1 Peter - Commentaries by William Kelly

The Prospect, 1 Peter 1:10-12

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WE have here three stages. First, the prophetic Spirit foretelling the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow; then the accomplishment of Christ's sufferings; and then comes the Holy Ghost down from heaven to report the things that are now ministered unto us, and this according to the hope, and the power of communion with the love that gives us this hope.

The Church's Calling1—Its Practical Effects.

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." (Eph. 4:1-6.)

This portion of Scripture contains two subjects, the one mainly affecting the Christian himself, the other affecting the body of Christ, through him. In fact, the deep interests of the Church of God for one member, and all, are unfolded in this passage. Hence we can understand the emphatic manner with which the apostle presses them on the children of God. He beseeches them not as the apostle or the prophet, but as the prisoner of Jesus Christ; as one in whom practically was realized the fruitlessness of all earthly expectancy; a witness of what faithfulness to Christ in the world must suffer; and as one for whom the termination of earthly scenes would be a release and rest. Such is the character to give emphasis to the appeal he now makes to all saints. And, as such, he beseeches them “to walk worthy of their vocation wherewith they are called." He had, in the preceding chapter of this epistle, opened out the nature and blessing of their vocation, and therefore, in this passage, he addresses the Church as understanding it. It is evident if one is ignorant of the nature and principles of his calling, he cannot walk worthy of it; a servant may be willing and obedient, yet he cannot fulfill the duties of his service unless he knows them; and, consequently, in every ease in Scripture, we learn that our gracious God always establishes his servant in the practical blessing of his service ere he enters on it. Doubtless service deepens it, but the truth I am called to exhibit is my own strength and guide in the work, so that "he that watereth is watered also himself."

The Old Testament times were before the Holy Ghost was given as the witness of Christ's heavenly glory, the abiding unction of each believer, and the power of the unity of the Church on earth. (2 Cor. 3; John 7:38; 14:26. 1 John 2:27. Gal. 4:6; 1 Cor. 12:13. Ephes. 2:22.) Then the nature and principles of the believer's calling, from which a corresponding service should flow, were explained in vision and inscribed on the soul of the servant, as by the finger of God, the deep truths he was to be a witness of; for God never left Himself without witness.

Moses learned in the "burning bush" (Exod. 3.) the power and unchanging faithfulness of Jehovah to manifest Himself amidst the frail, contradictory things of earth, in wrath remembering mercy; and this scene sustained and instructed him in all his course, while conducting Israel from the iron rule of Pharaoh to the mount of Pisgah, where He should bequeath " the good Will of Him that dwelt in the bush," (Deut. 33:16,) as one who had largely experienced it. To Joshua (chap. 5.) again, the Captain, rather than the apostle of the Jewish calling, there appeared, with a drawn sword, the Prince of the host of the Lord. Each had a vision suitable to, and characteristic of, his own peculiar mission.—So, a live coal from the altar, in the circle of the ever holy glory, and the presence of the King, the Lord of Hosts, touching the lips of Isaiah, not only set his heart ready for service, but gave strength to him, and guidance in all the details of it. The nature and principles of that scene were embodied in all his testimony. The holiness and glory of the Lord, the uncleanness of His people, the purging of a remnant, judicial blindness of the mass, and the preservation and return of holy seed, were all comprised within the vision of chap. 6.

In the instance of Paul we have a remarkable sample. His first view of Jesus in the glory taught him the elements of all the great truths of which he was afterward so faithful an expositor. He begins as unconnected with earth; neither seeing, nor eating nor drinking, the great links with earth; and so he ends his course: at first, a bondman by Christ's glory; and, at the last, a bondman for His glory. Peter, as it has been strikingly observed, might truly style himself a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. But Paul was the converse of this. Paul was a witness of the glory of Christ, and a partaker of His sufferings. That heavenly Christ, whose glory shone brighter than noon-day sun on him, and on him only by sovereign grace, (Acts 9:7.) called the astonished convert to know and to preach that the Lord of glory was the lowly Jesus of Nazareth, and that the Church was one with Rim in glory. “Why persecutest thou sue? I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."

These examples will suffice to establish the necessity (if any should doubt it,) of being truly and accurately instructed in the nature and principles of our calling, if we really desire to walk worthy of it, and that we readily will not, is not only evident practically, but from the marked manner in which the apostle presses it upon us. He knew, the Spirit knew, the many hindrances which arise to our walking worthily of our calling. But why no effort, desire, or response to this touching appeal of our apostle? Do we know, in any energy, the nature of our calling? Have we patiently, like Mary at the feet of Jesus, sought from the Word the momentous meaning of "our vocation?" Has every Christian, by the unction of the Holy Ghost, sought after a faithfully desired acquaintance with a subject so earnestly put before us? Or, are we content with the ignorance of Thomas (John 14.) on a kindred and connected subject: " We know not whither thou goest, and how can we tell the way?” I have said already, that the apostle, in the preceding chapters, gives a full and clear detail of our vocation, and as it must be first known ere practical effects follow from it, it may be well to ponder a little on it.

First, let us enquire whether our vocation, as taught in this epistle, is a new revelation, and demanding a new and peculiar path on earth; or such as all, in God's line of witnesses, from the creation to the cross, had known, enjoyed, and walked in.

When we have it once a settled axiom before our souls, that God has been always, though in very different and even opposite ways, unfolding the various rays of His own glory, at one time His creative wisdom, at another His power and government; here, as a righteous Ruler, who guards and exalts a peculiar nation on earth; and there, as a Father who seeks sinners in electing, though indiscriminate, grace for heaven: when this is simply and clearly seen, it follows as a consequence that the calling and walk of believers are modified, molded, and governed by these respective revelations of God's character.

I believe each and all of God's people, in every age, knew that all their “springs were in Him," knew” that His loving-kindness was better than life itself," and that “in His presence was fullness of joy, and at His right hand pleasures for evermore." They reckoned their blessing to flow from Him, and the power, and in whatsoever place He would be, there would be glory, unspeakable glory to them; and, therefore, it does not interfere with their enjoyment, rest and blessing, whether their hope reached forward to the epiphany of Christ in glory on the earth, (of which we have many proofs,) or to the simply heavenly glory and the full blessedness of the Church as the Bride of Christ. Of this latter we have no intimation, save such passages as “heavenly country," and "a city," in Heb. 11. be supposed to bear that meaning.

The saints, before Christ was rejected from the earth, expected and waited for the accomplishment of the promises in an earthly glory; not human achievement, but an irresistible and universal halo emanating from Immanuel—from God manifest in the flesh. We do not indeed find that God had abandoned man in the flesh as irretrievable, until the Fairest—the Holy One of God—is allowed no place among them, but is cast out and dishonored as an evil doer.

We must not circumscribe our ideas to the narrow limits of human selfishness. Man was destined by God to fill a glorious place on this earth; he was made in the image and glory of God. Not only in Eden, but in the postdiluvian earth, and especially as an elect separated people in Canaan, did the Lord make trial of man. In all these cases man was set to maintain godliness and lordship in the earth. He had not fully proved himself as yet totally unfit for God's high destiny respecting him, for the destiny itself could not be rescinded. But now, every trial being made, and Israel under the power of Rome, “the fourth beast," the Son of God is revealed as one to repair all and to accomplish, through Himself, God's purposes respecting us. "He glorifies God on earth." He proves himself fit and more than fit for man's high destiny, for He was, in truth, “the brightness of God's glory and express image of His person." But, while honored of God, He is rejected and crucified by the very people to whom God had committed His oracles, and to whom He had been sending prophet after prophet to instruct and counsel—by the people whom He had chosen as His own peculiar people, from amongst all the nations of the earth.

The blessed Jesus who had to manhood, and as a man, accomplished all God's purposes and destiny respecting man, being rejected and crucified, rises to the right hand of the Father, not that God's great purpose in setting forth man as His image and glory, in this earth, has been frustrated, but to wait there "till" the period determined of God will arrive. Of that time and season there should be no disclosure. It is reserved in God. Yet the interval was not to be lost, for in this interval is the Church being gathered, not to any earthly standing, for all had failed, but as in union with Christ in heaven, manifesting the characteristics of such an union down here, and this is properly our vocation; the revelation of a secret as to which there was profound secret since the world began. (Rom. 16:25, 26.) We can aver boldly that it was emphatically Paul's Gospel—" according to my Gospel"—though it was also revealed NOW unto the other holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. A Jew, righteously, ought to have sought to fill the place to which God's favor had called him, if apostasy had not deprived him of it. But of this there could have been no doubt, for the power once delegated to David had passed into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, and was now swayed by his Roman successor over Israel; but yet they looked for a Deliverer. Before the understandings of the disciples were opened to understand the Scriptures, they expected that Jesus "would have redeemed Israel," i.e. I suppose by external power. They little expected that any power, not even death, could divert him from this work. And again, after their understandings are opened, we find the apostles asking the Lord, as He was on the eve of taking His place above: “Wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" Surely, up to this they had no hope of a purely heavenly glory, apart and unconnected with earth. Nor reasonably could they then, for the Lord had not made the last offer to Israel, of which we so largely read in the first chapters of the Acts.

We find the same thing in the penitent thief. With a Jewish hope, his eye rested (and it was eminent faith) on Christ's glory, in His kingdom, wherein he asks to be remembered. The Lord refuses it not, but He promises a still more immediate blessing, and this Luke alone of the evangelists notices, because, as the companion of Paul, and in all probability a Gentile, he was led of the Spirit to every link, however undefined, with the present hope of saints. Again, we can understand the resistance and difficulty as to receiving the Gentiles, and the consistency of those who argued that they should be circumcised and keep the law of Moses, for into mere Canaan privileges there was no other passport.

To Peter, in a figure, (Acts 10) is shown the calling of Gentiles as well as Jews into the kingdom of heaven, whose keys had been given him. (Compare Matt. 16. Acts

To Paul, in person, (2 Cor. 7) unconscious of everything but the consciousness of unspeakable glory, is revealed the present portion of men in Christ, the Gospel of the glory, the nature and privileges of “our vocation."

Man in every trial has failed. The Holy One, rejected and crucified, is "set down at the right hand of God," "head over all things to the Church," His Spirit now gathering members unto Him, to be shown by and by, as also now in truth His body, the fullness of Him who Oath all in all. And as we realize His headship, and consequently our union with Him, (on the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven dwelling in us,) we understand our vocation. Not an union with Him only, but also union with all the members of His body, however disjointed here or failing to witness the traces of this blessed oneness, which as of one body we must desire, and, when in the power of the Spirit, express.

I think it is not possible to trace any similarity between the common notion of our calling, as held even by evangelical Christians, and that enjoined in this epistle. The one owns, and so far rightly, the doctrine of free grace; but with this great truth is added, without proof or consistency and in much confusion, a hope (it may amount to assurance) of heaven when we die, not a heaven the sphere of our citizenship now, but the final and beatic abode of the redeemed by and by. With death earth is to be totally abandoned, and yet, strange to say, while we are on it, (that is, Christians,) we are to embrace as much as possible of it under even our temporal rule, not only to propagate Christianity in the hearts and affections of men, but to endeavor to induce the powers of the world to adopt it as the wisest governmental policy, or it may be, as the best political economy. Will any thoughtful person say that there is not great confusion and incoherency in this involuted notion? and, coupled as it is with the doctrine of free grace, (glorious truth!) many are prevented from investigating the grounds for such ideas. The Reformation, in God's mercy, brought to light, as from the tomb, the doctrine of free grace and justification by faith. That was the first step, a

grand stride, from the deep darkness and ignorance in which Christendom was plunged; but, could there be no advance, no progress from it? In Ephesians 2., we are distinctly taught that grace confers more than life from a death in trespasses and sins. The argument of that chapter, in connection with the first, is, " that Christ being risen and sat down on the right hand of God," is "head over all things to the Church, which is His body; " that the power which raised Jesus and set Him there, forthwith " fashions in continuance " the members of that body, quickening us who were dead in trespasses and sins, raising us together, and making us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. The means whereby this mighty work was effected we next trace, viz. by the blood and death of Christ, who broke down thus the middle wall of partition, and reconciled Jews and Gentiles unto God in one body by the cross. This new man, this one body, is called in Scripture the Church of God. It is not merely isolated believers here and there, but Jewish and Gentile saint's are now builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. Hence, it is one body here below, whore the Holy Ghost is sent down and abides. Still, its origin, its character, its privileges, and its destiny, are of heaven and not of earth. United to the ascended Lord, the Church's blessings are whore He is, and where she looks to be manifested ere long with Him in glory. Now, this is all of grace, "that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace." And yet how few Christians seem interested save but in one portion of "the exceeding riches! " I cannot deny that part of it is enjoyed, for, if it could be denied, Christianity would be unknown; but I am convinced that we all seem to value one portion of the "exceeding riches of His grace, " to the exclusion of the rest, or mainly so. But if it be granted, and it cannot be denied, that being raised up together and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, is a component part of the gift of grace, then evidently it is important and essential to know it as one part of it. Our selfishness may be quieted by so much of it as assures us that we are alive from death in trespasses and sins; but, surely, we are not at liberty, nor are we wise to accept one portion of a gift of God and neglect the rest; and we cannot excuse ourselves on the ground that the part we have learned is so full and blessed that we are satisfied therewith, when it ought rather to have been, from its very blessedness, a pledge and a stimulus to us to learn the remainder.

Now, the death, resurrection and exaltation of Christ at God's right hand is the foundation, as the mission from heaven and presence of the Holy Ghost is the efficacious agent, of the Church; and we are even now one with Him whose glory is accomplished on high, and await a common appearing together. Does ordinary doctrine admit such a heavenly standing, even while we are here? I may be answered that Christians generally believe that the spirits of saints will be raised to heaven after death and the dissolution of the body. But this, surely, is not what is taught in the passage before us; for if it were, their quickening from death in trespasses and sins would not occur till then also, which is a manifest fallacy. Hence, if the one is true, and declared and enjoyed, so ought the other, and, therefore, the notion that we only belong to heaven when we die is not a correct idea of "our vocation."

It was, too, plainly recorded that heaven was the portion of believers to be utterly repudiated; but, as ever with Satan, when he cannot destroy "the meal," the food of souls, he will leaven it. And accordingly our heavenly standing is not denied but postponed till we quit this earthly scene; and this device has succeeded in engaging the mind of Christians with earthly things, and led them to hope for a repetition of Jewish blessings, as the people of God set on earth. But Eph.2:5, 6, is plainly contrary to all this. It declares that believers now "are raised up together and made sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." There is no idea whatever (but the reverse) that heaven is postponed to any particular period, and nothing whatever as to an earthly expectancy, seeing we are distinctly instructed in the foregoing chapter, that we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, entirely apart and dissociated from earth, even in that place to which we are now called by grace. True, we are actually on earth, but not with the power and interests of earthly blessing. We are here alive from death in trespasses and in sins, and ought to be practically exhibiting here conformity to the risen Jesus, who is our head, strangers to all earthly maxims, and manifesting ourselves as the body of Christ by the power of the Holy Ghost, who witnesses of Him; and this is our vocation, however little we have learned it, or, alas! are disposed, because of our carnality, to learn it. "There is one body and one Spirit."

Again, I must repeat, that it is not only important for us to know the nature and principles of our vocation, because of our own blessing; but, furthermore, unless we walk worthy of it, we shall not be able rightly or adequately to express that testimony to which God has called us, even that practical use to which the apostle so earnestly applies it; and how essential it is for this purpose we best arrive at by considering the nature and extent of the demand on us.

As walking worthy of our vocation, the first stage in this interesting course, we are exhorted to cultivate certain dispositions and habits, in order to produce a grand result, even the endeavor to keep "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." No self-denial is to be refused which may tend to the accomplishment of this great object. "With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love." A right eye or a right hand is not to be spared, if any barrier to the jealous observance of the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. This is the wonderful testimony to which Christians are now called; and if it is little displayed and found difficult to be accomplished, it only increases the necessity of our acquiring proper instruction to enact it. It is one great point to know what ought to be our object here. There is a sevenfold oneness with which every Christian has to do: " One body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all; " (verses 4-6;) and, therefore, unity amongst themselves should be the manifest fruit of it., and would surely be testified, if simply, and practically, and exclusively enjoyed. I say exclusively, for it is evident that no division can arise if no other element but Christ engaged our hearts, for there is simple unity in each of the parts of that whole with which alone we have to do. Whence then arises division and the little manifestation of this duty? Firstly, I believe it is not felt to be paramount and all-important. Our real position around Christ and in Christ is not individually maintained and valued, and hence no ability or interest to manifest the effects of it corporately. Popery has retained the shell of this truth when it requires all its votaries to adopt the same language in every nation, and to proclaim themselves "the one holy catholic church." But, alas! how little have believers declared they had the kernel of this assumed unity and catholicity. Christians may be careful about their own personal walk, either to avoid judgment and promote their own happiness, or, still better, to please God; but I fear with very few is it of the deepest interest and labor " to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; " and, consequently, we know the sad effects of this indifference. No believer now can individualize himself, for all are baptized by one Spirit into ()one body. This was not known of old. True, an open transgression, by any member of the nation, as in the ease of Achan, and such like, demanded temporal judgment and expurgation; but who will say that the sin of any one individual affected all the rest spiritually? In former times, they were baptized in the cloud and the sea unto Moses; now, we are baptized by one Spirit into one body. The Spirit has something more to do with me than merely to lead me into joys of salvation. He has an ulterior object, adopting me into that wonderful system, the body of Christ, and making me feel my interest and sympathy in it. "If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it." How so? Surely, there could never be any natural intercourse or acquaintance maintained with all; and if not, it must be spiritual, flowing from a very real union, if unseen, for we are one Spirit with the Lord, and members of one another. And there is mutual blessing, even " that which every joint supplieth," as such are practically led by the Spirit; otherwise, one is not walking according to the mind of Him by whom we are baptized into one body. This is the work of the Holy Ghost, present in the Church on earth—His

ultimate object, for the body is the fullness of Him who filleth all in all; and we cannot walk in fellowship with Him unless we are agreed; and we cannot agree with Him unless we follow the same objects and interests with Him; and if we are not in fellowship, it is evident we cannot enjoy the strength, guidance and comfort which are derivable from Him. On the other hand, if we are, we participate in all the blessings which His presence affords.

It is important to ascertain why we have not more spiritual power. It is simply because we prescribe a limited selfish course for His operation, and not the large comprehensive purpose into which He would lead us. We cannot have one without the other, for He is one; and if we are deficient in one, we must be in the other. No believer, really laboring to keep, the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, but must know the power and comfort of the Spirit. It is vain to suppose that I can enjoy the power and comfort of the Spirit, and yet not aim to walk in sympathy with His desires. The object of the Holy Ghost is to edify the body of Christ-to build for the absent Jesus a glorious Eve, to be presented to Him by and bye, but now curiously wrought in the lower parts of the earth; and this, assuredly, must be at least my aim and desire if I am in unison with Him, and, if not, barrenness must enter into my soul; "my right eye shall be utterly darkened; " my " salt will lose its savor." There is no such thing now as simply singular blessing. No one, however exalted, is the body, and no Christian, however weak, but is of it. You are elevated and advanced in proportion to your use to Christ's body: you are weak, as you are a mere drain on it. I can never view myself apart from it, unless I return to nature, and truly, as I widen my separation from the body, do I re-establish myself in nature.

The Jew expressed union naturally, we must spiritually. The temple in Jerusalem was the center of the one; Christ in heaven is the center of the other. It does not lessen our responsibility, because there is failure, and little expression of the Spirit's work; for if our responsibility can be lessened, then the Spirit may slacken in His purpose and object, which could not be true. Believers have been unwilling to submit to the sacrifices which the endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace inevitably entails. And if they have resigned the object and desire of the Spirit of God, they have accordingly forfeited the strength, grace, and cheer of Him in their own souls; and there is no way to obtain these blessings but by being renewed with purpose of heart, to be led by Him, and to fulfill all His counsel. Weakness, failure, and disunion are no grounds for our indolence or indifference to make the endeavors. I believe if a Christian was cast alone on a desert island, that the energy of the Spirit in him would lead him to seek the conversion of the natives, not only for the joy in heaven over one sinner repenting, but also that in communion with two or three, he might glorify Christ and fulfill the will of the Spirit, and it would assuredly increase his own strength and gladness. The Jew did not maintain the natural unity. The Church has not endeavored to maintain spiritual unity, But what was the strength and testimony of the faithful Jew, even in Babylon? Why "he prayed three times a day with his face toward Jerusalem." But where was Jerusalem? A heap of ruins! save in the mind of faithful Daniel, who could not forget Jerusalem, " the city of the great king." And, in like manner, when the Jews returned from Babylon, Haggai admonishes them to go up to the mountain and bring wood, and build the house of the Lord," for the Lord would take " pleasure in it," though that very temple was afterwards to be so defiled by Antiochus. A few walking in faithfulness could never forget or swerve from the object of God; whether, as with Daniel, there was no appearance of the expression of it, or as with the rebuilders a temple with another failure. And so with, us neither non-appearance of the object of God now is to dissuade us from endeavoring after it, nor a fear of failure to discourage us from making the attempt. Similar is the instruction of Paul to Timothy, in the second epistle, which we may well characterize as the last words of Paul. If the great house (Christendom) has in it vessels to dishonor, Timothy's course is, while purging himself from those, to seek still an expression of unity with them "that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." (2 Tim. 2:20-22.) None others could express the unity of the Spirit. This is important as the alone ground for discipline and separation from professionists; but no failure or magicians, ("Jannes and Jambres,") or similarity (chap. 3.) to godliness, should lessen his exertions, but rather promote them. Nay, his only remedy for such a state of things was CONTINUANCE, (verse 14,) as we find Moses aforetime, when encountering the same opposition before Pharaoh. In fact, as a faithful one, he was to do more because others did less. And again we have the same truth enforced in Judo's epistle, which contemplates Christians in a very tried state, and subject to great disorder. Yet a course is plainly marked out for “the beloved." But ye, beloved, (verse 20,) building up yourselves in your most holy faith, (simple dependence on Christ, not yielding to growing laxity and self-will,) praying in the Holy Ghost, expressing unity in the Spirit as touching all your need and circumstances, and forthwith strengthened and blessed, not to omit searching after members, who, from one cause or another, are deprived of their fuller blessing. So that the expression or manifestation of the unity of the Spirit was never to be lost sight of, but was ever to be the aim and object of the faithful in the darkest time. Hence, in the Lord's Supper, as well as in our mere salutations, there was to be an evidence of it. Thus was manifested, by the familiarity of the expression of affection, the great unity of Christians. And this is simply what the Church of God on earth was called to manifest. The Lord stir us up, and fill us with zeal for His house which lieth waste! But, alas! interest for our own things is mainly the cause of our neglecting the great end and object of the Spirit, which is a manifested counterpart on earth of that unity which is "infallibly," as another has said, maintained above, and this naturally follows from not understanding our vocation. For if conscious of our unity, there so unbroken and blessed, and if filled with the power and interest of it, we could not but endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Hence, in conclusion, is seen that if I do not understand the nature and principles of my vocation, my endeavors to keep the unity will only be right intentions wrongly attempted, and therefore ineffectual; and, on the other hand, I cannot have entered into the sweetness and power of my vocation. Thus, I must labor for a manifestation of that fellowship one with another, of which in “light " I am partaker.”O Lord, revive thy work! "

J. B. S.

1 Peter, 1 Peter 1:1

“Peter, apostle of Jesus Christ to elect sojourners scattered through Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Peter 1:1).

When James wrote his Epistle, as bondman of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, it was to the twelve tribes that were in the “dispersion.” It is a mistake to call this a “catholic” address, but it has an expressly large character for Israel; for it appeals to their utmost extent. So on a notable occasion the Apostle Paul says before the king Herod Agrippa, “Now I stand to be judged for the hope of the promise made by God unto our fathers, unto which our twelve tribes earnestly serving God night and day hope to arrive” (Acts 26:7). That hope hangs on resurrection, as the prophets indicated clearly, and the law too, rightly understood. Wherefore he immediately (ver. 8) speaks of God raising dead persons, as proved in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. God will thus be the doer and giver of all the blessing He promised; and Israel will have only to incline their ear and come to Him, from Whom they had so long departed, and by Whom they were at length for their apostasy dispersed among the nations. But by-and-by they are to hear, and their soul shall live; and He will make an everlasting covenant with them, the sure

(the faithful or inviolable) mercies of David, in Him Who is the true Beloved, a witness given to the peoples, a leader and commander to the peoples far beyond the son of Jesse.

“The dispersion” is a phrase evidently familiar to the Jews, which first occurs in John 7:35, and clearly means the Jews dispersed among the Greeks or Gentiles. For the genitive here as often elsewhere expresses a dependence, not immediate but remote and external, as for instance . B. removal to Babylon (Matt. 1:11).

But the Apostle Peter in this scripture prefixes two words before “dispersion” which necessarily limit the scope of that term. The first, “elect” points out restriction to individuals chosen of God. They were elect from among the Jews, as believing that Jesus was the Christ and Son of God; whereas their brethren after the flesh for the most part rejected Him. Those who believed were Christians.

Israel had enjoyed the privilege of being the nation chosen by Jehovah as no other people was; and they will in sovereign mercy be reinstated at the end of the age under the Messiah and the new covenant, to be blessed with richer favors and forever in that fast approaching day. It will be no longer a mixed condition as in the palmiest season of the past. “Thy people also (says Isa. 60:21-22) shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the land forever; the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified. The little one shall become a thousand, and the small one a strong nation: I Jehovah shall hasten it in its time.” So Daniel was told later, “At that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book” (Dan. 12:1).

But that time is not come. Out of the Jewish people, when the apostle wrote, God is choosing to a heavenly calling by the faith of Him Whom the nation rejected and God has glorified on high. They are His present election while the heavens receive the Lord Jesus. To these only does Peter here write; he does not, like James, address a larger circle, some even unconverted, throughout the twelve tribes. He writes only to Christian confessors of the Lord Jesus who had been Jews.

This last is made plain and certain by the second term, “sojourners,” when combined with the word “dispersion” which it qualifies. They were not the primitive possessors of these countries, nor simply “elect” from among its settled inhabitants. They were not only Jews scattered in those parts, but elect “pilgrims” or “sojourners.” This was a title of grace, as “dispersion” was of judgment. Their election in this case was bound up with the journey to the better country, that is, a heavenly. Originally Jews, they were now Christians. This entirely accords with the writer of the Epistle. Peter was an “apostle of Jesus Christ” as he here introduces himself; and as the gospel of the uncircumcision had been confided to Paul, so was that of the circumcision to Peter (Gal. 2:7). Hence it is to such that these two Epistles were addressed. Compare 2 Peter 3:1 with the verse before us. As this is certain, it is unbelieving to allow that any other statements can countervail. Even a man would not write so incoherently: why should men of faith think so unworthily of scripture? Can such persons hold divine inspiration?

