gains a first glimpse of Jesus, knows what it is to receive him and rest on him.

In thus far treating of faith, we have considered it altogether in itself, as a phenomenon, state, act, or exercise; we have reserved for other times, its origin in divine power, its object in detail, its degrees or variations, and its fruits, first in justification, then in sanctification. These are important subjects, too important to be handled in the subdivision of a discourse. It is enough to say, that saving faith is wrought by the Holy Ghost, who endows the soul with a new and spiritual apprehension of the truth. That which regeneration interposes between the soul and the objective truth, is analogous to light in natural vision. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." 2 Cor. iv. 6. Let that face, in that glory, by that light, be once beheld, and sight melts into believing, faith expands into salvation. The unwritten biographies vary; some Christian lives are stormy, and others calm. The voyage of some is driven off into vast curvatures in the course, while others seem to run straight into port. Yet there are some things

in common. All who come into harbour come believing; all come renouncing self; all come as ruined sinners. The degree of conviction or sorrow for sin or fearful apprehension is not prescribed and is not uniform. But all who come to Christ, come to him in distress. And this distress, in the case of all, is removed by a distinct and open view of the Lord Jesus as freely offering himself to pardon sin and bestow righteousness and favor. Hesitation to accept the bountiful and gratuitous offer in the Gospel arises from disbelief or doubt in regard to the doctrinal truth involved. If you could be thoroughly convinced of what has just been uttered, namely, that your not accepting Christ is owing to your not crediting the Gospel truth concerning Christ, you would have made a large step. You would then see how important is TRUTH, especially such cardinal and saving truth. You would no longer hang about the untenable position that you actually believe this truth, while you show no influence of such belief. You would learn what is the precise hindrance, to wit, your unbelief; and you would be made conscious of your principal sin, which is, refus-

ing to credit God's gracious declaration concerning his Son. Those who remain long convinced without being converted, frame to themselves manifold reasons, why they do not repose their souls on the Lord Jesus, as made over to them in the offer of love. But they shrink from looking at the true reason, which is their *not believing the truth comprehended in that offer*. Once suppose a soul awakened and desiring salvation, and all that is wanting in order to peace, is simple faith. The pleas which are commonly urged by the inquirer, that his sin is too great to be pardoned; that his case is peculiar; that he has forfeited all possibility of grace; that his heart is hard; that he has not been humbled enough; or does not feel terror enough or grief enough; in a word, that any conditions remain unfulfilled; all these pleas spring from disbelief of the fulness and gratuity of salvation. All this lingering betrays erroneous doctrine in the mind, or denial of true doctrine. All proceeds from narrow, dishonourable, and therefore false views of Christ and his work. The moment the soul apprehends the Lord Jesus Christ as he is, no longer as a taskmaster demanding condi-

tions, but, as a Surety, fulfilling them, it falls into his arms. You doubt him ; it is the same as want of faith. You doubt him ; hence your evil conscience. You doubt his power, his love, his truth, his willingness to save. He has saved others, but you doubt his readiness to save you. The very instant that complete truth gains possession of your soul, you will surrender. It is the simplest thing in the world, but the hardest, where the truth is not believed. Even true Christians, who have some faith, are not always in the exercise of faith in high degrees. The sun is not always equally bright in the soul's firmament. But when relief comes, it comes by seeing this truth and believing it. As this truth, which is the object of saving faith, relates to Jesus Christ, or rather as Jesus Christ is himself the Truth ; the best of all directions to the inquirer, and the doubter, and the backslider, and the mourner, is contained in the trite phraseology that he should be continually "*looking unto Jesus.*" If life depended on your seeing the sun, whither, I beseech you, should you be bending your eyes, but yonder, eastward, where the reddening dawn, breaking

into streaks of gold, harbingers the approaching orb of fire? Set up before your mind the one great aim of faith, JESUS CHRIST THE RIGHTEOUS. All our exposition, argument, exhortation, and entreaty can only reiterate the cry, Behold him! behold him! Infinitely below the reality are all our representations of his graciousness and earnestness to save. Angels and sainted spirits would hardly recognize the Jesus whom we delineate. Prophecy and Gospel combine to represent him as waiting to save. This is precisely what you disbelieve. In your careless hours of open sin, you scarcely considered whether he would save or not; you entertained no genuine estimate of the *Christ that is*, in beauty and glory; you believed nothing. Now, though you have a partial illumination breaking through chinks of the dungeon, enough to reveal loathsome horrors, you nevertheless have not yet enough to show you the Son of God, standing in grace and beauty, yearning over you with compassion, and offering to make you his at once. Still we cry, Behold him! behold him! He is holy, he abhors your unholiness. But he offers you a redemption which includes



your being holy. Keep your thoughts directed to the gracious form, who dignifies the Altar and the Cross. See in him your priest. See in him your sacrifice. “*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!*”



IV.

THE OBJECT OF FAITH.

## THE OBJECT OF FAITH.

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1 JOHN v. 11.—“And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.”

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So long as the great means of raising man to life is Truth, so long there will be importance in Faith. And inasmuch as salvation is by believing, there is not one of us who is not interested in the inquiry, What is it that I am invited to believe? From the very nature of the subject it allies itself to every other truth of the system. And the doctrine is so important that it requires to be held up in various lights and revolved in various phases, in order to a complete view. There is a species of religious teaching which affects to disregard all doctrinal statement and distinction; you know where to find it, but it belongs not to the children of the

Reformation. Our characteristic for centuries has been the establishing of all emotion, passion, purpose, and activity on a settled basis of unmistakable truth, so essential as to sustain its friends, and so outspoken as to offend its enemies. In the ministry of this doctrine, our whole reliance under God is on its being clearly and honestly stated. If it is false, our preaching is vain, and your faith is also vain. "Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, we faint not, but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the Word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." 2 Cor. iv. 2. The day was, dear brethren, when we ourselves disbelieved these blessed verities; hence are we more earnest in bringing them as near as possible unto you; and "the Word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart; that is, the Word of Faith which we preach." Rom. x. 8. Concerning faith, many things have already been said, but the inquiry which now presses with most importance, and which I design to treat simply and by familiar illus-

tration, regards the object of saving faith; in other words, WHAT IS IT THAT I BELIEVE, WHEN I HAVE THE FAITH WHICH IS UNTO SALVATION? The text contains a sufficient reply, being one of many comprehensive statements of divine grace and mercy: "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." Now, the point which we cannot too particularly observe in the context is, that this declaration of God, this critical and cardinal truth, is the very truth held forth to be believed in order to salvation. That is, this is the truth, the believing of which is saving. In other words, this belief is saving faith. Or, more exactly for our purpose, this declaration contains what we are to believe in order to be saved, *i. e.*, the precise object of faith.

Let me request your more particular attention to the way in which the words are introduced. The apostle is discoursing of testimony, or witness-bearing, and for this plain reason, that faith is belief of a witness, and that divine faith is belief of God as a witness. Mark, then, how he brings the sinner up to the point—most critical and momentous point—in which he must credit God or discredit him, in which he

must rest on God's veracity or hold it unworthy, in which he must recognize the grand object or deny it. For observe what is said, verse 9, of testimony in general, and divine testimony in particular: "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater, and this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son." Observe, further, what is said, verse 10, of crediting the Son, by crediting the Father, who speaks in testimony of him: "He that believeth on the Spirit of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar;" here the sinner is brought to the critical point of acknowledging or denying God's veracity "because he believeth not the record that God gave by his Son." In these words it is put beyond controversy, that the matter to be believed, the object of faith, is "the record that God gave of his Son." But to remove the last remnant of doubt as to what this record is, these words are added: "And THIS is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." Behold here the truth to be believed: behold here the object of faith.

Now here we might rest, and here, indeed, many a simple childlike soul has rested and been saved. For pure, clear, unsophisticated affiance, this word of God's redeeming mercy is enough. But ah! how much does the Father of Lies, the primeval deceiver, the murderous suggester of doubts, abhor this saving verity, and how constantly does he try, first to remove it out of the way, and in default of this, to perplex and tangle it with many complications! Nine-tenths of the work of the Bible-theologian consists in sweeping the cobwebs of ages from the windows of the soul. And though Providence raised up a LUTHER to tear away this obscuring curtain, the noxious foe as by ten thousand spiders is weaving, weaving, weaving it again. Even such decisive terms as those of the text become obscured, by being painted over and over by erroneous theology. Hence we have to substitute other terms, diversity of phraseology, manifold illustrations, thus imitating the Scriptures, which change the language again and again, lest the simplest should fail to catch the meaning; but above all, must we gather and make plain the varied statements of

the Word itself. For instance, not to go beyond this short letter, we find the following passages, which convey the same meaning with the text, and so equally hold up the object of faith, ii. 2 : " He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world." ii. 25 : " And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even Eternal Life." iv. 10 : " Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son as the propitiation for our sins." All which is summed up in the Gospel epitome of another apostle, 2 Cor. vi. 19, to wit, " that God [is] in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." We may, therefore, confidently say that the truth to be believed, in order to be saved, or, in other words, the object of saving faith, is this : *God, for Christ's sake, now looks with reconciling love on me a sinner.*

I. Keeping out of view entirely all that concerns the mental act which we call faith or believing, and which is sufficiently treated in another discourse, let us place before us, and in the converging rays and focal point of Biblical



light, the great but simple truth which is to save us ; hoping and praying that by the guidance of the Spirit we may not mistake, but be enabled to penetrate through all mists and coloured clouds to the vital reality. *What is it that I believe, when I savingly come to Christ?* To the unawakened hearer, the answer seems of no interest. God has uttered it to his deaf ear a thousand times ; but to a soul pierced by the arrow of law, it is an answer of life. What do I believe? *This: that God, for Christ's sake, now looks in love on me, a sinner.* The disclosure of this is a great fact, the gift of his Son. "He gave his only-begotten Son" . . . and, as this demonstrates, "so loved the world" . . . that the sinner's faith is commanded. He takes God at his word . . . he reads the letters of blood . . . he accepts the pledge of the Cross . . . he sets to his seal that God is true ; he says, though fainting, "I give up ; Christ does love me, God is my God, and I am a pardoned soul !" But hold, we must go to work coolly, for it is a matter of investigation. We are looking closely, to descry in God's light the very object of saving faith. All God's truth is the general object of faith ;

but we seek the particular object of the faith which brings pardon. What is a dying child to believe, in order to be instantaneously justified? O hearer! O thou who hast heard the truth from these poor lips so often, to thy hardening and perhaps to thy eventual destruction, O that I could think thou wouldst listen to my reply as touching thy case. Hearken to the answer. The truth to be believed is one, yet comprehensive. It is this: God, for Christ's sake, now makes over to me in the offer of the Gospel, a full pardon, without price or meritorious condition. Or thus: God here and now gives me Christ as my salvation from sin, a salvation to be received this instant. Or thus: Christ Jesus came to save the chief of sinners, and so to save me. Or thus: God is infinitely loving, and infinitely willing to save me, just as I am, and the moment I believe. Or thus: God is now become my reconciled Father through Jesus Christ.

Already you are whispering to yourself, "There is nothing very great in this; all this have I known from my youth up!" Yea, dear incredulous sinner, you have indeed known, but

never believed. The grandest, strangest, loveliest truth in all the universe, which makes the theme of all redeemed choirs above, is to you a hackneyed proposition, and a discredited commonplace. It would be far otherwise if you felt your soul sinking. The life-boat carried along our streets is a thing of indifference, perhaps an obstruction of the drive; but in the howling breakers and boiling surf, it is, in regard to life, the way of salvation. The truth on which faith seizes is very simple. Let us, however, turn it upon its axis, that different aspects of the orb may face our vision.

II. "God, for Christ's sake, is reconciled to me, a sinner." Here is a proposition sufficient to save the soul even in the jaws of damnation, but IT INVOLVES SEVERAL TRUTHS.

He who believes it, believes other things as well. All his antecedent beliefs are taken up as by summation in this, as all the previous stages and developments of the seed, blade, stem, leaf, bud, and blossom are perfected in the simple but matchless rose. In receiving CHRIST I receive a world of blessed truth, heavenly but

childlike, because of children is the kingdom of heaven. I receive and admit who Christ is, what he is, the love that was incarnate in him, the works he wrought, the words he spake, the Cross he endured, the righteousness he furnishes, the offer he sends me, the holy salvation which he bestows. Hence so much is made of believing *on* Christ. Sitting with my fellow-sinners and fellow-weepers, and fellow-lovers, where the Marys sit, at Calvary, and looking up into the pale and livid face that speaks divine sorrow and compassion, I am visited with many beliefs, but all harmonious. I believe, as never before, that there is no other salvation, that I cannot save myself, *and that this saves me*. I believe myself wretched, impure, justly condemned, and utterly helpless. I have a sincere faith in the doctrine that God loves sinners, even the world of them, and that this dying Son of God is sent to save them from perishing. I read in the crimson spectacle, the mighty cost at which God the Father redeems and rescues. Recalling what this Jesus has said and done, and forborne and endured, I behold law satisfied and justice enthroned and glorious. In the

outstretched arms of my neglected but now beloved Jesus, I discern a welcome to me and all the world to come and take wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Now, now I know, that God makes a free and unreserved gift of Christ, and makes the gift to me. Yes, this Jesus, and with him pardon, acceptance, and life; this Jesus is mine on my acceptance. And I do accept. Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief. All this is only an imperfect, free translation of the expression that God, for Christ's sake, is now reconciled to me, a sinner.

III. It is important to GUARD AGAINST SEVERAL ERRORS RESPECTING THE OBJECT OF FAITH. For though that which is to be believed may be stated in many ways, it is not every statement which may be made, that contains the truth which saves. Some who have never had a breath of genuine Gospel wafted to their legal wilderness, imagine that they have long known the heavenly message, and that it is this: Who-soever lives so as to please God shall be saved. In whatever sense this might be true in a perfect state, it is not the record which faith ac-

cepts, and it shows itself not to be such, by its wanting the essential idea of the Gospel, viz., free gift. The belief of this proposition, however strong, would give no relief to a sin-burdened soul. Neither is this the thing to be believed, that salvation is possible. This is true, as many other sayings are true; but it does not reach the case. Some have taught that, by the mediation of Christ, we are placed in a salvable state. This would throw the self-condemned wretch, already despairing of escape by his own struggles, back into the sea where he was drowning. It is the deep conviction that his most vehement endeavours are worthless, which has driven him to look beyond himself for aid. The truth which the sinner takes hold of at his calling is not that God, by the plan of salvation, has come down from heaven to meet him half-way, and that by his own doing he is to make up the remainder of the distance. This is no Gospel, least of all a free Gospel, in the ears of one who is not merely crippled but dead in trespasses and sins. Many there are who go all their lives halting between two opinions, and balancing between law and Gospel, by reason



of unscriptural teaching on this point. It may be laid down as universally true, that he who suspends his peace of soul, or his warrant to rejoice, upon any amount of performance by himself, either outward or inward, can never be certified that he has performed enough, and therefore can never attain to unshaken confidence. The proposition that God has done part, and we must do part, in respect to redemption, is not so much inadequate or irrelevant, as utterly false. "Salvation is of the Lord." Again, saving faith is not the believing that, after I shall have gone through a certain mental and moral process or train of exercises, such as awakening, conviction, submission to law, purpose of entire holiness, or what is by many taken as repentance—though scriptural repentance is a different thing—then I may find God reconciled to me. Such is not the proposition to be believed, and if it were, no one could know, without inspiration, whether he had reached the necessary point in the process, and therefore no one could know whether he might yet rely on the Redeemer of the lost. It is a more full, a more sure, a more present salva-



tion, that is in God's "gift" and in faith's "record."

To evince how nearly Christians of different schools agree on this point, let me quote some words from the sermon of a Moravian brother; they were published with approval by J. Wesley, and to the endorsement we add our humbler name: "But you will say, 'Must I not grieve and mourn for my sins? Must I not humble myself before God? Is not this just and right? And must I not first do this before I can expect God to be reconciled to me?'

"I answer, It is just and right. You must be humbled before God. You must have a broken and contrite heart. But then, observe, this is not your own work. Do you grieve that you are a sinner? This is the work of the Holy Ghost. Are you contrite? Are you humbled before God? Do you indeed mourn, and is your heart broken within you? All this work-eth the self-same Spirit.

"Observe, again; this is not the foundation. It is not this by which you are justified. This is not the righteousness; this is no part of the

righteousness by which you are reconciled unto God. You grieve for your sins. You are deeply humble. Your heart is broken. Well, but this is nothing to your justification. The remission of your sins is not owing to this cause, either in whole or in part. Your humiliation and contrition have no influence on that. Nay, observe, further, that it may hinder your justification, *i. e.*, if you build any thing upon it; if you think ‘I must be so or so contrite; I must grieve more, before I can be justified.’ Understand this well. To think you must be more contrite, more humble, more grieved, more sensible of the weight of sin, before you can be justified, is to lay your contrition, your grief, your humiliation, for the foundation of your being justified, at least for a part of the foundation. Therefore it hinders your justification; and a hinderance it is, which must be removed before you can lay the right foundation. The right foundation is, not your contrition, not your righteousness, nothing of your own; nothing that is wrought in you by the Holy Ghost; but it is something without you, *viz.*, the righteousness and the blood of Christ.”

Coming still more nearly to the point, the object of faith is not any vague and general mercy. Saving faith is not the belief that God is reconciling himself to some, to many, to others. No; the overburdened soul sighs for something more individual than this, and longs for a voice which shall call it, and speak to it by name. And then it cries, "God hath given me eternal life!"

IV. But it is so much better to treat subjects of this nature affirmatively than negatively, that we return with pleasure to the positive object of faith. That which the opening vision of the new creature looks forth upon, then, instead of inherent holiness, sincere preparation, or even faith itself as regarded by reflex acts, is something ALTOGETHER WITHOUT, ABOVE, AND BEYOND ITSELF. Leaving out of question those—many such are among my hearers—who are altogether indifferent to the whole matter, the majority of those who fail to believe God do so because they cannot be drawn away from the fruitless employment of gazing into their own nothingness. The time and strength which

might be given to the Cross are spent in querying, Have I holiness? Have I repentance? Have I conviction? Have I feeling? As if title to come to Christ were made to depend on such or such degrees or kinds of feeling, whether tender or joyous. Looking at self prevents the greater and more indispensable work of looking at a glory infinitely higher than self, and which is the proper object of faith. When a converted soul has once been brought to the enraptured sight of "Jesus Christ and him crucified," rising above its horizon with the morning effulgence of love, "full of grace and truth," it seems easy to look away from preparations and conditions. But where is the believer who does not recall the time when nothing was harder than to turn the thoughts away from home?

The single point at which the believing eye is directed is not only exterior to itself, but is altogether perfect, heavenly, and divine. It is something that God has fully done. It is a work wrought and consummate; a finished righteousness; a fact accomplished; an event which cannot be repeated; a deed which satisfies all heaven, and proclaims God a Saviour.

The tearful eye of faith fixes itself on an object which is not made greater or less, better or worse, by the act of believing, but which is always the same. The "one sacrifice of Himself," the one atonement, propitiation, expiation, obedience, and satisfaction, lies there before the throne of God, as unalterably and eternally accepted. The quality, or preciousness, or power of this finished work is not to be increased by any thing that the sinner can do, or forbear to do. This immutable object of faith abides there in a sublime plenitude and incorruptible glory, typified by the golden covering of the holy ark. Being something not his own, the sinner sees it as pure gratuity. Moreover, in believing, he regards it especially as something given of God, made over in free offer, and tendered to the acceptance of every one who hears. How can we better represent this mysterious and lovely object, than by naming it *Christ*? It is the personal Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us, who is made over by deed of gift to sinners of mankind. What we call Glad Tidings, or Gospel, is the record of this gift, "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." Believe

this, and the gift is yours; the contract is joined; the connection is complete; the soul is married; God's anger is turned away; Christ's righteousness is your righteousness; you can never perish, neither can any pluck you out of God's hand. This is present salvation; and it is accomplished in the case of the humblest soul, that, perhaps at this moment, joins itself to Christ. Such are the consequences of admitting the truth that God is reconciled to us for the sake of his Son.

V. Finally, lest some unremoved scruples or unanswered objections should prevent any from directly acting on the truth laid down, we ask a hearing for these NECESSARY CAUTIONS AND EXPLANATIONS.

1. This is not saying, as some have ventured to say, that saving faith is the belief that Christ died for me in particular. Faith does not busy itself with God's decree as to who shall be saved. Faith accepts the glorious truth that Christ died, and otherwise made satisfaction, of such value as to suffice for all human sin, and adequate to accomplish all hu-



man salvation, and that God makes a frank offer of this atonement to every one who hears the Gospel.

2. This is not saying, as some have said, that assured certainty of being in a state of grace is of the essence of saving faith. Such assurance is of priceless value; but where it exists it is not faith, but a fruit of faith. Even the assurance of faith is distinguishable from certainty of being saved, which is the assurance of hope. Saving faith is man's setting to his seal, "that God is true;" assurance of hope is wrought by God's seal that the soul is his. One may precede the other. Eph. i. 13, 14: "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the Word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation; in whom, also, *after that ye believed*, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession." But "this infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties before he be partaker of it." Confession of Faith, xviii. 3. To believe that he



believes, is nowhere made necessary to justification. This matter will be made clearer by means of the particular which follows.

3. While the object of faith, or truth to be believed, remains constant or invariable, *faith itself has degrees*. It may be weak or strong, and the weak as well as the strong may be saving. It is the object, not the receptive instrument, which saves. If it had been anywhere said that he who believes enough shall be saved, we might be forever doubtful whether the standard had been reached. But the promise is, "He that believeth shall be saved." A feeble hand may as effectually endorse a check for a hundred thousand pounds as the hand of a giant. The entire charge of an electro-magnetic system of batteries may be drawn out by the touch of an infant. But though the smallness of degree in faith does not impair its instrumental validity, it does greatly lessen its power to comfort. And high personal assurance is attainable only by means of great faith. In discussing that which is essential to faith, and therefore common to all instances, we must not exclude its beginnings, or earliest breath-

ings. Nay, we ought to treat these of preference, because our address is chiefly to such as have either small faith or none at all. So faint are the dawnings of grace, that it would be unprofitable for the young Christian to spend much time in contemplating them. The only safe direction is, that you abandon all thought of what goes on within you, and allow yourself to be swallowed up with a view of the wonderful gift of God. Take your flight from subjective to objective truth. Believe, and you shall know.

4. *The blessedness of believing will be in proportion to the strength and fulness with which the object of faith is apprehended.* Having allotted another portion of these remarks to the work of the Holy Spirit, as the author of faith, we shall not open that subject here. It is, however, proper to say, that when the Blessed Comforter begins the work, as a Vivifier, New Creator, and Enlightener, he carries it on with loving care as a Strengthenener, Sanctifier, and Comforter. Every part of this divine process is conducted by means of Truth, and every new accession of truth is taken up by the assimilat-

ing powers of the spiritual constitution through Faith. More especially, it is by believing that the hope, cheerfulness, and joy of the soul are exalted. Every fresh view of Christ in his manifold excellencies becomes a new inlet of happiness; and this by drawing the thoughts and affections more and more away from inward acts, intentions, habits, graces, and experience, and from all that is of the creature, to dwell upon infinite brightness, to admire eternal beauty, and to be bathed in the rays of celestial love. The rapture of a newly-converted sinner is great; his mouth is filled with laughter and his tongue with singing; in his trance of delight he is like them that dream. Yet how much is it that he yet sees of Christ as the gift of God? Only the dim grey twilight which precedes the day. He has faith, indeed, but its capacity is slender, and receives the object in small measure. Miserable is that professor who aspires to nothing better. The New Testament experience is a continual commentary on the prayer, "Lord, increase our faith!" If I were to paint the portrait of a mature saint, he should be one who speaks and thinks little of himself. He does

not descant on his own experience. He has no time for protracted inventories of his states and feelings. He says, in the spirit of the personified Church in the song: "I am black but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon; look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me." i. 5, 6. He is taken up elsewhere, and is all eye, to take in the radiance of the Heavenly Bridegroom. If once he received the "record which God hath given of his Son," now by augmented faith he receives a thousandfold more by the same words, even as the portrait of one beloved grows more dear by renewed knowledge of the original. Faith springs up at the slightest whisper, like the young wife at the husband's greeting, "the voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh, leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills!" Faith develops the latent elements of the great salvation, which it received wrapped up and unscrutinized, just as spring develops animal and vegetable nature; and each new unfolding of Christ's beauty adds warm showers and joyous zephyrs to the advancing

fellowship. Hear how the Church recounts her experience of "trysting times" with the King: "My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For lo, the winter is past, the [cold] rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle [dove] is heard in our land; the fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away." Why, my brethren, should we always remain among the beginnings of Christianity, beating about the port of departure, and hugging the coast of wintry doubt? Wherefore shall we not rather give all our canvas to the blessed wind of heaven, and set forth boldly into the broad ocean, where so many happy souls have gone before us, to climates of serene hope and sunny joy? We need, and we may have, a more meridian blaze of the Sun of Righteousness. The indwelling of the Lord in your souls is the great necessity. It will produce the effects which Paul prays for: "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus

Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened by all might in the inner man ; that *Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith* ; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God ! ”



V.

FAITH CONSIDERED AS JUSTIFYING.

## FAITH CONSIDERED AS JUSTIFYING.

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ROMANS iv. 16.—“Therefore it is of Faith, that it might be by Grace.”

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ALTHOUGH the highly interesting subject of Christ's righteousness as our justification before God, must be frequently brought into view in this series, it will come before us now only as incidental to our main inquiry. As an introduction to what is chiefly proposed, these few familiar statements must suffice in regard to this foundation truth of evangelical theology. In the course of ages Catholic divines, as they are called, met upon certain platforms of doctrine which they defined in creeds and treatises. These were taught in all the schools, with a certain degree of unanimity. Among the doctrines of these was that view of justification

which the Reformers, without a dissenting voice, rejected. Luther and the rest showed from Scripture that Romish theology confounded justification and sanctification. It asserted that a man is justified when he is made inwardly holy by a supernatural operation; by an infusion from above of inherent sanctity, which they call an infused habit, (*habitus infusus.*) Reformed theology admitted the necessity of this inward holiness, this supernatural aid, and this change of disposition, referring all these to the head of sanctification. But it went to the Law and to the Testimony, to show, that this is not the way in which Divine Wisdom has chosen to represent justification. In the Old and New Testament, wherever the sinner's rescue is spoken of, the great matter is made to be the removal of guilt, or that relation to God's justice, law, wrath, and penalty, which excludes and must forever exclude the offender from peace and perfection. Viewed from our low human point of observation, it is as if God, sitting in his august judgment-seat, should say, "This guilty man is no longer guilty," which is different from saying, This impure man is no

longer impure. This sentence or declaration is pronounced in court, whence our fathers, from the Reformation downwards, spoke of justification as a judicial or forensic act. All such terms are metaphorical, and are not even by generous opponents pressed to all the inconvenient results of a perfect analogy. So to press a metaphor, would render absurd all that we say about God's "council," "throne," or "moral government." These are phrases borrowed from the affairs of men, to help our understanding of the affairs of God. God justifies the sinner by declaring the Law satisfied in regard to him. In regard to this sinner, the Law has no demand of wrath, no sword of punishment, no bar of exclusion. But how can this be, while the sinner is still in fact a sinner? In no way could it be, if the sinner were regarded as in himself, or if justification imported a real or intrinsic change. For that real and intrinsic change we must look to another quarter. What we now seek is a change of state, from wrath to favour—from guilt to righteousness. God pronounces the sinner to be thus removed from one state to another, just as the judge pronounces the accused pris-

oner at the bar to be innocent. The declaration of the judge does not make the prisoner either better or worse as to his inward character. The declaration of God does not, as a declaration, make the justified sinner either better or worse; though he is then and there made better, and placed in a train of being made better eternally, but by an influence which clear minds love to keep separate. This logical discrimination was not observed by the Romanists, and hence the darkness which overspreads their entire scheme of redemption, the more remarkable in contrast with the clearness of their statements concerning the Trinity, the godhead of Christ, and the Incarnation. In pronouncing the sinner to be right in the view of law, which includes negative and positive righteousness, remission of sin, and title to favour, God does not pronounce what is contrary to the truth of the case, which would be so, if he pronounced him one who had never sinned, or one who is this moment sinless. The justifying act is the application to the sinner of Christ's satisfactory work. By a metaphor we call it forensic, or declarative. It sets over to the believing sinner the satisfaction of

the Divine Surety. 1. The righteousness of Jesus Christ with all its merits is placed to the account of the sinner; not as actually wrought by him, which would be untrue, in fact, but as wrought for him, in his name, and on his behalf. 2. As a necessary concomitant, or rather as a blessing involved in this, the sins of the believer with all their guilt are remitted; not on the ground that he has never committed them, nor on the ground that he has made personal satisfaction, both which would be untrue, in fact, but because the righteousness of Christ presents a complete satisfaction. 3. And, as a third particular, the soul thus justified because thus viewed in Christ, is admitted to favour, life, and the rewards of grace. To these advantages, all included in justification, the sinner is admitted immediately on his believing.

In any investigation of Faith, it is necessary to inquire, *What is the part or province of Faith in this important act of Justification?* And this is what we propose to consider in the sequel of this discourse. 1. The Word of God declares that he who is justified is justified by faith. "The just shall live by his faith." Heb.



ii. 4. "For therein [in the Gospel] is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, The just shall live by faith." Rom. i. 17. "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." Rom. iii. 28. "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law." Gal. ii. 16. "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith." iii. 24. "We wait for the hope of righteousness by faith." v. 5. "The righteousness which is of God by faith." Philipp. iii. 9. No proposition can be proved from the Scriptures, if such passages do not prove that a man is justified by faith. And, indeed, this is acknowledged to be true in some sense by all with whom we have to do in this argument. The question, however, is still open, Why, and in what manner, are we justified by faith? 2. Faith does not justify, in whole or in part, as a righteousness, or as a meritorious obedience. It is not the intrinsic excel-

lence of faith as an exercise of mind, or as a Christian virtue, which procures our justification. It is true that faith is highly honourable to God and beneficial to man. Taking all scriptural passages together, there is no single grace of which more excellent things are affirmed, than faith. It is the spring of all obedience, and the beginning of all sanctification, being the soul's homage to God as Infinite Truth. Faith is greatly acceptable to the living and true God, and "without faith it is impossible to please him." But no one of these qualities, nor all together, give Faith its justifying power.

In all the respects just mentioned, faith is part of our dues; an obligation to be rendered; a tribute exacted; a spiritual service commanded; an inward and most desirable work, and so a part of conformity to law. Under these aspects, Faith stands among sister Graces, such as Hope, Humility, Patience, Joy, Purity, and Love, as offering an obedience which in an un-fallen state would satisfy divine justice, but which in our present broken condition, as condemned, must not be pleaded before God. As a meritorious part of obedience, faith cannot be

accepted in lieu of a whole obedience. It would be the paying of a single sheaf by one who owes the entire harvest. The more we enhance the value of faith, in itself considered, the more do we lean towards a justification by works. But the very places which attribute justification to faith, do as in the same breath deny justification by works. And on collating the passages, you will be struck with the truth, if you have not already observed it, that when Paul intends most strongly and absolutely to represent our salvation as gracious or independent of all works, obedience, or deservings, he chooses to say it is by faith. In Paul's mind, justification by faith is justification by grace, or gratuitous justification, which clearly shows that faith does not justify as a rendering of meritorious obedience. For example, boasting is excluded, "By what law? of works? Nay, but by the law of faith." Rom. iii. 27. Again, iv. 2: "If Abraham were justified by works he hath whereof to glory; but . . . Abraham believed . . . and it was counted unto him for righteousness." iv. 16: "It is of faith, that it might be by grace." iii. 28: "A man is justified by

faith, without the works of the law." Gal. iii. 12. "The law is not of faith, but the man that doeth them shall live in them." These passages are cited to show how the apostle places faith and works in the relation of diametrical opposites. To be justified then by faith, on its own deservings as a meritorious act, were to be saved after all by our doings, or, what is the same, it were justification by works under the denomination of faith. In any comprehensive and spiritual view, faith is itself a work of obedience; and in this naked character it is excluded, like every other work, from any share in justification.

3. The act of faith is not set to the believer's account as an equivalent, which God accepts instead of a complete satisfaction to law. Thus asserting, we only deny the same error under a different form, somewhat more specious, because it is supported by the superficial meaning of certain passages of the Scriptures. The passages ought to be candidly weighed; they are these: of Abraham, Rom. iv. 20, it is said that he "was strong in faith, giving glory to God . . . and therefore it was imputed to him for

righteousness." James ii. 23. "And the Scripture saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness, and he was called the friend of God." Gal. iii. 6: "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Certain theologians hastily argue from the sound rather than the sense of these passages, that the very act of believing is placed to the believer's credit, or, in scriptural phrase, is imputed to him, as equivalent to all the debt of duty, as payment in full of all other obligation, in a word, as a righteousness before God. There is something so strange and startling in this, there is in it so little relief to the mind which labours with the problem of making an unrighteous subject righteous, it presents so much of new difficulty, while it removes so little of the old, that one would gladly find any fair way of escape from the interpretation, and such a way is happily obvious. All these similar expressions teach one grand Gospel verity, viz., not that any single act of duty, such as faith, is accepted in lieu of all acts of duty; which would satisfy grace as little as it satisfies justice; but that it is as believing, not

as working, that man is regarded when God accepts him. He believes "unto righteousness." Rom. x. 10. And this faith is not the ground, but the means of his justification. So that we may safely fall back upon the conclusion just now stated, that faith, viewed as a rendering of dues to the law, is not accounted to the believing sinner as his righteousness. All within him rises to testify that his righteousness in God's sight is something vastly different from any actings of his own mind.