It is the more remarkable, because, as we know, the churches throughout Asia Minor had been founded by the Apostle Paul and consisted largely of those who had been Gentiles. The delicate consideration of Peter is the more striking, because he directs his appeals throughout a part of that land to those Christian Jews who fell under his administration. Needless to say, his instruction in no way clashed with that which Paul had preached, taught, and written to them, whether Jews or Gentiles. None knew better than Peter how much the Jewish confessors of the Lord Jesus needed to be established in grace; none felt more than he how disposed they were on the one hand to boast in law and ordinances, and on the other to conform to the shameful ways of the Pagans who surrounded them. In his very address or the superscription he strikes the key-note. From the start he thus reminds them, that they were “elect” after a new sort, not national now but personal, and flowing out of the grace of God as Father for known association with Christ not on earth but in heaven. They were therefore but “pilgrims” meanwhile, where He was despised and rejected as a sufferer beyond all others in life (as He was alone and infinitely in His atoning death), that they too might by faith rejoice in sharing His sufferings as far as this could be.

For Peter was jealous over their souls with a godly jealousy, lest election might be severed from a deep sense of divine grace, and the spring be forgotten in claiming the issue. He therefore loses no time in saying plainly that not more surely are they “elect” than “sojourners.” Had he heard the Son of God, in pouring out His heart to the Father, declare that His own (and were they not His own?) were not of the world, as He was not? Had he forgotten the Lord's repeating, yet more emphatically, “Of the world they are not, even as I am not” (John 17:15,17)? Here it is a figurative expression, but the same truth. They were elect pilgrims. The world of man's home was not theirs, nor yet was Canaan, but heaven, yea the Father's house above. It was not Jewish feeling for the land of promise, but Christian hope in waiting for Christ and to be with Him where He is, and like Him glorified.

Therefore were they but sojourners here looking for glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, and called to gird up the loins of their mind, being sober, and setting their hope perfectly upon the grace to be brought them at that revelation. Practical duties are based on the new relationships of grace; and truth is the communicated knowledge of both. For it is a characteristic of Peter's method and style to blend all together informally and with fervor, so as to act on the renewed mind, exercising the conscience and the heart. If he has not the immense sweep of Paul in ranging through the counsels of God, if not his the penetrating into the roots of complicated questions and clearing the principles at stake, if a far-reaching and unfailing and subtle dialectic belongs to Paul beyond all others, to no one more admirably than to Peter was it given to strengthen his brethren pithily, earnestly, and affectionately, by the exhibition of Christ and His work, and by the constant application of God's righteous government, whatever be His grace too.

The names given of the lands, where were the Christian Jews addressed, call for little notice. It has been shown by others that it well suits one writing from the eastern Babylon, but not the little place so named in Egypt any more than the symbolic metropolis of the west. The lack of persons saluted serves to prove that Peter was little if at all known personally there, whatever might be the just weight of inspired letters from him. These various provinces had been the familiar scene of Paul's labors.

1 Peter, 1 Peter 1:2

They were “elect,” then, “according to foreknowledge of God [the] Father, in (or by) [the] Spirit's sanctification, unto obedience and blood-sprinkling of Jesus Christ: grace to you and peace be multiplied” (1 Peter 1:2).

Israel was the elect people beyond any nation on the earth; but they were elect after quite a different pattern. This clearly appears in Ex. 6:2-4. “And God spoke to Moses, and said to him, I am Jehovah; and I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name Jehovah I was not made known to them. And I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their sojournings, wherein they sojourned.” The designations as such, were familiar enough previously; but the name was not given by divine authority as a title of relationship to count on, when God first revealed Himself as El-Shaddai to the fathers, next as Jehovah to the sons, of Israel. The true pilgrim fathers were thereby assured of His unfailing protection, weak as they might be, in the midst of the corrupt heathen they were destined to supplant; and the sons were through Moses to know Him as their unchanging Governor who made them a people of possession to Himself through all ages, He that was and is and is to come.

The Christian Jews, believing in Jesus not only Lord and Christ but Son of the living God, as our apostle first confessed Him, were chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. So had our Saviour unbosomed Himself in John 17 “I manifested Thy name to the men whom Thou gavest Me out of the world: Thine they were, and Thou gavest them to Me; and they have kept Thy word....Holy Father, keep them in Thy name which Thou has given to Me that they may be one, even as we are O righteous Father, the world knew Thee not, but I knew Thee; and these knew that Thou didst send Me. And I made known to them Thy name, and will make it known; that the love wherewith thou lovedst Me may be in them, and I in them.” So on the Resurrection-day His message through Mary of Magdala was, “Go to My brethren and say to them, I ascend unto My Father and your Father, and My God and your God” (John 20:17). How immense the advance in the glory and nearness of the relationship revealed!

According to this form and reality of foreknowledge, then, is the Christian chosen. It was and is Christ's in the fullness of personal divine dignity; it became ours by grace through redemption. The name of “our Father that is in heaven” shone early through the Lord's discourses on the mount, as in Matt. 5-7, and in Luke 6 and elsewhere. But it was definitely and fully made our own by the Lord when risen; and thus the Holy Spirit leads our hearts now in joy and in sorrow. It is so that we are entitled distinctively to know Him, as Christ did perfectly. And it was in God's wisdom that the apostle of the circumcision should make it plain to the believing remnant of the Jews, as the apostle Paul did fully to Gentile believers.

Hence the “sanctification” or “holiness” here spoken of took quite another and far deeper shape. The elect people Israel had been set apart to Jehovah in an outward way. Individually and peremptorily they were circumcised in the flesh on the eighth day. Any other peculiar marks were, as the Epistle to the Hebrews declares, “carnal ordinances imposed until a season of reformation.” On the contrary the Christian, whether Jew or Greek, enjoys the Spirit's holiness; he is even born of the Spirit (John 3:6,8), and thus is the sanctification inward to the utmost degree. Accordingly such a one is “a saint” from God's first vital action spiritually in his soul. So Ananias instructed of the Lord goes to Saul, just converted, and at once accosts him as “Brother Saul,” before he was even baptized as he was immediately after; so it is in substance for every one that is begotten by the word of truth. The Spirit's activity is immediate and abiding, the ground of the practical holiness that ensues, which is but partial and relative; whereas what the apostle here introduces is a principle absolute, unfailing, and personal. In practice alas we must confess, with the Epistle of James, that “we all often offend.” Only unspiritual men flatter themselves otherwise. We too frequently need the active care of the blessed Advocate Whom we have with the Father (1 John 2:1).

Practical sanctification is a capital and constant duty for every Christian; and it is urged, as throughout the Bible, expressly in 1 Pet. 1:15-16. But in 1 Pet. 1:2 it is solely sanctification in principle, that is, in the life given by grace rather than in the walk which is bound to manifest it, as all the godly must readily own. “As he who called you is holy, be ye also holy in all manner of living; because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy.” But so to interpret the Spirit's holiness (or sanctification) here would necessarily dislocate the sentence, and could insinuate nothing but error destructive of truth, even the fundamental truth of the gospel. For what we are taught is that those Christian Jews were chosen, in virtue of the Spirit's sanctification, for obedience and blood-sprinkling of Jesus: the original spring, the necessary power and process, and the distinct result as a fact. If taken to mean holiness in practice, this would be before coming under the virtue of Christ's blood. In other words the error must follow, that practical holiness is the way to be justified by His blood; which might suit a besotted Romanist, but must be rejected by the least enlightened among Protestants. It denies the gospel of God's grace, and is at issue with all scripture that treats of the matter.

But if we understand the words to mean that the Spirit works in souls when born anew, to set them apart to God in this vital and indelible way, all is clear as well as consistent. For His setting apart is unto obedience and blood-sprinkling of Jesus Christ. We are thus sanctified, not externally but in the new life imparted, to obey as Christ obeyed and to be sprinkled with His precious blood. So the same Saul of Tarsus immediately, when converted, says, “What shall I do, Lord?” His heart's primary purpose is to obey; as our Lord Himself could say in His unique perfection, “Lo, I am come to do Thy will, O God.” The Christian is bent on the same character of obedience. It is not like a Jew, to obey and thus gain life, as under law; it is obeying out of life already possessed, because he believes on Jesus.

Even the order, which to some is a difficulty, strictly adheres to the truth. For converted souls in general, perhaps always, have invariably as the instinct of divine life this purpose to obey as Christ obeyed, not legally, in owning God's wondrous grace, before they can or do apprehend at all fully the efficacy of Christ's sacrificial work in blotting out all their sins. The interval may be ever so short where the gospel is distinctly proclaimed; but as this is far from usual, one can see that many a soul truly converted may struggle on for weeks or months or even years, without the comforting assurance that Christ's blood has made them whiter than snow in the eye of God. Saul of Tarsus again supplies an obvious illustration. Was there ever a more notable conversion? Yet was he three days without sight, and did neither eat nor drink: the plain sign of a deep work of self-judgment, in no way of distrust or doubt, before he entered into the settled peace of deliverance by faith of the gospel, which before those days he had only regarded with stern unbelief.

Unquestionably the allusion is to Ex. 24 where Holocaust and Peace-offerings were presented to Jehovah; and Moses took half the blood in basins, and sprinkled half on the altar. Then he read the book of the covenant and the people said, All that Jehovah hath said will we do and obey; and Moses sprinkled the blood on the people, and said, Behold, the blood of the covenant that Jehovah has made with you concerning all these words. The blood here was the special sanction of death, signified by the blood-sprinkling, in case of disobedience. With this ministry of legal condemnation for the sinner the apostle contrasts the Christian, sanctified by the Spirit from his starting-point, to obey as Christ did in filial love, with the immensely blessed addition of His blood-sprinkling, which cleanses from every sin, instead of menacing inevitable death if we fail. If this was the law wherein Jews boasted, that is the gospel of which Peter was ashamed no more than Paul. This resulting obedience, of which our Lord is alike example and power, is (in other words but the truest sense) our practical holiness; and it confirms in the strongest way the refutation, already ample, of the notion that the Spirit's holiness in this scripture imports the same thing. For it would really confuse the sentence and destroy the truth generally.

The fact is that theology in all the schools, Popish or Protestant, Calvinistic or Arminian, has somehow lost, and ignores, this most momentous truth of the Spirit's primary setting apart the renewed soul to God, even before and in order to justification and that obedience which is its inseparable effect. The only person my reading has lit on with any little inkling of its distinctness from the practical holiness which, as all the Reformed at least agree, follows justification, is the excellent and able Abp. Leighton. All others to the best of my knowledge slur over what they did not understand; and this is to say the least.

But I regret to add that none has more impudently tampered with this scripture, to suit his ignorance of it and his desire to uphold mere dogmatic views, than the famous translator and commentator, Beza, or Theodore de Beze. Dean Alford was bold enough sometimes in squeezing the text and its translation through too much confidence in German critics, and his own real desire to be candid, without sufficient knowledge of the truth or subjection to the divine authority of the written word. But even his occasional temerity shines in comparison with Calvin's successor in the college of Geneva. For I ask any competent scholar whether the ill-regulated wit of man could devise a worse or more shameless perversion of our text than his rendering, “ad sanctificationem Spiritus, per obedientiam,” &c. =ad! =per! Were it in Homer or Herodotus, one might smile at lapses so absurd on the part of a learned, able, and zealous Christian. But such a dealing with God's word is atrocious. Yet this flagrant error stands uncorrected in all the five folio editions of his Greek and Latin N.T. from 1559 to 1598.

Had Beza and other theologians been subject to scripture, they would have learned by grace that what the apostle of the circumcision here teaches is implied by the apostle of the uncircumcision in 1 Cor. 6:11, “But ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” Do men with the fear of God assume to correct the inspiring Spirit? Do they allow themselves the daring unbelief that they can alter the apostle's word, so as to avoid error and sustain their systems of divinity? It is clear that this greatest even of inspired teachers lets the Corinthians and all believers know, that there is a real and most vital sanctification to God which accompanies the first quickening of the soul, when we are born of water and Spirit, and cleansed from our natural impurity by His life-giving power, before we enjoy the blessed sense of God's justifying us through faith in Jesus and His work. The order of Paul therefore is as necessary and as exact as that of Peter, both conveying the same truth, which has dropped out of all the systematic divinity of all ages, as far as I know. The reader can also compare 2 Thess. 2:13. Holiness in practice remains intact, distinct, and imperative, to which justification gives its powerful impulse and cheer.

The Apostle here adds, “Grace unto you and peace be multiplied.” The nearest analogy in O.T. scripture, singular to say, is in Dan. 4:1; though the imperial penitent only says, “Peace be multiplied.” So Peter does yet more fully in the address of his Second Epistle to the same dispersed remnant of Christian Jews. It is characteristic of his fervor. James was content to write, “Greeting.” Paul usually says, “Grace to you and peace” though he almost always adds “from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,” with “mercy” to an individual. Grace is the source, peace the outflow.

1 Peter, 1 Peter 1:3

In grand terms from a glowing heart our apostle opens his letter after an address, as we have seen, of admirable suitability. It recalls the initiatory of a still greater apostle and the loftier theme of the Epistle to the Ephesian saints. But it is the deeply defined distinction between the two, notwithstanding this obvious resemblance, which gives the true key to both Epistles. He who fails to apprehend the different scope and the divine propriety of each betrays his own spiritual incapacity, and, if he imposes his ignorance on others, is nothing but so far a blind leader of the blind.

“Blessed [be] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ": so begins the letter, to the saints that were in Ephesus. He is the God of the Man, Christ Jesus; He is the Father of Him, His Only-begotten, eternal, and beloved Son. He blessed us accordingly in His sovereign grace as “God,” in His most intimate relationship as “Father.” Every spiritual blessing is conferred; not one fails. It is not natural blessing as on earth to Israel till by transgression they forfeited it. Ours is in the heavenlies where Christ is now glorified at God's right hand; and all is secured in His redemptive power by virtue of Whom all the universe subsists together (Col. 1:17). It is in Christ so as to be unchanging blessedness, in contrast with those who stood on the conditions of the law fatal to the sinful and fruitless.

No such wealth of privilege, no such heavenly elevation, appears in our text; yet does it announce what is equally momentous for the saint and for God's glory. Every other spiritual blessing had been in vain, if God's mercy did not beget us again, as our Epistle declares. There is no blessing more absolutely necessary for a sinner lost and ruined, with the old life depraved by inborn evil, habitual self-will, and incurable alienation from God. Hence the precious assurance of our apostle in words at first strikingly akin to those of the apostle Paul. “Blessed [be] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that according to His abundant mercy begot us again unto a living hope through Jesus Christ's resurrection out of [the] dead” (1 Pet. 1:3): an entirely new and divine life.

It is not as Jehovah for Israel, nor as Almighty God for the fathers. For us Christians God wrought more profoundly for His glory and for those who believe. It was in Christ's redemption in view both of the present and future on earth, and for heaven through all eternity. For He went down under God's judgment of sin, broke the power of sin and death, procured purification for sinners by His blood, and was raised again for the justification of believers. Every saint from the beginning had life in the Son of God: impossible to live to God, as all did, without life in Him. But now the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ wrought in a more triumphant way in Him Who as sin-bearer entered the dark portals of the grave which closed on all others, and so glorified God that He could not but raise Him from among the dead in the virtue of a life which death could no wise touch, so complete that henceforth we belong not to death, but rather death to us. Thus did God as here revealed beget us again through Christ's resurrection out of the dead. None could speak or know it till that mighty witness of redemption. It was not, nor could be true, till Christ was thus raised.

Truly it was “according to God's abundant mercy.” If death has no more dominion over the dead and risen Saviour, the believer receives a commensurate portion even now: so much so that were He to come from heaven for us, we should be changed in a moment into the likeness of the body of His glory. Mortality would be swallowed up of life without one dying. We should not be unclothed but clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.

It is therefore “unto a living hope” that God begot us again. “Lively,” though due to Tyndale and followed by Cranmer, Geneva, and even the Rhemish, is inadequate and misleading. Wiclif alone was right. We are viewed as pilgrims still on earth in our mortal bodies. We have left the Egypt world, and have crossed the Red Sea, and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus, instead of meaning death, is our cleansing from our sins; as His life is the spring of that filial obedience, which in Him is seen in absolute perfection. We are here not regarded in the height of the heavenlies, risen with Christ and seated in Him there. But Christ is raised for our deliverance, and we are ushered into the world as set free from the old house of bondage, and we traverse it as the wilderness, led of God on the way to the heavenly Canaan as Israel of old to the earthly.

It is accordingly under this aspect that the Epistle contemplates the Christian. He has to do with a God of grace, not of law for a Jew, and an object of His government here below, till the living hope is realized of being with Christ and in heaven. But that divine government for every day meanwhile is not of the chosen people as of old in earthly power and with deliverances to strike the eye and awe of the nations. A government of souls comes before us while evil is still prevalent in the world; but God makes all things, trials and sufferings of faith in particular, work together for good to those that love Him. As Christ's resurrection was manifestly the victory of the Saviour for His own over the enemy's power, behold Him on high to fill them with holy confidence that He will appear to their full deliverance and glory in due time according to promise.

In the Epistle to the Ephesians we find the present association of the Christian and the church with heaven in Christ. Here it is a living hope of reaching heaven through Christ in a glorified state by-and-by. Both aspects of the truth are of the deepest interest and importance: we are on earth redeemed, as pilgrims and strangers, going across a desert and waiting for Christ; we are also even now quickened together with Christ, raised together with Him, and seated in Him in the heavenlies. As the letter to the Ephesians treats all its topics on this footing from first to last, so does the first Epistle of Peter to the Christian Jews throughout open out to them divine life as theirs, aided by the sustaining power and gracious direction of God, to guide them through this dread and howling wilderness of the world.

Nor are there any proofs of the inspired mind of God finer or firmer than the details of divine truth thus discoverable to the soul dependent on God and honoring His word. Some of the indications, each characteristic of its own book, may appear as we dwell for a season on this or that; but what are they among the many more which remain to reward the diligent searcher into these oracles, nowhere deceiving, never dumb?

1 Peter, 1 Peter 1:4-5

The scope of our Epistle excludes, as we have seen, the great truth unfolded in that to the Ephesian saints, that we are already blessed in the heavenlies ( ) in Christ. This is connected indissolubly with the mystery of God's will, which gave Christ, set there above the highest creatures, as Head over all things to the church, the which and which alone is His body. Accordingly we await an administration of the fullness of the seasons or set times, when God will head or sum up all the universe in the Anointed Man, the things in the heavens and those on the earth, in Him in Whom also we were given heritage.1

We have no such elevated relationship revealed here, nor is the boundless inheritance of all creation in this Epistle predicated of us or even of Christ. The inheritance here is simply “in the heavens” to contrast it the more distinctly with that which was Israel's portion in the land of Canaan. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ begot us again unto a living hope through resurrection of Jesus Christ from out of dead persons. It was a hope therefore superior to the inroads of death. If He died, it was that our sins should not bar us from bliss with Him, inasmuch as His own self bore them in His body on the tree; and He rose that we might enjoy His victory, as well as profit now and ever by His suffering once for sins.

But the apostle pursues the inspired aim yet more definitely into the future— “unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and unfading, reserved in [the] heavens for you2, that are being guarded by God's power through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed in a (or, the) last season” (1 Pet. 1:4-5).

Thus Christ risen and gone on high (instead of taking His seat on the holy hill of Zion, and the scepter of righteousness over Israel and the nations) has changed the outlook for the believer meanwhile. He too looks by faith on Christ where He is, and awaits the part which the gospel pledges to him in heaven. It is an inheritance which no corruption can destroy, which no defilement can sully, which resists all the withering of time. In itself, in its purity, and in its freshness, it will abide unchanging. It stands in virtue of Him Who not only created all originally but Who has reconciled, and will more widely still by His blood (Col. 1:20; Heb. 9:23).

The inheritance in view is in no way enjoyed now, but “reserved in the heavens for you.” Who can doubt these words were meant to raise the eyes of these believing Jews especially, and of the readers in general, above “glory dwelling in our land,” as in Psa. 85:9? Yet the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and to those that turn in that day from transgression in Jacob, when (as surely as Jehovah said the word) His Spirit and His words, according to His covenant, shall not depart from them from generation to generation, from henceforth and forever. But beyond just doubt, neither the closing promise of Isa. 59 nor the glowing vision of Isa. 60 and of all that follows to the end of the book speaks of an inheritance “reserved in the heavens” for those who now believe in the gospel. It is Israel and the glory predicted for the earth, though rising up in the last two chapters to “new heavens and a new earth.” The promise is there applied to Jerusalem; but it furnished the ground for Peter in his Second Epistle to look onward to its fulfillment in the largest sense, when the kingdom shall give place to the eternal state, and God shall be all in all. Before that, will be accomplished, inchoatively at least, Israel's full part in that which shall never know change or eclipse.

The language here recalls Col. 1:5, where the apostle Paul speaks of “the hope that is laid up for you in the heavens.” The saints there, as here, are regarded as on earth, instead of being seen in their present heavenly association with Christ. It is hope anticipating the glory on high, not as already seated together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, as in Eph. 2:6. Only Peter was not given like Paul to tell the saints in the Epistle to the Colossians, that as they died with Christ and were raised with Him, and thus had done with ordinances for men as alive in the world, so they were to seek and mind the things above where He sits, not those on the earth. Indeed our apostle (as we see in 1 Pet. 2:24) rises no higher than our death to sins in a practical way, which is true and important, not at all to the doctrine in Rom. 6 of our death with Christ to sin, which is the root, and not merely the manifest effect or offshoot. Every shade of difference proves how grievously those err who think that scripture speaks loosely.

For such a thought really betrays the spiritual ignorance of such as presume to judge it; when in fact they, however great their erudition outside (it may be), have need to be taught the elements of the beginning of the oracles of God, and are become such as need milk rather than solid food.

The hope of such an inheritance reserved for them in the heavens was most cheering. But in thinking of themselves and the wilderness through which they pass, they needed and have another source of blessed comfort you, says he, “that are being guarded by (or, in) God's power.” What more suitable, what more precious and welcome, than such a divine assurance? The inheritance was kept or reserved for them in the heavens. This was just what was wanted, while they were on the earth waiting and learning self as well as God, and suffering for righteousness' sake or, still more blessed, for Christ's name. But, as proving their own weakness and men's hostility and Satan's active malice, they were constantly exposed to difficulties, trials, afflictions, and dangers. Hence their need to be meanwhile guarded all the way through. And so they are garrisoned by God's power. And if God be for us, who against? Is He not immeasurably more than all?

Still God has His means; and this the Apostle proceeds next to tell us. It is “through faith.” Nor can any means for a saint on earth compare with faith. For it beyond all others honors God and the word of His grace, needing dependence on the good Shepherd by the Holy Spirit, who is sent here and dwells in the Christian, to guide into all the truth, and thus glorify Him by receiving of His and announcing or reporting it to us. Thus is it “by God's power,” but “through faith” which gives Him His due place, and keeps us in our place of confidence in Him according to His word. For we walk through faith, not through sight (2 Cor. 5:7). It was not so that Israel marched through the wilderness, but guided visibly by the cloud or the pillar of fire. The Christian now, whether a Jew or a Gentile, has to walk through faith, of which the Lord Himself was the blessed pattern and perfection.

But the end is also added: “unto [or, for] salvation.” In our Epistle, as often in the Pauline Epistles, salvation does not stop short of the final result. See Rom. 5:9-10; 8:24; 1 Cor. 5:5; Heb. 1:14; 7:25; 9:28. Hence when our Apostle speaks of what is now given and enjoyed, he discriminates it as “salvation of souls” (1 Pet. 1:9). Otherwise he connects salvation with the full victory of Christ even for the body; which therefore must look on to the future day.

This is entirely confirmed by the context. Here for instance it is a salvation “ready to be revealed.” This is quite characteristic of our apostle. For the truth which runs through the First Epistle in one form, and the Second in another, is the righteous government of God as made known in Christ to the Christian. John is occupied with eternal life in the Son of God; the issue of which will be the Father's house where He is, and we are to be, at His coming to fetch us there (John 14:2-3). 1 John 3:2-3, adds that if it or He is manifested, we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is. The apostle Paul was given, more than any, to make known how the saints are to be changed and caught up to be with the Lord; so as to be brought with Him when that day begins (1 Thess. 3:13; 4:13-17).

Thus Peter points to the revelation of salvation in the day of Christ's appearing; because not till then will be the establishment of the kingdom in power and glory when the earth and the earthly people shall taste its blessed effects. Grace will be shown in the richest way by the Lord's coming to receive us to Himself that we may thus be with Him in the Father's house: all are caught up alike, as the Apostle Paul shows, into the same home of love. But there is no manifestation of righteous government in this; in the revelation to the world there will be in the highest degree. For in His appearing and kingdom each will be seen as having received his own reward according to his own labor. And the Lord, the righteous Judge, will render in that day the crown of righteousness, not to the faithful servant only who was already being “poured out,” but also to all who love His appearing. Then too will Satan be excluded not only from the heavenlies but from the earth. Then will come the world-kingdom of the Lord and His Christ, and not only recompence to the righteous, but destructive retribution to those that destroy the earth (Rev. 11:15).

Peter also lays great stress on the fact that Christ has so completely wrought redemption to God's glory that nothing calls for delay, save the long-suffering of God that is still bringing souls to repentance. Otherwise salvation is “ready” to be revealed “in a last season,” as Christ is “ready to judge living and dead” (1 Pet. 4:5). Both belong to that day of manifestation, when evil shall be put down, and judgment, instead of miscarrying as so often now, shall return to righteousness. Never more shall the throne of wickedness claim fellowship with Jehovah. “For He cometh; for He cometh to judge the earth.” Those who mind earthly things cannot love His appearing, which will establish the new divine order of righteous government wherein Jehovah alone shall be exalted.

1 Peter, 1 Peter 1:6-7

Thus the new life imparted, as abundant as the mercy that begot us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Christ from out of the dead, has a result no less worthy of the God and Father of our Lord. It is for an inheritance incorruptible in itself, undefiled by evil, and unfading in its beauty. It is not on earth as Israel looks for their portion, but reserved in heaven for saints who in their weakness are being guarded in the midst of difficulties and dangers through faith unto salvation, founded on a sacrifice even now accepted, and therefore ready to be revealed, even for the body, in a last season which will manifest the grand purpose of God.

The Apostle now turns to the marked and peculiar characteristic of Christianity which stands contrasted with the hopes of Israel: the co-existence of exceeding joy, whilst passing through keen sorrow of ever so varied kinds. It will not be thus, when Jehovah reigns, the world is stablished that it cannot be moved, and He judges the peoples with equity; when all creation is in harmony, the heavens glad, the earth rejoicing, the sea and its fullness loudly responsive, the field and all that is therein exulting, and the very trees of the wood singing for joy (Psa. 96). While the Lord Jesus abides hidden on high, the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now, though its earnest expectation waits for the revealing of the sons of God (Rom. 8); as their revealing depends on the manifestation of the Lord (Col. 3).

Then, and not before, will come the restitution of all things (Acts 3), when God who sent Jesus the first time for the redemption (by blood) of His heirs will send Him again for redemption (by power) of the inheritance, both heavenly and earthly (Eph. 1:10). Then Zion shall never more taste sorrow or shame; and stiff-necked rebellious Israel shall be meek under Jehovah and David their king, their backsliding healed, themselves loved freely, when He will be as the dew to them (Hos. 3:14), and they in the midst of many peoples as dew from Him, as showers upon the grass, a blessing that tarries not for man nor waits for the sons of men (Mic. 5).