4. Equally would we protest against the solution proposed by some distinguished and pious authors, that faith justifies, because faith carries in it as in a germ all the obedience which God requires; because "faith works by love," and "love is the fulfilling of the law," because faith is obedience in the source or in the bud; because faith is necessarily followed by universal holiness, and therefore is contemplated by God, who sees the end from the beginning, as prophetic of this and as the radical and all-comprehensive grace. As to all these beauties and glories of faith we will not unsay what we have already said. None shall go beyond us in high



thoughts of faith. Already have we wearied more than one by harping on this string. As the grace which most honours truth and God as true and the Word made flesh as God's Revealer of truth, faith stands forth forever as the forerunner and strengthener of all virtues. Nevertheless, we will not ascribe to the channel that which belongs to the fountain, nor to the means that which belongs of right to the cause. To all these several schemes which would discover in faith itself some intrinsic cause of its being the justifying work, we have one and the same objection; it is simple and insuperable; they all ascribe the righteousness of the soul to itself rather than to Christ. Though it be acknowledged by them that faith is wrought of God, we dare not make particular works of God in the soul to be a substitute for the soul's universal righteousness. We will not build up a structure, half meritorious and half gracious. We cannot accept a justification due to obedience under the name of gratuity, however refined that obedience may be made, and even though it be the seed of all obedience.

To sum up this part of the reasoning, we



must abandon all hope of being saved, even by faith, if our acceptance to favour is to depend on some value inherent in faith as a state, habit, or act of the human soul.

The Gospel is very intelligible when we look at it simply. Salvation there is all of Grace, all of Christ, all of God. The pardon, and the admittance to favour, and the reward, are all free, by which we mean gratuitous. Not merely works in their grosser sense do not deserve it, but faith, though it were the heavenliest of works, does not deserve it. And this is so far from being a speculative point, that the labouring soul needs this to rise from the dust of unrighteousness, and throws out ballast, ascends swiftly and surmounts many a cloud the moment it learns enough of free grace to cease all weighing or measurement of the believing acts. The glory of faith is that its utter emptiness opens to receive consummate good.

5. By these steps we are fairly reduced to something like a general conclusion. From denials of erroneous doctrine, it is high time we should come to an affirmation of the true. *The part of Faith, in the work of Justification, is*

*altogether instrumental.* Faith herself, lost in the dazzling rays, points away from her own reflections to the glorious Sun of Righteousness. All that we have recently said of Faith, represents it as essentially conversant with Truth, even with God as Infinite Truth. It is Truth, my brethren, which, to all eternity, is the satisfying nutriment of intellectual beings. It is the Truth of the Gospel which occupies, fills, transforms, and satiates the renewed soul. The truth presented in the person and atoning work of Jesus Christ is the special object of the returning sinner's faith. That which gives him relief and peace is not any thing of excellence which he discovers in faith as faith. The shipwrecked mariner, who descries the succouring vessel approaching his frail raft, spends no thought on the process of vision by which he sees the relief. The ship, the ship, fills his eye. The drowning wretch who has sunk and sunk, and now, as he rises out of the waves, seizes the offered rope with a spasm of agonizing vehemence, considers not the quality of that grasp; it is the cord, the arm, the friend who saves his life. The sinner, going down again and again

in a sea of troubles, where God himself plunges him, and with renewed conviction still plunges him, while all his waves and his billows go over him, and deep calleth unto deep at the noise of his waterspouts, and who stretches out those cold, clammy, convulsive, dying fingers to the almighty hand of Jesus, which is reached towards him, and which he knows by the print of the nails, makes no account of that stretching out of the hand. It is but the instrument, and yet it saves him. His faith saves him. But how little does he fix his eye on that faith! What is it but a receptive faculty, a hand that clings, a conscious vacuity that longs and receives, an acquiescence that is satisfied, a recumbency that finds rest? Repose there, thou long troubled soul, on the bosom of thy Jesus, for he loves thee, and would ever hold thee there. Cling on, and hide thyself in the ample folds of that golden, yea that crimson righteousness, and let believing make it all thine; but oh! dwell not a moment on thy believing. Learn the true excellency of faith, and it is enough, it receives Christ, *it makes Christ thine*. As a naked instrument, it apprehends and accepts the righteousness of Christ.

The more you fix your attention on faith as if faith were the object of inquiry, the less faith you will have. Meditating and prying into the mystery of the eye produces no vision; turn those organs towards the light. Forget the means in the end, and the instrument in the consummation. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved!

6. As in the matter of justification, faith is simply receptive and instrumental, it follows that our profoundest attention should be given to the glorious object of faith, which is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ as our Righteousness. All the brightness which faith has is reflected upon it by the luminary on which it gazes. When the once darkling soul is made the subject of that divine operation, by which a principle of life is infused, the very earliest symptom of such birth is its apprehension of truth. It has emerged into daylight. The great and infinitely lovely object which, though present before, was in obscurity, begins to be faintly visible. The face of infinite purity and love shining from the Cross, radiates unwonted grace and beauty. The historical Christ be-

comes the personal love of the new-born soul, as beheld not merely in the dull hard outline of facts and doctrines, but in the celestial and ravishing qualities of personal fascination. Inadequately but truly, because supernaturally and spiritually, the Christ of God is seen as he is; and now for the first is he thus seen. The eyes of this prodigal sinner's understanding are opened to see the light of the glory of God as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ. And as that which tempestuously drove him through mountain seas into this haven, was horrible and consuming consciousness of guilt and dread of God's anger, so that which the opening eye of the new creature first beholds, as he believes, is the infinitely satisfying value of Christ as his righteousness. "Surely, shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." Is. xlv. 24. Conscience is brought to peace by this means only.

See in this the compleatory antitype of what took place 3,000 years ago when a poor Hebrew wretch, in anguish for his crime, came with his kid or his lamb to the altar before the tabernacle. There he stands, all crimson and scarlet in

conscious defilement. The sword of God's vengeance seems lifted. He hardly conceives that for such guilt Jehovah will accept an offering. He trembles and is pale. See, the priest has taken the unblemished little victim and laid it palpitating on the altar. What a type of innocence in the room of guilt! What a signal hieroglyphic of substitution and imputation! Look again, for the anxious sinner has laid his unsteady hand upon the head of the offering; and hark, he is confessing over it his sins. But what is this? The gentle and holy priest, as if waking to sudden vengeance, has plunged the knife into the meek, unresisting heart, and the vital stream of the atonement baptizes the altar. Bowing his head, as if he looked through the emblem to a future Cross, the sinner receives from the priestly hand the sprinkling of a hyssop-branch dipped in expiation, and he knows himself to be pardoned. What is this scene? My fellow-sinner, it is sacrifice, it is atonement, it is the prelude cross and passion, it is the Old Testament sacrament expounding the new. Only a dim morning twilight was that levitical Gospel compared with our meridian illumina-



tion. Jesus cries, Look unto me and be ye saved! It is the perpetual voice with which we come to you. Looking is believing. Such looking is salvation. Look and live. Look away from self, and even from faith as wrought in yourself, unto the great and sole meritorious ground of acceptance. The faith which, by pre-eminence, saves the soul, looks at Christ. Bitten by fiery serpents, and burning with deadly poison in the veins, the Israelite in the desert gives one look, one look, at the lifted brazen type, and lives. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so [hath] the Son of Man [been] lifted up, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life." Believeth on him! And do I believe? Oh! do I believe? Look steadily. Look in one direction, and see to it, that direction be not self-ward. Unlearn the perverse lesson of a lifetime, and turn your thoughts yonder, towards the light, towards the healing serpent, towards the cross, towards the heart of divine love that breaks in agony upon the accursed tree, out of very longing for your salvation. Look, for looking is believing. And while you

look, and believe, and receive Christ as offered, and repose all your weight on him as your ultimate rest; yea, while you are forgetting self in the contemplation of him who is all your salvation and all your desire . . . the God of Justice and of Mercy, is writing your name among the ungodly who are justified. The Author and Finisher of faith, who has been leading you to believe, has in that instant and by that faith knit you indissolubly to his Son. As surely as you believe in Christ, so surely the righteousness of Christ has become yours. Nor is there a height or a depth, in heaven or earth, that can break the bond. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died? Yea, rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us!" Rom. viii. 34.

VI.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH.

## JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH.

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ROMANS iii. 28.—“Therefore we conclude, that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law.”

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THE labours of the early Reformers were specially directed to the interpretation of the term “Justification”; for among the errors of Romanism, which had been accumulating for ages, one of the most fatal was on this point. It subserved the popish defences of human merit, to teach that justification signified a change of character. Hence they taught, that to justify was to make just, in the sense of making holy; and they introduced the figment of a first and second justification. By the first, the unrighteous man was made righteous: by the second he was continued such.

So justification was confounded with sanctification. These opinions were almost universal among the Romanists. They were authoritatively established by the Council of Trent; and, what is more interesting to us, they have been revived, and earnestly maintained, by the Romanizing party in the Church of England. It is therefore of the utmost importance to attain a clear notion of justification, in its Scriptural sense.

To justify, then, is not to make just, in the sense of making holy, but to declare just. It is derived from courts of law, where every one who is arraigned is either justified or condemned. It is for this reason called a forensic or judicial term. To condemn, and to justify, are exact opposites. When the judge condemns a man, he does not by that act render him any worse than he was before: he simply adjudges him to be guilty. When the judge justifies a man, he does not by that act render him any better than he was before: he simply adjudges him to be innocent. In this sense, the term is used in the Scriptures: "If there be a controversy between men, and they come

unto judgment, that the judges may judge them, then they shall justify the righteous and condemn the wicked." Deut. xxv. 1. "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord." Prov. xvii. 15. It is obviously only in this declarative sense that God can be said to be justified by men, and Wisdom to be justified by her children.

We further observe, that where this term is used in a religious sense, an allusion to forensic practice runs through the whole statement. Thus Job says: "How should man be just with God? if he will contend with him, he cannot answer him one of a thousand." ix. 2, 3. And David: "Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." Ps. cxliii. 2. We seem by the Scriptural language to be introduced to a court: there are a law, a sanction, a tribunal, a judge, an accusation, a condemnation, an advocate, a surety, an acquittal. But there is not a syllable about changing the character; it is only a change of state, standing, or relation to law. A misunderstanding here, darkens the



whole system of grace, and ensures an unsound theology. This, as Calvin says, is the very hinge on which the whole work of redemption turns. And error in this point is the more easy, because the word sometimes has another meaning; because it has been extensively used for sanctification; and because, in point of fact, justification and sanctification are inseparably connected. Justification, therefore, is an act of God, whereby he remits our sins, and accepts us as righteous.

Having settled the meaning of the term, we proceed to consider the act itself. It will be agreed on all hands, that the moving or impulsive cause of our justification is the eternal goodness of God; but for which, no offender could ever have been received to favour. But men are so ignorant of God's true character, that they sometimes ask the question in their hearts, if not with their lips, Why this circuitous method? Why might not God accept the sinner by a sovereign declaration, irrespective of any acts on his behalf? Such inquiries arise from exceedingly low thoughts of the most high God.

But let us present ourselves in thought before his awful tribunal. Let us meditate on that Judge whose brightness eclipses the stars, and whose holiness sheds condemnation on the heavens, whose anger shakes the earth, and whose power melts the mountains, whose justice is dreadful to angels, who acquits not the guilty, and whose wrath has ordained Tophet of old; and we shall be ready to exclaim, If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand!

The law of God partakes in an awful degree the majesty of that character of which it is the transcript. It is holy, just, and unchangeable. Every thing which made a law proper in the beginning, remains in full force to demand satisfaction to it. Every reason which lay in the Divine mind for annexing a penalty remains in full force to exact the execution of that penalty. All the wisdom and justice which made it necessary that creatures should be threatened with punishment, in case of disobedience, make it necessary that the sinner's acceptance should not take place without some amends being made to the violated law. It is

indeed a sovereign act of God, which justifies the sinner—an act of sovereign mercy; but an act in which justice no less than mercy is exhibited and sustained.

Seeing, then, that something is necessary to manifest the glorious justice of God in accepting sinners, the question remains, what this is; in other words, what is the impulsive and meritorious cause, for the sake of which the sinner is justified in the sight of God? All answers to this question reduce themselves to these two: The ground of justification is something in the sinner, or something out of him; something done by himself, or something done for him, by another. He is justified either by works, or without works. And the doctrine which prevails in the Romish Church, is, that the sinner is justified, in some way or other, by works. The doctrine of the Scripture is, that he is justified without works. Indeed, so explicit is the language of Scripture on this point, and so distinctly is it sounded by the trumpet of Paul, as not merely his doctrine, but his capital doctrine, that few have the effrontery to declare in plain terms that their own works are the proper

ground of their justification. In order, therefore, to guard against the finesse of errorists, we must examine a little their mode of evading the truth.

It is agreed by all, and may be set aside among concessions, that spirits who have never sinned, and man in a state of innocence, were justified by works; that is, by an immaculate obedience to the law under which they were created. And in this case we have the simplest form of justification, namely God's pronouncing him just, who is such properly and in every sense. But the problem becomes less easy, when it refers to those who have already broken the law, as it is agreed that all men on earth have done.

There is a further concession to be made, in order to clear the question, and stop the mouths of adversaries. We fully admit, that he who is justified is in every case made the subject of holiness; which, if the term had not been abused, might be called inherent righteousness. Our opponents, not only of Rome but of Oxford, reproach evangelical teachers with rejecting inherent righteousness, both name and thing.

We indignantly resist the charge, and affirm that in every case of true justification, the adorable Spirit infuses a principle of holiness, which manifests itself in good works. But we firmly deny that these good works constitute, in whole or in any part, that righteousness whereby we are accepted in the sight of God. And this is the great position on which we make our first stand. Be it observed, that we deny this, as well of the principle as of the fruits; as well of works wrought after regeneration, as of works wrought before regeneration; as well of works wrought in faith, as of works wrought in unbelief; as well of works wrought with a spiritual influence, as of works wrought without a spiritual influence. Of works and of their principle, all and particular, we say they have no part in our justification.

The opponents of this doctrine, in order to give some place to the work of our Redeemer, teach that Christ has merited by his obedience, that internal righteousness should be communicated to us; but that the righteousness thus infused is our justifying righteousness. Their language is such as this: The righteousness by

which God justifies us, is that which he gives us when he renews us in the spirit of our minds, so that we are not merely accounted righteous, but are such in reality.\* This is familiarly known in theology as justification by infused or inherent righteousness; and it is wonderful, that at the very first presentation of the subject, it should find any tolerance in a soul which has ever been truly convinced of sin, or a conscience which has ever been arraigned before the bar of an infinitely holy and heart-searching God; or that it should ever be maintained, in the face of New Testament declarations that we are justified freely, and without works of law.

The Scriptures teach, and the most experienced Christians admit, that even after regeneration their obedience is unspeakably deficient in kind and degree; that in many things they all offend; that after all their performances, they are unprofitable servants; that their highest affections fall short of supreme love; and that there is no command, the spirit of which they have not broken, nor any hour of their lives, or single act, on which they could rest their hope

\* Trent.



of justification in the sight of a holy God. Gratefully owning the influences of the Divine Spirit, in renewing and gradually sanctifying their souls, they nevertheless find no inherent righteousness on which for an instant God could look with complacency.

On opening the New Testament, we are immediately struck with such passages as this: "Therefore by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight." To an unsophisticated mind, this would seem to settle the question; but such is the ingenuity of unbelief, that we are constrained to spend some time in removing the glosses which have obscured the text.

When we are said to be justified without works, the works meant, say some, are those of the ceremonial law. As this is not the most tenable position of our adversaries, so neither is it their favourite one in the present day. The New Testament writers do not much advert to our modern distinction of ceremonial and moral law; but apart from this, the supposition cannot be sustained. The Apostle Paul, who is most frequent in treating this doctrine, does not merely assert that salvation is without works,

but in more than one instance proceeds to prove it; and in every such case his argument is such as to show that he is not speaking of ritual or ceremonial works. Thus in the third chapter of Romans, when he concludes, "therefore, by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight," the whole preceding argument is a series of charges against transgressors of moral precepts. There is not one word concerning the emptiness of rites, or even concerning their being fulfilled in Christ; points which would have been unavoidable, if these only had been intended. If it had been his object to show that we are justified by moral, and not by ceremonial works, he would necessarily have contrasted the moral and the ceremonial law. On the contrary, the opposition which he establishes, is between works and faith, between law and promise, between debt and grace. And his principal instance of justification without works is that of Abraham, which occurred long before the institution of the Levitical service. Indeed, the presumption is so violent, that it has long since been abandoned by the most able controvertists even on the Romish side.

A candid examination of the apostle's argument will show, that under the name of law and of works, he excludes moral as well as ceremonial requisitions, and obedience of every sort. This is apparent from the universality of the expressions, that we are justified "without works of law," "without deeds of law," that "a man is not justified by the works of the law," that "no man is justified by the law, in the sight of God."

It has therefore been pretended, that the works here excluded are works before regeneration, or without faith. So important a distinction could not have been left unexpressed. The opposition is not between one sort of works and another, but between debt and grace, between law and promise, between our own righteousness and the righteousness of God, between working and not working. The very tenour of his argument shows that it is the moral law which he excludes; for it is that law (Rom. iii.) which condemns both Jews and Gentiles, saying, "There is none righteous, no, not one." It is that law, by which "is the knowledge of sin." It is "the law of works,"

as opposed, not to ceremonies or imperfect obedience, but to the "law of faith." It is that law which worketh wrath, and without which "there is no transgression." It is that law which says, "Thou shalt not covet," and those precepts, by which "the man that doeth them shall live in them." This can be no other than the moral law, in all its extent.

That Paul does not mean to exclude such works only as are done without faith and before regeneration, is evident from the case of Abraham. He argues, that if Abraham were justified by works, he had whereof to glory. But he was justified as one who "worketh not." Surely he of whom these things are spoken was not unregenerate or unbelieving. "Though the life of the patriarch was spiritual and almost angelical, yet his works did not possess sufficient merit to justify him before God."\* Equally pertinent is the instance of David, who is adduced as describing "the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works."

Here and elsewhere Paul opposes works to

\* Calvin.

faith, and justification by works to justification by faith. By works, therefore, he must mean obedience of every kind. And when he excludes such works as might be matter of boasting, he manifestly excludes all works. The same thing is proved by the declarations, that we are justified gratuitously; that we are justified by Christ; and that we are justified by faith. The conclusion seems unavoidable, that we are justified by something out of ourselves; and that the matter of our justification is nothing which we can render to the requisition of the law. The ground of our acceptance must therefore be sought where the text places it, in the righteousness of another. But how can this be?

All the acts and declarations of God are according to truth. As the God of infinite justice, he sees all things just as they are, and declares all things according to their reality. He cannot pronounce him righteous who is unrighteous; and as it is confessed that we have no righteousness of our own, it would be forever impossible for us to be justified, if God were not to behold us in another, rather than in our-

selves. This is the great and precious mystery which deserves our most special consideration. God looks upon his people as the body of Christ, as united to him—as one with him. Here we see the infinite importance of union with Christ. He not only represented his people, but acted as their head. From the moment of union, his acts are accounted theirs. And I have purposely introduced the consideration of this, before the inquiry, what constitutes the righteousness, that we might approach the latter question more free from prejudice. The way is therefore clear for the inquiry, What is the Scripture method of justification ?

And here the reply of the word is perfectly intelligible. That which justifies us, is not the righteousness of law, the righteousness of works, or our own righteousness ; but “the righteousness of God without the law ;” “righteousness without works ;” “the righteousness of God which is by faith of Christ ;” the “righteousness of faith.” It is the righteousness of Christ, for we are made “the righteousness of God in him.” The two most important questions concerning this righteousness are,—



1. What it is.
2. How it becomes ours.

1. It requires little consideration to perceive, that it is not the essential righteousness of the Divine nature in Christ, but his perfect satisfaction of the law. In a single word, the righteousness of Christ is his obedience; and his obedience rendered for us. The whole of his subjection to the law was mediatorial and representative. Except by virtue of the covenant of grace, the law made no demand that the Son of God should come under its yoke. In infinite mercy, he took our nature, to render to the law every satisfaction which was necessary to our salvation. This satisfaction is called his righteousness. It is called the "righteousness of God," because he devised it, and because he accepts it. The debt which sinful man owes consists of two parts,—penalty and performance. The righteousness of Christ, to be available, must furnish both. Accordingly, he exhausted the penalty and fulfilled the precept. By one, he provided for the remission of our sins: by the other, he procured for us a right to salva-

tion and reward. For justification is something more than the remission of sins: it includes both remission of sin and right to eternal life. Both are procured by the righteousness of Christ. That both are necessary, may be seen by the case of Adam in Paradise. At the very moment of his creation, he was perfectly innocent, and therefore in the state in which remission of sin places a sinner. But something more was necessary to give a right to the rewards of life, namely, obedience to a prescribed law. By mere remission of sins, the believer would at best be no further advanced than was Adam at the moment of his creation. By a title to the rewards of life, he attains that place in the sight of God which Adam would have reached at the close of his probationary obedience. The former of these advantages is purchased for us, by our Surety's endurance of the penalty of the law: the latter, by his performance of all its requisitions. Both are included under the term obedience. But while the righteousness of Christ is a resplendent whole, it admits of being considered under a twofold division, which we may now profitably contemplate.

(a) The Lord Jesus Christ, for our sakes, endured the penalty of the law. This includes the whole of his mysterious suffering. "Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." This expresses all. The law demanded the death of the sinner: it is satisfied by the death of an infinite Substitute. The all-wise Jehovah, who best understands the claims of his own glory, is pleased to recognize the suffering of his Son, as a more full satisfaction to the law, than the eternal pains of his people. It is the infinite dignity of the substitute which gives a value to temporal sufferings; making these more than equivalent, in the eye of the law, to the sufferings of creatures through all eternity. The crowning event of these sufferings was the death of Christ upon the cross; to which, therefore, above all the rest, our pardon is ascribed. This obedience of Christ to the penalty of the law was propitiatory or expiatory, washing away the guilt of our sin. It was a proper sacrifice, which gave significance to all the sacrifices of the Levitical law.

For ages God had been educating his an-

cient Church in the persuasion, that without shedding of blood there was no remission. Substitution was inscribed on every vessel and altar of the tabernacle and the temple. The bloody services of the priesthood, for ages, were but a preparing of the way for the entrance of the great High Priest. And every unblemished animal which panted and bled in the Levitical courts, foreshadowed the Lamb of God, "slain from the foundation of the world." The ancient sinner, as he laid his hand on the head of the victim, typically transferred to it his guilt. The ancient priest, as he sprinkled the blood on the penitent, typically absolved him. It was one being suffering for another. It was the death of the sacrifice for the death of the sinner. All these shadows were accomplished in the death of Christ, who was both sacrifice and priest; and herein a glorious satisfaction was made to the law, in regard to its penalty. We are redeemed "with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot;" "who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree; by whose stripes ye were healed." He was made sin for us, a curse

for us, that we might be the righteousness of God in him. By his own blood, he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. This obedience of Christ unto death, whereby he made a full satisfaction to the law, in regard to its penalty, is known in theology as his passive obedience; and to this we owe the remission of our sins.

(*b*) The Lord Jesus Christ, for our sakes, fully obeyed the precept of the law. This is what the law demanded of the creature, to constitute a title to the rewards of life. The infinite dignity of the Mediator caused his obedience, though rendered in time, a satisfaction to the law more glorious and acceptable than the perfect obedience of all his people could have been. And it is quite as just and reasonable as what we have been considering. Yet, while all who admit a proper atonement agree that the sufferings and death of Christ were in order to the remission of our sins, there are many who deny that the personal holiness of Christ, and his subjection to the precept, had any similar intention. This is truly surprising, when we consider that it was no less necessary that the

precept should be fulfilled in order to life, than that the penalty should be endured in order to pardon. Indeed, if the law demands one thing more than another, it is obedience. If any reparation is to be made, we might expect it to be the reparation of due performance. The acts of the Surety, in what he did, are as available for us, as his pains in what he suffered. Even his sufferings are included under the name of obedience—he was “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” It was to be expected that our Surety should fulfil for us all the demands of the law, as well preceptive as punitive. It is undeniable that the Lord Jesus Christ was made under the law, that he subjected himself to it, and actually fulfilled it. It is reasonable to conclude that acts so important, included in his mediatorial life, were a part of his suretyship, and were rendered on our behalf. And unless these acts are the ground of our acceptance, we must resort to our own acts for this end. But the letter of the Scriptures on this point is too plain to be mistaken. The obedience of Christ is expressly declared to be the ground of our acceptance, and the sufferings of



Christ are but a part of that obedience, and receive this name only in a secondary sense. He is the Lord our Righteousness. He is made of God unto us "righteousness." And in terms which baffle all the ingenuity of opposers, we are told, that "as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." It is this which is called the active obedience of Christ; and these two taken together, the active and the passive obedience, constitute that one righteousness which is the sole meritorious ground of our acceptance. What he did, and what he suffered, are but one object in the sight of the law; a glorious righteousness, with which we are graciously invested; wrought out by our Head, in our nature, but deriving infinite value from the hidden fountain of the Godhead.

2. Having learned what this righteousness is, the remaining question is, How it becomes ours. It does not avail for all, for some are never justified. The explanation is, that this righteousness is made over to those who be-

lieve, and immediately upon their believing. Hence it is called "the righteousness of faith"; the "righteousness which is of faith"; the "righteousness of God by faith of Jesus Christ"; and we are repeatedly said to be "justified by faith." These declarations are too numerous and too explicit to leave room for doubt, except as to the place which faith occupies in justification. And here arises a class of theologians, who teach that the very act of faith is reckoned to our account, instead of the righteousness of our works. They conceive that they find some colour for this statement in such texts as these: "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." "Faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness." But if we carefully examine the reasoning of the apostle in these places, we shall find his meaning to be, that justification is a matter not of working, but of believing; in other words, that it is gratuitous. In his argument, to say that justification is by faith, is the same as to say that it is a matter of grace; and his object being to prove that Abraham was justified

without works, he cites the declaration that he was justified by faith.

Nothing short of perfection can justify. To suppose any such commutation in the demands of the law as should receive the act of believing in place of other acts of obedience, is to annul the apostle's argument, and the whole method of grace is simply the substitution of one work in place of all the rest; and, strange to say, it is assumed to get rid of the substitution of Christ for his people. The act of believing is of course a work, and as such is demanded by the law; but as such it is also excluded by the Gospel. The very gratuitousness of the salvation is vacated by considering faith as the ground of acceptance. Faith has indeed a value, which shall be pointed out, but one which renders this supposition unnecessary. All the cogent reasoning of the apostle against justification by works bears in full force against justification by faith considered as a work. He most carefully distinguishes faith from the righteousness which is received by it. That which justifies must be a perfect satisfaction to the law, which faith is not. If faith is the ground

of our acceptance, we are justified without any satisfaction of the law ; unless we say that it is satisfied by the obedience of Christ, which, indeed, is most true ; but then the imputation of the act of faith is more than needless. To suppose the apostle, in the very discourses in which he is reasoning against all righteousness of our own, to represent the act of faith as set to the sinner's account in lieu of obedience, is absurd in no ordinary degree.

These reasons go far to set aside the kindred error, that we are justified by faith, because it is considered as the root and principle of all obedience. Faith is here regarded as inchoate obedience. This is justification by works under the name of faith. The supposition destroys at a blow the gratuitousness of salvation. It is only a refined righteousness of works. It is as much our own righteousness, as works are our own righteousness. It is a payment of the debt, in a different denomination. Nothing can be plainer, than that in every declaration that we are justified by faith, there is involved a denial of our justification by any thing proceeding from ourselves. Does Paul say that "boast-

ing is excluded"? "By what law?" "By the law of faith." Does he say that Abraham was justified by faith? He adds: "Now to him that worketh not, . . . but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned." And such is the irreconcilable opposition between faith and works, as justifying, that Paul assumes it as a maxim, that "the law is not of faith, but the man that doeth them shall live in them."

It is undoubtedly true, that faith worketh by love, and that love is the fulfilling of the law, and consequently that faith is the principle of all obedience. It is also true that no faith but that which is operative justifies; but it does not derive its power to justify from its fruitfulness. Indeed, the assumption is a covert method of bringing in inherent justification.

The Scripture, in speaking of justification, passes very lightly over the act of believing, as if not to ascribe to it a substantive part in the work; always introducing it as a sign and proof of the freeness of the benefit, and always as the channel for communicating something higher. It is this view which we should accus-

tom ourselves to take. Faith is simply instrumental and receptive. It is the hand stretched forth to receive an infinite bounty, namely, the perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its whole office is discharged when it brings the sinner into connection with that righteousness, to which he would otherwise have no claim. Being a persuasion of God's mercy, an acquiescence in God's plan, involving a despair of our own strength, and an acknowledgment of free grace, faith is above all other exercises fitted to exclude the pretence of merit, and to exalt the riches of Christ. The moment a sinner believes, he is justified. It is of all things the furthest from his thoughts that this act constitutes any claim; he scarcely makes it an object of attention; his soul is absorbed in the infinite object which it apprehends. Yet at this point of time the righteousness of Christ becomes his own; and it becomes so, because faith unites him to the Surety. This is the secret of its power. It establishes the communication with the source of merit. He is thenceforth in Christ, and the righteousness of God in him. Being one with Christ, he possesses in the eye



of the law the acts and merits of his Head. These are no longer the righteousness of another infinitely removed from him, but of one with whom he has become indissolubly connected. The oneness is so complete, that it is likened to the unity of the Father and the Son. On the page of God's awful account are written all the enormous debts of his people; but on the other page God's own hand has written, in letters of blood, the payment of his Son. God is pleased to regard the righteousness of the Head as the righteousness of the members. Nor is there error or deception in such a reckoning. This righteousness, though not rendered by ourselves, is rendered for us by one who is our Surety; and "we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." "We are not declared righteous in ourselves, which would be false, but in Christ, which is most true."\* "God does not judge that we in our own persons have rendered this righteousness, which is false; but that Christ has so fulfilled it for us, that we may justly be invested with his merit: which is so true, that it is the sum of the whole Gospel."† It was rendered for

\* Turretine.

† Witsius.

no other purpose. The law made no demand of it, except for this purpose. The Son of God became incarnate, to render it. He was under no obligation, except the obligation of his people. When he bowed under the law, it was the world of elect sinners which bowed. "If one died for all, then all died." The infinite Judge does not merely accept it: he devised it. It was the very thing which from all eternity he contemplated, as the most glorious satisfaction to the law; it would be the height of presumptuous scruple, for us to find fault with it. And all heaven rejoices in beholding a glorious body of saints, so united to the Messiah, that every act of his redounds to their salvation.

It is a view of the subject which avoids many difficulties and anticipates many objections. The union of believers with Christ is the ground of their receiving his righteousness. That is set to their account which has become theirs by this gracious connection. This, and no more, is what we mean by the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Instead of an arbitrary ascription to us of something contrary to fact, as our adversaries allege, it is God's be-

holding us as intimately connected with the Great Surety. The obedience which he rendered was rendered by him in our nature, in our name, and as our covenant head. It was in its very intention that it should be regarded as ours. It had no other intention. Faith completes the union, long contemplated in the covenant, and thenceforth God regards the believer no longer in himself, but in Christ, and the Church of elect saints as the body of Christ, invested with his righteousness.

From what has been said, it is apparent that justification is instantaneous. The notion of progressive justification is inseparable from the tenet of inherent righteousness. At every moment the soul is either condemned or absolved, either unrighteous or righteous. It is equally apparent that the favourite Antinomian notion of eternal justification, is unscriptural. The covenant counsels of the Godhead and the purpose to justify, were indeed from eternity, but the act of justification takes place in time. Neither can we say that actual justification ensued immediately upon the accomplishment of the satisfaction by the Lord Jesus. For although,

at that instant, the righteousness was complete, it was not yet applied to those for whom it was intended; because, as we have seen, this application is founded on the union of believers to Christ, which had not yet taken place in regard to all. The moment of justification is the moment of believing: in the order of time, it is therefore identical with the moment of effectual calling. This appears from all those expressions which speak of believers as having been under condemnation and wrath, as passing from darkness to light, from enmity to friendship, from death to life. In regard to holy men who lived under the Old Testament, they were united by faith to a Redeemer not yet incarnate, and justified by a righteousness yet to come.

At this blessed moment of justification, the sinner is at once admitted to the favour of God. He is accepted as righteous. The law is as fully satisfied with regard to him, as if he had never sinned. The righteousness of Christ is now his righteousness. He can no more come into condemnation, than Christ can come into condemnation. He is delivered from the guilt and penalty of all his sins. With regard to

sins which he may hereafter commit, he is not indeed pardoned; because it would be incongruous to say that sins are pardoned before they are committed; but God has graciously accepted the righteousness of Christ, even in respect to these, and in process of time pardon is dispensed. The effect of this grace is to remove all condemnation and all punishment. That sin which has been visited on the Surety, will not be visited on us. The afflictions of this life are not legal pains, but fatherly trials and corrections. And death itself, being deprived of sin which is its sting, and the law which is its strength, is despoiled of all its punitive force. Here is a change of state so great, that it is amazing even to him who experiences it. The absolving act is not in every case pronounced to the soul of the believer: it is, however, sooner or later, sealed to every one by the Holy Spirit. But the vastness of its import will not be appreciated by any, until the time of the general judgment, when, before the assembled universe, the Judge shall acquit his people as a body, and welcome them to the joy of their Lord.

Such is the doctrine of the Bible on this important subject; and if my endeavour has been successful, I have shown that justification is a forensic term, expressing an act of God by which he accepts a sinner as righteous in the sight of the law; that the best obedience of the sinner, even in his renewed state, is insufficient for this end; that we are justified without works, and that the works thus excluded are not merely ceremonial works, nor works wrought in unbelief, but all works whatever; that the righteousness which justifies us is that of our Divine Mediator, consisting of what he did and what he suffered; that this righteousness becomes ours upon our believing; that the efficacy of faith does not arise from the act of believing being imputed in lieu of obedience, nor from faith viewed as the source of all obedience, but from its uniting us with the Lord Jesus Christ; that in consequence of this union, the acts of the Redeemer are considered as the acts of his people, which is otherwise called the imputation of his righteousness; and that hence the believing sinner receives the absolute remission of all his sins, with a right to eternal salvation.



Two reflections will sum up our discussion of the subject, and will at the same time be a reply to objections which some think formidable.

1. The first is, that justification by faith is gratuitous justification. From beginning to end, the work of salvation is of grace. And it is futile to object that this grace is impaired by the satisfaction rendered to the law. The debt which we owed is indeed paid, but not paid by us. The means of paying it is freely given us by God. He who places in the hands of an insolvent debtor the amount which shall discharge all his liabilities, does not thereby lessen the obligation of the person relieved. Our own part in justification is merely receptive. It is not our own works or even our own faith which is the ground of our acceptance. And though the law is fully satisfied, and the debt cancelled, it is done by a gracious gift to us; and a gift from the hand of Almighty God. The offended Judge is he, by whom the propitiation is devised, applied, accepted, and perfected. This is deeply impressed on the heart of the rejoicing believer. The more clearly he views the right-

eousness of the Surety as the basis of all his hope, the more humbly does he acknowledge that his salvation is all of grace. The doctrine is abasing to human pride and exalting to the riches of Divine favour. And we may confidently appeal to experience to show that none have been more constant in praise of free grace, than those who behold it manifested in the imputation of perfect righteousness.

2. The belief of justification by faith tends to personal holiness. In answer to the objection of adversaries, we maintain that the obligations to obedience are not weakened, but confirmed. He who expects justification in this way, so expects it, for the very reason that his conviction is so strong of the eternal obligation of the law, which could not relax one jot or tittle of its claim, without satisfaction. He connects with this such a sense of the evil of sin, as can be produced only by seeing it visited on the holy Son of God. He sees, as none others see, the dreadful nature of its punishment. He sees, as no others can see it, the infinite purity of the Divine character. But especially he feels the obligation of gratitude, for the free

compassion and infinite love of God, so as to have a motive to obedience which is the strongest possible. Every view which he takes of the mediatorial work and suffering, affords a fresh inducement for him to live no longer unto himself, but unto him who loved him, and gave himself for him. Consequently, the history of the Church shows that Gospel morality has most flourished where this doctrine has been preached. To which side shall we look for strictness in observing the law of God—to the Romish body, where human merit was triumphant, or to the churches of the Reformation? Where shall we go to find poignant convictions of sin—to the assemblies where human merit is exalted, or to those where free salvation is proclaimed? What charge was ever more violently brought against our forefathers, than the charge of undue scrupulosity and pharisaical punctilio? To what class of preachers do worldly people attach themselves—to those who make every thing of morals, or to those who preach the righteousness of Christ? By whose labours are great reformations wrought, and extensive awakenings produced, if not by

that of the defenders of a gracious justification?

Are any disposed to say, that a doctrine cannot be true, which is open to such an objection? We answer, the misrepresentation is as old as Paul himself. The truth was misconstrued even in apostolic times. "What shall we say, then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid." The identity of the objection infers identity of doctrine. And we may reply, as Paul replied, "How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"

We may go further, and say, that of all means for promoting personal holiness, there is none more efficacious than the steady and affectionate contemplation of the very truth which has now been presented. It is when we behold our blessed Saviour suffering for us, and obeying for us, that our self-devotion rises to its height. Draw your motives, beloved brethren, from the cross of Christ. Your obedience will then have a perennial spring. Instead of being a cold observance, it will be the outgoing of a melted, broken heart. The more free you feel yourself from the law as a covenant of works,

the more will you feel it to be a delightful yoke as a rule of life. The more you feel disenthralled from the bondage of sin, the hardest of all masters, the more will you exult in the service of a gracious Lord. And if ever the insidious adversary should abuse your minds by Antinomian suggestions, you will answer his seductive argument, as it is answered by the apostle: "What then; shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants, his servants ye are? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but being made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness, having your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."

VII.

FAITH ESTABLISHING THE LAW.



## FAITH ESTABLISHING THE LAW.

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ROMANS iii. 31.—“Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.”

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THERE are times in every Christian experience when it becomes a question for the soul how to reconcile free salvation with the continual prescription of good works. Both are very clearly set forth in Scripture. We are said to be justified freely by his grace, without the works of the law, and we are commanded to be perfect as our Father who is in heaven is perfect. One passage tells us that by the deeds of the law shall no flesh living be justified, and another passage tells us that without holiness no man shall see the Lord. The chief of sinners is invited to be saved by him who justifieth the ungodly; and the pure in heart are blessed, be-

cause they shall see God. Now, while a captious and half-learned mind will seize on these as discrepances, if not contradictions, and thus discredit the Word of God, the wise and reverent inquirer will fall back upon a maxim as modest as it is reasonable, by means of which to solve the problem, or at least to prepare the elements of a solution. It is this: In all communications from a high source, apparent inconsistencies must be ascribed to the want of sufficient knowledge in our own minds. In the world of grace, as in the world of nature, we must sometimes sit down and wait for more light. Common reason will presume that in a book not only accepted by the Catholic belief of all Christian ages, but established by irrefragable proof as authentic and inspired, there can be no real contradictions. It is far more easy for a sound reasoner to believe that he is himself in the dark, than to believe that Holy Scripture contains propositions which are irreconcilable. It is more likely that any given set of words admits of another interpretation than that books penned and published by men of shrewdness, to say no more, should assert diametrical oppo-

sites. It is more likely that a single text, or a few texts, should be obscure, than that the concurrent lights of the whole record should be deceptive. All which brings us safely and surely round to the divine principle of interpretation, viz.: "the proportion of faith." Rom. xii. 6. All divine doctrine goes by a sacred analogy. If seeming irregularities in the motions of Mars\* led Kepler to doubt the universal exposition of circular planetary orbs which belonged to astronomy even as reformed by Copernicus; much more may inconsistency with the "analogy of faith," or the concurrent teaching of all Scriptures lead us to doubt our exposition of phrases however literal or natural these may seem. To give one instance out of thousands, it is thus we dispose of all those passages which ascribe bodily parts and passions to the Infinite and Unchangeable Spirit. In like manner, humble piety, here sustained by sound philosophy, will conclude that the seeming contradictions of Scripture concerning salvation without works, and salvation with works, admit of being perfectly harmonized.

\* Ency. Brit. iii. 739.

It is a great encouragement to think that we have lighted on a true interpretation of Scripture when we find such interpretation assailed by the same objections which assailed the original scriptural statement. For example, we interpret Paul as teaching that as the procuring cause of a sinner's acceptance with God, his works, doings, righteousness, and merits have no validity; that pardon and title to life are received by believing and not by doing; and that justification is a gratuitous act of God, so far as our obedience is concerned, while in regard to the Mediator, it is founded on the obedience unto death of the Divine Substitute. This is what we derive from the Epistle to the Romans. Now, the doctrine thus derived is met with an objection of this sort: You thus destroy the motive to holy obedience and relax the binding stress of law. I say, it is encouraging to our interpretation of the passage in Paul to know that in Paul's life time the same objection was made to his own words. He had been saying, iii. 28, that "a man is justified by faith without the works of the law." What is the kind of objection which Paul anticipates and precludes? It

is that by so teaching he vacates the law, verse 31, "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid, yea, we establish the law." But this is the very objection which in our own day is made against our preaching of a free Gospel. It is therefore our encouragement to believe, that this free Gospel is the identical Gospel which was taught by Paul.

I desire to treat this part of Christian doctrine in its relation to individual experience, and the case of those who are about to pass, or who have already passed, from death unto life. The high and glorious doctrines of the Pauline theology never seem so self-evidencing, and so precious, as when they are brought into apposition with the repentant soul, and when they are used as instruments in the hand of the Spirit, for converting the soul to God. If, leaving the schools of divinity, we proceed to investigate this matter in the light of inward experience, we shall find ourselves greatly aided. Divine theology was not sent down from heaven to be treated with dialectical nicety, or reduced to formulas as dry as the bones on the anatomist's table. Taking our position, therefore,

among new converts, we lend our ear to the objection, that he who believes himself justified without some personal obedience to render, proceeds as if the law were nullified. Let us go with this allegation into the court of religious consciousness. It is charged that this lately forlorn sinner, who just now stood trembling before the tribunal of divine justice, and who has just heard the gracious Judge pronounce his free acquittal, is released from all obligation, disposition, and motive. Now, if this objection were well taken, it would conclude not only against the evangelical scheme, but against Christianity itself; inasmuch as the declarations complained of are inseparable from the book and appear in all their fulness on its face. The ethical reason is final and overwhelming—that what is immoral is not of God. No evidences *for* Christianity can be stronger than that would be against it. And therefore we defend Christianity, not by showing that immorality is endurable, but that Christianity is not immoral, which we shall now make obvious in the case of the returning sinner; following the very order of thought in the objection, which denies obligation, motive, and disposition.



I. Obligation. THE BELIEVING SINNER ADMITS AND AVOWS HIS OBLIGATION TO OBEY THE LAW. No truly converted man, at the time of his conversion, has lower thoughts of duty than before, but altogether higher. At no moment of his life has he had such a view of justice and legal demand as he now has. His apprehension of the infinite rightness and fitness of doing God's will is greater than that of any legalist in the world. The fact that the legalist hopes by such obedience to merit life, does in no degree cause him to have higher moral convictions. Moral convictions, *i. e.*, convictions of the rightness or wrongness of actions are not dependent on any notions of merit and reward. The rectitude, beauty, and binding validity of the law are distinctly viewed apart from its sanctions. The returning and now believing sinner has become convinced and persuaded that God, for Christ's sake, is his reconciled Father and absolving Judge, forgiving his offences and receiving him to favour and life without the consideration of any righteousness of his own; but the entire transaction as the ground of his confidence and peace is such as to exalt beyond all

previous experience his estimate of holiness, justice, law, and righteousness. The sinner has fled to this grace of salvation, not because there was no claim of law, but because the claim of law was immense. He has rejoiced in this surety, not because payment was superfluous, but because he had nothing to pay. He has escaped breathless into this city of refuge, not because there was no retribution, but because the avenger of blood was at his heels. Justice, justice, it was, which drove him to grace. Justice, eternal justice it is which still abides. It was not simple fear, but contrition which impelled him to the altar; he not only dreaded penalty, he also had remorse for sin; it was more than wrath, it was conscience of guilt, which made him thirst for expiation. Now, conscience of guilt involves approval of rectitude, of holiness, and of law. Pardon of sin, though free, tends in no degree to lessen approval of law and consequent abhorrence of sin.

But there is much more to be said on this head. The believing sinner admits his obligation to the holy law, because he reads that obli-

gation in the very method of redemption. The method is one of substitution and vicarious atonement. The high obligation of the subject to law has been assumed by the Son of God incarnate, acting in covenant as Mediator and Sponsor. What was it that made the soul despair? It was sense of obligation. What was it that made it necessary for the Word to become flesh? It was obligation. What was it that caused Jesus to obey the precept and endure the penalty? It was obligation. Man must die. "Die he, or justice must." Divine justice becomes man, and dies to meet the obligation. In the stains of holy blood upon the ignominious tree, upon the accursed earth, and upon the fair cold body of the lovely Redeemer, the believing sinner reads, as in letters of crimson, Obligation, Obligation. This is a matter of experience. All true penitents find it so. Who shall affront my deepest sensibilities and holiest apprehensions of generous love, by charging that this my view of gratuitous redemption by the blood of the Cross tends to diminish my conscientious sense of duty to Him who died! What spectacle in heaven, earth, or

hell, so magnifies the Law as the spectacle of Christ expiring in the tortures of law, and of vicarious endurance? The faith that accepts this as redemption accepts it also as the grand testimony of obligatory command. Laying my hand on the head of the sacrifice to Infinite Justice, I thereby declare, as nowhere else, my obligation to the code of justice which demanded this sanction. He whom I behold dying in pangs and blood came not to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfil them. I believe in Him who is the end of the law for righteousness unto every one that believeth. And my conviction of the power of Law, henceforth and forever, is raised to its acme when I hear the cry of consummation from those lips, "It is finished!"

II. Motive. THE BELIEVING SINNER, IN HIS VERY BELIEVING, RECOGNIZES THE STRONGEST MOTIVES TO PERSONAL HOLINESS. These motives, though reducible to a common head, apply themselves to the mind with the distinctness of separate forces, all moving it to obey. Some of these arrange themselves under the heads of holy ad-

miration of law, sight of perfect example, and grateful love. 1. *Holy admiration of God's law* is a powerful motive to obey, and it is produced by faith; for the soul in believing looks forth on the Law as brightly effulgent in the plan of redemption. Proof of this has already been given. Admiration of the law is admiration of infinite holiness, which is admiration of God. This is immensely more operative than cold approval of moral beauty or excellence; it takes a wider sweep; it goes nearer the primal source of all ethical relations; it gathers around conscience the kindling fires of ascending passion; it reflects the radiance of a personal glow from the face of Jesus Christ, who is our law. Personal holiness in perfection is the realization of law. Now, personal holiness in perfection not only is apparent in Jesus Christ, but is most of all apparent in his cross and passion. That which faith apprehends at the moment of the sinner's conversion, is this very glory of God as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ. The admiration of infinite loveliness can never rise higher than at this Cross; and thus the very belief which makes the sinner a trophy of free

grace, subjects him, at the same time, to a motive of obedience. 2. The sight of a *perfect example* brings fresh motive to holiness before the soul that believes. The power of example is great and obvious. Example, as additional to mere precept, shows us several distinct objects: first, the beauty of holy obedience in palpable action; secondly, the practicability of holy obedience, and thirdly, the manner and detail of holy obedience. The only perfect example which the world has seen is the Lord Jesus Christ. Of his holiness thus exemplified in our human nature and under our human obligations, the crowning portions are in his atoning work. Never did he so please God the Father, never did he make manhood so lovely, according to the creative idea of the Father; never, in other words, did he radiate the splendours of so great a holiness, as when he sanctified himself in that offering, and gave up his life for his people. Of this work part was divine, and therefore inimitable; but a great and lovely part is sublimely exemplary. And these acts and sufferings of Christ, this subjugation and oblation of his innocent and blessed will, this atoning obedience unto death,



are the very object of saving faith, the very point on which the soul fixes its eye in believing, the very motive which the convert to free grace has to obey the law of his Redeemer. Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid! how shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein? If baptized into Jesus Christ we are baptized into his death. The atoning work, which frees us from condemnation, wins us to holiness by its lofty example. 3. *Grateful love* is a motive to obey the law. The love of Christ constraineth us, for we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead, and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, *i. e.*, should obey. Love constrains. Grateful love constrains—and to obey! O, the child-like simplicity of the motive. I believe, I love, I obey. First I believe. I take in all the wonderful demonstration of Christ's power and willingness to save me freely. I lean on it for my hope. Then, in this very instant of believing or accepting free pardon, I love. I love my redeeming God. And thirdly, I obey,

for as obedience is love in act, so love is obedience in principle. This golden chain binds the sinner at his believing to the throne of Christ. The voice of his Redeemer says: If ye love me keep my commandments, and in proportion as he loves, so he obeys. Thus the sinner who acts upon the principle of free grace, does, while he exercises the faith which justifies without works, recognize the strongest motives to personal holiness, even the motives of holy admiration of law, sight of perfect example, and grateful love to Christ.

III. Disposition. THE BELIEVING SINNER, AT HIS BELIEVING, AND BY MEANS OF HIS BELIEVING, IS BROUGHT INTO A DISPOSITION TO OBEY THE LAW OF GOD. If this can be proved it must entirely remove the objection, of which the whole force resides in the allegation that, in regard to those who hold it, the doctrine of a free salvation by faith indisposes to holy living. What we maintain, on the contrary, is that the soul which so believes in gratuitous redemption is at the same moment brought into a state most favourable to obedience. Our proof of this respects three

particulars: *the posture of the soul in believing, the nature of the truth believed, and the tender exercises of saving repentance.*

1. The more you consider it, the more will you perceive that no condition into which a human soul can be thrown more disposes for the rendering of obedience to God's law than that in which such a soul puts forth acts of belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. This will be evident if you remark the *precise posture of the mind in believing* a Divine record. It is a posture of inward obedience. It is a state of submission to the Great Supreme. Faith is obedience to God as true, just as right offerings and choices are obedience to God as holy and sovereign. So near akin is the temper of believing to the temper of obeying. He who is ready to believe is at the same time ready to obey. Both dispositions flow from one and the same spirit of self-surrender or grateful oblation of heart to God in Christ. Both are streams from the same fountain of principle opened in the soul by the regenerative power of the spirit. The new creature acts in both these parallel lines as by one and the

same impulse, believing truth and performing duty.

2. How the disposition to obey springs up in the new convert will be further manifest from considering the *nature of the truth believed*. It is absurd to speak of belief, unless we imply some truth to be believed. Now, the particular truth which I believe when I "receive the atonement" is that God, for Christ's sake, is reconciled to me, a sinner. This belief directly and infallibly operates to produce a disposition of loving obedience. Partly because sin is that from which I seek deliverance by believing, and deliverance from sin is holiness. Partly because the sight of God reconciled through Jesus Christ is fitted above all other views to kindle the flame of gratitude. This is the faith which worketh by love, and this is the love, which is the fulfilling of the law. This new disposition is properly called evangelical, because it proceeds upon motives of Gospel rather than motives of law. Sinai, with its barrier of threatening, its furnace smoke, its lightnings, its trumpet alarm, and its voices of terror, its wrathful volleys, and its portentous quakings, does not create one lov-

ing sentiment ; but the accents of pardon issuing from the Cross compel the relenting sinner to love, gratitude, and obedience.

3. It is thus that faith causes *repentance*. By repentance I do not mean sorrow, which is only one ingredient in it, but that grace by which the soul, convinced of the evil of sin, is also made to apprehend the mercy of God in Christ, and hence with sincere grief to turn the back on sin, and to turn the face towards God, in the full purpose of new obedience. By faith, therefore, we establish the law ; because faith is this very *apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ*. No man ever truly beheld himself a wretched sinner and Jesus a glorious pardoning Saviour, without, in the very act, and in the very proportion of these exercises, desiring and purposing to walk in the way of God's commandments. We might expect this from the consistency of God's dealings in conversion. The Holy Spirit, who seizes on a chosen soul in order to save it, purposes in this salvation a double deliverance, namely from guilt and corruption ; from guilt by a baptism of blood, from corruption by a baptism of water. Both inward.

This is the twofold current from the sacred heart of Jesus; who came not by water only, but by water and blood. The blessed Quicken-er and Sanctifier at one instant breathes into the soul two influences, one respecting Truth and the other respecting Holiness; one is *Faith*, the other is *Obedience*. "Both worketh that one and the self-same Spirit." The hand which touches Christ as a Saviour or Priest, does homage to him as a King. It is true, indeed, that the justifying power of Faith does not consist in its being thus the root and origin of obedience. Exact theology prefers to say that the same renewed nature which breaks forth in believing on the presentation of Truth, breaks forth into loving obedience on the presentation of Duty. The very sense of deliverance by free grace makes the soul abhor the license of sin. "What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid!" "Now, being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life." Rom. vi. 15, 23. The temper of the believer is a temper of holy subjection; obeying not as a price for



life, but as an irrepressible expression and outgoing of a heart all in fusion from infinite compassion and grace. Thus the sinner, by faith, is brought into a disposition to obey the law of God. And, in recapitulation of our whole progress, we have proved, first, that the convert to free grace admits his obligation, secondly, that he finds his motive, and thirdly, that he acquires his disposition to serve; and all three by believing. And in so proving, we have established our position, that the doctrine of salvation by faith, without works of merit, does not make void the law, but establishes it.

IN CONCLUSION: While motives of mere law are cold and inoperative, in effecting genuine obedience, motives of the Gospel warmly and commandingly act on the affections and the will, and tend to universal holiness; thus the Gospel confirms the law. Give me these few moments to compare the two sets of motives, in regard both to principle and fact. 1. The principle of the *legal motive* is one of conscience, and it keeps in view retribution. Its maxim is: Do this and live; fail of this and perish. Especially, when its most violent forces are

applied, it denounces the damnation of hell. It crushes, but has no power to elevate, to melt, or to inspire. It reveals guilt, and seals condemnation ; but it stupefies and petrifies in despondency and woe. It wakes up sin as light wakes up a torpid viper. "I was alive without the law." The legal principle alone begets no *love*, which after all is the true spring of obedience ; and hence, in our fallen state, we cannot reasonably expect the doctrine of merit to inspire affection, nor the law to secure its own fulfilment.

What we thus admit in principle we observe to be true in fact. Answer all ye who under this yoke have been all your lives toiling to work out your salvation, like the slave, under the lash ; and who, at each fresh agony of endeavour, find yourselves only more convinced of your incapacity to perfect holiness in the fear of God. Witness ye who day by day are no better, but consciously worse, from working amidst these sullen fires of obligation under the thundering doom "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." "The

law worketh wrath," and its effect is not acceptable to heaven, being void of love, which is the heart and soul of all fulfilment. The hosts of deluded Papists stand out in history as so many ghastly examples of what the expectation of meriting God's favour by legal performance can beget. So far from being the holiest of men, they have let down the pale of duty, made sin easy, published tariffs of transgression, made traffic of indulgences, dispensed solemn obligations, and in the very proportion of their prevalence and power, in all countries, established a looseness of morals which is a proverb, so that where they are least restrained by Protestantism they are most unholy, and their most sacred ministers are the worst of men. Such is the fact as to the doctrine of merit in its grosser varieties. Lesser instances, among degraded Protestant churches, exhibit the same tendency of legal teaching to make void the very law which it vaunts. Thus we trace the legal motive, both in principle and fact. Its great opposite remains. 2. The *evangelical motives* act warmly on the affections and the will, tending to a universal obedience and

thus establishing the law. The principle here is just that which the whole preceding discussion has set forth. It is no faith which does not prove influential in obedience, just as on examination you pronounce that to be no heat which does not cause expansion. Such faith is nominal and dead. "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."

The fact is not less apparent, and we appeal to it with the confidence of triumph. Whether we survey the individual soul, or entire communities, stretching through many generations, we discern that where the doctrine of justification without works has been most freely and fully preached, believed, and experienced, there the standard of morals has been highest. Not only are there warmer feelings, there is also stricter observance. Our arrogant opponent charges us with relaxing the bonds of morals, and an apostate Calvinist in this city, once an orthodox preacher, has calumniously stated that the doctrine of justification by faith tended to looseness of morals. This opprobrium is cast upon us by those maligners who in the next breath accuse

us of sourness, puritanic scruple, ascetic observance, sabbatarian harshness, and pharisaic sternness of rule. The fact is one of history. For wide-spread and deeply-rooted morality of life, the world can show no such examples as those of the lands of the Reformation; I mean those in which the doctrines of Calvin, Knox, Cranmer, Fox, and Jewell prevailed; the lands of the Huguenots, the Covenanters, and the Non-Conformists; the lands, thank God, of our forefathers. As diversity of opinion has come in, as we have refined upon the tenets which lifted the souls and nerved the arms of our forefathers; as the doctrines of our immortal Confession have become less those of the people, I call you to witness that public morals have become degraded. Let us praise the Lord that there are still in our national counsels men whose tongue is not "set on fire of hell," and who do not "smite with the fist of wickedness." Our hope of salvation is in the pure Gospel. Believe it, love it, act on it, and you do so much to bless the country, while you fulfil a higher law. Convinced of your sin, you need a Saviour who stands before the tribunal all sinless—

“Jesus Christ the righteous.” When you believe in him who thus fulfilled the law you begin yourself to fulfil it. Tarry not a moment in the legal plain. Look not back to the ruins of your own insufficient righteousness. Approach at once, as you are, but believing, to the open arms of the inviting Saviour. The faith you thus attempt will not embolden you in sin, but will make sin your abhorrence. And, despairing of justification from the law, you will nevertheless establish the law.



VIII.

THE PROGRESS OF FAITH.

## THE PROGRESS OF FAITH.

LUKE xvii. 5.—“And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.”

WHEN the disciples of our Lord and Master prayed him to increase their faith, there was implied in their request a truth which continually reappears in our discussion, namely, that faith has degrees. There is a weak faith, like a grain of mustard seed, and there is a strong faith, like a great tree of the forest. And all that makes faith valuable goes to awaken the desire that our own faith should grow in strength. The subject now before us is this very growth of the believing principle, considered in its source and manner.

While evangelical faith is not without a constant blending with the emotional and vol-

untary part of our nature, it is not so within reach of command, as that we can effectually tell our minds to believe, or not believe. Even though a man does not believe against his will, he cannot ensure belief or disbelief of a given truth by the putting forth of a direct volition. This is too plain to need proof or elucidation. So far as evangelical faith is concerned, it is God who is its author, and we may regard the point as no longer open for debate. We have already seen that at the moment when the heavenly call brings a soul out of darkness into light, God implants in it a principle of believing, and so acts upon the faculties previously existing, as to secure the due reception of the truth which he reveals. All our terms on this point are figurative. The words renewal and regeneration are themselves such. We are not competent to define precisely what that is, which God does in regard to the soul, at its effectual calling. The very throwing in of light into the dark chamber is under divine efficiency the cause of faith. The nature shows its first sign of renovation, by actual believing. It lives, and the proof of this is, that it sees. This is the beginning of faith.

God gives both the vision and the object of vision, and in this twofold manner he continues to operate, during all the Christian career. He gives vision at the regenerating call out of darkness into marvellous light. The new creature is not blind. It is of its very nature to turn towards the light and to enjoy it. This is the specific way in which it acts, and this mode of action conditions all its subsequent life. As natural life is kept up by nourishment, so spiritual life is kept up by perpetual repetition of believing acts, all flowing from the inward principle of divine habitude, communicated at renewal, and predisposing the mind to receive divine communications with persuasion of their truth and excellency. This is the true theory of growth; thus is faith increased. The soul has an affinity for divine truth, and turns to it, just as the young plant in your greenhouse looks, and bends, and clambers towards the sunny window. Or the Heavenly Father may be said continually to hold up the infant believer, to look out upon the processions and prospects which are afforded by the Word. But we have seen that God gives not only the vision, but the

objects. That this holds good in regard to the original revelation of the truths revealed, it is hardly needful to say; but we go further. The Father of Lights is perpetually bringing before the mind the great spiritual realities upon which faith seizes. This manifestation of heavenly things begins, as we have already seen, at regeneration. Especially the great central object is then revealed to the wondering eye of the awakening sinner, even God, in Christ, reconciling the ungodly to himself. This illumination is coincident with the beginning of the new life. But the series of divine objects has only begun, and all through the religious life, he who affords the faith furnishes that upon which it shall feed. The newborn babes who desire the sincere milk of the Word, find supplies continually replenished from these breasts of consolation. As long as we are in this world we may be said to be walking through a gallery of marvels, to each of which the Great Master who holds us by the hand directs our attention.

When we speak of God as maintaining the increase of faith by renewed and perpetual exhibition of that which shall be the object and

pabulum of faith, we include both outward presentation and inward influence. The outward presentation of truth falls under the domain of Providence, which perfectly concurs with grace. The believer, in his state of pupilage, is placed under an economy of merciful instruction. He is now in Christ's school. By parents, teachers, friends, ministers, and holy books, he has offered to his view the facts and doctrines of religion; and this external instrumentality is indispensable. But something is needed nearer the centre. The inward influence of the Holy Spirit prints the rays on the table of the heart, and faith here finds its precious materials. This is the secret source from which all graces are irrigated. In the ordinary work of sanctification we know not that God ever operates on the soul with an entire independence of the truth. He answers the intercession of the Son, when he sanctifies them by the truth, his "Word is truth." But we dare not, with some, confine these influences to a bare presentation of objective truth. All observation and all Christian consciousness show that this is utterly ineffectual, unless something be added; which is



the clarifying, directive, and swaying potency of God put forth upon the thinking principle; which now not merely has an object presented, but actually sees it in something of its reality and excellence. By this double favour, in which we have both the exterior truth as something to be received, and the interior faculty of receiving it, God is day by day carrying forward the process of assimilation, nutrition, and strength.

What we are now considering belongs to what may be called spiritual physiology; it becomes known to us only by experience. But the biographies of all Christians harmonize here in a surprising degree. The disciple will find it useful to look back on his own. You were once an infant in faith. If there has been any increase you perceive it has been by a never-ceasing engagement of your mind upon the communications of Scripture. Having begun with milk, you have been gently led on to partake of strong meat, as you were able to bear it. Happy was it for you, if you early learned to covet an experience more robust than that which consists of flights, and frames, and moods; flashes of joy, chills of fear, effusions of grief; good

days and bad days, independent of Christian doctrine. You entered yourself upon the study of the Scripture with method and perseverance; you hearkened to the preached Word with modest expectation. These truths had a savour which made you come again. Not content with the mellow fruits which lay on the ground, you were taught to search for others among the branches. From that which was easy you advanced to the keener relishes of that which was difficult. The Master met you where you did not expect him, and you tasted honey in the open field, and your eyes were enlightened. Sometimes that which had once made your pride revolt, became the source of edification: "out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness." Passages, and even whole books of Scripture, which had lain by you as lumbering unopened caskets, were in time brought forth and made to reveal their "hid treasure." You were taken in twilight hours into the "House of Mourning," and there taught lessons which you would never have learned by day. Comparing Scripture with Scripture, and summing up scattered expres-

sions into great comprehensive heads, you have risen to schemes of theological method, and have discerned the beautiful consistency of truth. These lessons have not been speculative; they have exercised the heart. While knowledge has been pouring out the heavenly wine of evangelical doctrine, faith has carried it round to all the sisterhood of graces, till each has been revived. The work of the understanding and the work of the affections so run into one another, that happy souls are never more a-glow, never more melted, than while they are in contact with some good word of God; just as on a fair autumnal day we walk abroad, and while we bask in the gentle ray, receive from it silently both light and heat. Did you ever see the array of clouds at sunrise show the same colors on two occasions? Just as diverse are the lessons of truth which Christ has taught you out of the Bible; day by day changing the instruction, "He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned." Is. l. 4.

In all the departments and families of animal nature, we find analogies, and these are not

to be despised, partly because of the laws pervading the universe which sustain these analogies, and partly because they are made use of in the teachings of Scripture. However high and however low we go in our range, we find every creature which lives depending on nourishment. Whatever be wanting, some organ or faculty receptive of aliment is always present. Now, I say this very analogy is used in the lessons of faith, when we are taught that the soul is nourished by truth. That this is implied in the milk and strong meat, to which we have alluded, is exceedingly plain. But in addition, and with yet more impressive figure, the similitude of this vital law is brought before us in regard to our reception of the truth concerning Christ. We receive Christ, when we fully believe the truth concerning him. And as all truth centres in him, and faith accepts not only his Word, but his person, we are represented as receiving himself; and this not only in a general way, but particularly as to his flesh and blood; that is, his sacrificial body, as representative of his redeeming work, which centres in the Cross. Nay, to make the correspondence more

complete, the mode by which our faith receives the Lord Jesus is set forth by the particular figure of eating and drinking; and the Lord Jesus is exhibited as the bread which came down from heaven. After the miracle of the loaves, which gave occasion to our Lord's most remarkable Capernaum discourse, he said to his hearers, in words connecting the whole subject with his atonement, John vi. 51: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." Concerning this sixth chapter of John, it is disputed in the schools whether it relates to the Lord's Supper. Roman Catholics affirm this, founding on it their monstrous dogma of a real bodily presence. Protestants usually deny. The true solution seems to be that these words do not primarily relate to this sacrament, not instituted as yet, but that they do relate to that great truth which underlies it and on which it is founded. For we are not to suppose that the Lord's Supper is an arbitrary ordinance, or that one emblem would have answered as well as

another for a commemorative sign. On the contrary, the ordinance has its essence, vivifying form, or idea, which is the resemblance between the taking of food and drink for bodily sustenance, and the receiving of Christ by faith. To return, then, the varieties of truth revealed in the Scripture yield increase to faith, as so many different sorts of nourishment. The actings of faith are modified by the nature of the communication made. Thus the believer receives historical teaching with instruction and reverence, as on the authority of God speaking in the Word. He bows in obedience to that which is communicated in the shape of command. He trembles at divine threatenings, and rejoices at divine promises. While his capital acts of believing are his accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for salvation, by virtue of the covenant of grace.

In giving increase to faith, it may be observed that God adds to its greatness in two respects, first as to its extent, and secondly as to its intensity; its extent meaning here the range and number of truths discovered and believed, and its intensity the degree of certainty



to which the persuasion arises. The difference among true believers, as to clearness of apprehension and multitude of objects, is immeasurable. Here is a babe in religion, whose mind just twinkles with the smallest, feeblest ray that can save a soul, and whose creed contains only this: "I am a sinner, but Christ has died;" and yonder, near the founts of light, is a Paul, who from that source of illumination beholds worlds and systems of revealed knowledge. Between these the scale has innumerable degrees, which we are unable to graduate. From the lowest to the highest, in regard to knowledge of the objects, God did actually conduct such a saint as Paul. Every addition which we make to our stock of divine communications gives so much increase to the field of vision, and so to the amplitude of faith.