But though by faith we behold Jesus, Who has been made a little lower than angels on account of the suffering of death, for the same reason crowned with glory and honor, now we do not yet see all things subjected to Him, as they will be seen when His world-kingdom comes (Rev. 11:15). Meanwhile sufferings prevail during the present time; and Satan, though known to faith as judged in the cross of Christ, is the ruler of this world, the god of this age blinding the thoughts of the faithless to the end that the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ Who is God's image should not shine forth. Hence the Christian has the part of Christ, rejection and suffering both for righteousness and for His name. “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable” (1 Cor. 15:19). How different from the day when “great shall be the peace of thy (Zion's) children. In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression, for thou shalt not fear; and from terror, for it shall not come near thee.” “Behold, they may gather together, but not by me: whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall because of thee.” “And nations shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising” (Isa. 60:3). “For that nation and kingdom that will not serve Thee shall perish” (Isa. 60:12): “Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself; for Jehovah shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended” (Isa. 60:20).

Undoubtedly these are highly figurative expressions; but they are figures expressive of Israel's blessings in the days of the future kingdom when Jehovah shall be King over all the earth. In that day shall Jehovah be one, and His name one (Zech. 14:9). Then idols of silver and gold shall be consigned to the moles and to the bats (Isa. 2:20). And peoples shall flow to the mountain of Jehovah's house; and many nations shall go and say, “Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah and to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His path; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem. And He shall judge among many peoples and reprove strong nations afar off; and they shall forge their swords into plow-shares, and their spears into pruning-knives: nation shall not rise against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Mic. 4:1-3).

In these scriptures is a true foreshadow of the coming kingdom, but in no sense applicable to the Christian. For he now, though having peace in Christ, shall have tribulation in the world, called to suffer hardship as a good soldier of Christ; he knows, that if we endure, we shall also reign with Him, while wicked men and impostors wax worse and worse deceiving and deceived. As our Apostle says (1 Pet. 2:20), “If when ye do well and suffer, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable (or, grace) with God.” Such is practical Christianity in contrast with the coming kingdom, contradicted alike by the principle and the practice of Christendom. It is therefore the more imperative to dwell on the truth and expose the departure from it for His glory and the walk of faith.

Again we have, in a general application, what the apostle of the Gentiles says of Christian service in the still fuller and more emphatic terms of 2 Cor. 6:4-10. If Paul knew it above measure in his ministry, he like Peter calls on every Christian to be “as sorrowful (or, grieved), yet always rejoicing.”

“Wherein ye exult, now for a little (if it is needful) put to grief in manifold trials, that the proof of your faith, much more precious than gold that perisheth though proved by fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at [the] revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:6-7).

To connect “wherein” with the last season seems poor in comparison with the glorious result generally. It is even misleading, if it be so taken as to deny the Christian's title to exuberant joy even now in the portion God has given us in Christ. Never will there be a work to surpass, yea or to match, what has been already wrought in the cross. Nowhere else such a concentration of what otherwise must be irreconcilable, majesty and humiliation, holiness and mercy, righteousness and sin, love and hatred, Satan apparently victorious but really and forever vanquished, man at his utter worst, God in His fullest grace, Jesus at the lowest point of obedience, yet glorifying God absolutely even as to sin, all issuing for the believer to God's glory in a perfect acceptance and an everlasting deliverance, with the reconciliation of all creation to come. “Wherein ye exult.” What else can we feel through grace? If we believe, we do not wait for the day of sight to participate in this exceeding joy, which breaks forth in thanksgiving and praise. In that day it will without doubt be unmixed with suffering and sorrow. The weakness of the mortal body will be no longer, but incorruption, glory, and power: so thoroughly shall we all be changed at Christ's coming. There is no scripture, no sound reason, however hostile, to deny present exultation as a proper characteristic of the Christian even now; or this, as the precise meaning here intended by the apostle.

But it is accompanied by being “put to grief” as a needed passing trial in God's government, while the exceeding joy may and ought to be habitual. For this rests on accomplished redemption and life in the power of resurrection, on the grace and truth which came through the Saviour. These abide unchanging for our souls, whereas the grief is definite; as the very tenses of the verb and of the participle imply, no less than the facts warrant from which both affections cannot but flow. Hence “now for a little” qualifies of course the aorist participle, and in no way our actual exultation as unbelief in effect would make it. This is still more distinctly taught by the brief clause “if needful,” or “if there is need.” How considerate and good! For the Father of spirits deals thus for our profit to the partaking of His holiness. No discipline at the time seems of joy but of grief; but afterward it yields peaceable fruit of righteousness to those that have been exercised by it. So we read in Hebrews 12:10-11.

Nor is Peter's doctrine really different: “for a little at this time,1 if there is need, put to grief in manifold trials,” or temptations. So triumphantly says Rom. 8:34, It is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather raised, who is too at the right hand of God, who also intercedeth for us: who shall separate us from the love of Christ? tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? These were heavy trials, but by no means all; for indeed they are many and manifold. But if we do not know what we should pray for as is fitting, the Holy Spirit Who dwells in us intercedes according to God Who hears Him; and we do know that all things work together for good to those that love God, to those that are called according to purpose.

Only as Hebrews 12 looks for a good result now, our text points to yet more by-and-by, as it says, “that the proof of your faith, much more precious than of gold that perisheth though proved by fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory in the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Thus the Apostle contemplates the wilderness and our journeying through it. In the type this began for Moses and Israel with a song of exultation; and if Israel failed to continue thus, it is no rule for us, for (or, concerning) whom God foresaw some better thing; and what happened to them is written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come. The worshippers once purged have no longer any conscience of sins; and no wonder. For Christ by one offering has perfected forever—in perpetuity—those sanctified, as Christians are. The wilderness is pre-eminently the scene of temptation. There the heart is put to the proof. All the more needful is it, that in passing through we cherish confidence in God's love to us. There we find by these trials how weak we are, and alas! it may be, careless, light, and unfaithful. We are sifted like Simon Peter, but have the Lord pleading for us as for him that our faith fail not. For this is the desire and aim, that the proof of

our faith might be found to praise.

Note again that praise, honor, and glory are connected with Christ's revelation. His coming to receive and take us to the Father's house is supreme grace; in His revelation will be the appraisal of fidelity and reward accordingly. Both assuredly will be verified; but righteous government is quite distinct from sovereign grace.

1 Peter, 1 Peter 1:8-9

The Apostle explains how it is that the Christian is enabled to exult in the midst of trials ever so severe, yet never allowed but where need calls for them at the present time and for a little while. For assuredly, if God's power acts as a garrison round His saints whilst they pass through the world, it is no less energetic in controlling every hostile influence, whatever be the malicious wiles of the adversary the devil. Hence can we boldly say, we know that all things work together for good to those that love God, to those that are called according to purpose. Yea we glory in the tribulations also, knowing what under God is the blessed result both here and hereafter. All the blessing along the way turns upon having Christ as the object before our souls.

“Whom, having not seen, ye love; in whom, though not now seeing but believing, ye exult with joy unspeakable and glorified (or, full of glory), receiving the end of your faith, salvation of souls” (1 Pet. 1:8-9).

When the kingdom is manifested in power and glory at the revelation of Christ, when Jehovah will punish the host of the high ones on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth, wherewith His sore and great and strong sword He will visit leviathan the fleeing serpent and leviathan the crooked serpent, and will slay the dragon that is in the sea, He will in Zion make unto all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. And there He will swallow up the veil that veils all the peoples and the covering that is spread over all the nations. He will swallow up death in victory. And the Lord Jehovah will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the reproach of His people will He take away from off the earth; for Jehovah hath spoken.

But now there is the contrast which the N. T. everywhere proclaims, as in the opening, and, we shall see, throughout this Epistle; where it was a special aim to instruct the Christian Jews, lest their old Jewish expectation might mingle and lead to disappointment. For we who believe in the rejected but glorified Christ have to do meanwhile with “the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens” (Matt. 13:12), as the Lord told the disciples. “To you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God” (Mark 4:11). As a whole, and in its varied parts, it was a secret for which the chosen people was unprepared, looking mainly for the display of righteousness, when Israel shall blossom and bud, and they shall fill the face of the world with fruit, and Jerusalem shall be called Jehovah's throne, and all the nations shall be gathered there, to the name of Jehovah, to Jerusalem; and as they shall walk no more with stubborn heart, so shall both houses of Israel be gathered in one, and Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim. And no wonder, for Satan shall be bound in the abyss, and Jehovah-Jesus shall be King over all the earth, nor this only but as the Head over all things heavenly as well as earthly.

With the glorious prospect for the universe in ages to come Christianity stands in striking contrast. For the devil, as our Epistle shows (1 Pet. 5:8), walks about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. It is a wilderness world still, instead of blossoming abundantly and rejoicing with joy and song; and the glory of Jehovah is not yet seen, the excellency of our God, as all the earth in that day shall be filled with His glory. The saints are the very souls who are put to grief, as need arises, in manifold trials. At the same time they are entitled to deeper joys than the displayed kingdom can afford. And here, as the fact had been clearly stated according to experience in the light of the truth, the Apostle explains the rich and unfailing source. It is Jesus, the crucified; yet He is not here but risen, yea glorified on high. He is thus the key to all.

“Whom having not seen ye love.” What a difference from the ordinary occasion of human affection, nay more, from the promise to Israel in that day! “Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty” (Isa. 33:17). “Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips. Therefore God hath blessed thee forever... Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of equity is the scepter of Thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows” (Psa. 45:2,6-7). It is not only His reign of beneficence in power and majesty; but at least Jerusalem begins with looking on Him whom they pierced, and mourning as for an only son, a firstborn. Yet appears their Deliverer when their danger is at its extremity, and their bitterest self-reproach is swallowed up in their loving gratitude for Him whose faithfulness to them no evil on their part could overcome.

Good as their portion will be, that of the Christian is far better. And here the Apostle does not even notice the peculiar circumstances of such disciples as beheld the Lord in the days of His flesh. He does not say, “we who saw Him then,” but “ye” as addressing those of the dispersion, just like the bulk who believe the gospel. “Whom having not seen ye love.” Nevertheless it was a vast deal that He had come, the obedient and dependent Man; God's faithful Witness, manifesting the Father, as we read of Him in the Gospels; accomplishing redemption, and now at the right hand of God above. Hence the Lord pronounced the least in the kingdom of the heavens greater than the greatest before it; and the Epistle to the Hebrews says that God provided or foresaw “some better thing for us.”

It must be admitted, as to the words before us, that whatever the love the elders cherished for the coming Messiah, it could not have had that impulse and strength which was given by the power of His infinite grace acting on renewed hearts, as they followed His steps, and hung on His words, and delighted in His ways here below. The Lord could say, “Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see. For I say to you that many prophets and kings desired to see the things that ye behold, and did not see them, and to hear the things that ye hear, and did not hear them” (Luke 10:24). But it is plain that even that wondrous privilege was beneath the mighty accession imported by His death, and resurrection, and ascension, especially when the Holy Spirit was given to apprehend all fully and to bear witness accordingly.

Therefore those who yearn after a Messiah seen on earth know not how much it is to know Him dead, risen, and glorified, even for the deepest profit in tracing His recorded ways on earth. For it is in this light that His every word, step, and act is best understood and enjoyed. There His love shines at its fullest; and we love, because He first loved us, and assuredly love Him beyond all. Now it is in this way that the Apostle could say characteristically, “Whom having not seen ye love.” It is just so the Christian loves Christ. He knows His love, as none before Incarnation could know, and beyond all during His ministry. He knows it in His humiliation, in His suffering unequaled and above all

comparison in His rejection and cross. He begins, though he never saw Him here, with learning its depths, where those who followed Him on earth closed their difficulties, and passed into spiritual understanding, when He was raised from out of the dead. None has such vantage ground for loving the Lord Jesus as the Christian. Even the apostles loved Him all the more when they emerged from Jewish wraps and veils into that state of light and liberty.

The next clause only confirms the superior blessedness of Christianity: “in whom, though not now seeing but believing, ye exult with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” Our Lord has conclusively ruled that believing has a value beyond sight. “Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed they, that have seen not and believed” (John 20:29). It is just the difference between the Jews when their blessing comes, and the Christian yet more blessed morally now; and what will it be then? As heaven is above earth. Hence it is evident that as Christianity deepens love, so it purifies and strengthens faith. The elders in its power obtained witness; but how immensely the scope of faith is enlarged when the secrets of God are no longer hidden but revealed as now to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit!

Well may the Christian then “exult with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” It is so characteristic that our Lord represents its very starting-point in the reception of the prodigal son. For God as such is glorified in that cross of Christ which is its foundation, and He is also as Father in the love of that relationship. “Bring out the best robe and invest him; and put a ring on his hand, and sandals on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it; and let us eat and be merry. For this my son was dead and has come to life, he was lost and is found.” God Himself has His joy in the grace that brings such salvation. What sanction for its object and all that have tasted of like mercy! And as we are called to grow by the knowledge of God and His Son, so also to rejoice in the Lord always, and in everything give thanks. Shame on us if we do not now exult with joy unspeakable and glorified, seeing that in the glory is He on whom our blessedness depends. No doubt we boast in hope of the glory of God; but our best, our perfect, security for it is that He is there, entered as forerunner for us.

In accordance with the exultation to which we are even now entitled, while looking on for its perfection when we are glorified, it is added, “receiving the end of your faith, salvation of souls.” We shall not receive salvation of the body till He comes for whom we wait; but we are not waiting for the salvation of souls. This the gospel announces with all plainness of certainty. Christ has wrought such a work for it that no addition could make it more complete in itself or more efficacious for him that believes. He is not like the earthly priest standing to renew what never could be finished. When He had offered one sacrifice for sins, He in perpetuity (or without a break) sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till His enemies be made the footstool of His feet. Whatever else He may do, He has nothing to do for cleansing the worshipper. For by one offering He has perfected in perpetuity those that are sanctified; His seat there proclaims it.

But we are told by one who denies this present fruit of Christ's work to be here meant, that the word quite forbids the sense of “present realizing,” and in every one of the references it betokens the ultimate reception of glory or condemnation from the Lord. Is this true? The texts are 2 Cor. 5:10, Eph. 6:8, Col. 3:25, 1 Peter 5:4, 2 Peter 2:13; which in fact disprove the strange allegation. For indisputably the first is from its nature only a future scene with which the aorist subjunctive falls in. The second and third not only presuppose that day but are expressly the future tense, like the fourth. The fifth is a future participle, whereas in the contested case of our text it is the participle of the present tense, and the context confirms that it is now. “Joy one cannot speak out and glorified” may be and is pleaded for a future sense. But will it be really so in that day, when perfection is come? When we know as we are known, will utterance fail as now?

“Glorified,” or full of glory, is no doubt an unusual word; yet to attribute this also to a joy too big for our present power of expression seems just to suit the fervor of the Apostle. Christ on high its source might readily clothe the Christians' joy with that character of glory before they themselves are there. Soul-salvation, before our bodies are conformed to the body of His glory, is a worthy end of our faith to receive now; for beyond all controversy the outer man follows the inner, and God never disappoints the believer of his hope. Salvation “of souls” too by its restricted application fittingly lends itself to what the believer receives now; whereas for the future the Apostle does not so qualify “salvation,” as we have already remarked.

1 Peter, 1 Peter 1:10

The concluding verses of the introduction refer to salvation as far as it was originally disclosed to prophets, and now fully presented as glad tidings by the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven, consequent on the sufferings which were to befall Christ and the glories that should follow, while we await that power which will even externally deliver from evil at His appearing. The brief unfolding here given was of extreme moment for the believing remnant whom the Apostle then addressed and all such as might follow. They had little difficulty in apprehending that the Lord in that day will not only accomplish the blessed and joyous prospect for the earth, but for the heavens also. Salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time, comprehends, though it be not limited to, their entering on an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and unfailing, reserved for them on high, whilst they need to be guarded in God's power through faith meanwhile. It is but soul-salvation now, the pledge of what is final, complete, and glorious in that day. The rejection of Christ and His absence on high brought in meanwhile a necessary modification which tests every soul of man, and not least those who had the early and partial revelations of God.

The unbelieving Jews sought to solve the difficulty by the fiction of two Messiahs: one the son of Joseph, of the tribe of Ephraim; the other the son of David, of the tribe of Judah; the first, to contend and suffer death; the second, to conquer and reign gloriously and forever. The Talmud taught it; the later Targum applied it to Song of Sol. 4:5, 7:3; and the Rabbis Solomon Jarchi, Aben Ezra, and D. Kimchi popularized it. Now we know that the Old Testament leaves no conceivable opening for two such personages, but lays the utmost stress on their being different states of the same Anointed of Jehovah. He was indeed the Son of David, not through Mary only as in Luke 3, but legally too through Joseph who was of Solomon's royal stem as in Matt. 1 And, what was of immeasurably deeper importance, He and He only of David's sons was David's Lord, as in Psa. 110:1 cited by Himself to confound the haughty adversaries who doubted and despised Him. The crowd then, and probably their leader, had not yet invented the delusion of a double Messiah; but they left no room for His sufferings, and cared only for His earthly glory as their vested right. Hence when He said (John 12:32), “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all to me” (this He said signifying by what death He was about to die), they answered, “We have heard out of the law that the Christ abideth forever: and how sayest thou, The Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?”

As we shall have more to say, when we look closely into ver. 11, we turn here to examine the details of what precedes in its due order.

“Of which salvation prophets1 that prophesied of the grace that [was] toward you sought out and searched out” (1 Pet. 1:10).

So we learn from Gen. 49:18. “Salvation” was identified with the coming and work of the Messiah. The believers little if at all understood how it was to be; but they had no doubt of the saving grace which would then be manifested. They recognized signal acts of deliverance meanwhile, as in the days of Moses the miraculous passage of the Red Sea; as in the work which Jehovah wrought by Jonathan; and as later still in Jehoshaphat's day, when the sons of Ammon and Moab and those of mount Seir destroyed each other to the relief of Judah whom they had menaced with ruin. But they looked on to the latter day as the goal of their hopes, when Messiah should establish the salvation fully and forever. How clearly it is “grace,” not of works whereof flesh might glory.

Hence in the Psalms we hear as in Psalm 14:7, “Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When Jehovah bringeth back the captivity of His people, then shall Jacob rejoice, Israel shall be glad.” In the second book Psa. 53 similarly concludes, “Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When God bringeth back the captivity of His people, then shall Jacob rejoice, Israel shall be glad.” The times were dark, and growingly darker; but if the godly remnant fall back on what God, Elohim, is when covenant privileges were no longer enjoyed, they anticipate in faith God's scattering the ruined foe, and long for final salvation to come out of Zion as His center, when His people as a whole should return with everlasting joy. It is certain too from Psa. 67 that the Spirit of prophecy, if the written word had been but heeded, regards God's mercy to Israel as His way to extend His “saving health among all nations.” Sovereign grace is not more sure and definite than rich and free. “Let the peoples praise Thee, O God, let all the peoples praise Thee. Oh let the nations be glad and sing for joy! for Thou shalt judge the peoples with equity and govern the nations upon earth.” Nothing can be in more marked contrast with Jewish narrowness. Salvation is neither of prescriptive right, nor of personal merit, but of “grace.” And so will sing in a day yet to come, both the nations, and all Israel that shall be saved.

It is of deep interest to observe that the next Psa. 68, has for its central truth the Lord ascended on high, the mighty conqueror, Who, as He “received gifts in man” (i.e. as such), gave gifts to men. So the Apostle could add, without citing the words which await divine grace in its future activity, “yea, the rebellious also, for the dwelling of Jah Elohim [there].” Alas! the Jews are still rebellious; but the day hastens, when they shall look up and say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of Jehovah; and He will assuredly come with a blessing never to pass away. Their God is the God of salvation; and so they are to prove, when in answer to their cry He rends the heavens and comes down, and all their righteousnesses are as a polluted garment in their eyes, as indeed they are, and He clothes them with the raiment of salvation and praise. But we must refrain from citing more from the book of praises.

None need wonder that the prince of prophets is pre-eminently rich in speaking of salvation so divine. In Isa. 7 which closes the first section of his prophecies, Isaiah predicts that Israel shall say, “Behold, God is my salvation: I will trust and not be afraid; for Jah, Jehovah, is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation. And with joy ye shall draw water out of the wells of salvation.” This follows beyond doubt the introduction of Messiah and His future reign in Isa. 11. In Isa. 25:9 he says when drawing to the end of the next section with various and prolonged thanksgiving, “Behold, this is our God: we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is Jehovah, we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.” So in Isa. 26:1, “We have a strong city: salvation doth He appoint for walls and bulwarks.” In his third section, where the final troubler of Israel is revealed with a “woe” to him, Isa. 33, we have in Isa. 33:2, “Jehovah be gracious to us; we have waited for Thee. Be their arm every morning, yea, our salvation in the time of trouble;” then in Isa. 33:22, “Jehovah is our judge, Jehovah our lawgiver, Jehovah our king; He will save us.” Again in Isa. 35:4, “Be strong, fear not; behold, your God: vengeance cometh, the recompence of God! He will come Himself, and save you.” In the middle or fourth section of history we could not look for more than such a typical reference as Isa. 38:20. But in the fifth where “My servant” appears, we have ample testimony and in forms of great variety beyond the words “save” or “salvation.” He restores, redeems, forms for Himself, pours water and His Spirit upon them, as His witnesses and His servants as He is the God of Israel, the Saviour, “a just God and a Savior; there is none besides me. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth” (Isa. 45:21-22; see also Isa. 45:8,17; Isa. 46:13). In the sixth division, where Messiah comes out fully and His rejection, salvation is still more conspicuous, as in Isa. 49:6,8,25; 51:5,6,8; 52:7. Who can be surprised that discerns the Saviour suffering, and exalted, in Isa. 53 where we have the fullest and clearest witness to Him and His work, though the expression of “save” or salvation there occurs not. But many other words point to that truth and the meritorious and efficacious cause, as in Isa. 53:5,6,8,10-11,12. In the seventh or last part we have its express and abundant mention, as in Isa. 59:1,11,16-17; 60:18; 61:10; 62:1; 64:5.

In Jeremiah it is enough to refer to Jer. 25:20; 33:10-11; 46:27; in Ezek. 34:22; 36:29; 37:23; Hos. 1:7; Zeph. 3:17, 19; Zech. 8:7, 13; 9:16; 10:6; 12:7. Only it would be a mistake to imagine that other prophets did not predict the same thing in other words. See for example Daniel (9:24) who confesses the sins of Israel and pleads the Lord's righteousness and name. Then comes the answer of a definite time, when the transgression should be closed, and an end made of sins, and expiation for iniquity, and everlasting righteousness brought in, and the vision and prophet sealed, and the holy of holies anointed. So it is with others, each in differing forms.

Nothing then can be plainer in result than that prophets predicted concerning the coming salvation, which did not fail for such as believed the gospel, like those to whom the Apostle addressed this Epistle. For what if the mass of the Jews were without faith? Their unbelief did not make of none effect the faith of God. Those who submit to His righteousness in Christ reap the blessing.

Prophets before them, we are told, diligently sought and searched diligently concerning that salvation. Their prophesying did not supersede the need or the profit of sedulous research, but rather stimulated it. No honor in prophesying saved its instruments from seeking and searching earnestly to understand what was given them to predict out of the fullness which is in God. Dependence is and has ever been called for, with confidence in His goodness and His tender consideration of our own ignorance and weakness. But the gift of His word encourages us to wait on Him for understanding it as far as pleases Him. So did inspired men, as we see notably in Daniel, for a case at hand, as well as for what would only be in the time of the end. Nor can any incidental fact more distinctly prove how truly prophecy was not of man's will nor shrewd guess of wit, but of God, Who spoke or wrote by His servant in the Spirit. For he had still to sift it with all diligence to understand what he had thus divinely uttered. Salvation was a rich blessing from God, transcending all that they possessed in gracious privilege and bound up with Messiah's day, which God alone gave prophets to anticipate. But what they prophesied, they needed to weigh and examine deeply to make truly their own, in whatever measure of intelligence that might be.

Let us now consider what is revealed as the object of this research. “Searching what or what sort of time the Spirit of Christ that [was] in them did indicate when testifying beforehand the sufferings that [were] for Christ, and the glories after them” (1 Pet. 1:11).

A mind was at work far beyond that of prophets, yet at work intimately in them; “the Spirit of Christ,” a phrase the more striking because not till long after did the Son become the Christ. But what He was disclosing looked on to that wondrous fact and testified of Him beforehand in that character. It is somewhat as in Heb. 2:17 the Apostle speaks of Him as High Priest, whereas He only became a priest properly when He rose from the dead and went to heaven. This some not perceiving have been led on by the enemy to cast the precious truth of propitiation into the chaos of their own error, which denies to His cross its moral glory, and gives it to a fable.

Be it observed that the language employed is unusually precise. The sufferings are said to be not merely “of” Christ, but “for” Him. They befell Him not simply as a fact, but were appointed unto Him; just as the grace was “to you-ward,” so were the sufferings to “Christ-ward.” Christ is never by Peter used mystically as in 1 Cor. 12:12, but exclusively and strictly in person. Compare especially 1 Pet. 4:1,13.

Nor are we left in doubt what the Spirit of Christ that was in prophets of old did signify, seeing that He testified beforehand, not only the glories of the anointed One Whom all saints awaited, but What at first sight seems beyond measure strong, the sufferings destined for Him which precede. This it was that the astonished disciples were taught by the Lord Himself, both before His death and after His resurrection, and nowhere more clearly than in the Gospel of Luke. “So shall the Son of Man be in His day (i.e. His appearing in glory). But first must He suffer many things and be rejected of this generation” (Luke 17:24-25). Again, when risen He said (Luke 24:26), “Behooved it not the Christ to suffer these things, and to enter His glory? And, beginning from Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself.” Who could wonder that they should afterward say one to another, Was not our heart burning within as He spoke to us on the way and as He opened to us the scriptures? Now that He is gone, His Spirit, the Spirit of truth, is come to guide us into all the truth.

The saints addressed, like all other Christians, come between the sufferings that came unto Christ, and, if not the glory, certainly the greater part of the revealed “glories” that should follow. For it is plain and sure that the magnificent scenes of the last days, times of restitution of all things whereof God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets since time began, await His coming from the heavens to take the earth and all the universe under His direct and manifested sway.

Messiah, ascending as a conqueror on high, was clearly made known in Psa. 67:28, and His receiving gifts as Man, that Jah Elohim might dwell in Israel, still regarded as the rebellious till He make Zion His abode forever. Then, on the one hand, God will smite the head of His enemies; and, on the other, princes shall come out of Egypt: Ethiopia shall haste to stretch out her hands unto God, and the kingdoms of the earth shall sing praises to the Lord. The same great truth is reiterated in Psa. 110—the scripture Christ Himself recited to confound those who denied His divine dignity as David's Lord. Both psalms strikingly pass from His exaltation in heaven to the day of His wrath. Then Jehovah shall send forth the rod of Messiah's strength out of Zion, and He shall rule in the midst of His enemies.