But growth equally concerns the intensity of believing, and this was doubtless the chief thing meant by that prayer of the twelve, "Increase our faith." One man believes more strongly than another, and some truths more strongly than other truths. It is of great practical moment for us to recognize this law of men-

tal action, that faith has degrees. Its fainter measures just glimmer above the point of incredulity and doubt; its higher soarings are among the certainties of assurance. The same man may believe the same truth with very sincere degrees of strength at one time and at another. The advanced Christian, who has the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen, looks back on the early beginnings of his persuasion as scarcely any faith at all. One of the most precious gifts which God ever vouchsafes us, is a clear, unwavering insight of the soul into future and unseen things, which on God's authority become so sure to us, that they stand out palpable and real before us, and though not by the same evidence, become as influential upon our affections and will, as the material objects of our senses. Such faith is no fancy, but self-evidence. He who is strong in faith is as certain that God made the worlds as if he had seen it done; as certain that they shall be dissolved as if he heard the final trumpet. Though humble and illiterate, and though he may have followed out the branches of truth to few of their inferential conclusions he has a

precedence over the philosopher in virtue of this his intensity of believing. Brethren, we only need greater faith to transport us at once into a new world. This Abram had, when, against all appearances, he took the wife of his youth by the hand, and went out, not knowing whither he went. This Isaac had, when his prophetic eye looked down through ages on the fortunes of Israel and Edom. This Jacob had when he, in like manner, became a seer, in regard to Ephraim and Manasseh. This Joseph had, when, amidst the mausoleums and pyramids of Egypt, he ordered that his burial should be in the land of his birth. This Moses had, when, contrary to every human probability, he gave up "the treasures in Egypt," gave up the learned pride of the Court, gave up "the pleasures of sin," gave up the honour of being son to Pharaoh's daughter, and "chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God" in sure and certain faith in "the recompense of the reward." In conducting his children forwards, God is pleased to work step by step, and sometimes slowly. The progress, however, in such hands, is certain. Hard winters may make the tree leafless and seem to con-

geal its juices, but there is life, nay, there is growth, though comparison must be at long intervals to make it apparent. There are many ways in which it may be assailed and weakened, and there are times when even a true Christian may think of himself that he is a rejected hypocrite. How, you will be ready to ask, can this be? Can a man have so remarkable and heavenly a prize within him and yet not know any thing about it? No, indeed, he cannot. If faith is in exercise, he knows it, that is, he is conscious of believing; but it by no means follows that he knows this believing to be saving faith. In like manner, when other exercises, peculiar to the new creature, are present in the mind and heart, he is conscious of them; but the knowledge that these are gracious affections, is altogether a different matter. As this is true of early religion, it is likewise true of religion in progress. There may be advancement, where the reigning experience is so shaded by sadness, self-reproach, lowly views of inward sin, and apprehension of chastisement, that the soul may seem to itself to be drifting in a direction away from God. More serious maladies of the mind

and heart may, for a time, not only seemingly, but really, put back the religious movement, causing painful but temporary decays. Temptations may harass and even defile, the world may come in like a spring-flood, inbred sin may reassert its sway, clouds of error may overshadow, despondency may impair the comforts of believing; but amidst all, and through all, God carries on the good work and "will perform it unto the day of redemption." The case of Peter, about the period of his dreadful denial, is full of instruction. Some think his faith then utterly failed, but if this were so, Christ's prayer was never answered. "Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you [disciples] that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee [Simon] that thy faith fail not." Luke xxii. 31. Faith at length gets the victory, growing up in many to the attainment of a full assurance through Christ.

From first to last that which waters and refreshes inward faith is the river of divine truth, constantly kept in its channel and directed to the roots by the Holy Spirit. Truth is at once means and object. By looking at the truth,

faith is cherished and increased. And this is so important that we may profitably spend a little time in considering the manner in which this work of increase is conducted.

1. God increases faith by presenting new truths to the mind, or by shedding new light on truths already presented. In addition to what has been already offered on this topic, we may remark that Christian knowledge is continually carrying forward its frontier into contiguous territories. The field of discovery is the Word of God itself. This is to the believer what the starry heavens are to the astronomer. It is a noxious error to suppose that we have found out all that is in the Bible. There are seals yet to be broken and interpretations yet in the hand of Providence, which may surpass in glory all that has shone upon the church since Pentecost. In the individual believer there is a perpetual conquest by believing. He may have known before, but this was only surveying the domain which he is to possess. His progress is towards the acquisition of all truth, but this end he shall not reach, till that state where he shall know even as also he is known. But every



proposition of the Word which is taken up by genuine faith becomes a source of new strength. Some of these are never whispered out of doors, being communications from the Heavenly Spouse within the curtains of the heart's tabernacle, concerning the person and grace of Jesus. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and He will show them his covenant." Every one of these blessed experiences, often little flowers of heaven, will be found, on examination, to have proceeded from some bud of distinct revealed truth. The more, therefore, truth is added, the more does faith advance.

2. God increases faith by presenting known truths in new relations. In all knowledge, whether of divine or human science, this is a principal part. The knowledge of simple objects, in a given circle, would soon be exhausted, if it were not for the knowledge of relations between their objects. How few are the original and elementary objects from which geometry takes its departure; yet at length it reaches the extraordinary and to common minds inconceivable heights of analysis which lead to the weighing of planets and the mensuration of un-

seen orbits. The relations of divine truth afford an endless study. The ramifications of these truths never terminate, and connected as they are with the highest and purest enjoyments of the soul, they furnish the best occupation of the human mind. This is one of the greatest differences between Christians. Compare a pious but narrow believer, whose whole theology is contained in a few precious propositions, seldom compared with one another, and never made to produce important deductions, with an Augustine, whose width of view, fertility of comparison, keenness of insight, and subtlety of logic, rendered the most abstruse theology a delightful play; or with Calvin, whose mind, even in youth, had cast all religious tenets into a crystalline regularity of method, whose judgment, by a sort of dialectic instinct, separated truth from falsehood, and whose never surpassed elegance of diction rendered him the master of his period; or with Owen, who, with all his inelegance, is equal to these in learning, in comprehensiveness, in subtlety, in wisdom, and in piety, and who traced out the lines of orthodox theology to lengths never reached by any pre-

vious inquirer. These are marvellous instances of the "diversity of operations" in the great Master. By such processes, He is pleased, according to his own pleasure, to exercise and augment the faith of his people, leading them, especially in devotional hours, to think deeply and profitably on common topics, which, to less observant or less patient minds, might seem to have nothing left for inquiry. Here it is that solemn and continued meditation brings in rich spoils.

3. God increases faith by gradually purging the mind of its errors. In some this is a work of vast extent, in others comparatively small. Religious education and the absence of seducing causes give some minds a signal advantage. There are none, however, in whom this purification does not become necessary. Some errors are poisons, and others are like indigestible or noxious matter taken into the system. There is no religious error which does not impede sanctification. The tendency of increasing truth is to thrust out and at length entirely eliminate contrary falsities. The process is like that which takes place when, as we say, a child outgrows some deformity, or as when an

ulcer tends to healing with sound flesh. The law of a superior nature works towards the establishment of symmetry and the casting off of temporary irregularities. This is the more successful where it is not mere knowledge, but religious faith, which is the reformatory agent. Growth in grace and holiness of heart, beyond all other means, give the soul a repugnance to falsehood, and tend to unity in the truth. Hence, as differing Christians approach nearer to the heavenly state, they are found to be nearer to one another in opinion. The secret but uncontrollable affinity of the soul for God's pure truth tends more and more to eject remnants of falsehood.

4. Above all, God increases faith by strengthening the inward habit of believing. This habit may be viewed from two different sides; either as the principle, infused with the new nature, to be the origin of all acts of believing, or as the faculty of believing called up by frequent practice and rendering all subsequent acts of believing more easy. Of course, we regard this as respecting chiefly the intensity of faith. As a man advances in religion it is more easy for

him to believe. Habitual intercourse enables us to recognize the voice of a dear friend; so the sheep know the voice of the shepherd. A single whisper from God becomes effectual and ensures persuasion. To which we must add that as faith is an immediate product of the life of God in the soul, whatever adds to the vigour of that life, that is, whatever increases inward piety, gives strength to the habitude of faith. All the means of grace, therefore, and all that elevates, purifies, and comforts the soul, go to help forward the disposition to believe; so that, however little we may know of it by our own experience, we have reason to think that there are persons, especially in the quietude of a Christian old age, who have reached a state in which questionings have ceased, and in which the abiding disposition of the soul is to rest upon God's truth, faith being brought into close resemblance to vision. It is the more necessary to dwell on this mode of increasing faith, lest any should suppose it is due to any natural course of learning or process of reasoning. There may be much knowledge where there is no faith, and powerful believing

where there is little science. But the more we believe, the more we are able to believe. And with this will come clearer views of the object, and more profound, immovable, and intense persuasion. All accompanying and resulting graces or holy affections react on faith and increase its strength.

Since these things are so, we see at once how wise was the resort of the apostles to Him who is the Author and the Finisher of faith. Some of us here present, I am quite sure, are convinced that the very greatest blessing we could receive this moment would be a mighty and immediate lifting up of our souls to great faith, such as should realize to us and make present to us God, and Christ, and the eternal world. We err by seeking this too much from our own efforts. There is unbelief in the very endeavour. This is a case in which no man can receive any thing unless it be given him from above. An hour of prayer will do more than a week of study. The very posture of the soul in prayer is favorable to believing. Prayer ascends to the very source of the good which we most need. Do we believe that God, by one



almighty touch, can create in us the faith which would so bless us? Then why not ask him? why not ask him now? why not ask him importunately, jointly, and for one another, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith? One look in that heavenward direction, of a longing, aspiring heart, will accomplish more for us than a lifetime of unaided reasonings. And let us remember that in praying for faith we pray for all good things at once. There is a sound sense in which still "all things are possible to him that believeth." Faith is the chief of sister graces, and she leads in all the rest. He who is the Author, is at the same time the object of faith. While we look towards him praying, let us also look believing. Lord, increase our faith; Lord, increase our faith! Methinks I hear it coming up, as an irrepressible sigh, from various parts of our church! And if so, then I know that a general blessing is nigh, which will be felt in our hearts, in our children, in every assemblage of worshipping people.

IX.

EFFECTUAL WORKING OF FAITH.'

## EFFECTUAL WORKING OF FAITH.

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1 THESS. ii. 13.—“The Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.”

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RELIGION is not the tame and sleepy thing which some suppose. This misapprehension is derived partly from erroneous views of doctrine, but yet more from the examples of actual Christianity among us, which fall so far short of the biblical standard. In its beginnings, the religion of Jesus must have had an extraordinary fund of warmth and power, or it never would have accomplished such changes. Even of false religions, however we may detest their pretensions, we judge rightly that they have an inward motive power of great expansive force, when we behold them rapidly pervading whole

nations. Such is our just conclusion in reference to this particular, when we see Mohammedism diffusing itself like a conflagration over the most celebrated countries of the East, and even sending its victorious flame into southeastern Europe. And such must be our conviction respecting certain forms of popery, as, for example, Jesuitism, which embodies most of what belongs to the Romish system. But never was this more true than of the early progress of Christianity. Wherever it came, it was hailed as a mighty revolution. Those that turned the world upside down were its propagators. Without aid from philosophy, government, or arms, nay, in the face of all these, it began a triumphal march, which for a while looked as if it would reach the limits of the habitable globe, and which did attain to boundaries, compared with which all later missionary successes have been small and insignificant. To reach such results, there must have been a secret, operative, and indomitable force in the souls of early disciples. And it is the absence of this to which we ascribe the tardy pace of modern evangelism. The new religion did not simply claim to be admitted to a

purity with existing superstitions, nor was Jesus offered for a coequal place among the divinities of the Pantheon; but the conquering faith claimed to reign alone, and pushed with a mighty assault against all that had hitherto prevailed over the minds of men. It not only transformed rude and violent men into the gentlest creatures, full of graceful love; but elevated the humblest and meekest into heroes and martyrs; so that women, slaves, and children went joyfully to chains, peril, and death in the fulness of their persuasions. The point to which I ask attention, is, that the minds, thus nerved and thus propelled, must have been actuated by a principle of immense force; and accordingly that this belongs to the Christian religion, in its vigorous condition. This actuating principle was, in its simplest form, the conviction of divine truth. Here we arrive at one of the great constituents of the true Christian character, the consideration of which will explain much of the extraordinary operation concerning which we inquire. This persuasion of the truth wrought by the Holy Spirit, is faith; which occupies so high a place in the inspired account of grace.

At present we are to look at it simply in regard to its tendency to stimulate and exalt the nature. Strong belief makes strong characters. We see this in common life. The man who clings to some great conviction, even though it be of error, becomes a man of energy. He has a hidden fire perpetually urging him to act. His motive power is sometimes wonderful to all beholders. Genuine belief propels its subject to a degree far beyond all that can be imitated by simulation and hypocrisy. The fixed idea is always driving on the wheels of fervid action. This is apparent every day, among men of science, artisans, inventors, speculators, bold traders, popular reformers, enthusiasts, and fanatics, as well as in great discoverers, commanders, and philanthropists. The man is energetic, hopeful, laborious, and untiring, simply because he believes. Difficulties vanish before him, and the scoffs of those who predict disaster, pass by him unheeded. This conviction distinguishes him from the half-persuaded, who desist from the race, and the unbelieving, who never commence it. To this must we trace the toil, patience, and success of Columbus, Watt, Fulton, Dewy, and



Henry; of Cesar, Marlboro, and Napoleon. Bring this principle into the field of religion, and its power is so much the more apparent, because religion deals so much with mental and spiritual objects, the proper nutriment of faith. Men are strong and influential just so far as they have some darling thought, some immovable conviction, some urgent belief. And their strength lies in the precise direction of this their inward judgment. In other matters they may be as weak as other men. In nothing do we more observe the power of mind over mind, than in great revolutions of human opinion. The champions who have accomplished these have been those who had each some cherished truth, or cherished falsehood, to which he clung, even amidst peril of death. Whether a Pelagius or a Luther, a Loyola or a Calvin, a Wesley or a Pusey, there was a certain strength of purpose and action, and this was traceable to the great controlling idea. And the true reason why many men of fertile minds and a most diffusive activity, leave little mark upon their age, is that they lack this high commanding belief of some grand truth which they deem all-important.

Such, then, is the manifest influence of faith, considered barely as a general principle; it enlarges, and fortifies, and impels the character. Each of us, my brethren, in his own little sphere, is strong or weak, according to the presence or absence of inward hearty belief. And he is the feeblest of mortals who has nothing to which the power of his mind adheres tenaciously as true and excellent. It is very evident that this force is not wanting, when applied to religious truth. Here, pre-eminently, earnestness of conviction works upon the character with a moulding and irresistible efficacy.

Thus far we have contemplated faith in its most general idea, without reference to the things believed; but when we come to inquire for its appropriate objects, the reality and extent of its power rise before us with increased importance. We shall see then that the objects of faith are of such a nature and magnitude, that the belief of them awakens the strongest principles of our nature, elevates the aims, sustains the purposes, and confirms the manly ardour. We are no longer concerned with the faith of earthly things. Our field is exclusively

that of religion. Here faith erects her throne and predominates over her wide dominion. And how much more extended is the world of faith than the world of science or of sense ! It is the opposite supposition which keeps multitudes from taking the sweep of this great spiritual horizon. Their views are bounded by the little hills which embosom their confined valley, an area which to them is all the world. The things of eternity seem to them airy, visionary, unreal. But true faith gives intense reality to these spiritual existences, and introduces the wondering, awed, and delighted spectator to new heavens and a new earth, which he surveys from his mountain-top of observation, without a lingering doubt. When one comes, under the influence of the Spirit, and by the aid of Scripture, to believe in spiritual and eternal things, the visible frame of nature and all the objects of our senses, the matters which surround and touch us every moment, dwindle away in the comparison, and become as nothing. And this is the great change which is wrought in a truly religious man. The first and greatest object of faith is God ; that he is, and what he is. To the mind

of the unbeliever, God can scarcely be said to exist. For him, and to his apprehension, there is no God. Walking amidst the multitudinous traces and signatures of divine power, wisdom, and beneficence, and receiving showers of favour from his hand every moment, the unbeliever entertains no willing thought of his Creator and Preserver. Faith works here an entire revolution. God is seen, by the inward vision, in all his excellent glory and mysterious presence. The great truth that God is, that most undeniable, precious, and fundamental of all truths, enfolds the soul, as its very atmosphere. In Him we henceforth live, and move, and have our being. We set the Lord always before our face. It is good for us to draw nigh to God. We walk with God. Now, can a human being come under the impression of this sublime principle without a change of thought, feeling, habit, and character? Can he be the same sordid, or selfish, or trifling one as before? Nay, can such a great belief enter the soul without at once advancing to the throne, and reigning over all the propensities and passions? Faith of such a reality takes guidance of the soul, and gives

it new motives and a new direction. But this, though the greatest, is only one of the truths of religion. You will not expect me to enter into all the details of things believed; this would require an epitome of all theology. Let me notice one or two of these objects of faith, still with reference to their power to confer strength and greatness on the man. Sin and its remedy are matters of revelation, and so of faith. When a man comes to believe that he is a sinner, comprehending the dreadful import of these terms, he lives in a new world. He is a sadder and a wiser man. Till this eclipse, that darkens all his skies, has passed away, no other thought can interest his soul. His mind runs on beyond the boundaries of the present life, and seeks to explore the palpable obscure of that untried state, where this tremendous evil of sin shall have full development, and work out dire results, and this forever. And when the sun breaks in upon the lurid prospect, and God's grace is manifested, and salvation is proclaimed, and the Lord Jesus Christ, now the most lovely object in the universe, stands forth revealed as the most accessible, and the freeness of heavenly love irra-

diates the soul, and the bliss of pardon and communion sends wave after wave over the reconciled conscience; of a truth, faith has wrought its chief earthly wonder! Now the earth is forgotten, as it was by the three upon the mount, when they said "Lord, it is good to be here!" Now the grandeur of the new spiritual objects occupies the entire faculties. And as these are occupied, so are they also shaped, warmed, and expanded. Who can think largely, deeply, and constantly of the glorious Emmanuel and his work without having a glow, a hopefulness, and an energy which he never knew before! We see this, as matter of fact, in all the history of the church, and all the round of our religious observation. It is transforming. The vile are purified. The grovelling are caused to soar. The fickle are established. The feeble are made strong. Faith, as terminating in Jesus and his cross, proves the renovator of human habits and will. He who continually thinks of Christ, with firm belief, such as makes him real to the soul, and present as truly as things of sight, as friends, as family, as the very body; he who lives on this truth and so dwells



in fellowship with the Son of God, hearkening to him, speaking to him, consulting him, loving, enjoying, adoring him, cannot but be transformed. The littleness of earth and self must in some measure pass away. And the reason why our common religious warmth and vigour are so small, is that we have so faint and wavering a faith.

People of the world are remarkable for this, that they live entirely in time. The temporary and the transient absorb their thoughts. Their future is only a little snatch of days or years that shall presently be over. True, if pressed, they will acknowledge that there is such a thing as death. It is found upon them, by badges, obituaries, processions, vacancies in their circle. Ah! sometimes the dart strikes in the very bosom of their families, and they own, for an instant, that they are mortal. Or they are shaken, in the mighty hand of God, over the gaping vault, and terrified with the certain prospect. But these are thoughts which they love not; and to the worldly eye a thick veil hangs at that point, which they care not to lift, and beyond which all is darkness. Dreadful infatua-

tion! For beyond that sable pall is Eternity, —awful, delightful word, Eternity!—compared with which all the lifetime here, nay, all the lifetimes of our race together, are but as the breath, the moment, before continued existence; Eternity, fraught with happiness or woe; Eternity, which you and I must inevitably enter and experience, after a lapse of time, which, in the retrospect, shall seem but the twinkling of an eye! My brethren, here is enough, at this single point, to account for peculiarities of character, and to mark the difference between two souls, one of whom neglects this whole subject with averted eye, while the other lives in full view of that boundless, endless existence. It is the Word of God which reveals these sublimities! It is Faith which takes hold of that Word. And the Word, so believed, energizes [such is the term] in the soul of the true disciple. For Faith is the substance of things hoped for, substantiating them to the apprehension, realizing them to the heart, making them operative motives, as much as the gain, the pleasure, and the fear of our daily walks.

Reflect, moreover, that in the case of the es-

tablished Christian, the eternity which perpetually floats before his thoughts and colours all his prospect, is an eternity of consummate knowledge, immaculate purity, angelic society, and absolute bliss. Shall such a belief lie dormant in a soul made up of susceptibilities? Shall it not cause the believer to leap for joy? Shall it not arm him for all adventures, and quicken him for every labour, and steel him for thorough endurance? But this is the idea which rules in the minds of all God's people, and which, according to our text, works mightily in them, pervading their nature, stimulating their activity, and altering every lineament of their moral countenance.

Thus have a few leading truths been singled out, to show that, as objects of faith, they have an energy in changing the character. The same is true of all the contents of Scripture, of all the revelation of God. All doctrines have not, indeed, the same importance or the same potency. But all do their part, and faith works by all. There is no lesson of the Word which does not contribute to form the Christian man. And there is no moment of life in which some part

of the work is not going on under the hand of the new-creative power. As in the studio of the statuary, all the operations are not of the same dignity, yet all conduce to the harmonious and exquisite result. There must be the beautiful idea in the artist's soul; the careful moulding of his clay model; the choice of his rude material; the measurement and blocking out of his marble; the rough removal of unsightly masses; the patient work of mallet and chisel; and the final polish of the resplendent surface; all needful to secure a thing of beauty to be a joy forever. So, in the hands of God, who carries out his perfect and loving idea, it is Faith which, by a patient and perpetual energy, operates with ten thousand separate shaping influences of Truth, all carrying forward the living sculpture and bringing out the eventual form of holy grace, which shall be the everlasting delight of angels and of God. How happy are we, if, indeed, we are the subjects of such a process! And how low are the views which we ordinarily take of this plastic force, continually operating through faith of the operation of God. No wonder Paul so eloquently dilates on the

virtue of faith in transforming the saintly characters of every age. "Who, through faith, subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again; and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment; they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy."

Although the subject has already been touched in the way of allusion, we must spend a few moments on the power which truth, as believed, exercises upon the affections. Man is made up of emotions and passions. From these spring his actions, and hence they have been philosophically classed as the active powers.

At the first presentation of the objects of faith, they are undoubtedly seized upon by the intellectual faculties; but their influence does not cease here. Even after knowledge has been elevated into belief, there is a further work upon the emotional part of man. And just here the prime energies of faith are expended. While the affections take their origin and complexion from the nature or character, it is also true that they react, and by reflex operation mould the habits and tendencies, and even remotely the intellectual exercises. It is from the affections that all actions take their first motion; for will is inward action, and will is moved by the feelings and desires. The grand problem, then, is, if we would change the character, what lever shall we bring to bear upon the affections. Here we arrive at the energy of faith. Truth believed operates upon the emotions and passions, and so upon the will and its acts. The force of genuine belief is obvious and universally acknowledged. This force will be in proportion to the strength of the persuasion. A wavering confidence will scarcely stir the heart, but let it swell like a torrent, and it will carry all before



it. Hence faith works mightily in them that believe, to produce the other graces. Slight views of Christ's atonement and of the future glory which it purchases, may give a man cold and doubtful expectations; but let him be persuaded that these things are as real as his own existence, and straightway he rejoices in hope of the glory of God. Here is faith engendering hope. Faint apprehensions of the love of God in Christ may leave the heart void of corresponding affections, but let the full excellency of the benignant dying Redeemer overpower the soul, and it is dissolved in tender attachment. Here is faith working by love. The same is true of all these ever busy emotions, which, like a ceaseless sea, forever fluctuate in the soul of man. Faith rises over these waves of feeling and commands them. The cordial belief of unseen things makes the heart's pulses play with new animation. And then these moving powers give animation to the whole Christian life. The main spring of all, however, still is "the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe."

Study the terms of the text, and you will

recognize that form of expression which indicates an action now in progress, actually going on at the moment, and always going on ; a regular and constant operation of this great principle, to which all things in religion are due. It "effectually worketh," or puts forth its energizing and transforming virtue, now and at all times. The work of truth and faith in the soul is a continual progress. Growth in grace is growth in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. As knowledge of the truth is gradual, by continual fresh apprehensions of Christian doctrine by the intellect, so faith which takes up and employs this knowledge goes on from step to step. Mere knowledge may increase, indefinitely, without saving effect ; here there is no energy, no renewal ; but knowledge believed and appropriated spiritually, diffuses its illumination through the entire nature. Knowledge resting in the understanding gives a certain light, which may be compared to the taper, confined within the sides of the lanthorn, on which, nevertheless, it works no change. But knowledge transformed to faith, is like the mass of crystal which the artificer brings from the fur-

nace of the glasshouse, a molten globe of fire, all luminous, in every particle, all pervaded by the principle of light. Our progress is real, when there is advance in faith, corresponding to the advance in knowledge. And this may be going on during all our Christian course. Every perusal of the Scriptures, every hearing of the preached Word, should make us stronger and happier Christians, by the energy of faith within. And this is most likely to be the case, when we look away most from the particular instrumentality, and regard the divine authoritative source. So was it with the Thessalonians, to whom Paul says: "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." And here we close what may be considered the doctrinal part of this discussion. A few words of application may be allowed.

What is the grand defect of our popular Christianity, in this busy, bustling city? It is want of faith. Let me apply the question in

another form : Why is it, that, knowing many things in religion, you nevertheless are conscious of no such energy of transformation, as has been described ? It is because you do not believe. I anticipate your reclamation. You reply, We do believe ; we are unwilling to be ranked among infidels. Ah ! beloved hearers, I protest to you that you believe not ! This faint, inoperative assent to the august truths of religion, which works no repentance, no love, no joy, which hardly ruffles the surface of the stagnant pool within, this is not the faith of God's elect. This is not that mighty, heaven-wrought spiritual persuasion, which has made saints and confessors, and shall one day revolutionize the world. You have only to compare it with your convictions respecting worldly things, to find how weak it is. The news of the day, brought across the ocean, and affecting the trade of nations, how differently does it agitate your bosoms ! Here, all is clear and undeniable. Men of the world, ye need no tables of self-examination to settle the question whether your interest in the things of earth is sincere or not. But how nice a scrutiny must be instituted. in order

to discover your faith of things divine! And after the inquiry, how often does the search result in absolute negation. O, how long shall we trifle on the brink of that dread spiritual world which stretches away beside our very path! When shall we awake to consider the stupendous interests which shall soon burst upon us to the utter obliteration of all our temporal fancies! The single truth of the incarnation and death of the Son of God, duly inwrought into the soul, would arouse, and attract, and transform. But to influence, it must be believed. And to be believed, it must be contemplated and pondered. And in order to this, you must come to a deliberate pause in your whirl of engrossing occupations. Wonder not that I repeat this again and again to the children of this world. For your salvation depends on it. You must consider, or be lost. While you wait for some sudden shock, to rend you from your idol, you tempt God's providence and rush upon his indignation. Let me cry once more in your ears, that unless you turn the concentrated powers of thought on revealed truth, and unless you believe it, you will live

on as you have lived hitherto, and die in your sins.

Dear brethren of the Christian profession, we have failed to exemplify the truths which we profess. Who, that beholds our daily walk, would infer that we are living under the powers of the world to come? Our faith, if we believe at all, is too feeble to evince the energy of the Word. All churches among us need a deepening of the inward experience. Should such an influence come over us, we should become a wonder to each other, and a blessing to the world.



X.

JOY IN BELIEVING.

## JOY IN BELIEVING.

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ROMANS v. 11.—“And not only so, but we also joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.”

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IF you will take the trouble to look at the argument which runs like a strong thread through all the preceding verses, you will see that our apostle goes on with a chain or series of assertions, uttered in the name of renewed persons. For example, verse 1, “We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ;” verse 2, “We have access by faith unto this grace wherein we stand;” “we rejoice in hope of the glory of God;” verse 3, “We joy [glory] in tribulations also;” verse 9, “We shall be saved from wrath through him;” verse 10, “We shall be saved by his life.” These are

glorious asseverations, containing the whole of our redemption; but before going into another division of the discourse, as he does in the 12th verse, instituting his immortal parallel between the first Adam and the second Adam, between the offence and the grace, between condemnation and salvation, he utters a burst of satisfaction, as he surveys the goodly prospect, and thus expresses the joy of a soul which accepts Christ: "And not only so, but we also joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the atonement." Our margin says reconciliation, and in this sense the word atonement was doubtless employed. The same Greek word is elsewhere translated reconciliation. The joy here spoken of is that high exulting joy, when the soul is lifted up with complacency in the blessing possessed. It is the word employed to signify a proud joy, such as brooks no silence or concealment, but would fain cry aloud, clap the hands, and shout: "We exultingly rejoice and gladly glory in God." This joy is founded on a fact here recorded, "By whom we have now received the atonement or reconciliation." We, *i. e.*, be-

lievers, have received the reconciliation. This is a summing up of all the bright and stupendous things contained in the foregoing verses of this chapter. All comes to this, We are reconciled, and hereupon the great joy. It is my design to draw your thoughts to this subject: THE JOY OF THE SOUL WHICH RECEIVES THE RECONCILIATION. And we shall find it best to view the experience doctrinally, and the doctrine experimentally. Then is experience safe, and zeal not without knowledge, when it is distinctly authorized by definite statements of theological truth; and then is doctrine efficacious, savoury, and fruitful, when it enters into the emotions of the heart, the testimonies of the conscience, and the determinations of the will. You almost anticipate the division forced on us by this exposition of the words. We must consider: I. The fundamental truth, "We have received the atonement." II. The emotion resting on it, "We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

I. THE FUNDAMENTAL TRUTH, *We have received the atonement, or reconciliation.* This is

the corner-stone of theology, so far as regards personal salvation. To be reconciled was the great thing about which there were suspense and wonder in the universe. All the Gospel, the good news, the glad tidings, is in this one word, *Reconciliation*. This is the message, sent by the word of preaching to be believed, that God is reconciled; and he that believes this is saved. In all this it is implied that there was a difference or alienation. This controversy must be settled before any amity can take place between the contracting parties. The problem was, how God could be just, and yet justify the ungodly. This is a difficulty very lightly treated by those who have low thoughts of God's holiness and justice, and consequently slight thoughts of sin, its guilt, wrath, and punishment. All this argument of Paul, and the uniform current of Scripture, go to show that there was wrath to be removed. Many deny this altogether, remove from God every thing punitive and vindictory, and bring in the whole human race as already objects of God's favour. But all the previous parts of this epistle represent sinners as justly exposed to the anger of the righteous

Judge. Vain are all attempts to show that the only reconciliation needed was the reconciliation of the human soul to God. The Scriptures most clearly and repeatedly show that God must be reconciled to us. We are to be brought near by an expiatory work, a sacrifice, a vicarious obedience, a propitiation, or what is summarily named an *atonement*. Whatever may be the precise rendering of the word here, we must admit that all reconciliation grows out of atonement. And as this is true in respect of the nature of God, and the demands of his law, so it is strikingly true of the soul's experience. Conscience is a stern and mighty vindicator of the claims of divine justice. Working in all men, but most mightily in those who have Christian light, Conscience assures the sinner that he is lost. The law of commandments is applied to the heart and life. Now the inward nature testifies, that as surely as God is true and righteous, he must punish the sinner. And the only legitimate way of arriving at any pacification is by receiving the atonement. The text speaks of our receiving reconciliation through the Lord Jesus, "by whom we have



now received the atonement." By him, because he is himself the reconciler, the propitiation, the surety, intervening between God and the sinner, bridging over the gulf, slaying the enmity, nailing it to his Cross, and so making peace. By him again, because, subjectively, as a matter of experience, we receive the reconciliation through Jesus Christ. It is from his hand we receive our succour. His mouth speaks our admission to favour. His Spirit seals the reconciling truth on the heart. So likewise, we are said to receive the reconciliation in two senses. First, we have now, since the death of Jesus, received a gift of salvation in offer. Now, but never before, there is a full and open manifestation of a way of life. This is the "Redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith, in his blood, to declare his righteousness." ii. 24, 25. The closing verses of the context gleam with the effulgent radiance of this truth of free salvation. "The free gift is of many offences unto justification; the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life; by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." "That as sin hath

reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord." This is that Cross of Christ in which Paul gloried. God is reconciled by the blood of the Cross. His anger is turned away from all who believe. This offer of salvation, tendered to us as a truth, we now have knowledge of. But secondly he would say, We now by faith accept this offer, and are safe, "by whom we have now received the reconciliation." Here we plunge at once into saving experience. This is a matter which none can understand but he who makes trial of it. On this point, precisely, hinges our salvation. By faith, or believing, we receive the reconciliation. It is faith which makes the atonement ours. This most simple acquiescence of the soul, in the great truth that "God is in Christ Jesus reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them," unites the believer to Jesus and gives him a share in the reconciliation. He receives the atonement.