What is being done for His friends meanwhile is developed only in the New Testament generally, as here in particular. Room is left for it in the O. T. It is the grace come to the believing remnant, as to us who believe from among the Gentiles, before the generation to come is born again for the days of the displayed kingdom. Undoubtedly He is received up in glory (1 Tim. 3:16); but this is part of the mystery of piety, there made known by the Apostle of the uncircumcision, and found so largely explained and applied by him in his epistles, as it is used briefly and powerfully in what lies before us (1 Pet. 1:21; 3:22).

But there are “glories” to come, which give object and exercise for that hope which is a bright and large part of the truth, so characteristic of Christianity, and so difficult for a Jew as such to apprehend. Hence one perceives how unpalatable to a rabbi it is to read in Dan. 9:26 that after a definite interval Messiah the Prince was not to come merely, but “should be cut off and have nothing” i.e. of His Messianic rights, which is the true force. It was ruin to the benighted and faithless people; it brought destruction, as the context shows, on the city and the sanctuary. The facts and the prophecy which revealed this and more, they themselves cannot deny. Yet are they still impenitent, unbelieving, unblessed, and disposed to deny a great prophet, who shed light on what and what sort of time the Spirit of Christ was signifying, as was done in various ways.

But those who believe the gospel, Jews or Gentiles, come in according to the new principle of sovereign and indiscriminate grace to save souls. The Saviour, rejected by the Jews as a whole, is gone up on high, not at once to introduce the Kingdom in power and glory as even the apostles at first expected, but to inaugurate the mysteries of the Kingdom, itself a mystery, while He sits at the right hand of glory above. This it was which perplexed prophets of old, and not only the sufferings destined for Him Who might well have seemed the last One to suffer. Yet so said the prophetic word, so testified beforehand the Spirit of Christ that was in prophets: the Servant Righteous beyond all comparison was to be equally the sufferer beyond comparison. Suffering is an enigma to all who believe not what sin is before God; but even to those who did believe of yore, which of them so read the riddle that the Christ was to fathom its depths? For He was to suffer, not only from man because He was faithful to God, but, yet more overwhelmingly as it must beyond controversy be, from God because He was faithful for man, for sinful man! Yet Daniel is equally clear that the people are to be delivered after a time, the last time of distress without parallel, when blessed is he that comes to those days, and the prophet like all the righteous dead shall then stand in his lot, as part of Christ's glories to follow, when He shall reign, not as Son of David only, but with the wide and everlasting dominion of Son of Man.

Long before the prophet of the captivity, the lowly seer of Moresheth-gath, testified (5:1-3) of the Judge of Israel smitten with a rod upon the cheek. Even a Rabbi cannot mistake that He was to be born in Bethlehem, though overlooking on the one side His rejection, and on the other His going forth from of old from everlasting days. Knowing Him not, they in judging Him fulfilled also the voices of the prophets which were read every sabbath. “Therefore will he give them up until the time when she that travaileth hath brought forth.” The birth of the new-born Israel is thus postponed; while Christ sits, rejected by them but exalted by the right hand of God to the blessing of such as Peter was writing to. When that day comes (the prophetic terminus of glory for Israel and the earth), “the residue of His brethren,” instead of being added together now to form the church as on and after Pentecost, “shall return unto the children of Israel.” Then shall He stand and feed them in the strength of Jehovah, in the majesty of the name of Jehovah his God. And, instead of being scattered as now, outside their land, they shall abide: for then shall He be great even to the ends of the earth. And this [Man] shall be Peace. When the last head of a great country, the leader of the outside nations, shall come into the land, it will only be to find power there, not the previous weakness. Then the enemy's land

shall be wasted retributively; and the remnant of Jacob be not only as a dew of blessing in the midst of the peoples, but also as a lion among the beasts of the forest.

Here again was no obscure intimation of the sufferings to come for Christ and of the glories that are to follow them. But seek diligently and search out as they did, no small difficulty remained, even for those who pondered the wonderful words of Isa. 49:1,4-9, 52:13-15, and 53, the most detailed and luminous of all: the sufferings which awaited Messiah, and the glory of His people Israel. But there was also a covert allusion in Isa. 65:1-2, of a time, and a singular sort of time, when God would be found by the heedless Gentiles, and find in Israel a people disobeying and opposing; just as Moses of old predicted (Deut. 32) that God would provoke them to jealousy through a no-nation, and anger them through a nation void of understanding.

But we know that even those who were blessed in seeing and hearing what many prophets and kings desired to see and hear, so little realized our Lord's clear and repeated explanation of His coming death of rejection and ignominy, that they were utterly staggered when it came to pass. “We were hoping,” said two of them no more downcast than others on the resurrection day, “that He it is that was about to redeem Israel.” His sufferings in redeeming by His blood, so far from entering their hearts, were the stumbling-block; whereas, as the Lord assured their troubled souls, this was both the only way consistent with God's character and their moral necessities, and the very truth set out in the scriptures. He must be a suffering and an ascended Christ: as emphatically for the Christian now going to heaven, so for Israel and the nations to be blessed on the earth by-and-by under His reign of glory.

In fact, however, the first prediction in the first book of scripture made known to the instructed ear what prophets searched into, and what the apostle explicitly states here with all clearness of light from Christ dead, risen, exalted, and about to appear in glory. The figurative terms are intelligible and expressive. The woman's Seed (in itself a phrase as gracious as startling and unique) should have His heel bruised, but bruise the serpent's head: a victory over the power of evil complete and final, but not without keen suffering. Again, blessing even for all families of the earth, when idolatry had overspread them, was promised in Abram's seed in Gen. 12; but fuller light came in chap. 22 when the father's only son is seen risen from the dead in the same parable which presented him previously as the lamb God would provide for a burnt offering. Thereon Jehovah's oath which distinguishes, in a way which the apostle Paul gives us to understand, the numerous seed which shall possess the gate of the enemies (as in O. T. prophecy), and the Seed, without any such number attached but “one” only, in Whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed; which Gal. 3 applies to the grace come now to Gentiles no less at the least than to Jews who believed. What a testimony is this to “the sufferings Christ-ward, and the glories after these things"!

The same principle might readily be shown in the history of Joseph, suffering in the pit at the hand of his brethren, and then both sold to Gentiles and consigned, if not to death, to the Gentile prison, but exalted to rule the world, administering its power with the same wisdom that had been manifested in previous humiliation, to the glory of him who sat on the throne. We at least are inexcusable if we cannot clearly discern what prophets may have duly searched. Add to this, that so it was before he made himself known to his guilty brethren whose sins he forgave and life he preserved, no less than for the Egypt-world that he governed. Can one fail to read here another application of our text? Nor would it be difficult to trace a fresh testimony beforehand in the blessing Jacob a-dying pronounced on his sons, yet to be fulfilled, for the good portion at the end of days, if we may not now speak of it all more particularly.

Genesis is not singular in this respect. So it might be shown in the types of Ex. 12 and Ex. 14-15. So too throughout the earlier and the later prophets. The Book of Psalms is quite as rich in the same witness borne beforehand unto Christ. What can be deeper, what more undeniable, than the testimony to His sufferings and His consequent glories in Psa. 22 and 102? These may be the fullest; yet are they but a part of what presents both, in that rich collection which the Lord loved and used so perfectly, and prophets searched not in vain, though at a great interval, in their day.

1 Peter, 1 Peter 1:12

We have next an interesting intimation made as to inquiring prophets, full of importance to us no less than to those the apostle was addressing—

“To whom it was revealed that not to themselves but to you1 they were ministering the very things which have now been announced to you through those that brought you glad tidings by2 [the] Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven; which things angels desire to look into” (1 Pet. 1:12).

There is no distinction more characteristic than the one just brought out. The Holy Spirit wrought in those of old as “the Spirit of prophecy"; and so He will work in days to come, as we learn from Rev. 19:10. Our brethren that have the witness of Jesus at the end of the age, when the final conflicts arise, will know the Spirit's action in a prophetic way, not as the one Spirit who baptized us into one body, the church, and who dwells with and in us individually (John 14:17).

Here we have the contrast drawn. It was revealed to the O. T. prophets that not to themselves but to us they ministered the things announced now to the faithful through the gospel. They prophesied of the privileges now enjoyed. The Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven at Pentecost is not giving a prophetic testimony to Jesus as then. He is as given to the Christian a Spirit of present communion in a way which was not and could not be, till Christ had come and accomplished redemption.

Fully is it admitted that all saints of old were born of God. If not born of water and Spirit, they could not see or enter the kingdom of God, as the Lord told Nicodemus. This was no privilege special to Christianity, as some shortsighted men conceive. It is indispensable for that kingdom of God in which shall come many from east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, as well as with the elders before them, and prophets and saints after them. Flesh and blood cannot inherit God's kingdom, nor does corruption inherit incorruption. But all the children of God without exception will have their part in it, as they that are Christ's are raised at His coming.

The saints of old, before He came in flesh and suffered as He did once for sins, could not have more than the Spirit of prophecy. And it appears from the Revelation, that so it will be again during the Apocalyptic crisis, when the heavenly saints are seen on high, and Jewish and Gentile saints will be separately called to bear witness on earth in the tribulation to come. All that is revealed of them in those trying scenes points to a distinct testimony and experience, resembling substantially that of the elders who had witness borne to their faith and through it,

but with the faith and witness of Jesus too, as far as it is given them. They will look for His coming in His kingdom. But nothing indicates the possession of those privileges, individual and corporate, which we now enjoy through the Holy Spirit given to us.

They will not know that their bodies are Christ's members (1 Cor. 6), and that they are a living God's temple (2 Cor. 6); nor will it be theirs to say that they have put on Christ, in whom they are all one, and there can be neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, nor male and female, but who as being sons have the Spirit of God's Son sent into their hearts crying, Abba, Father (Gal. 3:4). It would be language beyond their intelligence to hear of the glory of His grace which God freely bestowed on them, in the Beloved, still more to be the fullness of Him that fills all in all (Eph. 1:23). Nor could they, as Paul exhorted the Colossian saints, give thanks to the Father who qualified them for their share in the inheritance of the saints in light, who rescued them from the power of darkness and translated them into the kingdom of the Son of His love. They in faith long for the glorious future He will establish, but they fast and groan in the present. The two witnesses prophesy (not, preach grace) in sackcloth, but with power to devour their enemies with fire, killing those who would hurt them, power to shut heaven, and over the waters, and to smite the earth, till their hour is come ere finishing their testimony. Symbolic and figurative no doubt, but symbols and figures of a state wholly foreign to that of the Christian and the church.

Far different is your position, says the Apostle, who have not only the prophetic testimony of old, but had glad tidings brought to you by the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven. Even the babes of the family have an unction from the Holy One and know all things (1 John 2:20); they know the Father, as well as their sins forgiven for the name's sake of Christ. The Christian dwells in God and God in him: what greater blessedness can there now be? He is sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, Who is the earnest of our inheritance. We are children of God, kings and priests. We are Christ's body, and bride. We are heavenly in title and about to bear the image of the Heavenly at His coming. What precious, holy, or glorious privilege is withheld from us? In short, as another apostle says, “all things are yours;” not that ye in yourselves are anything, but that Christ is the whole sum and substance of blessedness. “All things are yours. Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present or things to come, all are yours; and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.” What a circle, and what a center!

How wondrous it is that the rejection of Christ which would prove the Jews returned from Babylon worse than their fathers banished there and elsewhere for their idolatry, as Isaiah and others foretold, is made by God's grace in the cross the turning-point of all blessing! It is the righteousness of God. Receiving it by faith now (while the people generally are as unbelieving as the nations generally) the remnant according to the election of grace enters into better blessings than if He had been received in the display of His Kingdom. For thus only in divine wisdom could these exceeding privileges be the portion of believers on earth with the further privilege of suffering, not only for righteousness but for His name. Truly, as the Epistle to the Hebrews says (Heb. 11:40), God provided, or foresaw, “some better thing” concerning us.

It is the interval after propitiation was made, Christ meanwhile exalted at God's right hand, and the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven, which gives occasion and ground for the special privileges of the Christian, and of the church as well as of the gospel. The Messiah had been cut off and had nothing (i.e. of His Messianic glory on Zion and over all the earth); but He was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father for another and higher glory; and by-and-by He will appear for the promised glory. Christianity comes in between.

Thus the joys of communion as well as peace in Christ are tested fully. Also love has the freest scope, in the endurance of suffering for good rather than evil, and in earnest service both in the church and in the gospel. And hope again acquires its highest character, no less than spiritual understanding in our waiting for Christ's coming and the glory to be revealed in the last time. The new blessedness is so rich and peculiar, that the Holy Spirit, besides illuminating the ancient oracles of God, was about to indite another divine volume, and expressly in the leading tongue of the Gentiles of which this Epistle forms a part. It is written in Greek, not in Hebrew, even when addressed to believing Jews or to the twelve tribes of Israel. Nothing short of this would set forth the new things adequately, beginning with Christ's advent and atoning death, and closing with that great prophecy, which, while it crowns all the predictions, fitly concludes the entire revelation of God.

Who can wonder that the verse ends with “which things angels desire to look into.” Angels were upheld by the Son. They were enabled to keep their first estate. They did not need redemption like guilty man. But they were permitted, not only to shout for joy when the corner stone was laid in founding the earth, but in the multitude of the heavenly host to praise God at the birth of the Saviour, and say, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good pleasure in men. It was not that they doubted; but what wonder and awe, yet eagerness withal, must have filled them as they bent down to apprehend what His sufferings meant, and indeed His humiliation at large, and the glories after these! Oh, what lessons to learn of God in men, and above all in that one Man Who best proved the divine complacency in mankind!

1 Peter, 1 Peter 1:13

Exhortation here begins, founded on the preceding verses. Now that Christ is come, and gone to heaven, having borne our sins, the believing Jews were objects of rich and sure blessing, far beyond what their fathers enjoyed before the law or since.

The glory is not manifested on earth as the prophets predicted, but this will have actual accomplishment in a new age. There is now an intermediate state for saints on earth before that new age: faith, love, and hope have their fullest exercise, after the sufferings destined for Christ were closed, while He is received up in glory. It is therefore before the revelation of His other glories to all the earth and indeed the universe. Our life is hid in God; but when He is manifested, so shall we be with Him in glory. The glories after His sufferings are not therefore complete, but in a large measure await His appearing at the end of the age.

Yet the glory in which He sits already at God's right hand has a momentous bearing on the soul individually and on the church as a body. Hence even now we exult with joy unspeakable and full of glory; for Christ, its spring, is glorified and we expect to be, now receiving the end of faith, salvation of souls, but not yet that of our bodies. Meanwhile we have for our profit, not only what prophets of old testified beforehand, but the still fuller light of truth announced since Christ by apostles and others, who evangelized in the power of the Spirit sent forth from heaven, as Father and Son alike promised. This is Christianity, not promise but accomplishment of redemption by Christ's work, and, as shown elsewhere, for Gentile believers as much as Jewish, though these only are addressed here by the Apostle appropriately to this message.

“Wherefore, having girded up the loins of your mind, being sober, hope perfectly for the grace that is to be brought to you at Jesus Christ's revelation (1 Pet. 1:13).

The allusion in the opening clause is evidently to their forefathers at the first passover: a memorial to them, a feast to Jehovah to be kept by an ordinance forever. “Thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand.” Could words or acts more graphically give us the living picture of a people screened from divine judgment, and leaving in haste the house of bondage for a land flowing with milk and honey? The Lord in Luke 12:35 employed the same figure, with others, to impress on His disciples their pilgrim character in waiting for His coming: in no taking their ease, but constant readiness to do His will earnestly, as was meant by their loins girt about. On occasions of active exertion the garments, instead of being allowed to flow loosely, were tucked up, that the work might be done without impediment. So would He now have our hearts engaged without wandering affections or distraction of mind. The blessing is assured to our faith; we love Him Who first loved us, and He with a love above all measure; whilst the prospect before us is glorious beyond all comparison.

The Apostle's phrase “the loins of your mind” renders inexcusable the notion of such fathers as interpreted it of chastity; for this would require another expression of quite distinct form. It seems strange that Calvin should characterize a turn so unintelligent in itself, and unsuitable to the context, as philosophizing refinedly about the loins. It is a wholly baseless importation of prurient ideas, natural perhaps to those who piqued themselves on a fair show in the flesh, which soon betrays its hollowness by falling into all manner of uncleanness. He himself however had no doubt of its quite different meaning, in the disentanglement of the Christian from all hindrance to devotedness.

There is another term which immediately follows, of great practical moment, “being sober.” It is expressly from its form a continuous habit; which is the more emphatic, because the form of the phrase before, with which we have been occupied, implies no less precisely the act done and settled; and such is the force of the hope which immediately follows. They had once for all girt up the loins of their mind; their hope was set with equal decision upon the grace to be brought to them at Christ's appearing. The nature of the case called for and explained these being accomplished facts in their souls. But the sobriety in question calls for unceasing diligence.

For there is much in the gospel and in the truth now fully revealed, which might naturally lead to the utmost enthusiasm. We see how it affected outside observers on the day of the church's birth. All were amazed and in perplexity when they heard Galileans speaking in the various tongues of the Gentiles the great things of God. Some mocking said, They are full of new wine. Apart from the striking phenomenon of grace which was thus ungraciously maligned, how much there is in Christianity if realized to fill the heart and lips to overflowing. Even the eminently wise Paul could say, “whether we are beside ourselves, it is to God; or we are sober, it is for you” (2 Cor. 5:13). Here no doubt it is the kindred thought of discretion that is expressed; but it is at bottom the same truth. Before God and to Him, the heart may rightly go forth in ecstasy; but when we think of men and even the saints, a more guarded feeling is well on our part.

Hence the same apostle exhorts the saints that were in Ephesus to guard against exciting causes. “Be not drunk with wine whereby is dissoluteness, but be filled with the Spirit.” Where He becomes the source and power of all within us, acts outward should be according to God's mind. Our singing even is meant to be so characterized that it may please Him Whom we praise, in no way carried away by sweet sound, but with the spirit and with the understanding also.

Hence then “being sober” is laid on us as a continuous duty. It is a figure naturally drawn, as all admit, from keeping clear of all intoxication, which for the Christian means the avoidance of everything apt to excite the flesh or spirit. Young Thessalonian believers are thus exhorted, “So then let us not sleep as do the rest, but let us watch, and be sober [the same word as here]. For they that sleep, sleep by night, and they that drink, drink by night; but let us, being of the day, be sober, having put on a breastplate of faith and love, and hope of salvation as helmet.” In 1 Peter 4:7 the word, in view of the end of all things having drawn nigh, is “Be of sound mind therefore, and be sober unto prayers.” (So also in 1 Pet. 5:8). Here it is not constant habit that is involved in the form of the phrase, but the soul's attitude due to so solemn a fact. Both appeals have their importance. The call in our 1 Pet. 1:13 is grounded on known redemption as our portion, whilst we journey through a wilderness world, with an expectation worthy of what God has already given us in Christ.

Of this he proceeds to speak in the next words, “hope perfectly for the grace that is to be brought to you at Jesus Christ's revelation.” One cannot doubt that it is the glory about to be revealed unto us, as it is put in the Epistle to the Romans (Rom. 8:18-19), the revelation of the sons of God. Nor does our Apostle treat of anything beyond that supreme bliss, which he describes as “the grace that is to be brought” in that day. For he does not open out, as Paul did in 1 Thess. 4, the preliminary stage and the special action of the Lord, in Himself descending from heaven with that shout which shall assemble His own whether dead or alive to meet Him in the air. Our Epistle dwells on the manifestation of the saints with Christ in glory without telling us how the wondrous issue effected.

It is so intrinsically blessed, and so efficacious even now for the well-being of the soul, that he bids the saints “hope perfectly” for the grace to be brought then and thus. “To the end,” as in the A. V. and so understood by many, seems short of what is intended by the adverb; nor does any sufficient reason appear to make us swerve from the simple meaning. It is likely that translators shrank from connecting perfection with a hope which too often fluctuates, if it be not also rather indefinite and feeble. They took it as “to the end.”

But it is the aim of the Spirit apparently to reveal it in its power, grandeur, and blessedness, so that the coming glory should be regarded as part of that grace which we have known in Christ's death and resurrection for our souls, and the rest we are awaiting for our bodies. Then indeed we shall be conformed to the image of God's Son, the Firstborn among many brethren. The grace that is to be brought in that day is a meet object for our hope to have once for all and perfectly; just as in Heb. 10 we are now called to approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, sprinkled as to our hearts from a wicked conscience, and washed as to our body with pure water. For the veil is rent; and we who believe have boldness to enter into the holies by the blood of Jesus. It may be that none of those addressed by Peter did “perfectly” hope for that grace to come, as sure as the grace which had already appeared; but the aim of this scripture was to invite, yea, to urge it. Why should the saints not cherish the hope fully and without a waver? He Who has promised will assuredly perform. Let us treat all shortcoming in hope as a wrong done to His grace and truth.

It may seem strange that our Apostle writes here of the grace to be brought at Christ's revelation only to those who now believe. Prophets do speak of this, as may be seen with especial plainness in Isa. 8:13-18. To this throughout is the Epistle directed, rather than to the far more common witness which prophecy bears to the manifest and wide-spread blessing when Christ comes in His kingdom with power and glory. Then all Israel shall be saved; and their receiving and fullness shall be “life from the dead” to the world at large. But this would not have been meat in due season to the believing remnant whom Peter here addresses. Hence he stops short of any development on that head which fills

the prophets, and he dwells simply on their own Christian portion at the revelation of Christ. This is what they needed, and what the Holy Spirit gave him to minister. Compare the preceding ver. 4. What will be by-and-by for Israel and the nations on earth the prophets fully declare from Isaiah (we might add from Moses) to Malachi.

1 Peter, 1 Peter 1:14-16

“So great salvation” calls for earnest decision and sobriety, brightened as it is by a perfect hope which puts not to shame. But next the apostle insists on a quality of the new life we have in Christ which is as indispensable for the saint, as it is due to God.

“As children of obedience, not conformed to the former lusts in your ignorance, but according to the Holy One that called you, be ye also holy in every [part of] conduct, because it is written, Holy ye shall be, because I [am] holy” (1 Pet. 1:14-16).

The Christian is characterized as a child of obedience. This is far more energetic than the “obedient children” of the A.V. which rightly speaks of men in their unrenewed state as the children (or rather sons) of disobedience (Eph. 2:2, Col. 3:6). It is the habitual bent of fallen nature to disobey God. Now on the contrary, when sanctified by the Spirit, we are for obedience, childlike obedience, as we see its perfection in our Lord Jesus. As He is our pattern as well as life, it is to His obedience we are livingly set apart, no less than to the sprinkling of His blood. Quickened by the faith of Christ, we are neither left to ourselves like the Gentiles, nor set under the law as the Jews; but are subject to Christ and His word as the perfect law of liberty; even as it was His meat to do the will of Him that sent Him.

Here it was of the more consequence to express this, as the apostle was addressing such of the circumcision who believed. Re-action is a danger. They might have slipped into the delusion that all direction was gone because the law was; a mere negation for those delivered from the bondage of the law. But Christ freed from law only to lead into a constant obedience far deeper and more comprehensive. So in Romans 8 the apostle taught the saints in Rome, Jewish or Gentile, that if the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus (which is our law) set free from the law of sin and death (against which Israel and man vainly strove), it is through redemption that the law's righteous requirement ( ) might be fulfilled in us who walk not according to flesh but according to Spirit. And this walk is solely one of obedience. We are not our own but bought with a price, and what a price! Glorify God then in your body. We are the Lord's freedmen, had we been slaves; we are Christ's bondmen, had we been freest of the free. The Christian denies his Master and his standing, if he claim independence of His authority and His word. The more he knows his privileges, the greater is his obligation to obey. He was once, Jew or Gentile, a son of disobedience; he is now a child of obedience; let him be consistent as such. “If therefore the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” The Apostle John only confirms and completes Paul and Peter.

Such then is the great governing principle; and so it must be, unless God's children are to have an unnatural independence, yea mastery, of God Himself, and thus subvert the highest of all rights. But it is of moment also to beware of old habits, which may not be weighed sufficiently when the Christian relationship is new, and which are apt to re-assert their evil influence when the truth has no longer the fresh power over the soul which the ungrieved Spirit maintains. Hence it is here added, “not conformed to the former lusts in your ignorance.” When the True Light was unseen, the heart's ignorance of God was extreme. Here it is no comparison of Jews with heathen, but their real state pointed out as before Him, when divine love was as unknown as light. How rank was the growth of lusts in that ignorance! They were now the more to beware of being conformed to what dishonored Christ, being themselves begotten of His God and Father unto a living hope. If God's power alone keeps, it is through faith, which implies the heart simple and subject to His word. Those who are still passing through the wilderness need to be on their guard, vigilant, and self-judging.

Another consideration follows and lifts the eyes yet higher. “But according to the Holy One that called you, be ye too holy in every [part of] conduct.” Holy is He that called them out of darkness unto His marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9). Holy is He that called them by His grace unto His eternal glory in Christ Jesus (1 Pet. 5:10). He is just the same every step of the dangerous journey they were meanwhile treading. They were even now in the nearest relation to Him as objects of His love, and after a sort which was only shadowed by His people of old. Then it was national and after a fleshly and temporal sort, though individual faith pierced through to the Coming One and to things better and enduring. Now it was distinctly personal in character and everlasting. For the people and the land and the world Jesus was the rejected Christ; higher and larger glories came into view, grace fuller and more intimate. “He calleth His own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. When He hath put forth His own, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him; for they know His voice.” The highest in earthly position might claim or call away; but such are strangers to those that have heard the voice of the rejected Christ. “And a stranger will they not follow; for they know not the voice of strangers.” Can one wonder? He is the door that opens into every blessing. By Me (said He) if any one enter, he shall be saved, and shall go in and shall go out, and shall find pasture. Who but He can truly say, I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly? It is now in the power of His resurrection (1 Peter 1:3). If He that called them is holy, how essential it is that they should cherish the same character of separateness from evil to Himself, and this without stint or limit? “Be ye too holy in every part of conduct."1

Was this an unheard of requirement on God's part? Far from it. When as Jehovah He governed a people after the flesh, even so it could not be otherwise: “Because it is written, Holy ye shall be, because I am holy.” The Apostle cites Lev. 11:44: see also Lev. 19:2; 20:7,26. Without doubt, as we read in Heb. 9:10, the Levitical system consisted only of meats and drinks and divers washings, ordinances of flesh imposed until a time of rectification. Christ brought in His person grace and truth, and redemption enables us to walk accordingly in the Spirit. It is now the children, not of the fathers, but of God the Father, whose standing is not in flesh, but in Christ. The holiness rises according to the place and relationship.

If the principle in itself is invariable, the character of the holiness is akin and proportionate to the blessing conferred. As there is no bound to the grace and truth received in receiving Christ, so is the holiness suited to the Holy One revealed in the Son of God. God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. And Christ is the light, not of Jews only but of the world. Hence he that followeth Him shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. The natural man, no matter how intelligent, never rises to this; if he profess Christianity, as he may and often does, it is unreal. “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth.” The believer alone has reality in Christ, whence is the contrast: “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light [and there every true Christian does walk], we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from every sin.”

We all know how often it is argued that this is a condition. Who doubts this of “If we walk,” &c.? But what most who so talk overlook is that it is the condition of being a Christian, not in name only but in deed and truth. The Apostle John in no way means of some real saints compared with others. It is the condition of such as are born of God. It is the unquestionable privilege of all the faithful who follow Christ, unless it be pretended that any faithful souls do not follow Him. It is not a question of walking according to the light which admits of different degrees, but of walking in it, which belongs alike to all who were once darkness but are now light in the Lord. They are therefore exhorted to walk as children of light. But John expresses the necessary condition assumed: if we walk in the light as God is in the light (true of every real follower of the Lord Jesus), then have we these other privileges. For all now go together, as the gift of divine grace: we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus cleanseth us from every sin. They are the constant enjoyment of all that walk in the light, as necessarily do all that are Christ's.

So too in this Epistle of Peter the exhortation to be holy is addressed to all. If all were alike sanctified of the Spirit in principle, as we have seen in 1 Pet. 1:2, all are in 1 Pet. 1:15 enjoined to be holy, because the God that called them is holy. Here it is holiness in practice, without which (as Heb. 12:14 solemnly assures) no one shall see the Lord. If ye live after the flesh, ye are about to die (Rom. 8:13). Know ye not that unrighteous men shall not inherit God's kingdom (1 Cor. 6:9)? He that soweth to his own flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption (Gal. 6:8). We need not surely quote more of these grave warnings.

It is well to guard against the misuse of this text and others, as if God's word gave apparent support to the heterodoxy of perfection in the flesh, otherwise styled sinless sanctification, whether taught by A'Kempis and other Romanists, by Jer. Taylor and W. Law, by J. Wesley and his followers, or by the American school of so-called higher holiness, with its modifications in Great Britain since it got discredited. Nothing can be plainer than that scripture urges God's people, or as we now say His children, to be holy, because He is. It is a call addressed to all. The false deduction is of a state attained by special faith in some. And this has led J. W., if my memory serves aright, to misquote, “holy as God is holy.” What is written is the reason God lays down: He requires practical consistency with Himself in those that are His. Nothing can be more certain, becoming, and necessary. But to be holy as He is holy is in any case mistaken, and liable to most presumptuous thoughts if not blasphemous error.

Possibly what was running in the good man's head was our Lord's injunction in Matt. 5:48: “Be ye therefore perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” But this text has no real connection with the aim for which it is produced. For our Lord simply insists on the grace toward evil men which His disciples are to cultivate, after the pattern. of their heavenly Father, Whose sun is made to rise on evil and good, and Who sends rain on just and unjust. What has this to do with the question of the old man in believers? There is power in the Spirit given to us against every ill; but this assertion is very distinct from the assumption that sin is extinct and gone from any saint on earth. It ought never to be allowed to act.

1 Peter, 1 Peter 1:18-19

The fear in which the saints were urged to pass the time of their sojourn is the farthest possible from that doubt as to their souls and distrust of God's grace, which go together if they be not the two sides of the same unbelief that leaves Christ out as revealed in the gospel. Such a dread is wholly excluded by the words which follow, as they ground the inculcated fear on the comforting and assured fact of having been redeemed, and redeemed by that which is of all things the most precious to God, and the most efficacious for sinners.

“Knowing that not by corruptibles, silver or gold, ye were redeemed, from your vain course ancestrally handed down, but by precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless” (vers. 18, 19).

Jewish believers ought to have been familiar with redemption. In its earthly and temporal shape it is the central truth of the book of Exodus; wherein their bitter bondage and oppression forms the beginning; and God dwelling in the tabernacle in their midst, founded on that redemption, is the close. But they also came under the law, which Israel then undertook to obey. They thus let slip the promises to the fathers, and slighted the grace just shown to themselves from the Red Sea all the way to Sinai. This was fatal; not because the law was not good, but because they were weak and ungodly, sinners and enemies, as another apostle describes man's natural state (Rom. 5). To such, no matter what long-suffering and goodness may be shown, the law must prove a ministration of death and condemnation, And so it was to the elect nation, which blindly and self-righteously offered to stand on legal conditions.

Now it is by grace that any have been or can be saved, and therefore through faith. This was attested to their fathers, as plainly as any shadows could convey it, in the combined type of Jehovah's Passover and Israel's passage of the Red Sea. The blood of the lamb sprinkled on the door-posts and upper lintel of each house expressed in that figure the sacrifice of Christ (1 Cor. 5). This alone could perfectly meet His moral judgment and not only screen a people justly exposed to it, but give them there and then to feast on the lamb's body. With bitter herbs they were to eat; for repentance toward God must accompany the faith that He would see the blood that night and pass over all within the sprinkled doors; also with loins girded, shoes on feet, and staff in hand, as pilgrims henceforth turning their back on Egypt for Canaan, but meanwhile crossing the desert. But there was a great supplement—the passage of the Red Sea; which in figure joins the resurrection to the death of the Lord Jesus for us. Here it was divine power righteously exercised on behalf of His people, impossible without the Victim's blood, but now annulling the enemy's power, and entitling them to sing as delivered, Jehovah too no longer as a judge shut out, but leading and fighting for them victoriously. Christ was not only a propitiatory through faith in His blood, but given up for our offenses and raised for our justification. It is God for us (Rom. 8) but by Christ, Who gave Himself for our sins to take us out from the present evil age. We are thereby brought to God not yet to heaven though made meet for it, as Col. 1:12 declares.

It is of this redemption Peter speaks when he tells the saints that they “were redeemed,” and that they knew it consciously (). It was no longer a simply objective fact: this they had at first to apprehend by faith; it was now part of their inward realization by the Holy Spirit. And the Epistle to the Hebrews (9:12) characterizes it, in contrast with the foregoing pattern, as “everlasting redemption.” An eternally divine Person was needed, as He deigned to become incarnate, in order by His atoning death to obtain it; and having obtained it, He entered once for all into the heavenly sanctuary where we know Him now on high. Redemption is therefore an accomplished standing of rich and immediate consequence to God Who is glorified by it, and to the believer; and of his acceptance, not Christ's resurrection only is the guarantee but His session at God's right hand above.

There is another and future application of divine power which is called redemption, as in Rom. 8 for “our body” when raised or changed at Christ's coming (1 Cor. 15:23); so too of the acquired possession, “our inheritance” (Eph. 1:14, cf. Rom. 8:19-22). But this power of His glory is also founded on His work as well as His person. The same principle applies to its very frequent use in the Psalms and Prophets to the future deliverance of Israel for His kingdom on earth. See Psa. 103:4; 106:10; 107:2; Isa. 35:9, &c., 41:14, &c., 43:1, 44:22, 23, 48:20, 52:9, 63:9. Another word also conveys it, as in Isa. 1:27; 29:22; 35:10; 51:11., Jer. 15:21; 31:11; Hos. 13:14; Mic. 6:4; Zech. 10:8. All however rests on His blood-shedding. The return from Babylon was an outward sample and pledge.

True redemption was no mere release by creature means, such as the children of Israel knew, when every man in the numbering of them had to give a ransom for himself as a living man to Jehovah, “that there might be no plague among them.” Here it was no question of sins or sacrifice but of a ransom for his life against plague. Accordingly the principle established was a sacred half-shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary. The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than the half shekel when they give the heave-offering of Jehovah to make atonement for your souls” (Ex. 30:15).1 This was a beautiful token that each of the people, all alike, belonged to Jehovah their Divine Guardian and Governor. But in presence of Christ and His redemption already possessed, even silver that shadowed grace or gold that represented divine righteousness, were but “corruptibles,” fading away before the glory that both surpasses and abides (2 Cor. 3:9-11).

It is worthy of remark, that the saints are here said to be redeemed, among its manifold and wondrous results, from their vain course, or mode of life, handed down from their fathers. Language so precise to describe, not Gentile idolaters, but the Jews since the Maccabees in their tenacity of tradition from father to son, it is hard to conceive. Of old before the Babylonish captivity, kings, priests, people, ran a race after the abominations of the heathen. But this hateful lusting after strange gods they learned to abjure; and even Antiochus IV. (Epiphanes) could only impose his profane Hellenizing of Jerusalem and the Jews for a measured space by treachery and violence, by pillage and massacre. Our Lord Himself formally charged even the more orthodox and learned among them with neutralizing the most solemn duties of the law on its human side, and thus the word of God, because of the tradition of the elders. It made them “hypocrites.” “In vain do they worship me” (citing Isa. 29:13); a prophecy which embraces their final trouble but deliverance when at the lowest, as well as their sinfully blind state, that brought them so low, about to pass away forever at the end of the age.

Can there be a more authoritative comment on the apostle's description of their state before they were redeemed? Their manner of life, even in its religious aspect, had neither purpose nor result. No doubt this might well be said of Paganism, which was wholly a lie with demons behind it; but how emphatic when applied truly to men confident of being a guide of the blind, a light of those in darkness! Only among Jews had the early fathers a claim from God. But this was for His promises, not for any such tradition of theirs, as the sons imagined. For the truth, “one is your Father, who is in heaven” said the Lord to the disciples. Fore-fathers, of whom scripture gave a reliable and sad account, were their trust, not the living God. They were guilty, because only they knew those sure and unambiguous oracles; but the heathen knew them not, and filled the void with the deceptive myths of poets. Gentile religion, like their wisdom, did not come down from above, but was earthly, natural, and demoniacal. What a contrast with ours which has its center in Christ and its basis in His redemption, its glorying in God, its charter in His word, and its power in the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven!

Accordingly the redemption is here said to be “by precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless.” The order of the Greek, which some prefer in English also, is “by precious blood as of a lamb..., Christ,” followed closely by “fore-known” &c. in ver. 22. The truth in substance remains the same. Christ's blood is of all things precious. “Without shedding of blood is no remission “; by His blood our conscience is purged from dead works to serve the living God (Heb. 9:10). Not only are believers redeemed by it, as here; but it is everlasting redemption, as we have seen. In Christ we have redemption through it, not yet of the body, but the remission of offenses (Eph. 1:7). Nor was there forgiveness only but peace through the blood of His cross (Col. 1:20), and justification in virtue of it (Rom. 5:9). For indeed as He loves us, so He washed us from our sins in His blood (Rev. 1:6). As we now drink the cup of the new covenant in His blood, so in heaven the new song is of the Lamb slain Who bought to God by His blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation. Is it not indeed precious blood?

The allusion is plain in “as of a lamb unblemished and spotless.” It may well be to the paschal lamb of which we have spoken. They had too the burnt-offering of the morning, and especially perhaps the evening lamb, offered between the evenings, day by day continually. It was at the door of the tent of meeting before Jehovah, “where I will meet with you, to speak there unto thee [the mediator]. And there I will meet with the children of Israel; and it [the tent] shall be sanctified by my glory.” So it stands in Ex. 29:38-46, the book of redemption. Thus only could Jehovah dwell in their midst. Hence we can measure the daring that takes away from the Prince of the host the “daily” or continual offering (Dan. 8); for it was the exclusion of the visible link of acceptance between God and His people on earth: a more impious affront than any political oppression of His people.

For the Christian the sanctuary is on high. “For Christ is not entered into holies made by hands, figures of the true, but into heaven itself now to appear before the face of God for us” (Heb. 9:24); and there He entered once for all by His own blood (12). “For such a high priest became us, holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and become higher than the heavens” (Heb. 7:26).

1 Peter, 1 Peter 1:20-21

The apostle next treats of the comforting truth, in order to establish the saint, that however new to them the gospel might be, it was all settled in God's mind and counsel before man fell, yea before creation. Redemption was no remedial afterthought, though of course implied in the sentence of Jehovah Elohim on the serpent in paradise, and shadowed in sacrifice ever after.

Hence we here read of Christ, “foreknown1 indeed before [the] world's foundation, but manifested at [the] last of the times for your sake, that through him believe on God that raised him out of [the] dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God” (vers. 20, 21). All the older English versions, save that of Rheims, add “who was” foreknown. But the absence of the article forbids this. It is assumed rather than asserted.

Such language is never employed about the divine dealings with Israel. Rich and large as are the promises to the fathers, they never go back into eternity as here. Men may reason in an abstract manner on prescience and omniscience; but the fact is plain, that God did not speak to

the fathers nor through the prophets of blessings before the world's foundation. They were made in time, however enduring they may be.

Here we learn that which transcends the promises. Late in manifestation, Christ as God's Lamb was foreknown before creation. The gift of His Son to suffer and redeem was ever in the mind of God. He knew what the creature would be if put to proof, and that none could stand save those upheld by the word of His power. Meanwhile every means to instruct and to direct, to cheer and to restrain, to warn and to alarm, was tried; and this formally and fully in Israel separated from the nations for God's grand moral and religious experiment, vain as it must prove. God showed all along how thoroughly He knew the end from the beginning, though they believed it not, seeking to make their own righteousness out of that law which was meant to prove the impossibility. For through law is the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20), as salvation is only through the faith of the Savior.

“Foreknown” could not suffice. Christ was “manifested” in due time; and the due time was “at close of the times.” Long had been God's patience; manifold His dealings in moral government, if by any means there might be fruit from man for His acceptance. But the fall, though in one man, was of the race; and the sample of the race under the special care of God proved the tree to be worthless, producing therefore bad fruit. If any one could have been conceived to change the result, it was the Lord Jesus, the Messiah of Israel and the Son of God. When He was sent, as He Himself puts it, the husbandmen said among themselves, This is the Heir: come, let us kill Him, and seize on His inheritance. And they caught and cast Him out of the vineyard and slew Him. But in Christ's rejection on the cross God made Him that knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become God's righteousness in Him. For therein only was God glorified as to sin. The Son of man bore His judgment of evil, as He had already glorified His Father in the unfaltering obedience of a life devoted to do His will. Hence as it was God's righteousness to raise Jesus from the dead and give Him glory at His right hand, so it is to justify every one who believes in Jesus.

It is accordingly written “manifested at the last (or, the end) of the times for your sake.” The most ancient and best MSS. (ABC), many good cursives, and old versions give this sense; not “at the last time” according to earlier editors. It is similar in force to Heb. 1:1. where the form is “at the last of these days.” In fact the gospel was sent out to Jew first, and to Greek. Among those who believed, the dispersed Jews to whom the apostles wrote received it as God's power unto salvation. When boasting is excluded, and ought to be silenced, God speaks, and speaks in love to all; for all are lost sinners. When we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for ungodly men. Such as owned their guilt and ruin before God cast themselves on Christ and His precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless. Nothing else could meet adequately either God or man. And as these believing Jews submitted to the righteousness of God, they became entitled to the blessing of the gospel.

But it is an error often made to confound what is here annexed with the statement in Rev. 13:8. For this scripture teaches no more than our text that the Lamb was slain from the founding of the world, a meaning only made possible by a mystical imagination. The comparison however of what is said in chap. 17:8 affords plain evidence that the name written in the book of life of the Lamb slain is the true connection with the world's founding, not that the Lamb was then slain. For the later scripture referring to the same truth omits “of the slain Lamb,” but affirms the writing in the book of life from that time.

Nor is this all. “From” the world's founding is not of the same import as “before” it. Let us respect and learn from the very words of God.

Those saints who are preserved from yielding to the Beast at the close of the age had their name written from the foundation of the world in the slain Lamb's book of life. With this we may compare the King's language to the blessed from all the nations, severed like sheep from the goats, to inherit the kingdom prepared for them “from” the world's foundation. But the phrase used in Eph. 1:4 as in 1 Peter 1:20 is pointedly different. As Christ was foreknown and loved by the Father (John 17:24) “before” then, so did God choose in Christ us who now believe “before” the world's foundation, that we should be holy and unblemished before Him in love. It is easy for a Christian to understand Christ foreknown before time began; but how wondrous the grace that God chose us to such an association and for such a purpose I He was known before creation, as He had a glory in personal right above it; we by grace are objects of divine counsel which His work suits in order that we may enjoy all where He is, and with Him.

Then the apostle carefully defines who they are that are thus blessed, though in no way confined to the believing remnant of Jews, “for your sake that through Him believe on God.” The testimony of the gospel is quite unlimited. “Disciple all the Gentiles (or, nations),” said the Lord (Matt. 28:15); “preach the gospel to all the creation” (Mark 16:15); “that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations” (Luke 24:47). Nor is He less explicit in the gospel of John: “for God so loved the world that He gave his Only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have life eternal.” Here as we have the result no less plainly unlimited as in the other Gospels, so does the Lord restrict life and salvation to those that believe the testimony of God.

There is a difference in the reading but not in the truth. Three MSS. (A B 9), supported by the Latin Vulgate, say “that are through him faithful.” The great weight of copies, uncial and cursive, with the ancient versions generally, support the usual text “that through him believe.” Faithful often says more than believing, in no case less. The substance remains the same. Not a doubt can there be to a renewed mind that it is through Christ that we are faithful toward God. The question is, if this be intended here, where faith appears to be set before us, rather than the fidelity which springs from it. If so, it is a truth no less certain than interesting that through Christ we believe on God.

Men talk of rising “through nature up to nature's God.” But how could this, even if true of any, avail for a fallen soul whose sins morally compelled the Creator to become a Judge? And what could His providence, real and gracious and mighty as it is, do to cleanse the sinner from his guilt or to give him reconciliation with God and assurance of His love? The law again, righteous and holy and good as it is, could only aggravate his misery if his conscience rightly felt his evil state, and God's just and necessary displeasure with a creature, originally upright, but now so alienated, self willed, and rebellious. No, it is the Lord Jesus Who alone could and did meet the otherwise insuperable difficulty. It was His to conciliate what without Him was irreconcilable on any ground of truth; but He only by His sacrificial death for our sins. In His cross divine love and light, grace and righteousness, majesty and mercy, unite to bless those who repent and believe the gospel. Thus only are loving-kindness and truth met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Hence then through Him we believe on God as the Savior God, giving His beloved Son for our offenses and raising Him again for our justification. It is not said here, as once to us when mere sinners, that through the Father's drawing one comes to Christ; but now we through Christ believe on God in the deep, intimate, and enduring way that is revealed to us as saints.

No one hath seen God at any time: the Only-begotten Son Who is in the bosom of the Father—He declared Him. It is through Christ that we believe on God, as Light and Love, Savior and source of all grace, Who sent Christ and drew us to Him, made us His children, sons of God

through faith in Christ Jesus. But we must not forget that by receiving God's testimony the soul believes on Christ. “Verily, verily, I say to you, He that heareth my word and believeth him that sent me hath life eternal” (John 5:24). Christ being received makes God known more fully to faith, as in resurrection He could say, I ascend unto My Father and your Father, and My God and your God (John 20:17).

Here it is intimated of those “that believe on God that raised him out of [the] dead, so that your faith and hope are (or, should be) in God.” The resurrection of Christ from among the dead and the glory given to Him on high are God's mighty and distinct evidence that He is for the believer absolutely and forever. If anything could have made this doubtful, it was our sins. But they were laid—yea, He laid on Christ (Isa. 53:6) the iniquity of us all. Christ bore our sins in His own body on the tree. Where are they now? When He made purification of the sins, He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. Not one sin did God leave on the believer; not one did Christ carry into heaven; for what He thus did was the will of God; so that our faith and hope are in God. The teaching is thus far the same as in Rom. 4:24, 25. We can no more doubt God for the future than for the past, as the apostle so triumphantly declares in Rom. 8. If God be for us (and this He has proved irrefutably to the utmost), who against?

1 Peter, 1 Peter 1:22

The apostle had appealed to their conscious knowledge of redemption by that which is of all things most precious to God—the blood of Christ as of a lamb unblemished and spotless. And if it was eternally before God, however late in accomplishment, God's raising Christ from the dead had through Him so acted on them, that their faith and hope were in God. From Him they looked for all good, and nothing but good, henceforth and forever. He has now further considerations of the greatest weight in urging the saints to mutual love; for this is only secondary to receiving Christ and the truth, without which is no love according to God's nature.

“Purified your souls as ye have in your obedience to the truth1 unto brotherly affection unfeigned, love one another out of a pure2 heart fervently” (vers. 22).

Thus the saints are authoritatively taught the true source of their purification. It is from God as certainly as it is to God. It is not ritual which could not purge the conscience, but in the fullest sense personal; it was not in their habits only, or even their thoughts and affections. They had purified “their souls,” that is, their inner selves in all extent. For a man's soul is essentially the seat of his conscious individuality, of his will, of his responsibility to God. His inner capacity is in his “spirit,” for or about which he is as responsible as for the things done through the body as the outer instrument; but his responsibility lies in the soul. Soul and spirit however are so closely joined, that but one of the two generally is named, as here. Only the one which is named in scripture, though not excluding the other, is always strictly correct and has its proper force. On the other hand men and in particular philosophers, as they shrink from facing their responsibility to God, constantly incline to count the “I” to be in the “spirit,” of which they are proud, rather than in the “soul,” awakening thoughts which they do not relish. What depths of sin and shame has not man's will led him into?

But those to whom the Epistle is addressed had no more hesitation in owning the truth as to themselves than the apostle had in crediting them with the grace in question. It is not a wish or a prayer that they should be purified, but rather is assumed as a settled fact, as surely as they were faithful. This is said in no levity, nor does it imply the least license; save that they were still passing through a desert world, exposed to a sleepless enemy. Hence were they dependent on their unseen God and Father, as He is unfailingly faithful to such. But the call to love one another is manifestly grounded on the assurance that they had purified their souls already; which involves the responsibility of continual consistency with this state of purity, and of self-judgment in case of failure. It is the regular Christian standing, which may be varied in the form of expression; but it meets us substantially in every apostolic Epistle.

Hence our apostle averred the like grace for the believing Gentiles, when he pleaded the cause of their liberty against Pharisaic brethren who sought to put them under law: “And the heart-knowing God bore them witness, giving the Holy Spirit just as to us also, and made no difference between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.” As in Acts 15:8, 9 “faith” is stated to be the subjective means, our scripture says yet more that it was by the Jews' “obeying the truth” objectively put before them. “Obedience to the truth” is but another and fuller way of expressing their faith. To have a solid and divine character there must be subjection to the truth.

Further, the purification of their souls is next shown to be “unto brotherly affection unfeigned.” Before we have purified our souls, there is everything not only to hinder such affection but to render it impossible. Sin, darkness, self, fleshly and worldly lusts, and under Satan's power make men more and more miserable, relieved only by pleasures as vain as the religious efforts of a bad conscience in lieu of happiness. How deep the ruin of the fall! God good and holy, whom man gave up and lost, was replaced by the liar and the murderer! Cain is the firstborn of Adam and Eve: what a witness of natural religion and of brotherly affection! Abel testifies to grace by faith. By birth we are like the one, by new birth our part is with the other. “By faith Abel offered to God a mere excellent sacrifice than Cain.”

God justified us by faith, giving us redemption through the blood of Jesus. Not otherwise were our souls purged, and thereby are we fitted for brotherly affection, such as God looks for in Christians. In ordinary circumstances any other feeling would dishonor and in effect deny the relationship which grace has established for our present and mutual recognition. Scripture clearly lays down the exceptional cases, and how we ought then to behave; but we need not now say more about it. This is the Lord's new commandment. By this, said He, shall all know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love among one another.

So the Spirit guards against mere forms or words by qualifying the brotherly affection for which their souls were purified as “unfeigned.” Pretense to a good that is not genuinely felt is hateful to God, and unworthy of His child. Hence the value of cherishing the sense of His presence to be kept from hypocrisy in this way as in every other. Let us never forget His marvelous light into which He carried us out of darkness. “Know ye not,” says the apostle Paul, “that ye are God's temple, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you”?

Hence the exhortation, which is not tautological as some have irreverently said, “Out of a pure heart love one another fervently,” or intensely. It is a simple charge that the object in view may be earnestly heeded. God's love to us is the spring of all our blessing, and never did it flow out so freely and fully as when man's sin proved how utterly undeserving he was, and no less wretched and helpless. Then it was, and at the lowest point, when God turned his evil in rejecting and slaying Christ, His Son, to the proof of His own all-over-coming goodness in making Him

Who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become God's righteousness in Him. In the faith of Him and His sacrifice have we purified our souls, hitherto steeped in defilement, unto unfeigned brotherly affection. Let us love then the objects of the same divine love, who rest on the same sin-cleansing sacrifice. No doubt they were called to be holy throughout their course, because He Who called them is holy; but they were bound to love their brethren, not for any reasons of their own or for reasons in others, but “out of a pure heart” and “fervently “: had not God so felt and dealt with them? Even to heathen, when they believed in Christ, the apostle could write (1 Thess. 4:9), “ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.”

1 Peter, 1 Peter 1:23

Yet the purification of the believer's soul, effected as it is already, is not all that enforces brotherly affection unfeigned and fervent. Our new birth as saints has this love essentially in its nature, as surely as it is through God's word. So the passage proceeds—

“Having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, through God's living and abiding word” (ver. 23).

It is not without intention that the participle of the active perfect is employed in ver. 22, and of the passive perfect in ver. 23. Rigid Calvinism seems hardly compatible with the former, nor rigid Arminianism with either. Revealed truth, large no less than exact, insists on both as a settled standing of grace; on which is based the call to be imitators of God as children beloved, and to walk in love, as the apostle of uncircumcision exhorts us. It is not that purification precedes the new birth as matter of fact; for to be born anew is the first vital dealing of grace with the soul, but purification attests it.

Evangelicalism is here utterly lame and short, if we may judge by the theological text-books, and such discourses as meet the public eye. Of course, one could not expect sound doctrine from Romanist divines; but those considered orthodox Protestants are on this scarcely better. Their idea is a change on man by the Spirit's action through the word of God on his faculties, which are no longer devoted to self and Satan but directed to His service. But this is rather descriptive of the effect than a statement of the operating cause or means under His hand. Scripture is abundant and clear that a life is given to the believer (and Christ is this life, as the old one is from Adam fallen), which acts through our faculties on objects revealed by God and far beyond those of natural life. Thus, as our Lord taught, one sees and enters the kingdom, not only by-and-by but now by faith; or as the apostle puts it, translated by the Father into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

In vain do unbelieving professors, or saints misled by tradition, decry this now order of being as mystic. For the life of which the saint partakes was comparatively hidden from O.T. believers; yet they had it in Him Who had not yet appeared, but was truly hoped for. Now since Christ came, this and much more is cleared up; and the believer is assured that he has it as a present thing, whatever be the added blessedness at His coming again when the body is swallowed up by the life which the soul has already in Christ. For indeed it is life eternal, and so declared even now; and woe to him who is emboldened by the enemy to deny it! For this is the soil out of which grow the fruits of the Spirit working on the inner man to the glory of Christ its source, a life even now quite as real and incomparably more blessed and momentous than the old Adamic life. Calvin is almost as vague as the rest; only Leighton here speaks as one taught of God as far as he goes.

We have then been begotten again, as not even the Jews were, whatever their boast of being Abraham's seed and of never being in bondage to any, at the very time when they were undeniably slaves to the Romans for their apostasy, and of their father the devil, in believing his lie against Him Who is the true God and the life eternal. But the believer has been begotten, “not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible,” not of man or through man, but through God's living and abiding word. So the Lord declared to Nicodemus, Except one be born anew (i.e. of water and of Spirit), he can neither see nor enter the kingdom of God (John 3:37). That which is born of flesh is flesh; and that which is born of Spirit is spirit. The flesh does not become spirit, any more than the spirit becomes flesh. The life given is of God, in Christ, and by the Spirit who employs the word here figured as often by “water.” To bring in baptism here is not only foreign to the context, but opposed to all the scriptures which treat of the subject. James 1:18 is as adverse as Paul (1 Cor. 4:15), and John (15:3) no less than the text of Peter before us. Very likely all the fathers who discuss it join in gross and superstitious error; and Calvin may have been the first of the theologians, as Hooker says, who rejected the error; but so much the greater is their shame. This truth is transparent.