Generally this most free and immediate of all acts is preceded by severe struggles. The convinced sinner sees mountains of hinderance

between him and Christ. A hundred things must be done before he can be reconciled. At length, conquered, and with pride and self-righteousness humbled, and all activity in the way of effort slain, he gives all up, repudiates all his own strivings, desists from self-preparation, and receives the atonement. Now, what is it that he receives? He receives the wonderful tidings that God is now reconciled to him, freely, fully, and forever. There are those to whom this is long incredible, too simple to be worth any thing, too good to be true. Their sins are so great that the breach between them and God is infinite. They must be washed before they can venture near the fountain. They must be melted before they come to the fire. They must have good feelings, which are the beginnings of salvation, before they come to the Saviour. These are all different ways of reconciling themselves; these are all hinderances in the way of receiving the reconciliation. He who receives it receives all at once and all for nothing. He communicates nothing, brings nothing in his hand, offers nothing. Of what avail are his tears, his relentings, his reforms,

his earnestness, his compunctions, his soft feelings? Will he add these straws and rags as a makeweight in God's awful scale of justice to the golden talents of Christ's righteousness? Will the beggar lying at the gate refuse to enter in till he has offered some of his shreds in pawn for the admission? Will the sinful soul hold back when the eye of Jesus sparkles with love, and both his hands are stretched out with the completed and all-perfect reconciliation? No! The first real light of grace shot into the chinks of the prison house compel the sinking despondent one to receive the reconciliation; and the comprehensive word means the entire pacification between God and man, of which what is theologically called the Atonement is the basis. By Jesus he receives the reconciliation. From Jesus he receives it. Nay, it is Jesus himself that he receives, and this is faith. In that moment he is united. He is a child of God. John i. 12: "But as many as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name."

## II. THE EMOTIONS FOUNDED ON IT: "*We joy*

*in God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* It cannot be necessary to repeat that this joy ensues upon receiving the reconciliation. Worldly people have a great deal of joy, and look upon a Christian life as joyless. But their joy has some capital defects, in the view of a rational and immortal being: it is variable, uncertain, short lived, mixed, impure, and dangerous. Self-deceived and worldly professors, who have a name to live while they are dead, experience no joy. They are generally uneasy and self-condemned; an evil conscience, never yet touched by the great reconciliation, forbids the spreading of the wings in religious rapture. The awakened unbeliever has no joy, because he has no reconciliation. He has heard the sound of the coming storm, as he paces the sands over which the gathering tide angrily rises. He looks out from his desolate coast, seaward, upon a waste of waters on whose edge he has been long a traveller, but whose low murmur of wrath he never heeded before. He has been anxiously looking to the beetling wall of precipice which overhangs him and forbids escape from the rising flood; but the long black

parapet of cliff betrays no path, no step, no fissure. He has not been able to scale it by any self-relying efforts, such as personal amendment, humiliation, devotion, penitence. That bulwark is impregnable. But what is this suddenly apparent in the relentless rock? An open door! An inviting friend! A helping arm! It is the atonement of Christ. It is the peacemaking of his blood and righteousness. It is proffered reconciliation. And he receives it! He accepts it! He abandons forever his methods and appliances of self-rescue. He believes, is justified by faith, and has peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. "And not only so," says Paul in the name of true Christians, "but we joy!" Yes, joy has now revisited the human soul; and it is this which we must more particularly contemplate. 1. It is a joy specifically referred to this one persuasion; *joy because of being reconciled* or brought to peace with God, after having lain long under his displeasure. "We have received the reconciliation." It is God who properly receives the *Atonement*; it is we who receive the reconciliation. And hereupon there is joy. Heaven is



no longer hostile. The feud caused by sin is made up. The fear of a punishment, which was all the greater because it was just, is taken away. This is included in the reconciliation. See 2 Cor. v. 18. The ambassadors of the kingdom carried this message to you, if you ever heard the Gospel; theirs was "the ministry of reconciliation, to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." And when Paul, at the head of these ambassadors, beseeches thus for Christ, as though God did beseech you by them, saying, "We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God," mark the ground and argument which he subjoins: "For he hath made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." 2 Cor. v. 21. Matter of indifference to the "whole," who need not a physician, but of life or death to one under the law. How a true, and a holy, and a just God could admit him to the bosom of love, he did not see. The Babel tower of works, and frames, and feelings by which he would fain have reached heaven, has tumbled about him in confusion. Behold

all obstacles swept away by the mighty arm of God, who takes the whole work into his own hands. "Salvation is of the Lord." That which you could not do he hath done. He does not require your preparations, amendments, convictions, moods of grief, submissions; these are no parts of your justification. God sweeps them away, as you would a house of cards on your carpet, to replace them by the glorious finished work of Christ, and as you receive the atonement, you rejoice.

Some measure of joy there will necessarily be whenever any soul accepts pardon and peace. The contrary is as inconceivable as that a murderer under the gallows should receive sudden pardon without emotion. The degree of joy is nowhere stated nor prescribed. It might be a rapture almost to burst the clay integuments; it often is a gentle acquiescent glow of infant recognition. Nothing more recalls the fresh innocent delights of childhood, than the convert's love of espousals. But the quantity of joy is indeterminate. Let no man rashly acquit or condemn himself on any such uncommanded criterion. The constancy of this early joy may

not be unbroken. The sun may rise and enter clouds. The sun may shine dubiously, and we may not discern his radiant disk. But he is there, and sometimes he breaks forth. Our joy in any good is proportional to our previous desire of it and the present value set on it. Hence, where convictions of sin have been very bitter, the delight of pardon is most remarkable. Our joy in any piece of good news is proportional to our belief of it. How often must I recall to you the maxim that faith is faith, however weak; and where there is faith there is reconciliation, just as where there is breath there is life. But just as an infant which barely breathes, though certainly living, has no conscious pleasure, so the new convert who barely believes has no conscious safety. Yet is he safe. Greater faith is to be desired. If you have not believed enough, or believed aright, go not back, O sinner, over your track of error; believe again, believe again! Look out of self, far away from home, to the work which ended at Calvary, to the righteousness summed up in the Cross and Passion, and receive the Atonement! The more bright this vision the clearer your joy.

You cannot trust in Christ's work too much. He who by salvation means deliverance from sin, cannot for salvation too soon and too heavily lean and roll his whole weight on the arm of Emmanuel. And when you accept a free ransom thus offered, you cannot joy too strongly.

2. The rejoicing of a new-born soul is characterized as *joy in the Lord our Saviour*; "we joy . . . through our Lord Jesus Christ." This differs very much from certain doubtful if not counterfeit conversions, in which there is high rapture, but without any views of Christ as the reconciler. We have had painful interviews with such persons. From defective theology, from training under a ministry which undervalues doctrine, from ignorance of the evangelic method, they have emerged into a sort of Christless peace. They first had trouble and next had peace. But out of trouble unto peace they have come without any special thought of Christ or Atonement. They have climbed the wall, and did not enter the celestial gate. "I [says Jesus] am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me." No man can rejoice too strongly in Christ's will-

ingness to receive him. If without waiting for any feelings, you now, on that spot, credit what I say, viz., that Christ will take you, here, and reconcile you to the Father, then rejoice, for heaven rejoices! You do well, you cannot do better. But if your joy is in looking back to the efforts you have made, to the repentings you have produced, to the submissions you have effected, to the new course you have entered on, and if this is all, if no Sun of Righteousness beams in your heavens, then I exhort you to do what you have left undone: Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved; accept the reconciliation, and thou shalt legitimately rejoice. All true Christians' joy, whether at first believing or at the moment of dying, is "through our Lord Jesus Christ." 3. Yet *the convert's joy is in God*: "Not only so, but we also joy in God." There is no contradiction or inconsistency. Not to say that Christ is God, our rejoicing through Christ or on account of Christ, is in a high and peculiar sense joying in God. This is the creature's return to its chief good. Unfallen spirits rejoice always in God, as did Adam and Eve in Eden. Fallen spirits have naturally no joy in

God. Hence, as love of happiness abides, they long and lust for happiness in idols. The deep consciousness of being unreconciled to God keeps the soul shy of him in sullen alienation. This inward dull pain from subdued conviction of wrath makes the sinner shun God. This accounts for your having no Bible: you are afraid of it. This accounts for your using no prayer: prayer looks God in the face. Dissociated from God, the soul comes to shrink from the divine idea itself. Bad becomes worse, and distrust shows itself as enmity. Ah! my brethren, we have now travelled very far from joy in God. We have only to carry out this line towards infinity to reach eternity of sinful alienation. What a life from the dead, when the sinner looks up and sees in God a reconciled Father, when the prodigal feels the warm tears of one falling upon his neck and kissing him, when the rebel receives the Atonement! Now the precious theme is God the Saviour. I cannot refrain from saying, in borrowed language: "To feel as if you were in the company of God, to have delight in this feeling, to triumph in God as you would in a treasure that had come into



your possession, to dwell upon him in fancy and with fondness, just as one friend dwells in pleasing remembrance on another, to reach the ecstasies of devotion and find that the minutes spent in communion with the heavenly and unseen Witness are far the sweetest and the sunniest of your earthly pilgrimage, to have a sense of God all the day long, and that sense of him in every way so delicious as to make the creature seem vain and tasteless in the comparison, to have his candle shining in your heart, and a secret beatitude in him of which other men have no comprehension, to bear about with you that cheerful trust in him, and that cherished regard to him, which children do to a father whose love they rejoice in, and of whose good will they are most thoroughly assured, to prize the peaceful Sabbaths and the sacred retirements when your soul can wing its contemplation towards his sanctuary and there behold new glories of his character at the very time that you can exult in confidence before him,—thus to be affected towards God, and thus to glory and be glad in him, is certainly not a common attainment; and yet we do not see how any true saint, any

genuine disciple, can be altogether a stranger to it.\* Of this quotation, mark the qualifying phrase at the end—no genuine disciple is altogether without it. Yet the stream of joy may be like the brook Kedron, very shallow, and dry most of the year. The reality of conversion must not be judged by the amount of the joy. Indeed, the mind had better be turned away from considering joy as an evidence, to considering Christ as the source of joy. Come boldly to God in Jesus Christ, as already reconciled by the blood of his Cross. He that was your enemy has become your friend. The high model may never be reached; and in your present infantile experience you may never be wafted so high; but look high! Establish it as the law of progress forever, that your joy is to be all in God. Even the Old Testament reveals such exercises. “My soul shall make her boast in the Lord.” “Oh! magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together.” “I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.” “I will go unto the altar of God, of God my exceeding joy.” 4. This great exult-

\* Chalm. Rom. in loc.

ing joy *may be yours*. To you, also, is offered the reconciliation. To every hearer of the Gospel, in all the universe, who believes, this redemption is made over. Are you doubtful whether some of the steps you have taken are right or not? Here is a step which is always right. It is always right to believe. It is always sinful not to believe. No delay is lawful with a sovereign. The king's business requireth haste. It can never be wrong to accept what God offers: it can never be safe to put off accepting it. Now, that which God offers is reconciliation. The atonement propitiation was offered to God, and was accepted of him. Justice is satisfied with every one who believes. As the result of this atonement, God offers to you entire pardon, peace, and life. What shall you do? Receive the reconciliation. *Receive the atonement*. Receive the Cross. Receive the Righteousness. Receive the Lord Jesus! Is it done? Then he is yours. The espousal is accomplished. The iniquity is pardoned, and the sin covered. That believing has made you Christ's. You are one with him. His substituted acts and sufferings go for yours. His

righteousness is your righteousness, his Father is your Father, and his God your God. I seem to hear the new song from your mouth, Is. xii. : "Behold ! God is my salvation ; I will trust and not be afraid ; for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song, he also is become my salvation. O Lord ! I will praise thee. Then thou wast angry with me ; thine anger is turned away and thou comfortedst me." The voice of God's truth to delaying seekers is, Ye will not come unto me, that ye may have reconciliation. Lo ! it is here, it is complete. Take of the water of life, take of the blood of expiation, freely. The Lamb of vision lies on the altar before the heavenly throne, still bleeding as from recent death. God accepts the amends. Sinner, why should not you ? Add not to your other sins the destructive sin of unbelief, for if it be final, you perish. But "be ye reconciled to God."

XI.

HOPE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

## HOPE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

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GALATIANS v. 5.—“For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.”

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IN partially sanctified human nature we discern a uniform tendency to slide away from a religion that is spiritual, to one which is outward and ceremonial. Carnal, self-righteous man loves to have something palpable in his hand, which he can show as his title . . . though it be only a cross, or a string of beads, or a sacrament. Among early Christians, no sooner was the Evangelist or Apostle out of the way, than they strayed off after some false teacher. The simplicity and the liberty of Gospel grace were both yielded. “Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years,” verse 10; “I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you



labour in vain." They stood not fast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free, but, under the guidance of false teachers, had entangled themselves with the Judaic yoke, of which circumcision was the pledge and sign. The consequence of this, as Paul assures the Galatians, was very serious. Those who did so under the idea of being thereby justified in the sight of God, had abandoned the free Gospel. "Ye are fallen from grace," verse 4; "For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith."

This is a proposition which merits our study, as confirming the evangelical spirit on a particular point, not confined to Galatia or to apostolic days. We shall inquire first what righteousness is; secondly, what the hope of righteousness is; thirdly, whence righteousness and hope proceed; and fourthly, by what agency this happy state of mind is wrought.

I. What is Righteousness? It is that which puts us right in the sight of God. It is legal rightness. When the rule is applied to a surface in carpentry, and all is coincident, we say

it is right. When the moral rule, the Law, is applied to human character and deeds, and all is in full conformity, we say such character and deeds are right, and such person is righteous. Observe, though the same person may be inwardly virtuous or holy, and relatively righteous, the two notions are different. The perfect man, for example, unfallen Adam, would be righteous on account of his holiness, but the former is distinguishable as having reference to law and its sanctions. When we think of righteousness strictly so named, we think of a law-giver, *i. e.*, God; and we think of his published commandments, his glorious rewards, his awful threatenings, his award of both at the day of judgment, and the heaven and hell which ensue. The character and course of conduct which can answer these demands, meet this scrutiny, and claim this reward, are righteous. And the performance, in human nature, and under the law, which answers all these conditions, is righteousness. The least defect, failure, or blemish destroys the whole claim. The flight towards heaven equally fails if one league or millions of leagues be lacking. Were we

speaking of mercy, or forbearance, or divine compassion, it would be a different matter; but when we speak of righteousness, we mean perfection. Imperfect righteousness is no righteousness, as a line which deviates is not a right line. Grace may work otherwise, but we are now in the forum of justice, where the question is, Has the debt been fully paid? and he who has discharged all is righteous. God's law, like himself, demands the utmost obedience; it cannot demand less. Adam rendered this up to a certain point; Christ rendered it to the end. But it is very evident that no mere man, since the fall, has rendered or can render any such obedience; no man is right in the view of law; no man is just in the sight of God. Exactly thus our apostle speaks, iii. 10, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse, for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them;" again, 11, "that no man is justified by the law is evident." The award of every enlightened man's conscience responds in full agreement. You, my respected hearer, know assuredly that

your heart and life are not in such blameless undeviating agreement with God's law that you can lay the hand on the heart and say, "O God, thou knowest I am perfectly just." And, therefore, the sole and inevitable issue, by any law-method, is simply damnation.

But what? Is the whole race consigned to wrath, and is there no such thing as actual righteousness or justification? Clearly, such would be the result, if right, and law, and mere justice were left to work out the problem. Eternal justice, not blind, but too keenly seeing, holding aloft the infallible scales, lifting the gleaming and insufferable sword, knows nothing of mercy, and can pronounce just him only who sinneth not. Is there then no human righteousness in the universe? Sing, O heavens, there is! Just this is what the Son of God became human for, that he might produce and present a human righteousness, an absolute conformity to law, in the sinning nature. God, whose judgments are always according to truth, pronounces Jesus righteous. But he does more, He makes over this righteousness of Jesus to the sinner. God gives him it; it is his. This single act of free

grace turns the scale. This infinite weight thrown in makes it preponderate in the sinner's favour. This immeasurable value pays the debt. This intervening substitution shifts the edge of the sword from the sinner to the Saviour. What has come in to make this amazing difference is righteousness, the righteousness of Christ, made up of his doing and his suffering, or active and passive. It is the righteousness of God, for God ordained it, accepts it, and confers it. It is the sinner's righteousness, because God, by a sovereign act in his own court, puts it over to the sinner's credit, reckons it to the sinner, *i. e.*, imputes it to the sinner. And this is the imputation of Christ's righteousness, on the ground of which the Lord God justifies the ungodly. This, and nothing less or more, is the available righteousness of every one who is accepted. This made all ring again in apostolic days. "The righteousness of God without the law is manifested." iii. 21. "To declare his righteousness for remission of sins that are past." iii. 25. "Unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works." iv. 5. "By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."

v. 19. "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." x. 4. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." Gal. iii. 13. The justification or declaring righteousness is complete at one act, and is different from the making holy or sanctification. By virtue of Christ's obedience unto death, undertaken in our stead, performed in our name and nature, and imputed to us, who are at the same moment made one with Christ, God freely, and of his sovereignty, but in infinite grace so far as we are concerned, is pleased to regard his law as satisfied and his glory manifested. And this is righteousness.

II. What is the hope of Righteousness? It lies in the entire clause, "Wait for the hope of righteousness." "We most earnestly and expectantly look forward for the accomplishment of the great hope of life, namely, the celestial glory awaiting those who are justified." Called the hope of righteousness, because where there is guilt there is despair, and where there is pardon there is hope of glory. As long as a man



is under bondage of sin, at enmity with God, feeling a bad conscience, dreading his Maker, and uncertain what moment wrath may break upon him to the uttermost, he lives, a wretched, desponding creature. "Having no hope." He may divert his attention, but whenever he returns to the great matter . . . the sword is hanging over him by a hair. All men desire happiness after death, and the least ray of religion shows that this is connected with God's favour. Conscience sits at the threshold keeping out all hope of peace, till the doorpost is sprinkled with paschal blood. It is a good day for any house, when Christ's righteousness comes in, bringing peace and joy in its train. I have been greatly struck with the breadth and grandeur of the term Hope in the New Testament. It takes in all heaven. Especially in reference to this matter of justification, it looks forward to the sublime adjudication, when the sinner who has already been justified in the court of God's decree, and in the court of conscience, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the court of the universe. That is the ultimate justification, immediately antecedent to the throwing

open of heaven-gate and the entrance of the countless throngs into the joy of the Lord. As future, this is an object of expectation, and as good, of hope. And, as the original imports, this looking forward is wistful and intense. Amidst the throes of this dark and troubled period of transition and discipline, the saints look to the hills, and watch for the morning. This holds up the head, in deep waters, and makes pain tolerable. "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us, for the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God." viii. 18. The whole company of believers on earth are, as it were, looking with outstretched necks towards the sunrising. "Ourselves also which are the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves, groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body; for we are saved by hope." viii. 23. This hope "we have as an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast;" &c. Christ's righteousness has this heavenly reward; and the redeemed soul, at favoured hours, looks

forward to the meeting with inexpressible desire. Such is the hope of righteousness.

III. Whence proceed this righteousness and this hope of righteousness? Both from faith; "we wait for the hope of righteousness by faith." The righteousness and the hope are by faith. 1. The righteousness is by faith. You will hardly expect me now and here to go over the oft-recited passages which prove that our justification is by faith. Let me rather spend the time in explaining to humble minds the point of doctrine which is there proved. Righteousness exists, yonder, in "Jesus Christ the righteous." But how does this become mine? Seeing all men are not made righteous, how shall I be so made? Or, as the sinner, wrestling with his sins is sometimes led to express it, How can I reach Jesus the Saviour; how is it possible for me to get up to him, so as to be possessed of the advantages of his death? I know he is rich in all treasures of salvation, and has merits enough to lift a universe out of the throat of perdition; but are they mine? or how can they be made available? O, tell me, how to pass this gulf between the Redeemer

and my soul? It is true, my dear hearer, that Jesus, all-sufficient Saviour as he is, does not actually save all men; and it is certainly a possible thing that he may never save you, and that after all your instruction, and all your seeking, and all your impressions, you may go away from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, without a righteousness. It is not necessarily yours. But, hear me, for your soul's sake. It is yours in sufficiency, yours in fitness, and yours in God's gift to sinners of mankind. And it is yours in all its largest meaning, and for all your boundless want, if believing you accept it. Faith receives. There is no adding a link of your own to the golden chain which God lets down from heaven; but faith receives. The righteousness of Jesus becomes yours on your simple believing; it is "received by faith alone." And this is the reason why with every variety of command, argument, and entreaty, we again and again call upon you to believe. There is nothing that a man can do, say, or feel, which occasions him so little ground of glorying as his faith. Indeed, he does not come to faith, till he has tried every thing else and run the

whole round of self-righteous endeavour. And when he comes to faith, he finds it so slender, imponderable, evanescent an act, that he sees in it only a mode of connection, an instrument of union. But for the very reason that it is all meritless in itself, it glorifies Christ's righteousness. If there were any even the least particle about faith, to which the old merit-mongering nature could cling, it would do so. But faith, in the scale of merit, is sheer nothing; and hence again and again in the Scriptures, to be justified by faith is to be justified by nothing of our own. Mark how it is put right over against justification by works, as necessary and essentially its opposite, so that justification by faith is gratuitous justification. Romans iii. 22. "The righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all that believe." 28. "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith . . . without the deeds of the law." 4, 5. "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." And examine with me the words preceding my text, and out of which, as by contrast, my text

arises. "Behold, I, Paul, say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing; Christ is become of no effect unto you; whosoever of you are justified by the law, ye are fallen from grace, for we [mark the contrast, which establishes the doctrine] we wait for the hope of righteousness through faith." He that believes, then, does, instantly on his believing, receive the righteousness of Christ as his own. And thus our third inquiry is answered in part; the righteousness is by faith.

But, 2. The hope of the righteousness is by faith; a point of vast importance, but speedily settled. Faith so takes God at his word, so "sets to" its seal, so credits the utterances of eternal love, so appropriates the obedience of Christ, and so cleaves to him, as a Mediator, Priest, and Deliverer, that where it is strong or of high degree, it instantly grows up into hope of salvation. It instantly places this helmet on the head. It piercingly looks forward to the future and invisible, and beholds the judgment set and the books opened, but as clearly descries the ever-fresh sacrifice and ever-prevailing righteousness, lying in heavenly obla-



tion on the altar. Hence the more faith rises, and it is a thing of degrees, the more does Hope, blessed hope, take hold on immortality. And so we have learned whence this righteousness and this hope of righteousness proceed.

IV. By what agency is this happy state of mind wrought? By the operation of the Holy Ghost. "For we, through the SPIRIT, wait for the hope of righteousness by faith." In Paul's writings you have long ago remarked the continual parallel and contrast between two principles of action, which he calls the flesh and the spirit. There is no understanding his high argument without keeping this fully in mind. In two places this subject is specially discussed; in the seventh chapter of Romans, and in our context. Our apostle represents the two as not only in opposition, but in the struggle of conflict. In the unconverted, it is all flesh; in the glorified, it is all spirit. In the militant members of Christ, there is contest, such as to give pertinency to the exhortation, verse 16, "This I say, then, Walk in the spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh, for the flesh lusteth

against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." Yet, day by day, the flesh grows weaker, and the new creature stronger, while the "inward man 'is renewed day by day." Comp. John iii. 6. That portion of humanity, so to speak, which is inhabited by the Spirit of God, and from him named spirit, is perpetually actuated by a supernatural and divine energy, under which it puts forth acts in modes of spiritual action which we call graces. Faith, Hope, and Love are the chief of these, but faith and hope are those which concern us here. Every act of believing and holy assurance is produced in the soul by the influence of the indwelling Spirit. The moment a sinner believes, and is thereby united to Christ, he receives, in gracious effluence from the Head, the Spirit of Christ, to be in him an abiding source, a well of water springing up to everlasting life. Those trustings, hopings, and waitings of which we read, are but the filial voices of the Spirit in the heart, the new-born soul crying out for God, for the living God. Slavish feelings, disquietudes, and doubts, are no more from Christ than dark-

ness is from the sun; though incidentally we know the sun occasions shadows. But the operation of the new nature is hope and joy. "So, then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free." As surely as we are actuated by this influence, or "led by the Spirit of God," so truly are we "sons of God." For thus Paul proves it, "for ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father." And thus we find our answer to the question by what agency this blessed state of mind is wrought. "Through the Spirit, we wait for the hope of righteousness by faith."

Our meditation has caused to pass before us the great idea of Gospel righteousness, the hope of redemption from this righteousness, the ground of both righteousness and hope in faith, and the origin of all in the Spirit.

Now I turn suddenly from these doctrinal statements to address those who have no Spirit of power, no faith, no righteousness, and no hope. As the subject has revolved before you, you have wondered perhaps that any should be

interested, and we have been unto you as "one that mocketh." Even if the entire discussion has not seemed dull, it has waked no vibrating chords of experience. Ah! my hearers, thus it has been in all ages of the church. If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost. Blindness on this point remains with many all their days, and accompanies them into the gates of death. Having eyes, they see not, and having ears, they hear not. And, what is fearful, they are at ease. One may be blind and not know it. Great cause have you, my perishing fellow-sinner, to bewail that dark and carnal mind which will not admit a ray from the face of Jesus Christ. We hold over your head a celestial crown, but you will not heed it. The terms in which we describe great heavenly blessings are unintelligible to you, through your want of spiritual understanding. You are growing older without coming any nearer to the door of mercy. Again and again you have seen it open to receive some friend or neighbour, and then you have seen it shut. There is an hour coming, hastening on the mighty wings of Time, when either you will have believed in this sal-

vation . . . or you will be without—without—where are the fearful and unbelieving, &c. He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned. Thus far, you have not believed. Thus far the wrath of God abideth upon you! Were you duly affected with this your condition, you would go home thoughtful and silent. You would lay aside every worldly book, journal, or amusement. You would hasten to your most secluded chamber, and, with the Scriptures before you, would hearken to God's word unto you. You would fall on your knees, and cry importunately to your offended God for his Holy Spirit. You would call up your sins, and ponder on them till your conscience owned the salutary pang. You would lay your soul under the dealings of the Law, until the last hope of carnal presumption was slain. And you would plead with God, in the name of Jesus, that he would have mercy on your dying soul. The cause deserves it, and all rival topics and business might well be laid aside till this should be settled. You have never done so. You have never been in earnest about your salvation. Or, having once

been so, you have quenched the Spirit. Your sands are getting low; they fall in silent haste, peradventure the hand of judgment may shiver the glass at a blow, and end your useless suspense. Others have been where you are, and are lost! But some had sounder thoughts. They yielded to the warnings and considered; this you might do, this holy Sabbath. The week's din is hushed, and you have not the excuse of business. You surely will not squander hours that might bring you salvation, on the indulgence of sloth or social and convivial pleasure. Let me imagine some one to take the preacher's counsel. He bows before God and owns his sins. The iron has entered into his soul. As an outcast wretch, he feels devoid of all goodness. His life is all guilt. He lies prostrate at the foot of the sovereign rectitude. Where can he look for a righteousness to plead? Where? Why, to the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, to his perfect righteousness, to his infinite grace, to his fulfilment of the law, made over in gift to the condemned sinner by his own righteousness. And will he receive me? He will, if God is true. A clear beam of grace, like



a ray of sunlight, steals into the chinks of this dungeon, and reveals the Son of God standing beside the sufferer, who sinks and says, "My Lord and my God!" Now he knows that justice is satisfied and God reconciled. How gloriously resplendent shines that righteousness which covers the sin and shame of millions! How sweetly he falls into the arms of Divine Love! Lord, I believe, help mine unbelief! The Lord helps indeed, lifts up the fainting one, whispers syllables of peace, and pours in cordials of promise. Is he not secure? He looks towards Jehovah as a reconciled father. He looks towards the Judgment Day as a meeting of love with his King. There, at that once dreaded tribunal, he beholds the display of the perfect righteousness in which he trusts. He believes; he is justified; he hopes; he waits in joy. He, through the Spirit, waits for the hope of righteousness by faith. Here is our doctrine turned into experience.

But all this time I am speaking only of the childhood of experience; of sentiments which belong to the babe in Christ. In spite of the world's disbelief and the ignorance of shallow,

worldly Christians, the truth must be declared. Religion is a living process. When the Spirit takes hold of a man to transform him into a child of grace, working faith in him, and opening his eyes to see the boundless riches of grace, the work goes on continually. There is growth of knowledge, faith, and hope. The more the spiritual process advances, the more does religion become distinguished from all its outward forms, and attain likeness to the infinite benevolence of God; as the words next following show: "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing nor uncircumcision, but faith, which worketh by love." If we have known that faith, my brethren, we are in the state of waiting described in the text. We wait, as the servant, for his Lord's return. We wait, as the heir, for his inheritance. We wait, as the bride, for her Beloved. The time seems wearisome and the earth is a prison-house, till the day break, and the shadows fly away. There is something better coming than even the higher joys of earthly experience; though this is greater than most of us imagine. We wait for that which shall as much surpass all revelations

of the earthly church, as the bright morning surpasses the early twilight. "For we are saved by hope; but hope that is seen is not hope; for what a man seeth what doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. And we so wait, we have seen, through the Spirit, "because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God; and we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to his purpose." When we cast away our own righteousness and betake ourselves to the righteousness of God, we were like some shipwrecked creatures on the wild ocean, who had left one sinking bark and swam to the gallant vessel of relief. But not for relief only. Has she not spread her sails, and is she not bearing away towards those green shores where pain and sin are unknown, and where the hope of righteousness is consummated? We cannot rest here. There, there is our home. Every scene of life, to the eye of the believer, must be tinged with colours flung over it from the coming state. Believe in a heaven at all, in a meeting with Jesus,

in a gathering together unto him, in a resurrection, and assembling, and universal home-bringing of elect ones, to go out no more for ever—once believe in this, and human life becomes a different thing. All its relations are changed. Ten thousand matters, otherwise of great interest, grow pale, as stars at sunrise. Of every acquisition and connection we henceforth inquire, How will it stand the test of fire? how will it pass through the judgment? how will it look one thousand years hence? yea, a million ages and millenniums hence? how does it consort with the hope of righteousness by faith? If we have a religion which is a progress, we are finding it thus, beloved fellow-Christians, and are coming to him more in the climate and atmosphere of that other country. I say not that our exulting joys necessarily increase; though they often do so; for all are not favoured alike, to wander in the sweet enchantments of the land of Beulah. But this I will affirm, that the growing Christian lives more and more under the powers of the world to come. Losses, griefs, weariness, disappointment, decay may come; weights may hang on the outward man; life

may have clouds skirting its evening sky ; yet there is an increasing and abiding feeling that the day's work is nearly over, and that the hireling will presently be set free. There is a sense of the utter worthlessness of those things which have only the stamp of a lifelong value, and the immeasurable moment of those things which stretch on into eternity. And this substantiating of things hoped for, this evidencing conviction of things not seen, is Faith. This firm out-looking for its permanent glories, is Hope. And the play of these two great lights upon the soul is the preparation which God gives for bidding farewell to earth and entering into heaven. The face of Jesus, who is our righteousness, shines brightly on the soul that waits for him. My fellow-disciples, we have known him long, and, beholding his approach, can say, while we rejoice with trembling, This is our Beloved, and this is our Friend !

XII.

FAITH AND BAPTISM.



## FAITH AND BAPTISM.

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MARK xvi. 16.—“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.”

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FAITH is believing, and it would be superfluous to make so simple a statement if it had not become common to think it something else. Faith is belief, and he who believes has faith. Since salvation is dependent on faith, it is of the utmost importance that every one of us should know what faith is. When the sinner is exhorted to have faith, it is indispensable for him to comprehend what is meant by the exhortation. Here as elsewhere, that which is very clear in Scripture is made very dark by the perplexing varieties of human teaching. The Bible does not very often give formal definitions of Faith; for this reason, that the word

is not used in any strange or extraordinary sense, but is taken as a part of existing language, and applied to spiritual matters. Scripture often mentions faith, often assumes it as an exercise of the mind easily understood, and, above all, often gives examples of it. The best way of learning what this momentous word means is to discharge from our minds the notions which we have derived from conflicting systems, and to come to the divine oracles to learn how it is employed in its different connections. It is one of the secrets of Bible-study to approach these oracles with a childlike freshness of mind, somewhat like that of those to whom the Gospels and epistles were given when they came newly from the pen of the inspired writers themselves. This is a state of mind very different from ignorance, and very different from scepticism, and is the result of continued inward labour and prayer. In making such an investigation, the language of the soul should be, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak."

Opening the sacred volume, then, for this purpose, we proceed to inquire what an unbiased thinker will discover on this point from

the way in which faith or belief is here mentioned. And although there is much on the subject in the Old Testament, we shall find more than enough in the New to occupy all our research upon the present occasion. Besides, it is the New Testament which is the key to the theology of the Old, as containing the more explicit and the final teaching of the Spirit on the method of man's salvation.

The reason why I begin with the histories of the Gospels is, that abstract truths are most easily apprehended in the shape of examples. It is not without intention that we find the narrative of our Lord's works and sufferings, placed before the doctrinal arguments of the apostles. Let us see, then, whether any light can be thrown on the nature of faith from the beautiful incidents of the evangelical story.

The very first instance is remarkable. A Roman officer, a centurion of Capernaum, has a domestic servant who is paralytic, and he relates the case to Jesus. The merciful Saviour instantly proposes to go and effect his cure. The astonished and humbled captain, convinced of the power and now persuaded of the willing-

ness of the Lord, exclaims, "Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed!" He is sure that Christ has the same command over diseases that he himself exercises over his soldiers. In other words, "I fully believe thou art competent and ready to cure my servant, even without stirring a step." What is our Lord's comment? "Verily, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." Here is faith. Here is great faith. Here is faith in a Gentile mind, stronger than all that had been manifested by the more favoured Jews. This man admits the claims of the great Teacher and Healer. He has an unhesitating persuasion of the truth that the Son of God is endowed with power to heal disease by miracle. If you consider this frame of mind, you find it simple and easily comprehended. There is not a day of our lives in which we do not exercise this very persuasion in regard to common things. A commercial friend assures me that he will, in my stead, meet a particular responsibility as to money. I ask myself, Is he able? is he true? is he willing? The moment I affirm these points, I am a believer in his promise, I have faith in his word; my mind immedi-

ately reposes on his declaration, and I act accordingly. In common life we more usually apply the word trust to this reliance; and trust, even in religion, is the belief of a promise. The difference between this faith and that which saves the soul, is not so much in the way the mind acts, as in the nature of the truth believed. And the character of the mental act will not be altered, if, hereafter, we should see cause to ascribe it to a superior and divine agency. It is still persuasion of a truth, *i. e.*, it is still believing.

Let us look at an example of the contrary character, for such contrasts are not only striking but instructive. Mat. viii. 23. The cases are two and identical as to principle. Both concern storms on the lake. The disciples are alarmed beyond measure, and awake our Lord, crying, "Lord, save us, we perish!" And he rebuked them, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" The other case is, Mat. xiv. 29, when, as you remember, Peter undertook to go to his Master by walking on the water. Terrified at the tempest, he began to sink, saying, "Lord, save me!" Observe, now, our Lord's remark: "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst

thou fear?" Here we read a lesson concerning belief from two examples of unbelief. There would have been no fault, unless the disciples, in the first case, and Peter in the second, had had assurance that Christ would take care of them. This assurance is in its nature a promise of Christ. It may have been implied rather than expressed. If they had implicitly and strongly believed it, they could not have been struck with panic. Some belief of this assurance there undoubtedly was, but it was slender; and Jesus upbraids them as of little faith. Though the case was one of temporal danger, the principle is applicable to spiritual danger. Only, in place of the storm of wind and waves, put the storm of God's wrath, and in place of disbelieving Christ's ability and readiness to save the body, put disbelief of his ability and readiness to save the soul, and you have a perfect example of ordinary religious unbelief.

The transition is easy from these cases to that of Jairus, Mark v. 22. His little daughter was at the point of death. He had heard of Jesus, and such was his faith in him that he came in person and importuned him to go to



the sick-bed. On their way they were met by distressing tidings: "Thy daughter is dead; why troublest thou the Teacher?" Now, whatever belief this ruler may have had of Christ's power to heal a diseased child, we must conceive it to need vast increase in order to believe that he could raise her from death. And it is a sweet trait of the Lord's manner, and one which may encourage trembling souls now, that he anticipates this shock to the heart-broken father's faith, and, as it were, places his hands under him as he sinks, saying, "Be not afraid, only believe." v. 36. You bear in mind the happy result.

This incident greatly illustrates the doctrine of faith. It required confidence to go even with a prophet to the house were lay the corpse of a beloved child, in expectation of resurrection. As yet no instance of raising the dead had occurred in Christ's ministry. Jairus seems to have received strength from Christ's words, and his belief that Christ could and would save his child reached the proper point. Christ's words have no meaning unless they involve a promise. They mean, "Jairus, your daughter is dead, but

I can bring her to life ; I am about to do so ; be not afraid ; only believe this assurance." The faith of Jairus was simple believing ; and was exactly like the faith of many a sinner, when his spiritual case looks quite as desperate.

But we must go back a little to an episode in this charming narrative. It is justly reckoned one of the loveliest of our Lord's acts of mercy. As Jesus, accompanied by Jairus and a great throng, was on his way, a woman who had been a sufferer for twelve years came behind him and strove to touch his garment. "If I may but touch his clothes, I shall be whole." Mark what this short saying includes : "I believe this Jesus of Nazareth has power to heal me." This belief produced action, as true believing always does. She touched—she was made whole. "Daughter," said Christ, "thy faith hath made thee whole ; go in peace." Thy faith : it was her perfect confidence of the truth that there was healing in Christ.

In the similar case of a convinced sinner, faith is the perfect confidence that there is salvation in Christ.

Not unlike this is the account of the scene at

the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration. A demoniac child was in the very agonies of a seizure, which made him fall, and foam, and lie in spasms on the earth. Mark ix. 20. The prospect was darker, because the disciples had failed to effect a cure. The father burst into tears, but did not despair; yet his words are those of a man only half persuaded: "If thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us and help us!" The answer is most significant: "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth," *i. e.*, "Thou art half persuaded of the truth that I am able to save; be wholly persuaded; make the effort, put forth the act of faith; to faith there is no impossibility." My brethren, which of us has not often made this poor man's words his own? With tears he cried, "Lord, I believe! help thou mine unbelief!" For here, again, we see that faith has its degrees. It is as if he had said, "Lord, I believe; I believe thy power and goodness; yet not as I ought, nor as I would; I only half believe. Yet I do believe, and as to what is lacking, Lord, help thou my unbelief, and raise me to fulness of faith!" And Christ expelled the demon.

No instance in Scripture has been more cheering to inquirers than this. It has been a balm to wounded souls in all ages. The convinced sinner has a glimpse of light, from the person of the mighty Saviour. He can go to no other. All other resorts have failed him. He hears of the need of faith, and that salvation is possible even to him, if he could but believe. Despairing of every thing else, he falls at Christ's feet, saying, Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief! His belief is mingled with unbelief; yet belief is there. Faith is feeble, but it is faith still. And, as has been said, the hand of an infant may receive a free gift as well as the hand of a giant. It is not the greatness, but the reality of faith which connects the soul with salvation. And though it be but as a grain of mustard-seed, it justifies as certainly and fully as though it were consummate. The indispensable thing is this persuasion of Christ's truth.

In these several instances, each of the persons in question had been led to consider the claims of Jesus to be the great Teacher, the Messiah of Israel, the Son of God. The mirac-

ulous powers belonged to him in these characters. The question with each had been, Receive him as Messiah, or not receive him—be persuaded, or not persuaded of this truth—believe, or not believe. And observe how these terms all come to the same thing in that noted passage, John i. 12, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.

To receive Christ is to believe on his name. So it was with the Samaritans. First they heard the woman relate what she had seen and learned at Jacob’s well; then they came in person. Hear how they addressed their converted townswoman: “Now we believe, not because of thy saying, for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.” John iv. 42. They gave credence to the truth that this Jesus was Messiah and Saviour; they received him; they became sons of God.

On one occasion, John ix., our Lord gave sight to a man born blind, whom the Jews then excommunicated. Jesus sought him out in his disgrace and said to him, “Dost thou believe on

the Son of God?" He answered, "Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?" And Jesus said unto him, "Thou hast seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee." And he said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshipped him. Now, we may suppose the man's darkened mind to have worked somewhat thus: "Blind from my birth, I have been admitted to vision by One who is plainly full of mercy, full of gracious words, and full of divine power. These tokens prove to me that he is sent of God, and that what he says is true. For God will not set his seal in attestation of falsehood. What he says commands my belief. He says he is the Messiah, yea, the Son of God. I believe the testimony; Lord, I believe!" Here we have faith in full act; faith in Jesus as the Son of God; and faith by persuasion of the truth, *i. e.*, belief.

The apostle who relates this, wrote several letters about thirty years after, which contain expressions that derive much light from this incident. 1 John iv. 42. "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is born of God," *i. e.*, to believe in the incarnation of the Son of God is proof of regeneration.



Again, iv. 15, "Whosoever shall confess [sincerely and of persuasion] that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God." The truth here confessed is precisely that which the blind man confessed. Every such profession (of course, out of inward belief of the truth) is proof of union with God. 1 John v. 1: "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." Belief of the Messiahship of Jesus is proof of regeneration. v. 10: "He that believeth not God, hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." In all these cases—the case of the blind man included—it is one and the same truth which is believed, but this is expressed by different phrases; Jesus is come in the flesh—Jesus is the Christ—Jesus is the Son of God. It is a comprehensive truth, and carries more than this naked proposition, as is evident from the last verse we read, v. 10, where it is said that God has given us eternal life in his Son; an epitome of the Gospel; nay, the Gospel itself; the good news; God's record; the very

truth for a sinking soul to believe, and which he must believe, or make God a liar. So that we have really made progress in our inquiry, having found not only what sort of a mental exercise faith is, viz., that it is believing, or being persuaded of truth, but, further, what that truth is, which is to be believed, viz., that God freely bestows on us eternal life, in and by Jesus Christ, who is his Son, the Messiah, manifest in the incarnation. And this agrees with my text and the great commission under which all addresses to mankind have their authority. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Mark xvi. 15, 16. We are not just now concerned with baptism. "He that believeth shall be saved." Believeth what? Clearly "believeth the Gospel" just named. The truth, then, to be believed, is the truth of the Gospel. This truth may be expressed in a volume, or in a sentence. In the Bible, the compendious expression of it is often chosen. John i. 16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish,

but have eternal life." Here the Gospel is God's love to the world in giving his Son. The thorough persuasion of this, with all it comprehends and implies, is saving faith. This is what the ancient Jew believed, when he owned that Jesus was the Messiah, or that he was the Son of God. Express it as you will, it is still the Lord Jesus Christ, as the gracious Saviour, who is the object of faith.

Hitherto we have sought our examples in the four Gospels. But how was this matter treated in the discourses of the Apostles after the Ascension? Pentecost will tell us. Peter preached. The text of his sermon, though placed last, was these words: "Therefore let the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." Here is law and Gospel; law to convince; "whom ye have crucified;" Gospel to convert; "God hath made him the Saviour." Under such words the cry of the congregation was, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter said unto them, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of

sin, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Where is faith here? It is included in baptism. Never imagine, as some childishly do, that the application of water, whether little or much, is in itself the great regenerating or saving operation. Baptism was a sign. It was a seal. It was an initiation. It was a symbolical profession of Christ. He who was baptized thereby said, I thus avow myself a Christian, *i. e.*, "Let all men know by this rite that I believe in Jesus." Here, then, is faith; and the verse, expounded, runs thus: Repent, *i. e.*, Turn round to a new mind, and new thoughts, and new life; you are already pricked in heart, you already have conviction, repent, let the change of heart and conduct begin; it includes conviction and faith; and be baptized every one of you, *i. e.*, Come hither and be washed with water, as many of you once were by John. By being thus washed you become visible disciples, learners; you put yourselves to school, are initiated as Christ's people, in a word, you declare, publicly, We believe. For the remission of sins, *i. e.*, Believing thus, you shall be saved. And ye shall receive the Holy Ghost. The ascended

Christ has purchased, by his death and merit, the gift of the Comforter. On believing, you shall receive this promised Spirit. Read verse 41, and you will find this justified: "And they that gladly received his word [believed] were baptized, and the same day there were added unto them above 3,000 souls."

Let us go further, and join ourselves to a chariot, viii. 26, between Jerusalem and Gaza, in which an African treasurer is busy reading a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. The chariot stops and takes up a missionary, Philip, who now becomes the teacher of the Ethiopian noble. He begins "at the same Scripture and preached unto him Jesus." And as they went on their way they came to a certain water, doubtless some rivulet crossing the way, and not wanting even in that way "which is desert." And the eunuch said, "See, here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized?" *i. e.*, "I am persuaded by your exposition, and am ready to express my persuasion; here is water, apply it to me and make me a Christian by sign, as I already am by conviction." And Philip said, "If thou believest with all thy heart thou mayest." And

he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Mark well the sentence. It is a primitive profession of faith. Compare it with what we have already said about the truth to be believed. "And he commanded the chariot to stand still, and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him." In this place we have several confirmations of what has been already discovered. 1. The nature of faith, as belief, or persuasion of truth. 2. The truth believed, or object of faith; Jesus Christ as Son of God, in the senses set forth in the famous prophecy, Is. lii. 3. Baptism is the outward symbol of this faith, and follows on the profession of it. If the eunuch had died between the chariot and the spring or river, I do not suppose he would any the less have gone to Paradise. It was faith, not water, which saved his soul, and it was already saved; as was that of the penitent thief, who never was baptized at all, except with a baptism of blood.

If you are not weary of instances, take yet another, which is perhaps already in your thoughts. It is that of the gaoler at Philippi.



He had in charge two foreigners, the very first missionaries of Europe, who had been insulted by a mob, whipped by order of the magistracy, and condemned to prison. At midnight, in the inner dungeon, with feet in the stocks, they sang Christian psalms of praise to God. But another music came suddenly. The walls shook and the doors flew open, and chains and stocks fell off; and the very gaoler, affected by these attestations, and by the sermons, or the private talk, or perhaps the hymns of Paul and Silas, thought his hour was come, and was going to commit self-murder. But Paul prevented this, and the man found a lamp and sprang in, and being first relieved of anguish about his charge, then, I dare say, reinforced by words of Christianity, exclaimed, "Sirs, what shall I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." Paul and Silas then "spake unto him the words of the Lord, and to all that were in his house." And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes, and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. He was baptized, *i. e.*, he "took the pledge" of Christianity. He be-

came an adherent to the Gospel. He was enrolled. He subscribed under the name of Christ. He entered himself a disciple, a Christian learner. He initiated himself and his house, small and great, as designated for Christian teaching and training. It would have been wonderful, indeed, if primitive converts had been willing to leave their families behind; if a single bondsman or a single infant had been left without the washing which marked them as learners in the school of Jesus. And if any scoffing Jew had sneered at a rite bestowed on infancy, as if it could do no good to little ones, he might have been reminded of his own national initiation by the Old Testament sacrament.

You will observe the close connection between faith and baptism, in that form of the commission which occurs in Matthew xxviii. 19, "Go ye, therefore, and teach [disciple] all nations; baptizing them." And in Corinth, Acts xviii. 8, "Many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed, and were baptized." You will see that, in the common language of the day, baptism was used for initiation, profession, adhesion to a

teacher, or a doctrine. "All our fathers, 1 Cor. x. 1, were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea." And just as Old Testament believers were baptized unto Moses, so were New Testament believers baptized unto Christ. Romans, vi. 3: "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" In the very act of receiving their baptism, they professed their belief in the doctrine of Christ's death. Gal iii. 27: "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." And then he argues that other distinctions are merged in this.

It is well worthy of remark, that while it is said he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, it is not said he that is not baptized shall be damned; but "he that believeth not shall be damned." The difference is great. No Scripture teaches anywhere that any are lost for want of baptism; but many Scriptures teach that many are lost for want of faith. It is nowhere asserted that baptism alone saves the soul, but it is repeatedly asserted that faith

saves the soul. The inference is inevitable, that baptism derives its value from the faith that it professes. Shall we then make little of baptism? God forbid! It is the seal of the faith which is professed. And where there is faith in the heart, it will break forth into profession. Modern times of degeneracy show the painful spectacle of persons indulging the hopes of Christianity, and yet declining to own Christ before men! They imitate what was worst in Nicodemus. But sincere and hearty believers, in apostolical times, no sooner believed than they professed it, and were baptized. Though we often speak as if coming to the communion was entering the church, we err in so speaking. All who rightly come to the communion have already joined the church. "All baptized persons are members of the Church; are under its care, and subject to its government and discipline; and when they have arrived at the years of discretion, they are bound to perform all the duties of church members."\*

The words of our Lord have a meaning which is important enough without the figment

\* B. Disc. chap. i., p. 6.

of baptismal regeneration. They import at least this: "I now send you to preach the glad tidings of salvation, not to the Jew only, but also to the Greek, to men of every nation, till all mankind have heard the testimony. And when this Word of the Lord is declared, he that believes it, and becomes a Christian, [is baptized,] he who accepts it inwardly with such heartiness as to profess it outwardly, shall reap the benefit of such faith—shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

Thus have I endeavoured to set before you:

1. The nature of faith, or what it is to believe;
2. The object of faith, or what it is to be believed;
- and 3. The connection between faith and baptism.

Some application to our own case will properly follow this doctrine.

I. If you would be saved, believe. Till this is done you have not stepped on solid ground. Whatever you have done, whatever you have forborne, you are as yet displeasing to God, for "without faith it is impossible to please him." Unbelief is very common, but it is a sin which leads to hell: "he that believeth not

shall be damned." The Pagan has never heard the Gospel, he will not be condemned for disbelief of it. But you have heard it; line upon line, with every diversity of talent and application. If you are one who has often made a temporary effort to be saved, examine whether you have not striven in a wrong direction. What you need is faith. Now, faith is nothing without truth, any more than eyesight without a visible object. As faith comes by truth, acquaint yourself with that truth; find it; consider it. Make it your study and contemplation. As saving faith embraces the Gospel, examine, ponder, familiarize the Gospel. And as the Gospel is the testimony concerning Christ, bend all your powers of soul on Christ, the Messiah, the Incarnate Word, the Saviour of the world. Fall on your knees before the Cross of Christ, and remain there, looking and praying, and you cannot but see a glory, a beauty, and a grace, which will end in faith.

II. If you believe, profess your faith. This is what in scriptural language is called a good confession. In primitive times this avowal of



Christ was connected with baptism. It is so still where any come in from the unbaptized world. But the great duty now pressed is that of coming out and professing faith in Christ. No one can remain neutral without sin. To be ashamed or afraid to own Christ is to deny him. A consistent believer will not be willing to withhold his feeble testimony of attachment to his Redeemer for a single moment. Do you believe? Then, if unbaptized, hasten to make your faith public, by submitting to the Christian rite.

Or are you one who has been baptized in infancy? The case is somewhat different, but by no means less solemn. You are already marked with the seal of the covenant. You are already entered in the nominal church. You have enjoyed those inestimable privileges which are consequent on this initiation. You have been from childhood in the Christian school. Your parents, if faithful to their vows, have brought you up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. You have been cherished at the bosom of the Church, have learnt its lessons, listened to its Gospel messages, and witnessed

its sacraments. Having lived thus long on its advantages, will you now requite the Giver with contempt? Is it nothing to have been all your life under a dispensation of grace? Is there no obligation consequent on such benefits? Do you wish you had not received them; that you had been born among heathens or unbelievers; that you had never been taught the name of Jesus and the way of life; in a word, that you had never been offered to God in holy baptism? No, you shrink from such ingratitude and impiety. And no course is left for you, but either to refuse compliance with a duty which you tacitly admit, or [which may God grant] to assume the vows which were made for you by your pious parents.

XIII.

THE EFFICACY OF STRONG FAITH.

## THE EFFICACY OF STRONG FAITH.

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HEBREWS xi. 34.—“Who, through faith . . . . out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.”

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THE purpose of this discourse is to set forth Faith, as the principle of Christian strength, progress, and victory. It is no slander to say that religion is not making itself felt on every side, as at some favoured periods in the history of the Church. Individual professors, individual churches, large bodies of associated Christians, nay, the Church itself, are not putting forth a characteristic energy. In these respects, we compare disadvantageously with primitive Christians; with the Reformers and their immediate successors; with the great Nonconformists of the Commonwealth times; with the

associates and followers of Whitefield; and even with some whom we can remember, in revival days, thirty years ago. While we ascribe the efficiency to God, and refer the operation to his sovereignty, it may yet be safely said, that the power of these persons and communities, and their consequent increase and diffusion, may be traced to the intensity of their inward fires. No man strongly influences others on any subject which does not strongly influence himself. Some there are, in all ages, who make no impression on any around them, in regard to any subject. They accomplish nothing, because they feel nothing. The reservoir is void; nothing can flow from it. There is no fund of high aspiration and swelling wishes. Their views are limited by the paltry circle of daily wants, gains, appetites, and comforts. To such a man, his own household and his own business constitute his world. For this he enslaves himself, for this he amasses, for this he makes provision in his will; of this he dreams. We lay such men out of our inquiry, in examining the secret of influence. They have none. In the words of the Roman poet,

they are "born to consume the crops." But there are others, discoverable without going beyond the domain of worldly men, who cause themselves to be felt far and near, and are remembered, and, in a certain sense, active, after they are dead. Such are found in every profession, and to such the great changes in the world are to be attributed.

Looking now at instances which occur to our view in common life, we shall perceive that energy and success arise from the choice of a distinct object in life, and from a deep persuasion of certain truths, or what are held as truths, according to which the conduct of life is ordered. This may be called the faith of the natural world. A man of this class cannot live in a pent-up circle. He lifts himself to an eminence, and secures a wide horizon. He seeks to alter the state of affairs. He forms large plans, and executes them. His survey takes in society, and future generations. Though often eminently prosperous for himself, he becomes the stimulator, example, guide, and benefactor of others. By happy devices, and by courageous adventure, he shows (it may be in commerce, or any produc-



tive labour) that the slow and contracted methods which he found in use, may be replaced by others more rapid and effective. His success calls others into the arena. The wisdom of one becomes the policy of many; until we have sometimes found the whole mode of procedure in some department of worldly enterprise revolutionized by one or by a few leading spirits, in the course of a single generation. These are what we denominate men of influence, as they are certainly men of energy. And it lies directly in the line of our investigation to inquire, what, after all, is the secret of their strength? Philosophic minds will not sit down contented with an answer which refers all these results to fortune, to happy hits, to pure chance. The persistency of effort, in such persons, their constancy of operation, and the uniformity with which they repeat their experiments, assures us that the cause must be within themselves. If we endeavour to trace the stream up to the fountain, we shall probably attain some satisfaction on this interesting point. When, therefore, we find any man, of any profession, eminently successful, influencing large circles, and

operating on society, we shall always observe the following conditions as present. He is always at work. This needs scarcely be said. The matter in which he thus makes himself known is his great business, to which every thing else gives place. Other men may take up the same by the way, for amusement, or during a short period; but for him, it is the grand affair of life, and he never lets it go. Now I beg you to observe, that where this is the case, the individual always has a definite end in view; and no man leaves his mark on society, who has not a definite end. It may be very sordid; no more than the accumulation of substance. It may have added to it the vanity of being first in his own line of business, or the ambition of wielding power by these means; or the love of that excitement which belongs to every successful chase. But success in this particular mode of activity is present to his mind, as the great object of his life, and to this he makes every thing else subservient. He has an aim in life, and he lives for it. The higher the value he sets upon this end, the more intense will be his activity.

If he be one who rises higher in the intellectual and moral scale, and seeks to benefit multitudes, instead of living to himself, we must include this in his aim. It is his fixed purpose to make his power felt on a circle of fellow-creatures, large or small. To this he resolutely and unceasingly bends his energies. But we must go further. We never fail to notice, if we examine deeply, that the man of influence is in some sense a man of fixed principles. He has some definite truths, or supposed truths, which are the law of his whole action. I add, "supposed truths," because faith is so mighty an agent, that even error may become energetic and propulsive, if only it be believed strongly enough. This man of power has his beliefs, on matters connected with his own successes. These are the tenets of his worldly creed. They may be few, but not the less operative. They may be concealed, but sagacious observers will divine them from his conduct. Nay, he may not be able to express them; for there are implicit as well as explicit principles of action. Not every wise administrator can verbally interpret his own schemes;

not every philosopher can, like Franklin, embody in distinct enunciation the precepts of life. But there they are; and they are the secret of his activity and his influence. A revolution in these would instantly change the entire current of his life. They are really the motive-powers of the whole complex machine. His belief, I repeat it, of certain principles, gives origin to all the effects. This belief is concerned in the very choice of an object, and in adapting and employing all means. Upturn these principles, and you invert or nullify the whole man. Suppose, for example, that his field is commerce. Convince him that worldly wealth is undesirable, that commerce is not the way to attain it; convince him that his own branch of trade is unfortunate; convince him that his mode of conducting affairs is ruinous; and you have already cut the sinews of all his activity, and consequently destroyed all his power. Such is the efficacy of principles, even in things which it is not common to refer to this source. Examples might be added, which would yet more directly evince the operation of a natural secular faith upon the influential conduct of man-

kind. All can perceive, that in every such case, the energy, persistency, and success of the action will be in proportion to the strength of inward conviction. Belief has its degrees, and he who believes feebly, will strike faint blows.

Now it will need no long array of argument to show, that this influence of inward conviction must be more direct and powerful, in cases where the effect is sought to be produced through the very medium of supposed truth, and where the effort is directed towards bringing men over to their own opinion. "If you would have me weep," said the ancient, "weep yourself." Still more justly, "If you would have me believe, believe yourself." To show the great strength of the principle, allow me to cite the case of those who teach error. The power of such men is in their belief. It is a vulgar and superficial blunder, to suppose that many or most of these inculcate known falsehood. They believe, and believe strongly. They are not only deceivers, but "being deceived." They are blind, as well as leaders of the blind; and in countless instances they are followed by misguided multitudes. The very

firmness and vehemence of their persuasion, act on them with a perpetual momentum, and sometimes confer a sort of sublimity on their character. No man ever influenced great masses, who had not some leading opinion deeply impressed on his own mind. According to his belief of its truth and its importance, will be the efficacy of his endeavours. In all the instances which we have supposed, there has been an inward persuasion of some supposed truth, and an inward fervour in carrying it out in practice; all which may be fitly used to illustrate the power of high religious principle and feeling, in the vastly higher work which we have to perform in our Christian life.

Thus are we brought to the heart of the subject proposed for consideration, namely, that faith is the principle of strength, progress, and victory.

I think we have already discovered the cause of our inefficacious and drooping church life. We make little impression on the world, because we believe so little, and that little so weakly. If our faith were strong, we should feel ardently, speak boldly, act strongly, and



conquer certainly. Leaving out the special and divinely-constituted power of faith, all the analogies we have been considering go to confirm this view. Wherever a man strongly believes, he is successfully active, in the proportion of his other powers. In this sense we may say, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." If this spring be wanting, all power is gone. Faith may be defined, a persuasion of the truth. Evangelical faith is a persuasion of Gospel truth. Viewed in its origin, it is the product of Divine influence. Viewed in its connection with preceding exercises, it arises from spiritual apprehensions of the truth. In the matter of our personal pardon and acceptance, it takes hold specially of the promise of grace in Jesus Christ; but faith has its wider range, in which it embraces as true the whole round of revelation. And that which concerns us now, is, that the hearty conviction of God's truth is the great strengthening, operative and triumphant principle. Universally, as a man's faith, such will be his spiritual power. He cannot affect others save with that which first affects himself. If faith wavers or declines, the entire Christian

character is enfeebled. We see this at once in regard to great fundamental points. Let any one begin to totter about the being of a God, and he is palsied for every religious feeling and effort. Or concerning whatsoever truth he may harbour doubts, he will be unmanned for the whole corresponding class of emotions and acts. But faith may suffer not only in its extent, but in its intensity. We may deny no one doctrine—we may hold the complete system, in a certain way; but a way so faint and low as scarcely to differ from unbelief, and thus to be totally inoperative.

It is just in this modification that faith exists in many Christian professors; and can we wonder if they bear little fruit? How different a creature is one who is all on fire with the persuasion of Gospel verities. He is transformed. The instance of Saul of Tarsus at once occurs to us; for we are able to contemplate him under two opposite faiths. The first, that of Judaism and Pharisaism, was as sincere as the second. There was no feigning. He verily thought he should do God service by violence and murder. His faith was of

falsehood ; but it was not inert. It propelled him. It made him a persecutor, a blasphemer, injurious ; it caused him to breathe forth threatening and slaughter, and to make havoc of the Church. His second faith, as you know, came to him suddenly. He has a new attraction, and moves in a new orbit. Straightway he has become a new man. He preaches that Jesus whom once he blasphemed. The whole remainder of his life is a motion derived from this new impulse. Does any man doubt whether Paul believed ? Does any man doubt whether his belief was the impelling power of his activity ? It was faith that made him. His former principles, his former life, were obliterated by this new force. "The life that I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God." No wonder he speaks perpetually of faith ; it perpetually operated in him, urging him to endurance, to utterance, and to action. He writes to the Corinthians, expounding the principles of his extraordinary life, and showing that his contempt of difficulties, and his earnestness of labour, arose from his exalted apprehension of the truth of the Gospel ; and this was faith. For this cause,

he fainted not. And though "already delivered unto death for Jesus' sake," he reveals the secret upholding power of his ministerial work when he adds: "We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak." Behold the source of prophetic and of apostolic utterance! The deep persuasion of a single great truth may sway a man's character and actuate his life. Let it be the resurrection, or the judgment, or justification by faith—it casts its broad shadow over the whole prospect; every day of life feels its impression. Was it not something like this, which gave tone and dignity to the mind of Martin Luther? If he had not possessed one vast truth—if he had not believed it strongly—he would never have been so out of weakness made strong; he would never have so put to flight the armies of the aliens. It is a great blessing to a man to be fully charged with one sublime idea. It elevates him to something of its own stature. It preserves him from the calms and stagnations, in which too many of us dream away our lives. There is something

which he believes. Faith has the throne, and wields the sceptre. He need never look about for wherewithal to interest his vacillating mind. He possesses the luxury of a cherished truth. Oh! know ye not that this is sweeter than the honeycomb—richer than rubies? Ye, whose minds were never really awakened to any thing intellectual or spiritual, ye have a world of bliss into which yet to enter! Early disciples felt this, especially under the words of the Great Teacher. When once they heard him speak as never man spake, they were smitten with his heavenly voice, and received into their bosoms a secret, on which to ponder without weariness as long as they lived. Thus, also, many came from their philosophies, all unsatisfying, to the apostles and primitive teachers of Christianity. They believed, and the new truths lived in them as mighty forces, propelling them to speech and act. In reformation times, how many from all parts of Europe came to sit at the feet of Luther and of Calvin? The great re-discovered doctrine of free salvation had become their darling belief, and they were wrought upon accordingly.



Even in our later times, how have our hearts rejoiced, if we have been favoured to alight on a teacher, who is all alive with some vital truth of Christianity; who expounds, illustrates, and enforces it; who dwells on it, to the weariness, perhaps, of many, but not to ours. We almost learn to love the instructor, for the sake of his lesson. But the lesson, after all, is that which feeds our faith.

The majority of Christian professors, I know very well, have no great interest in Divine truth. They could give up this or that tenet of their creed, without feeling much loss. Little could they comprehend the spirit of dying for one's faith. At times, all sects and all confessions seem to them alike. But he who has clung to the doctrine of Jesus, as to a life-boat after shipwreck, knows no such apathy. His great belief is ever before him. It is the enkindling cause of all his ardours. It excites him to an energy which he never felt in the days of his ignorance. All merely secular verities, however acknowledged as important in their place, grow dim and fade and die out, in comparison, as stars before the rising sun.



Above all, the belief of Jesus Christ, in his person and his work, his excellencies and his invitations, his dying and his reign—when once settled on the throne in any heart, destroys all rivals, and becomes the principle of true Christian strength. Christ is formed in the heart the hope of glory. If any thing can make a weak believer strong, it is this. Hence, O my beloved brethren, in much infirmity, but with an unspeakable earnestness, am I thus constantly endeavouring, in my imperfect way, to win you to the contemplation of the Lord, and to faith in him. It is only by faith in Jesus, that these signal effects can be wrought. We might take up all the important doctrines of the Gospel, one by one, and show how each in its turn becomes a source of power and a means of victory. No man can be any greater or any stronger, in Christianity, than his faith. There can be no addition to real faith, without an accession of religious strength. And (using a distinction already noticed) this faith, which is thus important, may be increased in two respects, as to its extent and as to its intensity.

(1.) If the principle of Divine faith is in

us, we may be continually adding to the objects of faith; that is, to the doctrines which we believe. New objects or ideas, and new relations between them, rise upon the discovery of the believer, as new stars and planets before the gaze of the astronomer; and each he hails as the revelation of his God. Truth is the fulcrum of the lever, faith. Particular truths are so many polished stones, which faith builds into the wall of the spiritual temple. The doctrines of religion therefore nourish faith. In proportion to our faith, will be our desire for the increase of knowledge. No doctrines will be unimportant, though some will lie closer to our bosom than others. But doctrine—doctrine—doctrine—is that which faith desires. It is lamentable that the Christianity of our day desires it not. There is a craving for what is a contradiction in terms—teaching which is not doctrinal. The cry is for literature, for illustration, for exhortation, for imagination, for eloquence, for any thing but truth. If faith ever rises to manly vigour, it must be by enlarging the mind's acquaintance with the whole extent of saving truth. Believers who would be

strong and healthy, must not be detained upon the milk of babes, but must aspire to strong meat, and go on unto perfection. For faith to be strong and conquering, we must have variety of food. The entire truths of religion must enter into the regimen. Indeed, no one would greatly err, who should begin with the elements of doctrine, and go on to fill up the whole scheme of theological truth. This is the way to acquire bone, muscle, and sinew. The best sign of spiritual health is a sound appetite for solid truth. And this is the first mode of strengthening faith, namely, in its extent, or the knowledge of its objects.