1 Peter, 1 Peter 1:24-25

What can be more apt for the apostle's purpose than the passage he cites from the prophet? In setting forth the blessedness of being born again he makes it more felt by contrasting with it universal nature, and nature at its best.

“Because all flesh [is] as grass, and all its glory as a flower of grass. The grass withered and the flower fell away; but the word of the Lord (Jehovah) abideth forever. And this is the word that as glad tidings was preached unto you (vers. 24, 25).

It is the twofold lesson of repentance and faith, which is thus appropriately attached to being born again. Hence in comforting His people it is not only the coming of a Deliverer that is in question, even if this Deliverer be Jehovah, but the necessity that the people should judge themselves in His sight. The voice of one crying in the wilderness needs the supplement of the second that cries so solemnly of fallen man, “all flesh is grass, and all its comeliness as the flower of the field.” Israel had flattered itself that they were wholly different from other men. But a voice which flatters not must cry that it is not merely the Gentiles that perish, but “surely the people is grass.” Where were the ten tribes? and why chased out of Immanuel's land? And where had Isaiah just announced to the king of David's house, that their treasures and their sons were to be carried away? Was it not to Babylon, the center of graven images and enchantments and sorceries, because of Judah's persistent love of idols? Which of human kind so guilty as the favored people, and its most favored tribe?

Nor was this all. For the scattered remnant to whom the apostle wrote knew of another sin still more heinous, into which they had lately fallen though long predicted by the same prophet (Isa. 49-57) with its terrible issue in receiving “the king,” the Anti-Christ of the last days, as must surely be accomplished in its time. Yes, “all flesh is as grass, and all its glory as a flower of grass.” Difference there is. Some are much fairer than others, refined, tender, generous, brave, affectionate, and religious after the flesh. There is not only the grass in general, but its flower.

And men are apt to admire and even adore what is so pleasant to their eyes, their mind, and their feelings. But nothing is right truly, where God has not His rights: and He as plainly judged man's sin, as He clearly presented the only hope for the sinner in the woman's Seed, the virgin's Son, Immanuel.

Hence to believe in Him, now come and dead and risen and ascended, is the only salvation; and nothing more truly causes the penitent soul feelingly to own its natural ruin and its sins. For it is no light thing for man to sit in moral judgment on himself; and it is just what the Spirit of God works in him (not at first peace or liberty, far from either indeed but), the deep sense, not only of what he has done but what he is before God as a sinful man. That the Son of God is come from God, and by Him sent, not to condemn, but as a Savior encourages him to integrity in self-judgment. Without doubt it is deeply painful under the word and Spirit of God to be brought down in conscience of one's own evil in His sight into the dust of death; and the sight of Christ by faith by His very perfectness increases the self-loathing. How sweet then to have the testimony that the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from every sin! that He made peace by the blood of His cross! that He is not only the Living Bread, coming down out of heaven, but by His death gives us to eat His flesh and drink His blood, so that I dwell in Him, and He in me!

The Pauline teaching, of not only His death for us but of our death with Him, carries out the truth still more thoroughly; but even in its simpler form by our Epistle we are enabled to write death on all humanity, and forbear to boast of what seems fairest outwardly. Nor is it an idea or sentiment, but a reality personal and experimental for our everlasting profit henceforth, not only in distrusting ourselves, but in tenderness toward others, and in boasting in God through our Lord Jesus Christ through Whom now we received the reconciliation.

The reason was certain and extreme. All flesh is as grass, and all its glory as a flower of grass. In human nature, fallen too as it is, there is no stability; its flower only and altogether evanescent. Withered the grass, fell away the flower. There can be no trust, no dependence on the creature. Are we then left to ourselves, our sins and our follies, just when we most evidently need the only true God, as good as He is great? Not so. We had no just claim; we shamelessly deserted Him when He showed us nothing but tender mercy; like Adam, we forgot His word and disobeyed Him, we believed the liar and the murderer, and hoped we might sin and not surely die. This was ruin now; and if this were all, it led to ruin everlasting. For sin breeds more sin; and such was and is the history of the race. But He spoke, even when judging the sin and sentencing the enemy, of One Who should vanquish him who wrought the mischief; and of the One to vanquish Satan keenly suffering as the woman's Seed, in the infinite compassion of God for the ensnared. If human nature at its best is feeble and failing, man needs what abides; and so in contrast with that which fades away, “the word of the Lord (Jehovah) abideth forever.”

Here, in ver. 25, it is not as in ver. 23; for the latter is used to convey the meaning or mind of God, whereas is the expression, what was actually said or written. Compare the distinction which our Lord Himself draws between His “speech” () and His “word” in John 8:43: they did not know His speech, because they were unable to hear His word. When the divine truth is received, the words that express it become understood, not before. Here “word” goes beyond “speech” and is applied to Jehovah's message; which not only withered up self-dependence, but gave them His word immutable and abiding forever. “And this is the word that as glad-tidings was preached unto you.” What a spring of confidence to those that preach and to those that hear the gospel!

It is not only His abstract mind, but His meaning expressed fully and communicated indelibly in the scriptures. He would give His people solid assurance of the comfort He held out so emphatically to them, even before He set out by His prophet the twofold and tremendous indictment of their guilt. For, as in Isa. 40-48 He arraigns their idolatries which sent them captives to Babylon, so in chaps. 49-57 He predicts after the return the deeper guilt of rejecting the Righteous Servant, His Anointed, and receiving, as they surely will, the Antichrist, the willful king of the latter day. But where sin abounded, grace shall surpass it all, as the rest of Isaiah triumphantly proves, and the elect remnant at the end of the age shall be His possession forever; no longer bondmen but above bondage, yet all the more truly His servants, His Onesimi, once severed but now indissolubly joined, once unserviceable but now serviceable to Himself and a blessing to all the families of the earth according to unfailing promise.

But the apostle also shows that the remnant of Jews who now receive Christ anticipate, as do the faithful from among the nations, the blessing in the gospel already preached. They have before hoped in Christ, as the apostle Paul expresses it in Eph. 1:12. If the mass are now blinded, if mercy shall prevail over every obstacle in the darkest days of the consummation of the age, neither these reasons nor any others hinder sovereign grace while Christ sits at the right hand of God. Those of the Jews who now receive the glad-tidings have their hope in Christ realized to the full, before the remnant becomes the strong nation of the new age. Such is the force of their pre-trusting in Him, while their brethren in the flesh refuse Him, and before the latter day bow to Him in faith. They are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. We are also those who from among the Gentiles have heard and believed the word of truth, the glad tidings of their salvation. For as there is no difference in the ruin, so there is none in the salvation according to the riches of God's grace.

Here too is implied the immense superiority of Christian blessedness over that of which the Jews so loudly boasted. They undoubtedly had privileges from Jehovah as the seed of Abraham: and they were born to them, if at least duly circumcised as they were, in witness of the uncleanness of the flesh. But their privileges were earthly, external, and temporal; and so it had been openly proved in O. T. times by the Babylonish captivity, as it was soon to be more overwhelmingly by the Roman scattering of much longer duration. Far different is the Christian's portion even now, and far brighter his hope. Hence in the Epistle to the Hebrews the emphasis on “eternal” or “everlasting.” Such is the salvation (chap. 5:9) as is the judgment (chap. 6:2); such the redemption (chap. 9:12), the Spirit (ver. 14), and the inheritance (ver. 15), as the blood is of an everlasting covenant (chap. 8:20). To this, without referring to other proofs, may be added the “better” blessings, as in 7:19, 22, 8:6 (twice), 9:23, 10:34, 11:16, 40.

Our apostle of the circumcision does not write so elaborately, but was led to base the greatness of God's gift to the believer on the being born again, of seed not corruptible but incorruptible through God's living and abiding word; a character and source of being quite above nature, in contrast with transitory flesh, even in Israel, and founded on His word spoken and written which expressly abides forever. This is the very word that was preached unto them with all its glad news, that they might know that they had through it received a new nature as incorruptible and everlasting as His word Who communicated both. The fervor of his heart breaks out in the simple earnestness with which he speaks of a boon so needful and so blessed for man as he is. He would have his brethren know it theirs now without a shade of uncertainty.

But other considerations are urged of distinctly Christian character, which add immense weight and power both to the new responsibility and to the comfort and cheer of those who are Christ's.

“And if as Father ye call on Him that impartially judgeth according to the work of each, pass the time of your sojourning in fear” (ver. 17).

As Jehovah was the divine name in relation to Israel, so is Father to the Christian, and this, not in the vulgar sense of the derivation from His birth, as fatherhood of Adam and the race (Luke 3:38, Acts 17:29), but of the special and spiritual nearness into which the risen Christ brought the believer. “Go unto my brethren, and say to them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and my God and your God.” He had prepared the disciples for this, throughout His ministry. Rejected by the Jew, He turned from fleshly kin and said, “Behold, my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father that is in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother” (Matt. 12:49, 50). But now that redemption was accomplished and accepted as the new standing fact, now that purification of sins is made, and life given abundantly by His resurrection, He could announce precisely that His brethren enter the same relationships that He Himself had as risen from the dead and taking His place on high. So had He anticipated while opening His heart to the Father in their hearing only a few days before: “I made known to them thy name, and will make it known, that the love wherewith thou lovedst me may be in them, and I in them.” This is Christianity, not in atonement (however true and needed through our sins and ruin), but in its positive excellency and in our special and proper place according to God's counsels and love.

To the fathers dwelling in tents with nothing but His promises He revealed Himself as God Almighty, El Shaddai, their sure and sufficient Protector in the midst of the peoples they were in due time to dispossess. When the time came to bring forth Israel out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, He gave the name of Jehovah as their unchanging Governor, He their God and they His people. “And what great nation is there (Moses could ask), that hath God so nigh to them, as Jehovah our God is in everything we call on Him for?” “Hath God essayed to come and take Him a nation out of the midst of a nation by trials, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a powerful hand, and by an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that Jehovah your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? Unto you it was shown that thou mightest know that Jehovah He is God; there is none else besides Him. From the heavens He made thee hear His voice, that He might instruct thee; and on earth He showed thee His great fire; and thou heardest His words out of the midst of the fire. And because He loved thy fathers, therefore He chose their seed after them, and brought thee out with His presence, with His great power, out of Egypt, to drive out nations from before thee greater and mightier than thou, to bring thee in, to give thee their land for an inheritance, as at this day. Know therefore this day, and lay it to thy heart, that Jehovah He is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath—none else” (Deut. 4:7, 34-39).

It was indeed the best portion a nation could have here below till Messiah reigns over them, and the new covenant be made with the houses of Israel and of Judah. But before that day Messiah came for a deeper, holier, and more wondrous purpose—to suffer for sin, and for the sins of all who believe, to the glory of God. The cross of Christ, where He suffered from God as well as from man, presents a work divine beyond all that ever was wrought or can be again. For in this way, so strange to human eyes, not only was the Son of man glorified, but God was glorified in Him Whom man despised and the nation abhorred. Therefore God glorified Him in Himself and glorified Him straightway, instead of in His kingdom of manifested power and might, which He awaits in due time. But in and by His sufferings on the cross atonement was made; and risen from the dead He could and did reveal in all its fullness the name of His Father and our Father, His God and our God; that we might ourselves call upon Him as such, in a blessed nearness never till then appropriated by the faithful, never even possible before save to our Lord Himself.

Yet it is exceedingly important to recognize that divine love never weakens but really and powerfully strengthens our sense of divine light. It is the dread of fallen humanity. Conscious sinfulness, till we know that we have been once for all cleansed sacrificially, makes us shrink from God. How changed all is, when we not only repent and believe but rest on Christ's one offering, whereby He has perfected in perpetuity ( ) the sanctified! Then we children of light walk in the light, and prove it as wholesome as it is marvelous. We are thus thankful for the way with us of our God and Father in a world of danger and darkness and deception and self will and rebellion against His will and word. For He “impartially judgeth according to the work of each.”

So had the Lord Himself taught in John 15, speaking of Himself as the True Vine, and of His disciples as the branches. “My Father is the husbandman. Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away; and every one that beareth fruit He cleanseth it, that it may bear more fruit.” Those that remained around Him were already clean because of the word, He had spoken to them; many went back and walked no more with Him, and stumbled at the word being disobedient. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray Him. The Vine represented the external relation, and the branches those who bore His name truly or not. It was no question of life eternal or of union with Him as before. It was a blessed place on earth of cleaving unto Him and bearing fruit, and so every true saint proves; but it might be only mental or external, and so unable to bear the word or overcome the world, and thus in some way come to ruin. The believer welcomes the Father's care and bears more fruit. Even if He chastens, it is a Father's hand, and a proof of His love, the very reverse of alienation from the erring one. “He dealeth with you as with sons, for what son is there whom a father chasteneth not? But if ye are without chastening, of which all have been made partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.” The Father of spirits can make no mistakes, as our honored parents may have done; without fail He chastens for profit in order to the partaking of His holiness (Heb. 12:7-10). Man or woman, young or old, poor or rich, He judges according to the work of each. There is no partiality with Him; there is a Father's love in the light.

But the present participle expresses here, not the abstract principle, but His actual dealing in distinct reference to the time of our sojourning. It is uncommonly bold to say otherwise in presence of John 5:22, and indeed the context; where our Lord teaches that the Son quickens in communion with the Father, but has all judgment committed to Himself, because He is the Son of man. He only, of the Persons in the Godhead, became man, and suffered to the utmost in that humiliation; so He only has authority to execute judgment (in the final and everlasting sense) in that very nature. This is set beyond fair doubt, because the Lord declares that the believer does not come into judgment, by any such solemn act as He speaks of; whereas it is certain that every believer does become subject to the judgment which the Father now carries on while we are here. It is not that future act in God's judgment no doubt through Jesus Christ the Lord (Rom. 2:16; 14:10); it is not the Father's but the Son of man's. But it is the Father who now judges according to the work of each saint in his sojourn here.

That this scripture goes no farther than the Father's present scrutiny is evident from the exhortation which follows: “Pass the time of your sojourning in fear.” At Christ's appearing there is for those addressed or others like them no sojourning more. Any such time is ended. Pilgrimage in the wilderness is exchanged for an abiding city, the coming one. There is no longer grief which we possibly needed, but praise

and glory and honor, with an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading. But now it is our responsibility as Christians that our conduct be “in fear” of our Father and God, Whose word is living and operative, sharper than any two-edged sword, and penetrating to division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern both thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature unapparent in His sight; but all things are naked and laid bare to His eyes with Whom we have to do.

It may be well, even if hardly needful, to say that the fear enjoined on the believer, during the time of his earthly course, is not only consistent with enjoying our Father's love but its inseparable accompaniment. “There is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared,” says Psa. 130:4. Hence “blessed is the man that feareth Jehovah, that delighteth greatly in His commandments” (Psa. 112:1). Not only is “the fear of Jehovah the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 1:7), but “happy is the man that feareth always” (Prov. 28:14). It is in contrast with him that hardens his heart, who shall fall into mischief.

There is a natural fear of unbelief, which distrusts God and really hates Him. Of this John speaks in his First Epistle (4:18) as incompatible with love as with faith and hope, in short with the knowledge of God and His Son. “There is no fear in love, but perfect love [His, not ours] casteth out fear, because fear hath punishment; and he that feareth hath not been perfected in love. We love, because He first loved us.” A true and filial spirit fears the commandment; as whoso despiseth the word shall be held accountable. In His fear is strong confidence, for He looks to the man who trembles at His word. No privileges of grace are meant to hinder or weaken this pious fear and godly awe. We shall also give account of all done in the body before Christ's tribune, and receive accordingly. But this to us who believe is not the judgment from which grace exempts.

So the apostle Paul speaks of being with those who received the gospel at Corinth “in fear and in much trembling,” though in the full assurance of faith and in labors as abundant as his love; and in the Second Epistle he praises the saints for receiving Titus with fear and trembling (7:15), to his comfort and the joy of his fellow-workman. What a contrast with the wicked and slothful bondman in the parable! Him the Lord describes as being afraid of the gracious Master, counting Him “an austere man,” and therefore hiding His talent in the earth, instead of using it faithfully for the good of others in His service, relying on His love!

Well did one write more than two centuries ago, “This fear is not cowardice; it doth not debase, but elevates the mind; for it drowns all lower fears, and begets true fortitude and courage to encounter all dangers for a good conscience and the obeying of God. The righteous is bold as a lion' (Prov. 28:1); he dares do anything but offend God; and to dare do that is the greatest folly and baseness and weakness in the world. From this fear have sprung all the generous resolutions and patient sufferings of the saints and martyrs of God, because they durst not sin against Him; therefore they durst be imprisoned, and impoverished, and tortured, and die for Him. Thus the prophet [Isa. 8:12, 13] sets carnal and godly fear as opposite, and the one expelling the other. And our Savior [Luke 12:4], ' Fear not them that kill the body; but fear Him who, after He hath killed, hath power to cast into hell: yea, I say to you, fear Him! ' Fear not, but fear; and therefore fear that ye may not fear” (R. Leighton in loco, (Jerment's ed. 1:133, 4).

1 Peter 1:2, Appendix on 1 Peter 1:2

IT may help souls if I give a. few proofs, not from persons of extreme views, but from the most intelligent among the Reformers, of their looseness on this subject and their divergence from scriptural truth. It is needless to speak of Romanists; for they are too stupefied. by tradition to afford the least hope of finding real and intelligent subjection to the teaching of the apostles.

The plainest conceivable instance of the way in which popular error works may be seen in the following extract from Beza's Version mind Annotations. I quote from the latest edition (1598) during his life, where his thoughts are given most fully and correctly. “Electis ex praecognitione Dei Patris ad sanctificationem Spiritus, per obedientiam et aspersionem sanguinis Jesu Christi.” Such is his version: of the note this will suffice. “Ita complexus fuerit Petrus omnes proprias salutis nostrae causas quae a Deo manant, nempe efficientem summam causam, Dei Patris praeseitiam, id est decretum aeternum: Formalem, vocationem efficacem, quam electionis nomine intelligit: (nam ut alibi diximus, tum demum re ipsa eligimur quum Deus aeternum suum decretum in nobis per vocationem exequitur) Finem, sanctificationem electorum: Materiam ipsam, Christi justitiam, cujus imputatione justi coronamur.”

First his version is as unfaithful as one can imagine. He not only departs from the necessary force of the apostle's words in two most weighty particulars, but inverts the prepositions employed so as to alter completely the reveal mind of the Spirit. It is true that in one of these errors the Vulgate had led the way; for it is impossible fairly to render v by “in sanctificationem.” Beza should have been rather warned by such a flaw, especially as Erasmus from the first had correctly given “per sanctificationem,” as none could justify the taking and as both = “in” with the accusative. But Beza allowed his system of doctrine so completely to warp his mind that he proceeded to the still greater error of representing by “per,” a tendering which not only falsifies the meaning but has not the smallest shadow of justification from the Greek idiom in any work of any author from Homer down to the fall of Constantinople. And, secondly, this bold and excessive perversion is the foundation of his comment; which, being wholly unfounded, calls for no remark further than that it is just the common notion on the subject. For, spite of the English Bible, which is in the main right, people continue to fancy that the Lord means here that the Christian is elect according to God the Father's foreknowledge unto sanctification of the Spirit by the obedience of Christ and the sprinkling of His blood.

Much more right was his leader, J. Calvin, though he speaks hypothetically. “If there be parts or effects of sanctification, then sanctification is to be taken here somewhat differently from what it means when used by Paul; that is, more generally. God then sanctifies us by effectual calling; and this is done when we are renewed to an obedience his righteousness, and when we are sprinkled by the blood Christ, and thus are cleansed from our sins.” Even he is mistaken in thinking that Paul does not use sanctification in this more general way, as I have shown on 1 Cor. 6:11. But plainly the Genevese chief owns a sense of sanctification different from that which is ordinarily seen and admitted. 2 Thess. 2:13 appears to me another clear witness of Calvin's limiting this more general usage to Peter. For there the I speaks of God's having chosen the Thessalonian saints from the beginning unto salvation by sanctification of the and belief of the truth. It was in virtue of the setting them apart and their faith in the truth of the gospel that God thus chose them to salvation: doctrine strikingly in analogy with the statement of Peter, if we allow for the difference in presenting the thought to Jewish and Gentile Christians.

Again, the excellent Archbishop Leighton, in his well-known Commentary upon the first Epistle of Peter, is perplexed by this obedience. He rejects Beza's application to Christ's obedience actively (though he took it as His obedience unto the death of the cross); and he himself thinks that it is contained in (yea, chiefly understood to signify) that obedience which the Apostle in Romans 1 calls the obedience of faith, by which the doctrine of Christ is received, and so Christ himself. When he adds that “by obedience sanctification is hire intimated,” it appears to me that he gets confused by not holding fast the more general sense of sanctification. The apostle certainly treats of obedience in this place as flowing from the setting apart to God or sanctification which precedes it. Besides, I think he mistakes the nature of the obedience by understanding it as the obedience of faith when a soul receives the gospel. In my judgment the, phrase means that we are thus set apart to obey as Christ did, in the consciousness of our sonship, and with the assurance of being purged by blood. Much more correctly does To say later (Works, vol. i. pp. 15, 16, Jerment's edition) that “sanctification in a narrow sense, as distinguished from justification, signifieth the inherent holiness of a Christian, or his being inclined and enabled to obedience mentioned in this verse; but it is here more large, and is co-extended with the whole work of renovation, and is the separating of men to God by His Holy Spirit, drawing the unto Him; and so it comprehends justification (as here) end the first working of faith, by which the soul is justified through its apprehending and applying the righteousness Jesus Christ.”

1 Peter, 1 Peter 2:1-3

If the plague of leprosy were healed in the leper, however this might be (for it was beyond man), it was required that he should be pronounced clean by the blood of a bird slain over running water sprinkled on him, and a living bird dipped in it let go into the open field. Thereon he that was to be cleansed had to wash his clothes, shave off all his hair, and bathe himself in water. Only so should he be clean. So it is here. The believer knows, feels, and owns his own nature corrupt, withered, and fallen, as grass under the blast of Jehovah, but has a new nature given which is as incorruptible as its divine seed by His word living and abiding forever. On this he is called to act.

“Putting away therefore all malice and all guile and hypocrisies and envyings and all evil-speakings, as new-born babes long for the guileless intelligent milk that by it ye may grow unto salvation, if indeed ye tasted that the Lord is good” (vers. 1-3).

It is well that the English reader or any other unacquainted with the original should bear in mind the force of the opening word; which means an act done once for all, as the aorist implies, the tense of what may be called factness, not of gradual process. Again, it is not in the active, but the middle voice, which in transitive verbs refers back the action to the agent, giving this emphasis variously according to each word. We may compare James 1:21: “Wherefore putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, accept with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls.” They are indeed exhortations of marked agreement, in substance of united practical aim, yet characteristic of each writer, and both of them distinct from the apostle Paul's way of dealing with the great principle of the case in Christ's death and our death with Him. They are equally given of God and equally needed by His children.

First, our apostle calls on the saints to have put away, if one may so phrase it, “all malice.” That the word, though sometimes meaning “wickedness” in general, here refers to that special root of evil is evident from the other forms of iniquity with which it is joined. It appropriately begins the list as the opposite of love, the fervent love, which he had been enjoining on them as became brethren. Every kind of malice is unworthy of those born again, born of God Who is love; for it may hide its spirit of hatred, and assume many a disguise to accomplish its nefarious ends. What a complete contrast with Christ, and how close the resemblance to his enemy the devil, whose occupation is to tempt, and to persecute, as well as to accuse Next, “guile” follows with no less moral truth, and “all guile” because of its manifold aim, and the desire with which men shun its discovery. For however much addicted to deceive others, they are inwardly ashamed of a habit so base. “Guile” naturally succeeds “malice” in order to do the man deadly mischief, and withal escape detection. It is the reverse of that transparent truthfulness to which we are called as representing Him Who is the truth, just as Satan is a liar and its father.

This opens the Way for “hypocrisies,” the pretenses to be what we are not, and not to be what we are. Hypocrisy is opposed to sincerity, and is simply playing a part in that which is mere fable it be not the most solemn of realities as well as the most precious. How awful to make the truth of God a game of man for a little while “Envyings” are the other side and in the next place. For as hypocrisy has its spring in claiming to have the good we lack, envy seeks to deny and defame the real good of others. God be praised that He fails not to work here and there in ways of love, devotedness, patient grace, zeal for the truth, delight in His glory, compassion for the wretched and the unworthy. There is ample scope for detraction among such as manifest no such qualities, and are vexed to find others credited with what is so excellent. Here the believer must beware lest he yield an ear to this evil spirit and get defiled by it.

Lastly, and fittingly therefore, comes the warning against “all evil speakings,” for what a variety of shapes this wears! And how readily it cheats many a one under the plea of care for the Lord's honor and just censure of what is wrong? As “envyings” utterly misbecome those who are blessed by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, so “all slanders” are a deep offense in His eyes and can but please the great adversary of souls. Let us set our face against both and avoid the very suspicion of either.

Then we hear the positive exhortation: “as new-born babes long for the guileless (or, pure) intelligent milk, that by it ye may grow unto salvation.” No one can doubt that it is the milk of the word that nourishes the believer. It was the word of God whereby he was born again; it is the same word whereby he is fed. There is no contrast here as in 1 Cor. 3 and in Heb. 5 between milk for the immature and solid food for the adult, blame being put on those who did not profit by the word, rising from elements to higher truths. Here the Spirit of God dwells on the suitability of the food provided for the babe when born; and all are encouraged to desire earnestly the pure nourishment which God supplies so liberally. It is milk for the saints' intelligence; as a mother's breast yields nourishment to her babe physically, so God's word is to our spiritual understanding.

The general sense is quite plain. The only question is how to represent best the language of the apostle. That which in the A. V. is translated “of the word” occurs only in one other passage of the N. T., Rom. 12:1; and there it is rendered “reasonable,” as it is frequently employed by ordinary writers of the Greek tongue. “Intelligent” seems well to express its force in both texts, a better word than “rational.” Why Beza who held this as to the text in the Epistle to the Romans changed it to “sermonic” (of the word) here does not appear, as he regarded them both as alike in sense. The Peschito Syriac has here “of the word “; the Harclean S. “rational,” as both give “rational” in Rom. 12:1. But it is hard to understand on what principle it can bear both meanings together.1

This we may leave, as it is merely the delicate point of a rendering, where the substantial truth remains untouched. The call is of all moment. God puts the highest honor on His word, not only for its quickening power in the hand of His Spirit, but for the constant refreshment and strengthening of the new nature that He imparts.

To put baptism in place of the one, or the Lord's Supper in place of the other, is a daring departure from what is here clearly revealed. The aim of those precious institutions is, one for initiatory confession, the other for the constant communion of the saints. But to turn baptism into the means of being born of God is to falsify the truth, to contradict scripture, and to efface the nature of Christianity. “Ye are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you,” says the Lord in John 15:3. “In Christ Jesus I begot you through the gospel,” says the apostle in 1 Cor. 4:15—the same Epistle in which he thanks God that he baptized none of them save a few individuals! So James tells us (1:12) that the Father “of his own will begot us by the word of truth, that we should be a certain first-fruits of his creatures.” We have no earthly mother, more than the Lord had an earthly father save legally.

The sacramental system sins against the Trinity in usurping the divine prerogative. Nor does our apostle differ from the rest (1 Peter 3:20). Baptism signifies not life-giving but Christ's death unto which we were baptized; and His death as not only salvation to those that believe, but the privilege of being identified with His death. Thus died we to sin and no longer live in it. Nor is it by the Eucharist, blessed as it is, that the new life is sustained but in Him Who died for us to Whom the Eucharist points. It is of Him coming down from heaven, the Incarnate Word, of Him dying and giving life to the world, and ascending where He was before, that John 6 speaks, in no way of His Supper. Peter does not go beyond salvation's sign in baptism.

The teaching here is that as through the word of God, not baptism, we have been born again, so by it, not the Lord's Supper, we “grow unto salvation.” To be born again on the one hand is as strictly individual as growth is. Each has to do with God directly in believing and profiting by His word, whoever or whatever may be the channel. Without faith neither can be; and the essence is that one receives the testimony immediately on God's own word for one's own soul. Hence “he that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself “; whereas “he that believeth not God hath made Him a liar, because he believeth not the witness which God hath witnessed concerning His Son” (1 John 5:10). On the other hand in the Lord's Supper it is a question of communion when individual want has been settled between the soul and God; and we are there together to enjoy His grace and presence. “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not communion of the body of Christ? Because we, many, are one loaf, one body; for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor. 10:16, 17).

But a strange omission has prevailed since the Complutensian Edition and that of Erasmus, followed by Beza, Stephens, the Elzevirs, and Mill, to say nothing of others. Colinaeus (1534) is the only one of the early editors who adheres to the great body of the oldest and best MSS., versions, and Patristic quotations, and reads ( ). It may have been drop either as a supposed scholastic addition or by those jealous of trenching on sovereign grace toward sinners. But here it is a question of saints growing in grace and in knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ according to the terms of the Second Epistle (3:18). Certain it is that any difficulty, in receiving the words so fully attested, is solely due to ignorance of our apostle's doctrine. For though he does speak of “salvation of souls” (1:9) as a present privilege, and symbolized in baptism (3:21), he still more frequently regards salvation as a complete whole for body as well as soul, and therefore to be revealed in the last time, even in the revelation of our Lord for whom we wait. Compare 1:5, 7, 13, 4:13.

Verse 3 furnishes a weighty proviso: “if indeed ye tasted that the Lord is good.” It is a reference evidently to Psa. 34 (33) 8 where there is a most touching call from the inspired writer that others might share his joy in Jehovah. “O taste and see that Jehovah is good; blessed is the man that trusteth in Him.” Here it is to the Christian so much the sweeter, in that the apostle identifies the Lord Jesus with Jehovah, as it is the truth. To have proved it for and in our inmost soul is the condition of growth in the word; but it is a condition that is assuredly verified in all who believe on Him. Yes, they can and do say in their hearts, that the Lord is good. They have tasted it in the word all through.

1 Peter, 1 Peter 2:4-5

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ begot us again unto a living hope according to His abundant mercy, through (not the incarnation, but) resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. It was not, as the Jews expected, unto an inheritance of earthly glory, ease and power superior to all disasters and adversaries, the kingdom as it is to be, but unto an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and unfading, reserved in the heavens for those who are guarded by God's power for salvation ready to be revealed. All intrinsically has been accomplished, at a last fit time, wherein they exult, for a little at present, if there is need, put to grief by varied trials to the proving of their faith. After mention of redemption by the Lamb's blood and its practical end, the apostle refers to our being born again of incorruptible seed through God's living and abiding word, and that new nature nourished on the guileless or pure milk of the word unto salvation. All is in contrast with the law at Sinai lightening against disobedience and transgression, but powerless to give either life r righteousness, the indispensable wants of sinful man. But grace has already supplied both abundantly in Christ, and hence, to the faith that receives Him for whom we wait, for salvation to the full, having tasted already how good He is, and so anticipated Psalms and Prophets that proclaim it for a future day.

Now we enter on privileges already conferred, represented by figures singularly interesting to the Jewish mind and its associations of honor and reverence. For, speaking of the Lord, the apostle says “Unto whom approaching, a living stone, by men indeed rejected but with God chosen, precious,1 yourselves also as living stones are being builded up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (vers. 4, 5).

However sure and enduring may be the counsels of grace, God allows no reasoning to weaken the need and the value and the duty of constant dependence on the Lord. So He Himself said, “Verily, verily, I say to you, Unless ye ate the flesh and drank the blood of the Son of man, ye have no life in yourselves.” It is truly an act by faith once for all; but where real, a continual participation follows. Hence He adds, “He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath life eternal, and I will raise him up at the last day; for my flesh is truly food and my blood is truly drink. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in me and I in him.” It is not life eternal only, but communion as a constant thing: so the Christian abides in Christ and Christ abides in him. To pretend that once to have eaten and drank supersedes always eating and drinking proves its unreality, its selfishness also, and its contrariety to God.

So here it is said, “Unto whom approaching “: from the time of approach it is real and full of blessing. Assuredly a soul is not left free and assured, if one go back and walk no more with Him, as some of His disciples did, of whom John 6, tells us. Christ is the center and touchstone and foundation of Christianity. Those who left Him were fruitless branches of the Vine. The apostle hoped better things and akin to salvation of those who abode (Heb. 6:9). The converse is written later that “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have abode with us, but that they might be made manifest that none are of us” (1 John 2:19).

Christ is then called “a living stone, rejected indeed by men but with God chosen, precious.” “Living” is a word near to Peter's heart, since so he was enabled to confess Christ, “the Son of the living God,” and heard himself for it pronounced “blessed” by his Master. “The Christ” or Messiah was indeed truly given of God; but this truth does not raise above the earth over which He will reign from Zion His center in Israel. When the Jews were denying Jesus, as they still do, to confess Him as the Messiah was to be born of God. But the Son of God, as revealed in the Gospel of John, is often far more; and “the Son of the living God” gives strong emphasis to our Lord as the conqueror of him that has the power of death. Hence the person of the Lord thus revealed is the rock on which He would build His church, now that the Jews, not the fickle crowd only but the chief priests and elders and scribes, were rejecting Him, and would even to the death of the cross.

The new building of God was to rise when the chosen nation publicly and finally, as far as their responsibility went, forfeited all for the time; a heavenly work and witness displaced the former earthly one. And the new one, here peculiarly called “My church,” He declares superior to “the gates of Hades,” which is more than death. As resurrection was to mark Him out Son of God in power, to begin the new as First-born, not of all creation only but from out of the dead, so was that which Christ builds beyond Satan's power to destroy. Thus is its distinctness made plain and certain from that which man builds, which was to be corrupted and the object of divine judgment more irreparably than Israel, as shown through the N. T. from Matt. 13, 2 Thess. 2, 2 Peter and Jude to Rev. 17 For it is revealed that the apostasy shall come before the day of the Lord; and there is no restoration for Christendom, as there will be for Israel thenceforth and forever.

Meanwhile if Israel do not yet own Him as the Shepherd and their Stone, this He is, and a Living Stone as the apostle of the circumcision here designates Him to those who come unto Him. Shall the unbelief of the mass of Jews make of none effect the faith of God? Far be it: the remnant who believe are all the more blessed. He, a living Stone, imparts His own virtue to those who come. Did men, did the builders in Jerusalem, vent their contemptuous rejection of Him Who came into the world, not to reign, but to bear witness to the truth, to bring God into it and to put sin out of it, and thus met hatred as none ever had, and on the cross wrought atonement? What was He ever, and then especially, with God? Was He not His choice One? His servant, whom He upholds, though forsaken even by God as none ever was, yet so He must if made sin for us. Yes, He is Jehovah's chosen, in whom His soul delights; and as He put His Spirit upon Him, so Jesus shall bring forth judgment to the nations; He shall not cry, nor lift up His voice, nor cause it to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench; He shall bring forth judgment in truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till He have set judgment in the earth; and the isles shall wait for His law (Isa. 42.). Here however it is by the way; for the Spirit of God is occupied with a very different servant, deaf and blind, ensnared by the idols of the heathen with all the ruinous consequences, instead of being true witnesses, like Him of His choice, Who becomes from chap. 49 the great topic in His rejection with its blessed results; that in the end Israel may really become His servants to the joy and blessing of all the earth.

But the apostle writes in the gap of Christ's rejection, before the day of blessing and glory dawns on Israel, the land, and all the nations; and he shows us Christ, dead, risen, and ascended, the object of God's delight, and the hinge of all that is good for the believer now. He is a living Stone, rejected indeed by men, but with God chosen, prized. So he preached at Pentecost. Him given up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye through hand of lawless men did crucify and slay, Whom God raised up. . . Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God made Him, this Jesus Whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ. And as Peter received a new name from the Rock which Christ alone was, so the saints who believe acquire a nature from what He is, as he here tells us; “yourselves also as living stones are being builded up a spiritual house.”

In nature no object lies more obviously void of life than a stone. But this only makes the power of grace the more impressive. Even John the Baptist could tell the haughty Pharisees and Sadducees, who pleaded their descent from Abraham, that God was able of the stones to raise up children to Abraham. Here the apostle predicates of the believing remnant that they themselves as living stones were being builded up for God's use and to His praise. But it was all through the One, even our Lord Jesus. He does not develop the unity of the Spirit like the apostle of the uncircumcision; but he not obscurely hints at the association of the saints. They are being formed into a spiritual house.

It was no longer a question of the mountain consecrated by Samaritan pride, nor yet of Jerusalem and the house, where the Jews said one must worship if one worshipped at all. That hour in principle passed away with the cross of Christ, as the Epistle to the Hebrews demonstrated at a later day. The only temple God owns is the church as a whole, unless it be individually the temple of a Christian's body; for the Holy Ghost by His indwelling so constitutes both (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19). Here the language is less full and precise. The general import sufficed for the purpose in hand. They composed, as being living stones, a spiritual house. Assuredly such and so near a relationship to God was a high honor put upon them even now when passing through the world; and we shall find that it entails corresponding duties on all so invested.

This he follows up by another title of honor and living nearness to God, “a holy priesthood.” Nor does the Holy Spirit now recognize any other priesthood as accredited by God. The entire Jewish religious system came to its end with Christ's death: temple, sacrifice, rite, and priesthood. Heathenism was an imposture, Satan's evil imitation or delusive substitute. Christ is not entered into holy places made with hand, answering to the true, but into heaven itself now to appear before the face of God for us. As He according to scripture is the sole and great High Priest, become higher than the heavens and seated on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, the sole priestly house (the same scripture acknowledges) consists of all the saints of God. They are alike washed, sanctified, and justified. They had and have also access by faith into the favor of God “in which we stand.” In Christ Jesus they were become nigh by the blood of Christ. Whatever the distance between Jew and Gentile, and between God and both, we out of them both who believe have through Christ the access by one Spirit unto the Father.

Though nearness to God is the most precious and essential mark of a priest, the proof is not merely the principle furnished in the Epistles to the Romans, Corinthians, and Ephesians just referred to. In our text the apostle Peter explicitly characterizes the Christians only as the “holy priesthood” which the N. T. owns. The apostle John speaks to the same effect in Rev. 1:6; and the Epistle to the Hebrews, in the fullest treatment of the necessity arising out of the priesthood changed in Christ, from first to last treats Christian brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, as the true and present analogue to the family of Aaron. Early in it we read that Christ is Son over God's house; Whose house are we (Heb. 3:6). Later (10:19) we read again, “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holy [places] by the blood of Jesus, a new and

living way which he dedicated for us through the veil, that is his flesh, and [having] a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from a wicked conscience and having our body washed with pure water,”

Here the privilege attributed to all saints is greater than any son of Aaron ever enjoyed, or even Aaron himself; for it applies to all times, and with a boldness he never knew. Faith is entitled thus to approach where Christ is now through the rent veil in virtue of His blood and the Spirit who makes its efficacy good to our conscience and heart, as our settled status. Hence as we read in our text “to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ,” the functions are open to us and binding on us, far beyond using oxen, sheep, goats, cakes, or incense. And this we find confirmed in Heb. 13:15: Through Him therefore let us offer up sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, fruit of lips confessing to His name. The proof of our priestly place is remarkably complete. Hence it follows that the caste of a priesthood now on earth on behalf of the Christian saints, and separate from them, is an imposture not only unsupported by scripture, but wholly opposed to its plain and ample testimony. Nay more, it is subversive of the being and nature of the church, and incompatible even with the fundamental character of the gospel, and of Christian standing.

1 Peter, 1 Peter 2:6-8

The holy building, of which the apostle had just spoken, consists of living stones which derived so striking a peculiarity from the Living Stone. This, familiar in general to those who knew the Bible, he proceeds to base on a prophecy repeatedly cited in the N. T.

“Because it is contained in scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a corner-stone, elect, precious; and he that believeth on him (or, it) shall in no way be shamed. To you therefore that believe [is] the preciousness; but to disobedient [ones] a stone which the builders rejected, this became head of corner, and stone of stumbling, and rock of offense; stumbling as they do at the word, being disobedient, unto which also they were appointed” (vers. 6-8).

Isa. 28 turns from “the drunkards of Ephraim” and their judgment to the still more terrible stroke which must fall on the guilty “scornful” rulers in Jerusalem. For these, to escape the overflowing scourge of the king of the north, or the Assyrian, will have made a covenant with Death and with Sheol are at agreement. But lies shall prove no refuge, nor falsehood hide them. For Jehovah who is to rise up, after the fashion of the overwhelming victories He gave David of old, will do His strange work, only on an unexampled scale—a consummation and that determined upon the whole earth. Thus the willful king within and his covenant shall come to naught with the apostates of the people; and no less the king of the north without and the multitude of the besieging foes, as chap. 29 adds. But in the face of this unparalleled tribulation, of which all that has befallen the people is but an earnest, the prophet declares from the Lord Jehovah, that He lays in Zion for a foundation a Stone, a tried Stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. For that day will prove the downfall, final and irretrievable, of all the powers of the world, west or east, as well as of the unbelieving mass of the Jews, when the godly remnant that trust in Immanuel are forever vindicated. Then shall He Whose name is Branch grow up from His own place, and He shall build the temple of Jehovah; even He shall build the temple of Jehovah; and He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne; and He shall be a priest upon His throne, which no Son of David ever was save in a small typical degree, but He who is also the Root of David.

Here it is not the temple of glory as by-and-by, but a spiritual house, and a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices during the day of Christ's rejection by Israel. But do the believing Jews forfeit all because the mass reject Him? Far from it. They enter into the “enjoyment of the promises, as far as these were compatible with the present ways of God; and if there be not the reception of all, God has provided some “better thing” for or respecting us, as another points out (Heb. 11:39-40). They have in measure the blessedness of believing without having seen, when the prophecy is, not merely applied, but fulfilled to the letter. The trust in Christ which refused idolatry, antichrist, and the seemingly overwhelming power of the world, will surely be blessed, though objects of mere mercy at the end, if they have not the power of faith breaking through every obstacle in peace as ought to be now through the word.

It is interesting to note that the apostle Paul, in Rom. 9:30-33, seizes this portion with the aim of explaining how Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, failed; while Gentiles, that did not pursue it, yet attained it. The latter believed, and thus gave glory to God; the former clung to works, though far from what the law demanded, and thus betrayed their own vain self-righteousness, as they also stumbled at the stumbling-stone, despising their own Messiah. For the law is not of faith, whereas the blessing is, and thus open to the Gentile that believes, not to the Jew that disbelieves.

Moreover the introduction of Zion is seen to have a notable meaning. For, as thus figuratively used, it expresses the mountain of God's grace in contrast with Sinai, the mountain of the people's responsibility under law, where all was failure, not because the law was not good, but because man is bad and ruined so that he cannot do without a Savior. Zion appears after the utter breakdown of the kingdom under Saul, man's choice; for it was only wrested from the Jebusites to be the city of David, God's choice. But a greater than David is here, the Christ, Whom Jehovah lays as a cornerstone, elect, precious, beyond all comparison. He that believes on Him shall in no wise be put to shame; as all must be who trust in an arm of flesh, most of all those of Israel who despised Him to whom law and prophets ever pointed. For the world-kingdom Jehovah has anointed His King upon Zion, the hill of His holiness; and Christ, not now but in that day, will ask and have the nations for His inheritance, and the ends of the earth for His possession, breaking all that oppose with iron scepter, as the vessels of a potter are dashed in pieces. “For Jehovah hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His dwelling: this is my rest forever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it.” The key to all this, is that Zion will be the earthly seat of His anointed, His beloved Son.

But Zion and the earth vanish for the present as the center and the sphere of the divine dealings. For the rejected Christ is in heaven at God's right hand, angels and authorities and powers being subjected to him; and as He suffered for us in flesh, the Jews that believe are called to arm themselves with the same mind, no less than the Gentile saints and not to count as strange the fire-kindling among them that comes to them for trial, but, as we share in Christ's sufferings, to rejoice that at the revelation of His glory also we may rejoice exultingly. Such is the genuine Christian lot for the present, put to grief by varied trials that the proof of our faith, more precious than gold that perishes though proved by fire, be found unto praise and glory and honor in that day.

Assuredly the precious value of Christ will be manifest then. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; for that which had not been told them shall they see, and that which they had not heard shall they understand. And nations shall come to Zion's light and King, to the brightness of its

rising. Yet how infinite the mercy now, that the chosen people's ruin (not only under law but worse still in rejecting the Messiah and the gospel too) did not hinder the believing remnant from anticipating the blessing in its Christian form and fullness! All turns on Christ dead and risen and on high. “To you therefore that believe is the preciousness.” His rejection was the occasion of making good to God's glory all that was promised, and a vast deal more which it was given to the apostle Paul to communicate. But even here how rich is the grace that is unfolded! If they could not but sorrow over their unbelieving brethren after the flesh, in what had grace come short to him that believed?

Now they understood the import of many a scripture hitherto obscure through unreadiness to think that the rulers and the people of the Jews could be so hard and dark and rebellious against Jehovah. Not only did they overlook the solemn warnings of His word in their hands or hearing, but they fulfilled the voices of the prophets by condemning His righteous servant, marked out by those divine oracles, and by wonders of divine power and goodness, only surpassed by His personal glory and by moral excellence on every side without a parallel.

Take a sample. Isa. 53 was no enigma to them any longer; on the contrary it afforded the most luminous explanation of what had come before them in facts as certain as important. “Who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of Jehovah been revealed? For he grew up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground; he hath no form or comeliness; and when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their face, he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our sicknesses and carried our sorrows: yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; with his stripes we were healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and Jehovah hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all.”

Now the Jews are profoundly unbelieving, not only as all natural men but judicially blinded, because it was in the face of the fullest evidence and long-suffering withal to the uttermost. But their self-judgment will come at length in the day of Messiah's power and their national deliverance. Then shall they see and confess it all, as other scriptures attest; and they will understand that Jehovah wrought atonement for all their sins by what was their destructive and inexcusable sin. Into this work, already in itself accomplished, the believing remnant enters now in all its value, like ourselves from among the Gentiles. But as yet the mass are insensible. “To you therefore that believe is the preciousness, but to disobedient a stone which the builders rejected, this became head of corner, and stone of stumbling, and rock of offense.” How evident the solution of the riddle and how could it be otherwise if Jesus be the Christ and Son of God? Psa. 118:22 and Isa. 8:14 are as clearly fulfilled as the fuller prediction; while we have to wait for the earthly triumph when Israel shall own it all, Jesus is made head of the corner in heaven, and those who now believe, Jews or Gentiles, enjoy the blessing by faith. This too has even now more excellence for the heart than the visible glory when it appears as it surely will, to say nothing of the heavenly glory which will also be displayed above the world in that day.

The present state of the Jews exactly answers to the dark back-ground of the picture. And the words which follow are as solemn morally as they are sure in fact: “stumbling as they do at the word, being disobedient, unto which also they were appointed.” There is neither here nor anywhere else the dogmatic reprobation of the Calvinistic school; which has no more to justify it from scripture than the opposite error of the power for good of the Pelagians. All the evil is man's; as the good is exclusively of God's grace. He never made man to be a sinner, nor does He take pleasure in a sinner's death, still less in his everlasting destruction. But He is supreme; and, bold as man may be in willful disobedience, God's will stands. He presents His grace and truth in Christ; and men stumble at the word which reveals Him. To this they were appointed, not to be disobedient, but, being so, to stumble in this way, which God had in His wisdom appointed as their trial. They refuse and contemn the word, which others, by grace self-judging and believing Him, receive to salvation, peace, and joy. Compare Jude 4.

1 Peter, 1 Peter 2:9-10

Nor is it only that Christians now are a spiritual house, a holy priesthood; and this not as a mere title, but to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. They stand in the fullest contrast with such as stumble at the word, the disobedient. The roll of blessed privilege is unfolded here thus far.

“But ye [emphatically, are] a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for a possession, that ye might set out the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness unto his marvelous light; who once [were] no people but now God's people, the unpitied, but now pitied” (vers. 9, 10).

It is true that as “a holy priesthood,” the exercise of the heart by faith is toward the God who brought us to Himself by His grace in Christ, and could righteously bring us thus near by His blood. We hence approach within, and offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. What the sons of Aaron did in the sanctuary after a material sort, which derived all its value from being a shadow of Christ and His acceptance to God as a perfect and constant odor of rest, the saints are now exhorted to do, As the Epistle to the Hebrews expresses it, “By Him therefore let us offer sacrifice of praise continually to God, that is, fruit of lips confessing to His name.” Can any privilege be higher or more intimate than to be in His presence, walking in the light as He is, delivered from the egotism which breaks out into the variance of separate will, and cleansed by the blood which effaces every sin? to adore the Father, the only true God? to pour forth our thanksgivings for all the grace that has reached even to us? to praise Him for all that He is and has done, and given us to receive and know?

Christ is the ground and substance of it all, and hence without cloud or change, and the Holy Spirit given, that a divine power and character might be in vessels though still earthly. This is a wondrous assimilation to the everlasting worship which shall be in heaven and throughout eternity; but we own it now and are invited to it now, not as a title merely, but as a joyful occupation, especially as gathered to His name. It will be perfect, without alloy in the day of glory to which we look on; but it does become us to abound in it here, seeing that the light and the love and the known accomplishment of that work which secures the blessedness of all to God's glory are already ours, and Christ is revealed to us in that glory as the fullest witness and pledge that it is ours.

Never should we confound worship with the ministry of the word. Precious as this is, it is but the means of conveying to us the truth, which received by the Spirit fits us for the praise and adoration of our God. It is rather the service of the Levite than the approach and the offering of the priest. But no communication of blessing from God to our faith, however essential as the basis, has the same nature, character, and effect as worship; for this is the return of the heart, when made free of His presence and strengthened by His Spirit, to present our thanksgivings

and praises in the communion of all saints, acceptable to God through the Savior.

Yet it is not all. The believers are also viewed on another side. They, and they only, are “a chosen race,” at the very time when the elect nation had proved itself more than ever guilty to its own ruin. Now to a remnant of the Jews is this word primarily addressed; not as if it were not true of all who believe, but that those might be comforted who were saved from that perverse generation, over which a fresh judgment was suspended, about to scatter them once more, and more than ever. If Israel's place was for the time forfeited, the believing remnant get the blessing and are pronounced “a chosen race.” The distinction in Christianity acquired a higher character and more personal.

Next, they were “a royal priesthood” (which the Aaronic was not), but rather after the pattern of Melchizedek in its display of the blessing. In the day that is coming He will exercise that priesthood, sitting as Priest upon His throne, instead of bearing us up as He now does within the veil. Meanwhile those who are His are even now said to be a royal priesthood to manifest His praises before the day of His power. It is not of course preaching the gospel to the lost that they might be saved, but telling out His virtues or excellencies, as our testimony to Him who alone is worthy and exalted of God.

Then again they are “a holy nation,” when the nation, who ought to have been so, stood with the stamp on it of evil to the uttermost, not of idolatry alone but of disdaining the Holy One of God, the Messiah. Had they not cried in their blind and mad hatred, His blood be on us and on our children? The remnant, on the contrary, who owned Him and were washed from their sins in His blood, were now “a holy nation” accepted in His name.

Finally they were “a people for a possession.” If God was morally bound to discard at length the people who were always resisting the Holy Spirit, as their fathers had done, those of them who believed on Christ became “a people for a possession.” They were the more dear, because their faith broke through the manifold hindrances by which unbelief, pride, and judicial darkness encompassed the Jewish nation. Few as they were, compared with the mass hurrying on to destruction, they were “a people for a possession” to God, that they “might tell out the excellencies of him that called them out of darkness unto his marvelous light.”

Such is the Christian position here below. By-and-by Israel shall have the place in power and glory before all the nations, where the blind people, see and the deaf people hear in the rejected Messiah the Lord Jehovah, the only Savior. Then will it be plain that “this people have I found for myself; they shall show forth my praise.” And men shall know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides Him, who is Jehovah, and none else; and the heavens from above and the skies shall pour down righteousness, and the earth shall open and bring forth salvation, and righteousness shall spring up together. But even now, while the rejected Christ sits on the Father's throne, and the Spirit is sent forth to glorify Him after a spiritual sort in a world of darkness and rebellion against God, those who confess Christ are to tell out His excellencies. And well they may: seeing that He called them out of darkness unto His marvelous light. If these should hold their peace, as He said, the stones would immediately cry out. They were once as dark as any. So were all who now believe, darkness itself as the apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians, but now light in the Lord. And truly the light is wonderful unto which He called us, Himself the genuine light which never deceives nor grows dim. Though it has not yet arisen to shine on Zion, as it will surely come, it has shone in our hearts who believe, the light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ. Now it is only from heaven and for heaven, as we wait for Him. But He will return and appear in manifest and indisputable light for Zion and repentant Israel; and the earth, which darkness still covers, shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah and of His glory as the waters cover the sea.

Meanwhile those He called out of the Jews are consoled by the assurance that in Christ all that can be theirs, consistently with walking now by faith and not by sight, is their assured portion. The failure of the ground (their own obedience), taken in Ex. 19:5, 6; 24:3-7, does not compromise those who believe. Christ has established what could not but fall through their disobedience. Their faith rests on Him, not on themselves; whosoever believeth on Him shall not be confounded; and they did believe on Him who secures all for the weakest that is His. Hence they anticipate Hos. 2:23 before it can be verified to Israel, as ver. 10 clearly proves. They are warranted to appropriate now the prophet's words. It is due to Christ whom God delights to honor. But it is full of interest and instruction to apprehend that Paul, writing to both Jews and Gentiles that believed, quotes Hos. 1:10 no less than ii. 23; whereas Peter, writing to the believing Jews of the dispersion, does not go beyond the latter. Each inspired writer was perfectly guided of God for the divine aim in view. This Wiesinger totally failed to discern, and Alford, who endorses his error, confuses the two truths, and thus destroys a distinction of all moment for spiritual intelligence. The once “no people” were now God's people; the unpitied as to their settled state, which the perfect implies, were now pitied. How truly great His mercy now! And it is good and wholesome for the soul to feel habitually that it needs nothing less in the day of temptation in the wilderness. So the apostle Paul reminds the believing Hebrews in the close of chap. 4 Indeed it is what the priesthood of Jesus constantly implies. All saints should cherish His sympathy and God's mercy throughout our earthly path.