(2.) The other is not less important, though it respects the subject rather than the object of faith. In regard to the former, the question is, What do I believe? In regard to the latter, the question is, How, or how strongly do I believe? And surely we all need a great increase in the intensity of our faith. Remark, that we are now considering faith as a principle which forms the character to strength and influence. In this regard, every thing depends on its height, its glow, its bursting force. Amount

of knowledge is good, just as fuel is good ; but when we speak of expansion and progress, what we want is, fire—fire ! Faith must not be a lethargic assent, but a concentrated burning heat. It is this intensity of conviction and persuasion which has made the Pauls, the Luthers, the Whitefields, of the Church ; or (as all cannot be heroes) which has inflamed to generous action those humbler believers, who have been blessed to the salvation of many souls. It is really wonderful to see how much greatness can be conferred on a common man, by the warming, actuating power of faith. Out of weakness he is made strong ; he waxes valiant in fight. Thus the inert ball of iron receives velocity and resistless force from the heat and expansion of the cannon's chamber. It ought to encourage every believer who has a strong conviction. Let the truth which lies within his breast be raised to a red heat, and its influence becomes decisive. He may seem to himself to be as nothing ; but God's truth in him is operative ; the neighbourhood feels it. Where the truths which animate him are grand truths—where he holds them with a grasp that noth-

ing can disengage or relax—where his soul is steeped in them, day and night—where he delights in them—communication follows spontaneously. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh—the manner speaketh—the behaviour speaketh—the very visage speaketh. A man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost sends forth influence at every pore. His whole body is full of light, which he radiates on every side. It is not stir, it is not factitious effort, it is not learning, it is not eloquence; it is faith, it is holiness. Though Moses was slow of speech, his countenance shone when he came down from converse with God. Fill a soul up to the brim with realizing and absorbing persuasion of capital truth, and it runs over. There is a holy contagion in strong faith. To increase our influence for God, it is not so necessary to prescribe rules, as to believe mightily, with that faith which is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen. Kindle this fire, and the flame of love shall presently break forth in holy, irresistible action. O my brethren, this is what we need, to give our religion actuality, and to produce



results in the Church like those which we witness in the world, among men who are deeply in earnest, and borne onward by their ruling passion. Give us men and women with whom religion is the great and the one thing, and we shall soon behold some effects to remind us of the days of the Reformation, and the times of early faith. Coals must be brought to our lips and hearts by the hands of the seraphim. Fire must descend from heaven to touch the dead logs on our altar. There must be communication with heaven. The Holy Ghost must awaken these ardours. Pentecostal cloven tongues must hover over our assemblies. The adversary will cry, "These men are full of new wine"; but we shall confidently rejoin, "Christ, having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear." Are we convinced that our lack of power in the Church arises from our lack of faith? Then let us concentrate our souls on the great awakening truths of revelation. Let us redouble our application to the Word of God. Let us give ourselves to prayer for the influences of the Holy Spirit. Happy



would this hour be, if I could impress on any the truth, that a single soul, actuated by Divine faith, becomes a centre of power. We undervalue individual influence. We ascribe too little to what may be accomplished by eminent piety in ourselves. In a community like ours, no one believer can attain to unwonted fervour, without conferring benefit on others. The conflagration which wraps the mountain forest or the boundless prairie in sheets of flame, and seems to set the heavens on fire, had its commencement in one spot—perhaps in a single spark. Revival must begin somewhere. Let each of us pray that it may begin in his own soul. Disdain not the communications of God sent down to your solitary closet. Hope for great exaltation of faith from your private study of inspired truth. Aim, my Christian brother, at attaining high and commanding faith. Be strong in faith, giving glory to God. It is, in a certain sense, your whole work. Without it, you can do nothing; with it, you can do all things. It is the place to begin. It is the spark to be kindled. The work is near home; nay, it is within you. The moment for effort

has arrived. Defer it not till the morrow. God asks of you to determine what sort of Christian you will be. Upon instants like these, sometimes depends the whole current of life. Dream not of a progress in the Church, without a progress in individuals. Fancy not an elevation of others, but seek to be exalted in faith yourself. If this thought be well lodged in you, the exhortation will not have been in vain. Open every window of the soul to the rays of heavenly light. Accept it, and be mighty; for all things are possible to him that believeth.

XIV.

IN THE BELOVED.

## IN THE BELOVED.

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EPHESIANS i. 6.—“To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved.”

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“IF the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” Ps. xi. 3. Of all Christian character, experience, and action, the foundations are laid in Divine truth. This truth is capable of being stated in clear, intelligible propositions, which, when brought together in logical connection, and embraced under a single view, constitute systems of doctrine. Such arrangement of things known are not inventions of the learned, but demands of a necessity, existing in all human minds, precisely in the proportion of their respective clearness,

strength, and patient investigation. Truths of religion, inspired truths—that is, Scriptural truths, are not exempt from this law. The enunciation of these truths, in their simpler, more rational, or more scientific form, is doctrine. To inveigh against doctrine, therefore, in religious teaching, if not a contradiction in terms, is at least to withdraw religious truth from the analogy of all other knowledge. And to say, as has been said, that “doctrine is the skin of truth, stripped off, dried, and set up empty,” is to prate ignorantly for the sake of momentary effect, if not to be treacherous to the high majesty of truth itself. Doctrine is the form of sacred truth, adapted to inculcation and transmission. Doctrinal preaching is supposed by some to be controversial or polemical. If any so err, they need the schoolmaster more than the preacher. Doctrine is above all needed at a period of general awakening. A man convinced of his sins, asks how a sinner can be pardoned, in consistency with God’s justice: the answer to his question is doctrine. He asks what that work of Christ is, on account of which he may be admitted to favour: the

answer to his question, whether true or false, is doctrine. He further asks, by what means the benefits of redemption may be made his own: the answer to this is doctrine. Awakened souls desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby. The Apostle Paul, beyond all New Testament writers, affords milk for babes, and strong meat for men. He is the doctrinal apostle. This epistle is intensely doctrinal; and our text contains a precious cluster of doctrine, which we may profitably take apart, while we consider these propositions:—

1. The Son of God is the Beloved.
2. The saving love bestowed on believers, is on account of the Chief Beloved.
3. This Divine acceptance of the believing sinner is an act of sovereign grace.
4. The grand result of this gracious acceptance is a revenue of praise and glory to God.

Let us inwardly implore the presence of the Comforter, while we meditate on these contents of the text.

I. THE SON OF GOD IS THE CHIEF BELOVED.  
 How significant, how delightful a title! Surely this can be none other than the Lord Jesus



Christ, of whom God the Father in prophecy speaks thus: "Mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth" (Is. xlii.); and concerning whom, both at his baptism and his transfiguration, the utterance was from the cleft heavens: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." He is by pre-eminence the beloved of the Father. In the eternity which preceded creation, quite as truly as now, God was love, though there was no creature on whom that love could terminate. Yet it was not an inactive affection. The declaration was true, before all worlds, which Jesus himself made in time: "The Father loveth the Son." Here was object enough. The love of an infinite Being demanded an infinite loveliness on which to fix itself, and this it found in the Divine beauties of the eternal Son, in the bosom of the Father. Ineffable are the everlasting glories, ineffable the perennial flow of mutual complacency and delight. The attributes of the adorable Father are at the same time attributes of the Son. As God is and must of necessity be his own sole and ultimate end, so this reciprocal recognition and love of the Divine persons holds before the

infinite Mind its self-sufficiency of majesty, rectitude, and bliss, in a glorious reflection. But to all eternity, the Son, as the Revealer, Manifester, and Word, the Mirror of Godhead, is the object of the Supreme love.

When finite spirits emerged out of nothing, and came upon the stage of existence, their wondering eyes were turned upon this same luminary. "When he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him." Heb. i. 6. Of this worship, the chief ingredients are admiration and love. In the outgoings of infinite benevolence, seeking to communicate itself by the work of creation, that marvellous series and system of events took place which we consider the plan of redemption. It was devised in antemundane counsel and decree. It formed the subject of Divine covenanting. It received its anticipative heralding in patriarchal signs, and Mosaic emblems, and prophetic visions. It burst from idea and preparative, into actuality and reality of life, when the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. From first to last, however, it is He, the Elect, the Mediator,

the Redeemer, the predestined Saviour, who stands forth before all worlds as embodying and representing by illustrious manifestation the infinite love of Jehovah, and the harmony of all his attributes. In so acting, the Son of God is in the highest conceivable sense the Beloved of God, performing his utmost will, honouring and glorifying his justice, and giving accomplishment to his mercy and his grace. We hazard nothing when we say, that the Son is never so adorably lovely, and (through him) that the Father is never so sublimely honoured, in the sight of holy intelligences, in all worlds, as when he becomes incarnate, and obeys and dies in the stead of sinners. "Lo, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me, to do thy will, O God." Infinite is he in loveliness, when first he stoops to human flesh, and to be born of a virgin; when he lies a babe in Bethlehem, and is borne to Egypt; when in sweet boyhood he ascends to the temple; when he spends an unblemished youth among the hills and vales of Galilee; when he walks over the length and breadth of the land, teaching and healing; when he suffers the contradiction

of sinners against himself; when he sinks in the garden—rises, to be betrayed by a kiss—is dragged from tribunal to tribunal, mocked and buffeted—bears his cross—is crucified between two robbers—and sustains the anguish of desertion and imputed guilt. Lovely is our Immanuel, in life and death; in burial and resurrection; in the Church and in heaven; lovely to God and angels; lovely to his saints, and that forevermore. Let us, my brethren, mark well what constitutes the chief attraction of his perfect attributes. It is his voluntary giving of himself for sinners; his profound, yea, infinite condescension of yearning love, in assuming guilt, and becoming “sin” for sinners; his self-sacrifice in dying under wrath, and enduring the imputation of our desert. In the estimation of an immutably holy and immeasurably loving God, there is no beauty like the beauty of holiness, which is also the beauty of love. And when God looks upon his glory in the face of Jesus, he sees that which more fills the bliss of Godhead, than the spectacle of a universe rising out of chaos, or the harmonies of numberless worlds persisting in uninter-

ed due consent. The Lord Jesus Christ is therefore by pre-eminence the Beloved.

But more awaits us in these words; for,

II. THE SAVING LOVE BESTOWED ON BELIEVERS, IS ON ACCOUNT OF THE CHIEF BELOVED: "wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved." If the sons are received with favour, it is because of the Elder Brother. God loves them, because he loved him first. In themselves they are fallen, condemned, vile, and abominable. Not one of the mighty host possesses one trait upon which a holy God can look with complacency. But they are viewed in him. From eternity, in the awful, unuttered counsels, they were so viewed. At the Gospel promise in Eden, they were so viewed. Amidst the vicarious agonies of Gethsemane, Jerusalem, and Golgotha, they were so viewed; and all the expiatory transactions of the Head were regarded as offered by the members. In the moment of their receiving the Divine effectual call, which opens their blind eyes, educes faith, and unites them to Christ, they are so viewed. Else, considered in themselves, they must perish, and flee as chaff

before the whirlwind ; but thus they are pure from guilt. Infinite justice sees them in him. The sword smites the Beloved, and they go free. Vindicating wrath sees nothing but the Beloved ; and so foul, malignant wretches, who were posting in their blood and pollution to hell-flames, escape the doom. They are hidden from the storm in the beloved arms ; they rest on the beloved bosom ; they shine like sculptured gems on the beloved shoulders and breast. They are covered, as the contents of the ark were covered, by the golden mercy-seat ; cleansed, as the penitent who received crimson drops from the priestly hyssop-branch ; admitted to communion, as the son of Aaron was admitted to the holy of holies. Believing, they are in Christ ; and being in him, they are beloved for his sake. Every human being is in one or other of these relations ; and he who is in the Beloved, is accepted : that is, he is admitted to favour, justification, and pardon. The instant a sinner believes—though he may have been the chief of sinners a moment before—he is united to the Saviour ; he is in Jesus ; he is accepted in the Beloved. This is no inchoate or



half-finished justification. All God's anger is turned away. The sufficiency of Christ covers all. Millions of sins, each aggravated and intensified by accumulated turpitudes, are as easily blotted away and sunken in the deep, as a single infant fault. It is not they, it is the Substitute, at whom God is looking. No progress in justification can be conceived of. Each soul, at each moment, is either acquitted or condemned; either rejected as an alien, or accepted in the Beloved. Though there are degrees in the manifestation of this acceptance—for example, to the believer's own consciousness; to the recognition of brethren; or, at the last day, to the assembled universe—yet the justification is complete at the moment of believing. The believer needs no further justification. In Christ—he can no more come into condemnation than Christ himself. In Christ, he has Christ's righteousness as his own, by a heavenly imputation. Whosoever in all this assembly has believed in the Lord Jesus, has by that act become interested in the finished work of the Redeemer. His standing in the view of law is totally altered. He was con-

demned, and rapidly on the way to being eternally abandoned of God; now he is accepted in the Beloved.

III. AND THIS DIVINE ACCEPTATION OF THE BELIEVING SINNER IS AN ACT OF SOVEREIGN GRACE. Paul refers all to "his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved." "His grace," means the infinite and eternal grace of the Most High. And "grace" means undeserved goodness, mere favour, spontaneous kindness, unmerited compassion, absolute gratuity. No man gets any glimpse of the plan of salvation, so long as he thinks it proceeds upon any demand of doing or suffering on the returning sinner's part. All the meritorious doing and suffering are on the part of Christ. Faith itself, the only revealed bond of union; faith, by which alone any are in Christ, is the gift of God, bestowed when and where he pleases; faith itself, moreover, is no part of the righteousness, and only receives it, as the beggar's hand receives the alms. And therefore, as the work is all of God, and the merit all of Christ, the acceptance enjoyed by the believer is entirely of grace.

There is in it no shred or filament of human doing or deserving. The sight of this is indispensable to true faith; and for want of this, many are kept away forever. They continually demand of us, what more we would have them to do; forgetting, or never knowing, that the Surety has done all. Note well the terms, "Hath made us accepted." The word is active; it is not we, but God, who effects the acceptance. And when he effects it, he does so in pursuance of his own sovereign, uncaused, and eternal purpose; and so freely, fully, absolutely, or gratuitously. If anxious sinners of this house are ever justified and accepted, it will be without righteousness of their own; by another's righteousness, altogether out of themselves; and this they will simply receive at the sovereign hand of God.

Words could hardly be plainer, *de hoc*, than those of the Apostle Paul to the Romans (ch. iii. v. 24): "Being justified freely by his grace"; that "he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth." "A man is justified by faith, without works of law." "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace" (iv. 16).

“Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound”; “that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord” (v. 21).

It is this graciousness of his acceptance, which suddenly strikes and sometimes overwhelms the sinner at the time of his espousals. He had been hoping, indeed, to be saved by grace, in some inadequate apprehension of the phrase. He looked for a moment in which Divine strength should be kindly given him, in order to the doing of some great thing. In expectancy of this, he had been straining every muscle and sinew into the posture of effort and labour. At length grace came in a way he had not thought of—in the way of acquiescence—in the way of repose—in the way of ceasing from his own works—in the way of falling into Christ’s open arms.

And see how the gratuitousness of salvation is highly magnified by its being referred to so simple an instrument as mere faith; but still more, as every true convert must remember, by its being communicated at the very

instant when the struggler gave over struggling; and the sturdy worker ceased to work. Then he begins to comprehend this phrase, "the gift of God." Damnation is of merit; salvation is of gift. "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord." God is clearly and delightfully seen to be every thing, as he lifts up the faint, tearful, blushing, bleeding culprit from the earth, where he feels his true position to be, and, as he whispers in the astonished ear words of amnesty, forgiveness, adoption, fellowship, and heaven, he is in Christ; and that by the sovereign gift of the Lawgiver and King. The prodigal is seen, and met, and kissed, and wept over, and clad, and decked, and feasted. The creature that lay a perishing outcast in the open field of degradation and contempt, has found a time of love, and is covered by the skirt of Godhead. The sunshine of the Father's smile, breaking through the parting cloud of penal indignation, in a ray of Divine effulgence, strikes first upon the Beloved, hanging on the tree, and then is reflected to the prostrate sinner who believes. "The

kindness and love of God our Saviour" has now appeared; "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy."

And this gratuitousness of the reconciliation excludes not only acts, and words, and conformities to law, but quite as much all feelings, moods, purposes, exertions, endeavours, nay, even repentings and believings. All are made utterly worthless, and superseded, by the free grace of God, whereby he hath made us accepted in the Beloved.

And how gloriously is this free favour and loving-kindness of our God magnified, when we view it as covering over and blotting out all the black and multitudinous sins of a lifetime; sins too numerous even to be reckoned by classes; sins whose depth of horrible enormity can be sounded only by the plummet of Omnipotence; sins which were destroying the soul forever;—all, all, all forgiven, on the ground of one offering, and that one offering devised, provided, executed, and applied, by the mere purpose and good-will of Him who was grieved and insulted. Well might the soul cry: "And is this



the manner of men, O Lord God!" No! but it is the manner of God in Christ; "in whom," says the next verse, "we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."

IV. THE GRAND RESULT OF THIS GRACIOUS ACCEPTANCE IS A REVENUE OF PRAISE AND GLORY TO GOD. The entire method was introduced for this very end, the glory of grace. This was the ultimate object in God's plan, before the world began. The best authority for this is the declaration of God in the context: "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace." Here is the consummation; it was in prospect from the eternal heights, when Divine wisdom framed the covenant of grace. As God alone is eternal and independent, God alone can be his own ultimate end, in creation, providence, and redemption. It is the highest conceivable object, to which we must subordinate even the ransom of the "nations of them that are saved." To "glorify God," stands high-

er than to "enjoy him forever." This honour to the Infinite Supreme is effected by his grace, more than by all displays of his other excellencies. Hence we say, and feel, and sing, that our God is more manifested by the admiring homage and love of creatures, by his accepting sinners in his Son, than by all the wisdom and power displayed in the universe of matter and mind. Nowhere does so much of God shine out as in the face of Jesus Christ, dying and drawing sinners to himself. Hence we would not trim down the phrase before us to mean merely glorious grace, but take it in its fulness, the glory of his grace. Glory always carries with it the notion of light, effulgence, outshining; some idea of resplendent manifestation; as in the pillar of fire, at the door of the tabernacle, and especially above the ark of the covenant. So, perhaps, at the transfiguration, and the vision of Jesus to Stephen, to Saul, to John in the Apocalypse. Glory of grace is the luminous display, before all intelligences, and especially before his own Omniscience, of that in Jehovah which is revealed by the free redemption of sinners. The "glory of his grace," is

the sunlike lustre and celestial beauty with which the Lord God Almighty shines forth from between the cherubim, when he shows himself to be at once a "just God and a Saviour." The "praise of the glory of his grace," is the acclamation which rises, and shall rise, not only from ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands from among men, but from the voice of many angels round about the throne, when they cry, "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." It is the eternal echo of God's voice from all holy beings in the universe. It is the loving, admiring, adoring tribute of a world of sinless or redeemed spirits, evoked by the "manifold wisdom of God." All through this radiant chapter, the mind of Paul is full of this redundant ascription; and (v. 12) he says to early Christians, "that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ." Time does not suffice to hold such praises within its brim; they run over into eternity; "that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his

kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (ii. 7). Blessed be God, there are ages to come! for here we cannot praise enough. Were all the songs of all the saved on earth, when at the utmost rapture of each, gathered in one, and laid on one altar, the flame, though stretching heavenward, would be mingled with overclouding smoke. Hence the Church below is fain to make invocation to the Church above, and to cry, "Praise ye the Lord from the heavens: praise him in the heights. Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts!" The chorus still is, with unwearying repetition, "His mercy endureth forever." "He that offereth praise, glorifieth me," saith the Lord of hosts. Praise, therefore, for the wonder of redemption, from all pure spirits and ransomed voices, through the eternal day, will magnificently set forth the glory of Divine grace. For their God chose us (v. 4) in him before the foundation of the world; for this he predestinated us unto the adoption of sons. Thanks forevermore be unto his holy name, our rescue is not at the expense of his glory, nor to the tarnishing of one jewel in his diadem of attributes. True, the

brightest in heaven or earth did seem to suffer eclipse, and skies were darkened, and earth staggered in sympathy, when the cry was heard, "Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man who is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts." But the sun shone forth again; the Lord broke from the sepulchre; the heavens received him with hallelujahs, and created intellect learned to contemplate with tenfold honour the glory of the Lord.

Such is a single glimpse of the Divine triumph through grace. We have first referred it to its centre in the Beloved. On his account, we have next seen saving love bestowed on believers. Then we viewed in this acceptance of the sinner an act of sovereign grace. And last of all, we have followed out the whole to a tribute of adoration and praise rendered to the Most High.

From a discussion like this, which concerns the cardinal doctrine of Christianity, the inferences and uses may be manifold. Among those which rise unprompted in the hearer's mind, will be assuredly thankfulness to Him who hath made thee, and thee, and thee, O believing

brethren, accepted in the Beloved. But I choose rather to narrow our conclusion to a single point, while I plead with the unreconciled, yet not careless sinner, to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Set fully before your mind, O sinner, the great truth which this passage has afforded, and yield to the irresistible argument in favour of your turning to God here and now. If God is so glorified when a sinner is accepted in his Son, then the way of all others in which you may most glorify God, is to believe. The riches of his grace is revealed for the very purpose of being honoured and accepted. Why, then, should you hesitate as to whether the way is open or not? It is God's own way, and there is no other. Is not the Beloved worthy? Seek you one who shall be lovelier or more meritorious? If not, come—and he is yours! Nor need you think of preparatory amendments. Your believing in Christ is the very act which does homage to that glorious grace which God delighteth to honour. Sinners perversely hang back, as if there were merit in doubting, and as if there were some hazard in doing that which of all possible acts most honours the chief



method of infinite wisdom and love. Do not insanely remain in guilt, under a self-righteous apprehension that God cannot justly pardon so vile a sinner, or one so little prepared by heart-breaking exercises. To justify you in submitting to the righteousness of God, more honours God than all your obedience; because it accepts the righteousness of Christ. God's very law, his infinite justice, satisfied by the Beloved Son, is glorified when you are accepted in him; that is, when you believe. Not to believe, is to undervalue this method, and to derogate from the merit of this Surety. Could you behold the Redeemer as he is, you would be unable to doubt. Not to believe, is therefore a sin, and, if persisted in, a damning sin. "He that believeth not, shall be damned." Not to believe, is to withhold that much glory from infinite grace, and so to perish in your pride. It is not an enlightened conscience—it is not reverence for justice—it is not a disposition of inward obedience—it is not a fear of offending—which keeps you away from Christ; because nothing in you could so recognize and glorify infinite justice, as for you to be accepted in the Be-

loved. Grace waits for a new trophy, O sinner; yea, Jesus waits for thee. The more you own the splendours of law; the more you lament that you have rebelled; the more you long to be made holy; the more will you see the fitness of receiving Christ as your Saviour. It really looks as if reluctant, incredulous sinners sometimes thought there would be a sort of moral delinquency, if they should surrender themselves to be saved by Christ; as if justice would be compromised, if they should give over striving to do some great work. Whereas, the truth is, the highest tribute to law and justice, is when the soul, by an act of faith, acquiesces in the atoning work, which gives glory to Divine grace. Come, then, O burdened sinner, and be saved in the way which most places the crown on the head of God the Saviour. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thus submit to the joint sway of Justice and Mercy. Once accepted in the Beloved, you shall be the instrument of fresh praises to him who loved you, and gave himself for you.

XV.

CONVERSION AN OBJECT OF POWER.

## CONVERSION AN OBJECT OF POWER.

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LUKE xviii. 27.—“The things which are impossible with men, are possible with God.”

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THESE words follow our Lord's memorable saying of the camel and the needle's eye. Various attempts have been made to escape the harshness of the declaration. Men have read “cable” for “camel,” as if it were easier for a cable to thread the narrow orifice; and some have talked of a little gate, named the “needle's eye.” But the impossibility remains an impossibility, after all. Such was the intention of our great Teacher; and such was the understanding of the apostles, who did not say, “How hard for a rich man to be saved,” but, “Who, then, can be saved?” in other words, it is impossible. And to this their conclusion,

the words before us were addressed. "You say it is impossible for any to be saved; remember, that the things which are impossible with men, are possible with God." The plain meaning is, that but for Divine efficiency interposed, the worldly man is under an impossibility of being saved; nay, that independently of supernatural power, the same is true of every unconverted man. Though the hindrance is of that peculiar sort which belongs to things moral, and so is different from material obstacles or difficulties, it is absolute, and none but God can take the impossibility out of the way. And the proposition of the text, under which this falls as a case, is general, and imports, that God is able to do that which is impossible to man, and this more particularly in the way of saving the soul.

I. The power of man is very much limited. The things which are "impossible with men," are innumerable. All human power is derived, and is afforded in small proportions, and with reference to a very narrow circle of effects. Especially is this power scanty and utterly in-

sufficient in regard to the spiritual world. That strength which resided in the first Adam, has been diminished since the fall; and in consequence there is nothing in which a reflective man more feels his impotency, than in changing moral resolutions, dispositions, or character, in others, or in himself. Here the things which are impossible with men meet us at every turn. In the instance before us, it is perfectly plain to any unbiased mind, that the power in question is the power to save a soul; that is, to convert it; that is, to remove the insuperable moral obstacle out of the way. That obstacle is the love of wealth. Here is a most amiable and exemplary young ruler, who is grieved at the necessity, and casts many a longing look behind, but who nevertheless refuses to follow Christ, and goes away; all for a reason which is given—"for he was very rich." That settled the question. He trusted in riches; he gave his heart and love to riches. This constituted the impossibility. This led to Christ's terrible utterance, which ought to ring in the ears of the rich, as long as there remains a wealthy sinner upon earth. Now the problem is, how to



break this influence—to neutralize this attraction—to turn this perverse and idolatrous heart; for till this is done, salvation is impossible. And our Saviour teaches, if there is any thing intelligible in language, that no human power is competent to work this revolution. In the matter of converting a soul to God, all power of man is reduced to zero. This is true of ability to convert a fellow-creature, and of the sinner's ability to convert himself.

1. There is no power in man to convert his fellow. Those are best aware of this, who have made the most frequent and strenuous efforts to remove the leopard's spots, or change the hue of the Ethiopian. We may argue, we may adduce motives, we may persuade, we may coerce or bribe to external performance; but convert we cannot.

2. There is no power in man to convert himself. The text, if it has any meaning, has this. I know very well how much this differs from the philosophy of our age, and the dictates of proud human nature. It is not the doctrine of Pelagius merely, but of the natural heart, that a man is able to convert himself at any

moment. The doctrine of the text, and of all the Scriptures, is that he has no such ability. You may denominate this inability moral, and it certainly concerns moral subjects, and so differs from the inability to create or annihilate a world; but by such epithet you do not bring the effect sought any more within reach. No man feels himself any nearer to the object, after hearing such a distinction. You say it is a culpable inability; and we agree with you: but this does not lessen it. Joseph's brethren hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him; the greater their hatred, the more their inability. Theorists on the side of human power sometimes plead for a human ability which nevertheless leaves the sinner utterly indisposed to holy acts. An ability which does not make one able, is fit only for derision. If, overleaping distinctions, you argue for a complete or plenary ability to change the heart, you are clearly at issue with the Word of God, which declares it to be impossible. It is impossible for the camel to pass the needle's eye; it is impossible for the unregenerate sinner to regen-

erate himself; it is impossible with men. After a little reflection upon what passes within us, it becomes apparent, that the human soul has no power to change its own nature. Change of nature, or even of dispositions, is not a direct object of human power. Willing does not reach it. We may ply the will, with all effort, against the affections or the radical principles; but there is no fulcrum. By mere volition, we cannot change hatred to love, or love to hatred. The feelings direct the will, rather than the will the feelings. But we make a violent supposition, when we allow even for a moment that the sinner wills in the right direction. The very thing he needs, is something which shall make him will aright. Every man wills according to his disposition and nature. The good tree brings forth good fruit, and the evil tree evil fruit. Make the tree good, and the fruit will be good. But the depraved soul has no power of transporting itself, as it were, against the force of gravity, up beyond the atmosphere of sinning. Such is the humbling truth enunciated by Scripture, and confirmed by the experience of every soundly converted man.

II. That, however, which is impossible with men, is possible with God. And especially it is possible for him to change the heart, to save the soul, and to rescue even the slave and worshipper of Mammon. But it is like causing the camel to march through the eye of a needle. The fair construction of the passage leads us to look upon the salvation of the sinner as a work calling for omnipotence. So in a parallel place: "With God all things are possible."

It is good for us to be often in contemplation of God as almighty. He ever accomplishes all that he wills. What are denominated natural impossibilities, are not objects of power, and commonly involve absurdity or self-contradiction in their very statement. Moral impossibilities, or such things as would involve God's denying himself, are equally excluded from the scope of omnipotence. But there remains an infinite range for the sweep of this Divine perfection. The work is immediate. He wills, and it is done. We readily open our minds to the belief of this power, as terminating on the material universe; but it is equally operative in the vaster world of mind. He that could

create the soul, can re-create it. And we do not find any class of Divine operations more frequently mentioned in Scripture than those by which he moulds and changes the spiritual nature, producing new directions of human thought and feeling, and new determinations of human will; all in perfect accordance with that constitution of moral freedom which he has himself ordained.

Here Pelagian error, among its Protean forms, springs up in a shape suited to the prepossessions of our age. We are taught that God himself cannot act causatively upon the will; that it is of the very nature of will to act without a cause, in a self-determining manner. To render this more plausible, a specious distinction is devised, between things natural, proceeding according to the sequence of cause and effect, and powers supernatural, namely, moral or free, with which cause and effect have nothing to do. Hence every man is a god unto himself, in all that he wills; and not even the Almighty can cause him to will or do, by any influence other than presentation of motives. God himself cannot operate as a cause upon the



soul of a sinner. To work upon an ungodly will, is not among the objects of power. Pelagius taught the same in a cruder form.

Suppose we should allow the vaunted distinction; suppose we should remove all that concerns volition, all that is moral, from the cycle and system of cause and effect; we should only be allowing Pelagius to beg the question in debate; that question being, whether God can operate directly upon the soul, to produce holy acts, or infuse a holy principle. If, with these errorists, we say, No, we fly in the face of Scripture, and yield all that is worth retaining in the system of grace. For what is grace, but a Divine communication to the soul of man, effecting that good which is beyond the power of unaided nature. Just put the proud assumption into plain language: God himself cannot cause holy sentiments in any creature. For the moment (say they) you introduce the relation of cause, you expel the notion of freedom; thus inventing a condition of freedom, which philosophy does not accept, and which would make religion impossible. As if He who made the soul, and made it free, could not



so act upon it, as to render certain its holiness, and yet leave its freedom untouched! To will, is in its very nature free. But God worketh in us both to will and do of his good pleasure. Therefore, it is possible for God to act causatively upon the will, without destroying its freedom.

They talk of moral suasion (as if, forsooth, there was any other sort); they vouchsafe to own that God can persuade; he converts the soul by arguing, and is the greatest persuader because he is the best reasoner. But as to any proper efficiency upon the souls of sinners to turn them unto God—No! away with it; it violates liberty; it brings natural laws into the domain of the supernatural; in a word, it is impossible with God. With such a belief, one must read the whole Bible backwards, and make conversion by God a fable. What an impertinence does the reply of Jesus become! They were considering the case of a sinner, whose conversion, on any human principles, is out of the question. Jesus replies: It is possible with God. How so? how possible with God, if it is not in God to put forth a single

influence which shall act upon the will of that sinner—that will being really the mountain obstacle in the way? If every thing depends on the self-determination of the sinner, with which God cannot interfere without destroying liberty, obligation, and morals, then ought we to invert the text, and read, “That which is impossible with God, is possible with man.”

Solemnly pondered, this one verse, without any other, were enough to establish the doctrine of God’s power over the soul. For what is it which it declares God able to do? You answer at once, To secure the sinner’s salvation; that is, to convert his soul; that is, to change his purposes. And be it observed, whether this be done mediately or immediately, by one act on the willing subject, or by a series of acts terminating in volition, liberty must be equally endangered, in the view of those who dread any such Divine action as infallibly terminates in a given and predetermined choice. When the text teaches that it is possible for God to convert the most hopeless sinner, it declares that conversion is an object of power. God does not say in his counsels, “I will

throw in light, I will offer motives, I will outbid the world, I will make an experiment of suasion upon that wealthy foe, not, however, meddling with the sacredness of his inviolable will." No—but "I will convert that Pharisee. I will envelope that soul in a cloud of overpowering glory. I will act upon the very seat and source of all choices. I will renew that persecutor's nature, and bring him to my feet." Now I put it to every unprejudiced and simple mind, whether this is not the very impression which is derived from the reading of the Scriptures for a course of years? Do we not find them everywhere referring regeneration and conversion to the power of God—a power operating immediately on the human will; and is not the opposite doctrine constructed inferentially, from foregone conclusions in philosophy? The truth is, philosophers themselves have not been at one on this point; a large proportion of them, and those not the least acute, having maintained the perfect consistency between Divine concurrence and human liberty. We argue purely *ad ignorantiam*, when we object, that if God operates as a cause upon the will, he im-

pairs or destroys moral freedom. This is not a truth of intuition, to be assumed without proof; nor can it be demonstrated. From the very nature of the case, it cannot be an object of consciousness, whether we are actuated by a higher power or not. We are indeed conscious that we act freely, and this is a truth which we cheerfully avow. But we possess no such certainty on the other side, as should justify the contempt which some cast on the Scripture teaching of God's proper and gracious influence on the soul. To say that, in turning unto God, we act without spiritual influence, is to say more than we know, or can know, without revelation; and all the teaching of revelation is so clearly the other way, that the greatest ingenuity is in request to explain away this clear language. The convert knows, by consciousness, that he acts, that he acts from motives, that he never acted more freely in his life. But he cannot know from consciousness that God acts. Of this, God must testify, which he does, when he assures us by his servant, that it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do of his own good pleasure. It is therefore possible with God!

Age after age this doctrine has been a target for assailants, while it has been precious in the esteem of evangelical believers. The controversy first took a definite shape in the days when Augustine, Jerome, and Prosper, in Africa, Palestine, and Gaul, raised the standard against Pelagius and his followers. The writings of Augustine in particular have been the arsenal of theologians in this warfare; and for many years they succeeded in keeping the decisions of the so-called Catholic Church on the right side. But the mystery of iniquity was continually though secretly working against grace. Various schools of error within the Church, but especially the Franciscans, and above all the Jesuits, laboured for a scheme so favourable to human nature, until, at length, the determinations against the Jansenists and Port Royal showed the body of Popish doctors to have become radically corrupt—as they have gone on to be more and more every day. All that was pure, holy, venerable, and seraphic, in the prejudiced but lovely recluses of Port Royal, was founded on these doctrines of Augustine, of Paul, and of grace. All their persecutions,



resulting in the ruin, even to utter razing, of the *Port Royal des Champs*, were because these holy persons would not condemn Antipelagian doctrines. The corps of extraordinary writers, male and female, who as a body have never been surpassed, wielded their polished swords in defence of these truths. And Pascal, who unites the wit of Moliere, the logic of Leibnitz, and the eloquence of Bossuet, begins his immortal Provincial Letters with a piece of irresistible satire on the Jesuit opposers of grace. So likewise we find it the palladium of the Reformation. It had been taught by Wiclif and Huss, when Luther took up the championship, in his controversy with Erasmus. In this matter there was no division among the Reformers. Down to our own day, pure evangelical piety has been uniformly found associated with high views of Divine spiritual power and direct efficiency, in the conversion of the sinner. While, on the other hand, wherever we observe a breaking of the Protestant and Puritan line, a retreat from Reformation ground and the confessions of the Reformed churches, and a deserting of the ranks of liberalism and Socinian



heresy, we find a corresponding and proportional disposition to fritter away the meaning of Scripture declarations concerning man's helplessness and the power of the Holy Spirit. And these two antagonist systems will not end their great campaign, till Truth shall sound her trumpet in ultimate victory.

If, then, my brethren, there is any creed which can be called Catholic, as having commanded the suffrages of the best Christians, in all generations of the Church, it is, that conversion by any human agent is impossible; that God converts the sinner; that the Divine act in regeneration and conversion is an act of power; that such agency does not overbear or obliterate human freedom; and that the power of God, in this field of grace, is infinite.

1. We must all admit, that there is much in this to humble and alarm the impenitent sinner; which may account for some of the opposition which the doctrine has encountered. No man likes to hear that he is poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked. To be a pensioner, is humiliating, if not galling. Human greatness, by puffing up the depraved dispositions, indis-

poses men to submit to God's method of saving sinners.

The doctrine of the text and context shows no complaisance to ungodly wealth. It announces the infinite peril of setting the heart on earthly good. The great danger is, that every hearer will be thinking of some one wealthier than himself. We have no reason to think that the young ruler was a millionaire; or that Jesus proposed the never-to-be-forgotten needle's eye, to those only who were what we should denote by hundreds of thousands. The arrow of conviction flies clear over your head, while you whisper, Who is this rich man? It is yonder eminent banker, or successful merchant, or happy heir; it is not I! And a second says, It is not I! And others add the echo, It is not I! Yes, it is you, and you, and you! Turn not the head; look no further. It is you who have already been kept away from Christ, by the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches. The group is vanished. Jesus and that kneeling, sorrowing, departing young ruler, have long since passed in body from this earth. But in reality, each of you passes before Jesus—each

of you hears his proposal—each of you has rejected it. Your condition is fearful. Each of you is in the hands of an offended God, but for whose sovereign power, your salvation were impossible.

2. Believers ascribe their conversion to the power of God. It was impossible with men. Grace wrought it; and by the same mighty power which raised Jesus from the dead. Does it seem mysterious that Omnipotence should move the human will at regeneration? Scripture does not relieve the mystery. “The wind bloweth . . . . born of the Spirit.” Those who are so renewed, are “born, not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God”; which Paul confirms, saying: “So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.” All the saints in heaven agree in ascribing the original motion to God, and not to themselves; and in owning, that if he had not first sought them, they never would have sought him. The very dispositions towards being saved are from his free love: “By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift

of God." The difficulty of selecting passages is great, from their large number. Better than single proof-texts is the whole tenour of the New Testament, which ascribes the new nature and all holy thoughts, feelings, and choices, to the power of God. It is hardly possible for any man, whatever be his theory, to fall down upon his knees, and refer to his own conversion, without employing expressions which bear that the efficiency was of God, and that Divine grace operated upon the creature as a proper cause. This is implied in all our thanksgivings and all our confessions. This is that heavenly and effectual calling, of which such strength of expression is used by the apostles, and which is everywhere referred to God's sovereign pleasure. Nor is there any temper of soul more congenial to true piety, than that in which the believer says, "We are the clay, and thou our Potter."

3. The doctrine which we have been studying gives the greatest possible encouragement to prayer for the unconverted. Prayers of this kind have of late besieged heaven—going up in squadrons and mighty armies. All in vain,

if God exercises no power antecedent to the sinner's consent. Brethren, we have those who are dear to us as life, and for whom we intercede; perhaps they are beside us now; perhaps they are where no power but that of the Almighty can reach them. But it matters not whether God reaches them or not, if he is at the mercy of their stubborn hearts, and if his omnipotence cannot sway their will. If Jehovah can put forth no causation, in regard to human choices, then he cannot secure the holiness of those for whom we plead. It is not God, but they, who hold the arbitrament. To pray to them might be reasonable, but not to pray to God. For what can God do, unless they consent to do first? Let the impiety be with such as have broached and trumpeted the unscriptural tenet! No, beloved brethren, it is our comfort, and the lifting up of our head in prayer to God that he is able to influence the unregenerate soul with direct rays of converting power. The things which are impossible with men, are possible with God. He can breathe on the swollen tide of unholy volitions chafing in its rocky channel, and instantane-

ously turn back the free yet mighty river, so that its reflux shall be as sweetly heavenward as its flow was turbulently towards the lake of fire. Unless we mock the heavens, then, when we ask God to convert the rebel, we mean more than that he should do so, if the rebel agree to convert himself. And our hope of the eventual illumination of the world, the future perseverance of holy angels, and the everlasting fidelity of ransomed saints, resides wholly in the power of God, exerted to keep them from falling. This earth of ours, ever since it was blessed with the Gospel, has seen little, comparatively, of the omnipotence of grace. She has not seen knowledge of God inundating her populations "as the waters cover the sea." She has not seen nations born at once. She has not seen Israel restored, idolatry abolished, and all men knowing the Lord. But she shall see this, and more. She shall see it in answer to prayer. She shall see it as the consequence of God's irresistible and gracious influence upon each individual soul. It is the glory of the Holy Ghost thus to work on the corrupt mass of humanity. These are the supernatural influences, without



which religion degenerates into a poor, deistical rationalism. Here we fix ourselves; on this we hang, for ourselves and for others; for the beginnings of our new life, and for its consummation; for regeneration, for sanctification, and for glory. "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out. For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen." Rom. xi. 33, 36.

XVI.

THE MYSTERY OF THE GOSPEL.

## THE MYSTERY OF THE GOSPEL.

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EPHESIANS iii. 8-11.—“Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see, what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ, to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

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If books were to be valued by their size or cost, the book from which my text is taken, and which occupies about six pages of this volume, would not take a very high rank; but if measured by its intrinsic glories, the epistle to the Ephesians should be more prized than rubies, or than diamonds. And the inspired apostle intimates his sense of the greatness of his mes-

sage, when he says, that when the Ephesian Christians read it, they might understand his knowledge in the mystery of Christ (iii. 4). The people of this polished and idolatrous city were not without mysteries of their own, even before their conversion; for when the Gospel was preached among them by Paul, many that believed came and confessed their deeds, and many also of them which used curious arts, magical incantations, brought their books together and burned them publicly, to the value of some thousands of money.

Their exchange was a happy one; and none will doubt that the word of God's mouth in this epistle was (as in David's case) better to them than thousands of gold and silver.

The apostle, now imprisoned at Rome, writes to them to remind them of the dispensation or commission which was assigned to him as a preacher to the Gentiles, and celebrates the glories of that revelation, which, having been withheld from all nations, was now made known to them.

The text may be thus explained: It is my unspeakable privilege and honour, though in

myself, and in consideration of my past life, not worthy to be called a saint, and less than the least of such, it is my privilege, by the undeserved goodness and sovereign choice of God, to be the instrument in giving the Gospel to heathen nations, and thus of opening to them the riches of Christ, in his nature, his love, his mediatorial work, and his heavenly gifts—a treasure inexhaustible, unsearchable, incomprehensible. And this commission I have, in order to declare to all men, of every tribe and people, the long hidden but now revealed plan of grace. Hidden, I say, inasmuch as from eternal ages it has lain concealed in the Divine purpose of God, who created the universe by Christ, and who created it for this very purpose, that now in the fulness of time, by the redemption of Christ, and the universal offer, and the call of all nations, the Church of his redeemed ones might be the organ for displaying his immense, unfathomable wisdom and glory, not only to men, but to angels, to all superior intelligences—an event foreseen and predetermined in the covenant with Christ, before the worlds were made.

The passage, my brethren, contains the sum and substance of the Gospel, and cannot be exhausted in a single sermon; yet such is the coherence of the parts, that they could not be torn asunder without violence. Our view of its riches must therefore be connected, though exceedingly cursory.

I. THERE IS A MYSTERY OF SALVATION. It is called the mystery of godliness, and the mystery of Christ, and the wisdom of God in a mystery. And here we must be careful to lay aside our modern and English acceptance of the term, and understand it in its ancient and Greek and Gospel sense. A mystery is not an enigma or riddle. It is not necessarily something which surpasses all human comprehension, though it may be such. It is not essentially inscrutable, though it may be unknown as yet. The Greek mysteries were secret transactions and displays in their idolatrous lodges, remote, indeed, from the inspection of the vulgar eye, but thrown open to such as were initiated. A mystery, then, is a hidden thing revealed. A religious mystery is "some sacred thing hidden or secret,



which is naturally unknown to human reason, and is only known by the revelation of God." \* We shall err, therefore, if we consider a mystery as that which can never be known. "To you," says our Saviour, "it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom." So our apostle speaks of understanding all mysteries. And even concerning the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which none of the princes of this world knew, the apostle says, we speak or declare this wisdom. The apostles are stewards, that is, dispensers or revealers of the mystery. The result is, that that of which the writer here treats is a glorious discovery, rather than a concealment. As such, let us dwell upon it for a moment.

That which is here called the mystery, is the chief subject of this whole passage—a truth revealed by God to his apostles and prophets, "having made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he had purposed in himself, that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ." The origi-

\* Suicer.

nal is more emphatic ; the mystery is that God purposes to compact, sum up, aggregate, and organize all things in Christ as in their vital Head. The mystery is the redemption of the Church. A mystery (says he, Rom. xvi.) wrapt in silence through the eternal ages—such is the import of the Greek—but now revealed by the prophetic writings. He well calls it, therefore, the mystery of the Gospel, or revelation of long hidden glad tidings. “Even the mystery” (he says to the Colossians) “which hath been hid from ages, and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: to whom God reveals the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: whom we preach” (Col. i. 26).

The grand truth, therefore, which the apostle glories in declaring, is that God can be just, and yet merciful, and that this salvation is to be preached to every creature under heaven. Jesus himself announced the mystery, when with a word he broke down the partition wall between Israel and the nations, and said, Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel.

II. THIS MYSTERY WAS HIDDEN IN GOD. The words are, "hidden from the ages in God." Not hidden from God, for known unto God are all his works from the foundation of the world, but confined to God; reposing in the unfathomable depths of infinite silence in the Divine mind. Not as though there were a period in which Jehovah was without a plan, for it was according to the eternal purpose, or "purpose of ages," which he purposed.

It is the signal error of many, that they treat salvation as an accident. I repeat it, they treat salvation as an accident—an expedient brought in to remedy evils which turn up in the stream of chance. According to them, the fall of man and its consequences presented themselves as a new case to be provided for, and the plan of salvation is the provision. The Bible takes higher ground, ascribing sovereignty to God, and suspending his purposes on nothing in the creature. The propitiation of the incarnate Son of God is not a mere refuge from inevitable necessity, but a glorious mystery foreseen long before the fall, before the world, before creation, and declared in due time as beyond all

conceivable modes the brightest display of the Godhead.

God could have prevented or avoided the death of his only-begotten Son ; he could have prevented the incarnation ; he could have prevented the fall of man ; he could have prevented his creation ; nay, he could have prevented all creation, even of a single existence. He must have low thoughts of the Most High who can deny it. Jehovah might have spent eternity in Divine unwitnessed silence ; in the plenitude of unapproached light ; the heaven of his own immutable perfections, and the harmonious bliss of the Triune majesty. There was no necessity or fate to force him from his perfections, or to extort a world from his forming hand. And even when he chose to roll the planets in their courses, and to call the universe out of nothing, it was not a necessary emanation. God is not necessarily Creator. Nor is he under any necessity of exhausting his wisdom on any given world, or producing a system which shall be the best possible. Jehovah might have filled all things with himself in an eternity of Divine solitude.

That he hath otherwise chosen, is of his own good pleasure, and for his own glory. "Thou hast created all things, and for thy glory they are and were created." He has been pleased to come forth from his pavilion; and no one ray of this effulgence is without a purpose; no one work is accidental. Neither the death of Christ, nor that which led to it, has taken the Omniscient by surprise. The mystery, if hidden from ages and generations, was hid in God; the result was no more than he had purposed in Christ Jesus before the world was. Every step was foreseen, and directed to its end, namely, the Divine glory.

Once grant, indeed, a manifestation of this glory to creatures, and means to that end become in a subordinate sense necessary. The end itself, however, is first in the Divine prospect, and next to this the display of his attributes in the work of Christ. Yet no creature existed to participate in the heavenly counsels. The purpose was in Christ Jesus. It was known to the co-eternal Son. The covenant of grace between the Father and the Son, whereby many were to be brought unto glo-

ry, was established, indeed, but profoundly hidden.

III. THE WORLD WAS MADE TO REVEAL THIS MYSTERY. "The mystery which hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ, in order that now (that is, by the events at present in progress) might be made known the wisdom of God." Such is the force of the original, according to the natural connection of the words, and in the judgment of many eminent interpreters. But even if it is not; if I err in grouping the clauses, my position is still a Scriptural one. I say it is an undeniable truth, that the universe was created by Christ, and that it was created for him. In the epistle to the Colossians, which is remarkably like this, we read that "by him were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible . . . all things were created by him and for him" (Col. i. 16). "All things," says John, "were made by him." "There is one Lord Jesus," says Paul, "by whom are all things" (1 Cor. viii. 6); and again, "Heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds" (Heb. i. 2).



Consider the connection. Why is this clause interposed? Why tell us that this mystery was hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ? The words surely have a meaning, and a meaning which implies, at the very least, that this mystery is connected with creation. My brethren, Christ is himself the mystery—great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh (1 Tim. iii. 16). The world was made that he might be so manifested, and that in him might be manifest God's varied wisdom.

When it is said that God "created all things by Jesus Christ," and when it is added (with only a comma, according to the best critics), to the intent that now might be made known God's wisdom, it is really hard to doubt that the apostle meant to teach that even in the foundation of the world, this mystery was in view. Exactly in correspondence with this, we are taught in the first chapter (v. 8, ff.) that God caused grace to abound toward us, in all wisdom and prudence, revealing the mystery of his good pleasure, which he purposed in him, that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one, or

sum up in Christ, all things. Truly the worlds were made by him and for him !

Creation itself is but a mode of the manifestation of God. No other satisfactory final cause can be assigned. It was God who shone forth with the light, "when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job xxxviii. 7). No one will deny this; the very admission of creation carries this along with it. But many who admit that creation displays God's glory, are not so ready to see that salvation does so much more. For the sake of such it may be briefly suggested, that there are glories of the Godhead which no creation could show forth, and which appear only in the cross. All the Divine attributes do indeed blend and harmonize in the redemption of man, but grace and mercy shine pre-eminent, and shine there only. Here it is, in the display of grace, or mercy manifested to sinners, that sin, that hideous evil, is overruled for good; for if man had not sinned, grace had not reigned through righteousness unto eternal life.

Long before the incarnation, while the ages were rolling on towards this fulness of times,

the earth was becoming fitted more and more for this transaction. It was the theatre for the Son of God. And from the first promise in the garden, till the veil of the temple was rent in twain, all human events were tending towards this one point. The whole Jewish ritual was but like the gorgeous clouds of red and purple which betoken the rising of the sun. The manifestation was gradual, more by clouds than by substance, yet all pointed hither. The blood of victims, the tabernacle, the temple, the Shekinah over the ark, the propitiatory into which the cherubim bowed, as desiring to look—all was but a temporary pageant, whereby this world was becoming more and more the theatre of this mystery. And no event in the history of this globe is more momentous, than that he who made it should have died upon it.

IV. THE END OF THIS MYSTERY IS THE GLORY OF GOD IN REDEMPTION. "To the intent that now might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God." Wisdom is, in the language of heaven, an exalted term, infinitely surpassing cold knowledge. Like holiness, it may

be regarded as one aspect of the unclouded effulgence of all the attributes, when viewed as compassing infinite ends by marvellous instrumentality; an instrumentality displaying in its working every trait of the Godhead. Jehovah is the only wise God. He has chosen that redemption should be the choice specimen of his wisdom. It is "the glorious Gospel of the blessed God."

If we may, even for a moment, conjecture the reason why wisdom holds so prominent a place, it may be suggested, that the union of justice and mercy in one transaction was a problem which all heaven could not solve, and, when solved, filled all heaven with wonder. The love of Christ is a love which passeth knowledge. More particularly the depths of Divine wisdom were laid open to the Gentiles. "The Greeks seek after wisdom," but their philosophy was a groping in the dark. The Gospel revealed to them not merely God, but God the Saviour, God manifest in the flesh. There was a combination of wonders and of glories, like the cross-lights from the play of gems in the breastplate of the high priest; but the result of all was light and perfection.

V. THE CHURCH IS THE ORGAN FOR MANIFESTING THIS GLORY. "That now might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God." The Church, my brethren, of which such things are spoken, can scarcely be a mere external organization of professors, however pure their creed or seemly their ritual; still less a hierarchy glorying chiefly in matters of succession and modes of government: but the whole number of God's chosen, who have been, are, or shall be gathered into one under Christ as a Head, sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints. Of this body Christ is the husband, and the Head; nay, he condescends to regard it as no less necessary to the completeness of his mediatorial character, than the human body to its head; for it is "the fulness of him that filleth all in all." Of old, the glory of the Lord dwelt in the temple; thence from the cherubim he was wont to shine forth: that temple is destroyed, but there is another, a living structure, "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone, in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto a holy temple in the

Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. ii. 22).

In the ancient temple, the shrine of shrines contained the ark with the mercy-seat. Such also is the place occupied in the Church of Christ by the propitiatory work of Christ, as that which consecrates the whole structure, and over which the glory of Jehovah is chiefly visible.

VI. THE EXHIBITION OF GOD'S WISDOM EXTENDS TO ALL INTELLIGENT BEINGS. For not only was Paul commissioned to preach "to make all men see what was the dispensation of the mystery, but by the Church the wisdom of God was to be made known unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places"; or, in plain terms, to the heavenly intelligences (Rom. viii. 38). In other places these same terms are put in connection with "angels" (i. 21); in a preceding paragraph, Christ is said to have been set "in heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion"; and still further is declared to be the Creator of such (Col. i. 16).



Without entering into minute distinctions between the condition of angels and of redeemed souls, who are declared to be like them, let it suffice us to know, that both agree in beholding the glory that shines in redemption.

The glorious spirits are not indifferent to our salvation.

1. *In time.* Though high above us, they are deeply engaged in our welfare. The sons of God sang together when the earth was made; and when God bringeth in his only-begotten into the world, he saith, Let all the angels of God worship him. They celebrated the birth of the Redeemer, and ministered to him in his temptation. In his agony in the garden, "there appeared an angel unto him from heaven strengthening him." And if these blessed spirits veiled their faces during the hour of darkness, how speedily did they fly to announce his rising from the sepulchre, and to accompany his return to heaven. Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, seen of angels.

Not less remarkable is their interest in the Church. The angels even of Christ's little ones do always behold the face of our Father in

heaven (Matt. xviii. 10). The ministers and apostles were a spectacle to angels as well as men (1 Cor. iv. 9), and in their presence the apostle charges Timothy, "I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels" (1 Tim. v. 21). An obscure passage in the epistle to the Corinthians seems to point them out as present in church assemblies (1 Cor. xi. 10); and we who are saved are said to come not only to the heavenly Jerusalem, but to "an innumerable company of angels" (Heb. xii.). It is not surprising, therefore, that the development of these mysteries should reach even unto them.

It is not without meaning that the cherubic emblems, in the holiest of all, and amidst the very glories of Divinity, hang over the golden propitiatory, as if they would pry into the mystery: "which things the angels desire to look into" (1 Pet. i. 12). We know that there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth, and we further know, that when a poor beggar died, he was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom.

2. In *eternity*, the angels and glorified spirits

more fully behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The propitiatory work of Christ is not a mere preliminary transaction, preparing the way, and then vanishing out of sight: it is derogatory to the work of Christ so to consider it. It is the very scope of the epistle to the Hebrews to exalt the Gospel reality above the legal shadows, by showing that the former is eternal. Some are for merging all the priestly work of Christ in that which is kingly; but he does not cease to be either. Thou art a priest forever—forever—after the order of Melchizedek, who was both at once. It is as our Great High Priest that he hath “passed into the heavens,” “where he ever liveth to make intercession for us.” Because he continueth ever, he “hath (says the apostle) an unchangeable priesthood” (vii. 24); he is “consecrated forevermore” (vii. 28).

True, that sacred body can be pierced no more, but the death of the victim was but part of the priest's office. Heaven is full of sacrificial recollections. Christ dies no more forever, yet forever he “appears in the presence of God for us,” his hands filled with priestly oblations,

and his bosom covered with the sculptured names of his tribes.

Even when, in a certain sense, it is said by the Apostle John that he saw no temple in the heavenly city, the reason given contains a sacrificial name, "for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple thereof" (xxi. 22). By this name our Lord chooses to be known, and by this symbol to manifest himself even in the New Jerusalem. "In the midst of the throne . . . stood a Lamb, as it had been slain" (v. 6). Even the Judge does not lay aside the propitiatory name; for sinners tremble before the wrath of the Lamb (vi. 17). Nay, he is described as "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (xiii. 8). What can we understand by this recurrence of the sacrificial language and emblems in the heavenly state, but that even there God is pleased to manifest his glory to all intelligences in and through the plan of redemption?

In like manner, the ark of the covenant survives the final catastrophe, and appears in heaven. "The temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his

testament" (xi. 19). "When the Lamb stands on Mount Zion, he is surrounded by a hundred and forty-four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads, singing with a voice of praise, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder" (xiv. 1). It is the work of redemption which they praise. The new song is given in another place (v. 9): "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." Here is the very mystery of our text; and not only so, but what follows introduces the higher intelligences as beholding God's manifold wisdom in the same work, for it is added: "And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne . . . and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."

Here, beyond all question, we have the an-

gelic hosts discerning God's glory in the plan of redemption.

VII. It is but the summing up of what has been said, to declare that **THE GLORY OF REDEMPTION IS ETERNAL.**

The assumption of the human nature by the Son of God was not for a season merely. That "holy thing," born of Mary, was "called the Son of God" (Luke i. 35), and that body will never cease to be united in one person with the adorable Word. Glorious as shall be that second epiphany of the Lord Jesus (2 Thess. i. 8), when he shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, to be glorified in his saints and to be admired in them that believe, it shall be but the first step of a triumphal progress; for our Saviour, who is "Jehovah of hosts," shall reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously" (Isa. xxiv. 23). When there shall be no more sun; when the shadows on this terrestrial dial shall no longer mark successive centuries; when the angel, standing on the ocean and the land, and lifting up his hand to heaven, shall swear by



Him that liveth forever and ever, that time shall be no longer (Ap. x. 6), the wisdom of God shall still be studied by the principalities and powers in heavenly places.

Of other planets and systems we know little. Analogy would suggest that they are inhabited, and the Scripture seems to teach that they would be made in vain if they were not; for we read (Isa. xlv. 18) of God's making the earth—"he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited." But leaving this where we find it, in obscurity, one thing is certain, whatever worlds there are, and whatever inhabitants, our Redeemer is above all, and admired of all; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth" (Phil. ii. 10). And it is in his character of Mediator that he reigns—a priestly King, over a kingdom of priests. Well he remembers Calvary, nor lets his saints forget! The crown he wears is over subjects purchased with blood. "The nations of them that are saved," are led by the "Lamb which is in the midst of the throne," having washed their robes,

and made them white in his very blood (Rev. vii. 14). No longer, indeed, is he crowned with thorns, yet his diadem seems still crimsoned with expiatory drops! He chooses still to be called Jesus—still to appear as the Saviour.

Let us beware, then, how we regard this mystery of redemption as a transitory arrangement, a tragical exhibition, which at some shifting of the scene shall give place to higher glories. All higher glories, and they are infinite, are but the development of this; the unfolding of the plant into “the bright consummate flower.” The Shekinah, or visible radiance, was once pent within curtains, and stationary above the ark; but what do we read?—“the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord” (Num. xiv. 21); “the glory of the Lord shall endure forever” (Ps. civ. 31); the cloud of light which once filled the tabernacle (Ex. xl. 34) and the temple (1 Kings viii. 11) shall rise and expand over all worlds.

I readily admit that all this would be overstrained, if the end of God in providence and grace were the mere happiness of saved souls. Such, however, is his end, only in order to some-

thing higher: even "to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved" (i. 6). The bliss of saints does indeed show forth his glory, but the holiness and perfection of all elect angels and men are but a mirror for the reflection of Jehovah, the chief reflection being from the face of Jesus Christ. Without such a mirror, God could not be seen. He dwelleth "in the light which no man can approach unto: whom no man hath seen, or can see" (1 Tim. vi. 16). "Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father" (John vi. 46). "The only-begotten Son, he hath revealed him." Jehovah is the Mystery of mysteries, but the Word hath revealed him—the Word, so called, as the great, the only Revealer, who enlightens every one who is enlightened. He that hath seen Jesus, hath seen the Father.

If this revelation took place in some degree during Christ's humiliation, how much more when he shall come again the second time, without sin, unto salvation. Even then, the indwelling glory of Jehovah will be in Christ. He will be God to us even in heaven. Even in

heaven the fulness of the Godhead shall dwell in him bodily. Grace shall reign through his righteousness unto eternal life. Not merely as a victor or a king shall he then shine, but as one who has triumphed by blood. "I saw heaven opened," says the rapt evangelist and prophet and beloved disciple John (Rev. xix.), "the faithful and true; . . . and in righteousness doth he judge and make war; his eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood; and his name is called the Word of God." It is as if that glorious body were still scarred, that neither saints nor angels should forget to all eternity the baptism wherewith he was baptized.

My brethren, I find no Scripture warrant for believing that even in eternity we shall be able to gaze upon the absolute God, or behold him except in the face of Jesus Christ. It hath "pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell; and having made peace by the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven" (Col i.

19). For as Divine glory is effulgent in the Head, so its milder beams will radiate from the members, the saints—the fulness of him that filleth all in all: and as a thousand gems reflect one and the same ray of light, in manifold varieties of brilliant colors, so ten thousand times ten thousand saints, each in his special peculiar way, shall mirror forth the varied glories of grace; “that unto principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known *by the Church* the manifold wisdom of God.” The bride of Christ shall then indeed be “a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing,” (v. 27); and the voice of the Bridegroom shall proclaim anew, “Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee!” (Cant. iv. 6.)

O mysterious and soul-ravishing exaltation of the Church! that God, by our salvation, by calling and redeeming *us*, wretches, worms, all but devils, even when we were dead in sins, when we sought him not, nay, when even to the last we resisted him, that by us he should show forth his eternal praise; and this agreeably to a plan before all ages—“that he might make known the riches of his glory on the ves-

sels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory; even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles" (Rom. ix. 23).

Wonder no more at the value of the soul, or that there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth. Wonder rather at the abject folly of dead souls in their impenitency; that, carrying such a jewel within them, they think little more of salvation than do the brutes that perish. And O, my unconverted hearers, look within, and more prize that immortal part, which, if saved, shall be a gem in Christ's crown to all eternity.

Finally—

VIII. IT IS AN UNSPEAKABLE PRIVILEGE FOR A SINFUL MAN TO BE INTRUSTED WITH THE PUBLICATION OF THIS MYSTERY. "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." Such was Paul's view of the ministerial office. His soul sank under it: Who is sufficient for these things? Here was the spring of his apostolic zeal—the riches



of the Gospel in contrast with his own poverty. As he turns from gazing at the page of his commission, on which a single name fills all with its radiance, the name of Jesus—to look at what he was, what he is, he is amazed and overwhelmed that such a one as he should have this honour. He looks at the treasure of which he is a steward—the *Riches of Christ*, well so called; riches of his nature, of his grace, of his atonement, of that love which passeth knowledge; riches of its consequences, in the wealthy bliss of millions of overflowing vessels of mercy. *Unsearchable riches!* incalculable in number, in height, in depth. A river of life flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, unsearchable in its sovereign source, immeasurable and unfathomable in its ocean flow.

Recurring to his Jewish and Pharisaic notions, he remembers when God's grace was a fountain sealed—a mere laver in the temple courts; but it has burst over the brim, and, like the waters of Ezekiel's vision (ch. xlvii.), flows in a mighty stream, deeper and wider, to fill the earth. He has the key to many an ancient oracle, and beholds the spread of the Gospel

over the world. Great is the mystery of godliness—God was manifest in the flesh—preached unto the Gentiles—believed on in the world.

O how does prophecy break forth into singing at the prospect! The humbled herald bows low at receiving a commission to summon the Gentiles. He is now the Apostle of the Gentiles. He sees the temple exalted, and all nations flowing unto it (Is. ii. 2). There the branch of Jesse is erected as the ensign of the people, to which the people seek. The once hidden glory of the Lord is revealed, and all flesh shall see it together (Is. xlix. 6). “As I live, saith Jehovah, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all as with an ornament, and bind them on thee as a bride doeth (v. 18). On every side are gathering converts. Does he look toward the land? The forces of the Gentiles are coming to Zion, the multitude of camels, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah, they of Sheba, bringing gold and incense, the caravans of Asia and the flocks of sacrifice. Does he look toward the sea? He descries not merely the distant single sail, but the fleets of converted nations, and he says, “who are these

that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows, whitening the ocean with their canvas? The ships of Tarshish are bringing the sons of Zion from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of Jehovah" (Mal. i, 11). For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, his name shall be great among the Gentiles.

"Praise is in all her gates; upon her walls  
Is heard salvation. Eastern Java there  
Kneels with the native of the furthest West,  
And Ethiopia spreads abroad the hand  
And worships. Her report has travelled forth  
Into all lands. From every clime they come,  
To see thy beauty and to share thy joy!"

COWPER.

Here, then, is the unsearchable riches bestowed on the Gentiles. Here is the glory of the Church, and by the Church is reflected God's manifold wisdom. And I (we seem to hear the apostle cry), I am a chosen vessel to convey this blessing! I, who was a self-righteous Pharisee, who sat by to see the blood of Stephen shed, I who "beyond measure persecuted the Church and wasted it"; pursuing

disciples "unto the death"; breathing out threatening and slaughter, and being exceedingly mad against them, made havoc of the flock and caused them to blaspheme. I who am the least of the apostles, not meet to be called an apostle, nay less than the least of all saints, have this commission! To me is this grace given!

Can you wonder, my brethren, at the subsequent self-devotion of Paul, that he henceforth could know nothing else, that he speeded over sea and land to fulfil his calling? No. It is the vital spirit of every ancient, of every modern missionary. What were chains to such a man? "I am ready, not to be bound only, but to die for the name of the Lord Jesus." What was jeopardy of life? "I count not my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God" (Acts xx, 24). It was not a transient fervour. It stood the test. The marks or signs of an apostle were on him (Acts xxi.). He was in labours abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons frequent, in deaths oft, in perils by land and sea, from violence and

treachery, in weariness and painfulness, and watchings and hunger and cold and nakedness and shipwreck. Yet none of these things moved him. How could they? Two thoughts expelled all others, and reigned in his soul—his own baseness and the unsearchable riches of Christ, his own sin and the glory of the Gospel. Every Gentile convert was a jewel in his crown. Again and again he asseverates that he mentions them without ceasing in his prayers. Though himself a prisoner, he exclaims, “What is our hope or joy or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?” (1 Thess. ii.)

Contemplate here the true temper of the missionary. To such a one, life will seem a rapid current, for it will be filled with the haste of fervid action. Oceans will become mere straits to such a zeal. The place, the circumstances of labour, will be mere dust on the balance. So that the Gospel be preached, it will matter little in what language or amidst what dangers. The preacher thus fired will hence be able to fly from the impulsive thought of his own unworthiness and the glory of the Gospel.

Here, my brethren, here is the altar from whose coals to kindle missionary zeal. If we have the honour of Christ, and his glory in saving men, we shall not limit our desires to the relieving of their bodies, or the illumination of their minds. We shall behold in them the purchase of Christ's blood, and shall rush into the battle that we may win souls. To reach them we need not traverse continents, nor cross oceans. They are around us, amidst the blaze of these glories, in the noontide of the Gospel. But how are they affected by it! Just as the corpses in yonder graveyard by the sun of heaven. Yet we are bound to hold forth Christ to them. And doubtless God will open some blind eyes to behold the light of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ. Be it ours to know no other watchword, to publish no other Gospel, to seek no other science, to die in no other faith!

Happy if, with my latest breath,  
I may but gasp his name,  
Preach him to all, and cry in death,  
Behold, behold the Lamb!