1 Peter, 1 Peter 2:11-12

The exhortation at the beginning of the chapter is founded on being born again of incorruptible seed through God's living and abiding word. Therefore were they, and all other Christians of course, to lay aside all malice and all guile and their accompaniments or effects, and to desire earnestly the pure milk of the word, that thereby they might grow to the salvation of glory ready to be revealed. Here it is another exhortation no less general and necessary, based on those high privileges of priesthood, holy and kingly, which distinguish the Christian already, though to be displayed in glory by-and-by, as declared in Rev. 1, 4, 5, & 20. What Israel lost in rejecting the Christ was theirs, only in a more eminent degree and with even a far higher sphere in God's sovereign grace. This leads the apostle to press corresponding probity.

“Beloved, I exhort [you] 1as strangers and sojourners to abstain2 from the fleshly lusts such as3 war against the soul, having your behavior comely among the Gentiles; that in what they speak against you as evil-doers, they, as observing,4 may from your comely works glorify God in [the] day of visitation” (vers. 11, 12).

For the first time the apostle addresses these saints as “beloved,” for there is no ground for adding “dearly” though it be common enough with the A.V. It should be here, as the word is rendered in chap. 4:12; and in the Second Epistle, 1:17, 3:1, 8, 14, 15, & 17. The endearing term is as appropriate to this entreaty against carnal desires, as farther on against quailing under fiery trial. On either side danger lay; and the respective exhortations came from his heart to theirs.

But he appeals to them also as “strangers (or, pilgrims) and sojourners,” not in the more literal sense of chap. 1:1, but in the deeper and more spiritual view of 1:17. If grace called them to heaven, what were they to do with the objects and pursuits and interests of the earth? They were waiting for the revelation of the Lord Jesus in glory, called to be holy in all manner of behavior, as is He who called them, and while free to invoke Him as Father who judges impartially according to the work of each, bound to pass their time of pilgrimage in fear, yet in a fear not of distrust but of confidence; for it is based on the conscious knowledge of divine grace in their redemption at infinite cost and worth. Here he had been telling them of their invaluable nearness and dignity before God when Israel for the present had manifestly lost all. It was their blessing as Christians, not their calamity as Jews, which called them to walk through the wilderness world as pilgrims and sojourners. These too give the greater force to their present estate of strangers, that they abstain from fleshly desires such as war against the soul. Even what is lawful must be used with measure in God's sight.

How striking is the different way in which grace uses spiritual privilege as here, and the sanctioned principle, as well as ambition, of the world-church! Babylon is now clothed in purple and scarlet, bedecked with gold and precious stones and pearls, with a gold cup in her hand full of abominations and the unclean things of her fornication, mystery written on her forehead, and withal drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. Present exaltation on earth, universal power and visible glory, the grossest idolatry, the most wanton and corrupt betrayal of holy separateness to Christ, and the murderous hatred of God's saints and of the witnesses of Jesus: such are her horrible, indelible, and unmistakable features to all taught of God.

What a contrast was even the first hankering after outward honor and authority with our Lord's warning to the twelve! “Ye know that the rulers of the nations lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Not thus shall it be among you; but whosoever would become great among you shall be your servant; and whosoever would become first among you shall be your bondman; even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:25-28). From the beginning of His ministry our Lord had laid down for such as heard Him that they are to love their enemies, to do good to those that hate them, to bless those that curse them, to pray for those that despitefully use them. So teaches Peter in this very Epistle, and so he lived: blessed, if we suffer for righteousness' sake, and if we share in Christ's suffering, we rejoice now, that in the revelation of His glory also we may rejoice with exultation. The Catholic system, long before the world-dominion of Popery prevailed, was but the mystery of lawlessness developed; flesh rampant in and after the world to Satan's delight, as far from Christ known by the Holy Spirit as a theater or circus is from heaven. But greater abominations than these were to come, till the signal and final judgment which slumbers not, when strong is the Lord God who will then surely judge Babylon forever.

According to the mind of Christ the high privileges of faith were but to strengthen the believer's delight in God and vigilance as “strangers and sojourners” in holding aloof from the fleshly lusts such as war against the soul. It is not now the unamiable and bitter feelings of fallen man, as in ver. 1, but the self-indulgent and licentious. How often through lack of prayer and watchfulness fleshly lusts spring from sincere esteem and pure affection unawares gliding into carnality; as the Galatians' fall from grace was from going on to perfect in flesh what they had begun in Spirit! How readily little fond familiarities follow by degrees, in the intimacy of Christian love ripening into unhallowed freedom, if not the worst evil. So might lust take other direction and form, as covetousness or any other indulgence alien from Christ. These fleshly desires, many of which men praise as doing well to self, war against the soul and are an abomination in God's sight. How contrary to the new and eternal life we have in Christ, and inconsistent with God's wonderful light in which we walk! How mischievous and debasing to the Christian! They grieve the Holy Spirit, dishonor Christ, and fight against the soul.

Hence the call is to have their behavior comely () among the Gentiles. For there were these Christian Jews interspersed. Though the spring of conduct is the faith that looks to and calls on the Father, it is also an obligation to win the unbelieving and unfriendly by practical consistency with Christ, without affording occasion to those that seek it. For men of the world suspect the motives and the ways of the faithful, yet have a strong if not intelligent sense of their responsibilities, and are ever on the watch for their halting and failure. Therefore is the apostle earnest in urging “that in what they speak against you as evil-doers, they, as observing, may from your comely works glorify God in the day of visitation.”

It was an early and common reproach among the Gentiles that Christians must be atheists, because they turned from idols; and no image of gold, silver, stone, or wood, nor picture of man's device, met the eye of man in their assemblies. The Jews well knew that this was just because a living and true God had won them from such vanities to serve Him. But bitterly jealous were they themselves that Christians did not become proselytes of the law, instead of believing in His risen Son, Jesus the Deliverer, and waiting for His coming again from the heavens; and still more furious were they, that any of the stock of Abraham should have the same faith and hope as the uncircumcised.

Among Greeks and Romans again the service of the state was a cherished object: and he who did not take his share of its burdens or value its ambitions had no end of contempt. To have here no abiding city but to seek the coming one, to declare that the Christian commonwealth is in the heavens from which also we await the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, seemed to both Jew and Greek rank folly and odious in itself.

Love too, as the bond of perfectness, laid them open to the shameless suspicion of ill-wishers, who put an evil construction on the new brotherhood which astonished the world, embracing women emancipated by the faith of Christ from being the mere drudges and playthings of the other sex, and now in a near and common relationship where Jew or Greek cannot be, bond or free, male and female; “for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” It is easy to understand what men think and say of what is only known to and by faith, opening the door, as they in their ignorance of grace and truth judge it must, to indiscriminate license and uncleanness. But the apostle exhorts that, from observing the comely works of those addressed, even such as spoke against them as evil-doers might rise above their prejudices and glorify God in the day of visitation.

The apostle put no commendation of themselves before them. Christ bade them beware of such praises as dangerous. But He did more to the like effect as here in Matt. 10:16: Let your light (i.e. in confessing Christ) thus shine before men, so that they may see your comely works and glorify your Father that is in the heavens. Our apostle adds “in the day of visitation;” but hardly in the sense of being visited with the same light and grace which Christians knew, still less of a day when the Gentiles should have a clearer preaching of the gospel than then. It appears rather to look on to a day when God shall judge the secrets of men, when the Lord shall come who will also both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of hearts; and then shall each have the praise from God.

1 Peter, 1 Peter 2:13-17

Having begun with self-judgment as to the inner springs in order to a comely behavior before others, ready as they are to think and speak ill of Christian men, he now turns to various external relations and exhorts us to the conduct that becomes us in them.

“Be subject1 to every human institution for the Lord's sake; whether to a king as supreme, or to rulers as being sent through him, for vengeance on evil-doers and for praise to those that do well. Because so is the will of God, that by well-doing ye put to silence the ignorance of senseless men; as free, and not having liberty as a cloak of malice, but as God's bondmen. Honor all, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king” (vers. 13-17).

The Jews found it a hard task morally, and in particular when entrusted with the then only revelation from God, to live in submission to the powers that be; idolatrous as these were and given up to a reprobate mind. The mass never accepted the Gentile yoke as the divine chastening of their own wickedness and departure from the God Who deigned to make them His people. And as their pride was irritated by the gospel which, on their rejection of the Messiah, God was now sending out to the nations no less than to themselves in His free and indiscriminate grace, their rebellious spirit also was growing till it drew down on them the days of vengeance in war, and desolation, as Dan. 9:26 predicted, as well as the Lord Himself (Matt. 21:38-41; 22:7, and Luke 21:20-24), in the last clearly distinguishing the Roman siege under Titus from the far more solemn events about to be in the consummation of the age (Luke 21:25-27, as still more fully given in Matt. 24:15-31, and Mark 13:14-27).

It was therefore of moment to exhort the Christian confessors from among the dispersed Jews to whom the apostle writes, that they should in their humble loyalty please God and be gracious, instead of contrary, to all men. Notwithstanding that Israel was a wreck, and Judah so more than ever in God's sight because of adding the Lord's ignominious rejection to their old iniquity, the remnant that believed in Him not only received spiritually what the nation sought after the flesh, but enjoyed new blessings in Christ beyond all that saints possessed of old. Prophets had it even revealed to them, that not to themselves, but to the remnant that believed after Christ's sufferings and glorification, they were ministering those things which were announced to them through those that evangelized them in virtue of the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven.

In such a case therefore consciousness of such rich and unmerited blessing softens the heart before God, and opens and swells its new affections toward man. For as another apostle wrote, “the arms of our warfare are not fleshly, but powerful according to God to overthrow of strongholds, overthrowing reasonings and every high thing that lifteth up itself against the knowledge of God, and leading captive every thought into the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:4, 5). Thus, on the one side as God's children, and knowing their redemption by Christ's precious blood, while on the other strangers and sojourners instead of being at home on the earth, it was all the more beseeming, simple, and easy that they should be subject to every human institution for the Lord's sake.

The church is a divine institution, not a human one, and every Christian is a living part or member, whatever his place. And God set some in the church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers. After that we are told of another and inferior class, powers, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, kinds of tongues. Sign-gifts passed away, and such of the great gifts for edification as laid the foundation. But God is faithful, whatever the changes through man's unfaithfulness; nor can Christ's love to His body cease in active and effectual care, till we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, at a full grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

But here the call is external even to submit to every human institution; for they might assume different shapes, all involving trial to the Christian. But as the apostle Paul wrote to the saints in Rome (13:1), where these were chiefly Gentiles, and a cruel and unscrupulous and depraved emperor reigned, “Let every soul be subject to the authorities that are above [him]. For there is no authority except from God, and those that be are set up by God.” Here it is not the secret providence that comes before us, but the manifest fact. In both the duty is to subject oneself; and here “for the Lord's sake” as there for conscience. A republic had its claim no less than royalty. The only relation revealed as to the believer is subjection without one word here or anywhere else in the N. T. for exercising authority in the present evil age. The grace of Christ is the pattern for every Christian; and “for the Lord's sake” does not import His relation to the human creation, though He is indeed Lord of all, but His appeal to the saints themselves, that they obey Him in submission to the powers of the world.

But the Spirit distinguishes, while He enjoins subjection to all: “whether to king as supreme, or to rulers as being sent through him, for vengeance on evil-doers and praise to those that do well.” “Sent through him” refers to royal authority as superior. Had the reference intended been to God, the phrase would have been), “by,” and not the intermediate word , “through.” All may see the incongruity which the mistake would involve of predicating divine mission, not of the king but only of delegated governors.

The aim of government expressed in the latter part of ver. 14 is quite clear. It is to punish evildoers, and to encourage those that do well. The broad obligation was enjoined on Noah after the deluge. We hear of neither king nor magistrate in the antediluvian world. People imagine and reason in an abstract way about Adam; but the case of Cain left unpunished in Jehovah's hands indicates how matters then lay. “At the hand of man, at the hand of each one's brother, will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God he hath made man” (Gen. 9:5, 6) first laid the general basis of human government as it is. Life belonged to God, who thus communicated the principle to Noah. Henceforward man was responsible as God's servant to execute wrath, and even to blood if blood were shed; for he must not bear the sword in vain. It was the beginning of dispensations, neither the Adamic state being one, nor the new heavens and earth in the absolute sense during the ever-running space. Nor was it long before Nimrod, the rebel of the Cushite line, availed himself of the dispersion to usurp despotic power of his own will; and the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.

With the government of the world those who are Christ's have nothing directly to do. They are expressly not of the world as He was not (John 17:14, 16), who refused even to arbitrate when one sought His informal intervention; He would be no judge or divider of inheritance (Luke 12:13, 14). “My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my officials fight that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence.” He was come into the world to bear witness to the truth; and such is the mission of the Christian. The age to come will behold Him and them reigning over the earth when evil shall be infallibly judged and iniquity hide its head. It is now the time to suffer with Him, looking then to be glorified. Therefore should we meanwhile be the more zealous to submit

ourselves to every human creation (as it is literally), and not only to a king as supereminent but to governors as sent from time to time through him for righteous dealing with evil-doers and for praise of such as do well. Our proper interests are on high; hut that is our duty for the Lord's sake.

A weighty reason follows. “Because so is the will of God (and are we not sanctified unto obedience—obedience of Jesus?), that by well-doing ye put to silence (lit. muzzle) the ignorance of senseless men; as free and not having liberty as a cloak of malice, but as God's bondmen.” How sound, wholesome, unselfish, and godly! The true and comely answer to the spiteful hatred of the world is a godly course of living. For men as such, not some only but all, are senseless if they know not God, and therefore find their malignant pleasure in imputing their own evils to His children. This habitual well-doing is not to give up the liberty wherewith Christ set us free, but as we live by the Spirit, also to walk by it, instead of wearing the liberty as a cloak of malice, which enemies pretended. It is our happiness and cherished duty to carry ourselves as God's bondmen: such we really are; and we find it the perfect law of liberty, as it flows from our new nature.

The paragraph ends with a pointed and pregnant conclusion— “Honor all, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.” The form of the first honoring is not the same as the last expression of the act done when called for, not the habitual doing it. The Christian should not fail to remember that man was made as none other in the image of God. He alas! when fallen is prone to forget what rebukes his manifold inconsistencies.

Loving the brotherhood is a constant duty; but the love takes a shape according to their state. No Christian is called to love carnality or worldliness; nor yet a schismatic way, nor the heretical or sectarian, but to turn away from the one, and to have no more to do with the other after a first and second admonition, however once perhaps honored in God's service. Love would take pains with those guilty of lesser faults, admonishing the unruly, comforting the faint-hearted, sustaining the weak, and patient toward all. It is the very reverse of either self-seeking or indifference, or independency.

Then how necessary to cultivate habitually the fear of God! There is nothing right where this fails. The holy fear of God shuts out every dishonoring fear of man, and all tormenting fear of God. We know His majesty, His holiness, and His righteous character; and we know also that He loves us beyond a father's love, with the perfection of the Son's Father. May we all deepen in our fear of Him!

There remain the words, “honor the king.” This too is continuous. Whatever may be his personal character, he represents God in the things of earth. The Christian, if true to his calling on high, has nothing to blind his eyes; for he seeks no personal interests, favor, or honor, nor consequently has he to feel the disappointments of such as live for present things. He can therefore in simplicity and godly sincerity honor the king for his office as of God in His providence (for it is ignorance to speak here of His grace), and this as his habit with supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings, not only for all, but in particular for kings and all that are in high place, that we may live a tranquil and quiet life. Our sufferings, sorrows, and conflicts come because we have Christ our life in the world which led of Satan crucified Him; and because we have to do with men bearing the Lord's name who seek their own things, not the things of Jesus Christ. The world's false glory, the flesh's selfishness and self-will, and Satan's antagonism to Christ and the truth must make it a question habitually of overcoming by faith in subjection of heart to God.

1 Peter, 1 Peter 2:18-20

The exhortation is next addressed to domestics (), instead of continuing the unrestricted appeal of verses 11-17. The apostle begins with those, and does not follow up to their masters as in the Pauline Epistles; and then he writes to the wives and the husbands, without specifying either the children or the fathers. But it may also be noticed that the “domestics” here exhorted are a milder name if not a wider class, not necessarily “bondmen” as in the letters to Ephesus and Colosse. At least they were in contrast with the or born slave. One can understand hired servants of Jewish origin among Jews.

“Household servants, be in subjection with all fear to your masters (), not only to the good and gentle, but also to the crooked. For this [is] grace if for conscience toward God one endureth griefs, suffering unjustly. For what glory [is it] if when ye sin and are buffeted ye shall endure? but if when ye do well () and suffer ye shall endure, this [is] grace with God” (vers. 18-20).

One of the hateful and fatal plague-spots of Romanism is the so called church's interdiction of God's word, save according to its own will. None but Satan gave such an authority. But Protestantism never rose in this to the truth; for, in opposing Popish arrogance, it fell into the snare of claiming man's right to the Bible; which easily led on to the wicked principles of the French revolution, socialism, and other like iniquities. The Christian knows it as his real privilege and solemn obligation to assert God's right to address His word to His children now, as of old to Israel, not forgetting man universally in the Old T. as well as in the New. And this it is which constitutes the apostate guilt of the miscalled Higher Criticism, which is but a euphemism for base infidelity, however many amiable and would-be reverent persons are thereby ensnared in both Nationalism and Dissent as well as Popery. What a contrast with the world is God's communication first to the domestics whose lot among Greeks and Romans was hard indeed! The slaves at any rate were no more than living tools or possessions; and their numbers were immense, public as well as private.

With these home-menials as a class the apostle begins. As he had exhorted all in view of public authority, here he presses like subjection in the house. The domestics are enjoined to be subject with fear on every side to their lords; they were Christians, and bound to serve many a master where the danger of provocation was extreme. They needed therefore to walk in all awe. For according to Christ their godly subjection was due not only to the good and gentle, but to the crooked or perverse which last naturally abounded.

Where was any so noble a principle, morally speaking, found among men? We see in the O.T. how selfish were the ways of the Jewish chief men toward their own brethren after the flesh. What a conflict, and what humiliation to such as Ezra the priest and Nehemiah the governor! Of heathen heartlessness and cruelty we need not speak, even among the civilized Greeks and especially the Romans who had to face reprisals and rebellions and serious wars through their barbarity. It is Christ seen by faith as we perceive in the context that follows, which explains the elevation of heart which is here counted on by the apostle. They were to serve the Lord Christ in the spirit not of self-abnegation but of grace. No matter how worthless their masters might be, grace raises the soul above the most morose, and enables it to obey and suffer even in face

of wrong.

For as the apostle explains, this is grace, in contrast with the natural bias toward the legal claim, if for conscience toward God one endure griefs, suffering unjustly. The A. V. renders it “acceptable,” and this is a fair sense in this place, and capable of defense. But it appears to me simpler and more forcible to adhere to the ordinary meaning, bearing in mind of course that it is not grace as in God which is in question, but the answer to it in those who believe. They were in this and in their measure imitators of God as beloved children, and walking in love as Christ loved them.

An effort has been made to translate the word “thank worthy” here as in Luke 6:32-34. But this seems short-sighted, because there is no (to you) here as there, which makes a sensible difference. We can readily perceive the propriety of “thanks to you,” where “grace to you” could not stand. Here in the first case it is used absolutely; and in the second it has the very different adjunct (with God), who delights to find in His child what reflects Himself.

The apostle carries his argument yet more deeply in ver. 20. “For what glory is it, if when ye sin and are buffeted ye shall endure (or, bear it)?” This no person can affirm. One bears the burden of admitted fault. It is only natural in such circumstances. “But if, when ye do good and suffer, ye shall endure (or, bear it), this is grace with God.” This is supernatural; yet it is what the Lord looks for, not only in the mature and better instructed of His saints, but in the most down-trodden menials who call upon His name. For God despises none, and has called by His grace the foolish things of the world that He may put to shame the wise; and chosen the weak things of the world that He may put to shame the strong things; and the base things of the world, and the despised did God chose, that He might bring to naught the things that are: that no flesh should boast before God. A house-servant if a Christian was exhorted instead of resenting injustice to follow Christ in

His path of suffering love. Impossible so to do unless abiding in Him; but he that says he abides in Him ought, just as He walked, so to walk himself.

1 Peter, 1 Peter 2:21-23

The place of suffering is enforced for the Christian, to the special comfort of Christian servants, by that of Christ Himself.

“For to this were ye called; because Christ also suffered for you,1 leaving you2 a model that ye should follow up his steps; who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; who when reviled did not again revile, when suffering did not threaten, but gave over to him that judgeth righteously” (vers. 21-23).

The world's relations to the saints, whether servants or not, is made unequivocally plain. So it was even for the apostles. “I have given them thy word, and the world hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17:14.) “If the world hateth you, ye know it hath hated me before [it hated] you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own, but I chose you out of the world: therefore the world hateth you. No bondman is above his Lord: if they persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also (15:18-20).” If it be trying as it surely is, how great is the moral honor of “such association with Christ!” “For to this were ye called.” God allowed, overruled, and used it for the good of His children here below.

Earlier still, and more widely, had the Lord made known His will, God's will. “But I say to you that hear, Love your enemies, do good to those that hate you; help those that curse you, pray for those that use you despitefully. To him that smiteth you on the cheek offer also the other; and from him that taketh thy coat forbid not thy coat also. To everyone that asketh of thee give; and from him that taketh away thy things ask them not back; and as ye wish that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. For if ye love them that love you, what thank (grace) have ye? for even sinners love those that love them. And if ye do good to them that do you good, what thank have ye? for even sinners do the same. And if ye lend [to them] from whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners that they may receive back as much. But love your enemies and do good, hoping for nothing back; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be sons of [the] Highest; for he is kind to the thankless and wicked. Be ye therefore merciful even as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:27-36).

It is Christ practically, and the manifestation of the Father's character reproduced in His children. Nothing less palpable or more absurd than to expect such a character in fallen man as such, that is, in the world; nothing less is what the Lord looks for from those that are His. Who is sufficient for these things? Our sufficiency is from God. Do not doubt Him, nor allow to unbelief that these are bygone things. They become and bind the Christian at all times. And so we read here, “because Christ also suffered for you.” Was this to dispense with our suffering? On the contrary He suffered for you, “leaving you a model, (or, copy) that ye should follow up his steps.”

The saint needs an object from God to form our souls and fashion our ways. And He sets before us Christ. What or who can compare with Him? Flaws were in the best of saints at their best, think of Peter, Paul, John. Christ “did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.” Christ “when reviled did not revile again; when suffering, did not threaten, but gave over to him that judgeth righteously.” Who among his most bitter foes that sought every occasion ever convicted Him of sin? He always did the things that pleased His Father, and never once did any will but His, the lowliest of men, yet above the highest. For there is nothing so lowly as obedience; nor is there anything so pure and morally elevating as ever obeying God. He and He only was “His righteous servant,” He absolutely and perfectly.

It has not been shown as far as I am aware that the word rapa admits of the reflexive sense, good as it would be in itself, that is, of meaning “gave himself over.” Hence various modes of supplying the ellipse have been proposed. But why should it not be rendered, though a little rugged, as it seems used, absolutely? So we find in Mark 4:29, where there seems no need of rendering, “is brought forth” or “provided.” Why not “should permit”? See Pind. P. v. 4; and Demosth. 1394. 23 even for the aorist; which A. Buttmann oddly denies. The present, &c. are common as in Herod. vii. 15; Xen. Anab. vi. 4, 34; Isocr. 106 C.; Polyb. xxii. 24, 9, as given by Liddell & Scott.

1 Peter, 1 Peter 2:24

At this point the apostle turns from the more general reference to the Lord's sufferings for us, the peerless example of un-repining love and unswerving yet patient righteousness in a world of evil, to that which stands alone from all before and after in the expiation of our sins, here expressed in terms of extreme simplicity. In atonement Christ had no companions and no followers.

“Who himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed (ver. 24).

Both our text and the Epistle to the Hebrews (ix. 28) make certain the strict sacrificial sense of (“bore”) when connected with the object, “our sins."1 So joined, this is the simple and sole sense of the word. Such too is the regular, if not invariable, employment by the LXX, as any Scholar may satisfy himself. The notion of a pregnant sense “bringing up to,” and “bearing on” the tree, equivalent to the altar, is as certainly a mistake as anything can be. For to express the former, the usage is or , as opposed to . Thus we read in Lev. 1:2, 3, 5 (as in the corresponding cases), with the distinct term which answers to the latter in 9. The same fact occurs in Lev. 2:1 compared with 2, as in 16 is given, the exact term instead of its substitute. Compare also Lev. 3:1 with 5; 6, 7, 9 with 11, and 12 with 16. The Hebrew is always exact, and does not warrant the weak confusion of the LXX. in 14. The due distinction reappears in Lev. 4:1 contrasted with 10, though the high priest himself was in question; and so for the whole congregation, 14 with 19; again the ruler, 23 with 26; and one of the people, the simple is used in this case, and the proper in the other. In the intermediate mixture of sin and guilt, as well as the full guilt-offering, there is at least no violation of the usage, though other terms displace the latter; and so it might be shown from Genesis to Ezekiel that (“bore”) expresses the final sacrificial act, and not the preparatory “bringing up” which also some have sought to attach to it. This, as we have seen, has its own distinct and appropriate expression.

Our apostle and the still greater one to the Gentiles cite Isa. 53:12; which stamps these words of the Septuagint with divine authority. Heb. 9:28 has the deeper use of exhibiting in the same verse the exact distinctiveness of the two words (and), which many scholars have confounded, and incomparably more who were far from being scholars. In the Epistle to the Hebrews is no wavering, as in the Septuagint though generally correct. Both terms are used with strict accuracy, as for instance Heb. 7:27 for the closing act, and ix. 14 for what preceded it. Heb. 11:17 beautifully shows the proper word2 in the great trial of Abraham's faith, and with the added exactitude of the perfect and imperfect tenses, of which none perhaps but the inspiring Spirit would have thought, but which when revealed is appreciated by every Christian who understands it.

Does it surprise any reader that so plain a point should be proved so elaborately? Look at the margin of the A.V. and especially of the Revisers. And who does not know. the bitter zeal of too many in our own day to found, on the gross ignorance of that mistranslation, the dangerous misconception of Christ's work involved in Christ's bearing “our sins in His body to the tree?” To translate competently one must know a great deal more than a grammar and a dictionary; one needs to consider the varied usages of the language as modified by its application, and especially the scope and requirement of the context. Who but a tyro could write, “It is the same word that in the verse before us is rendered on, that in the following verse is rendered to, ‘Ye are returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of souls.' This, then, we apprehend, is the apostle's statement, ‘He himself bare our sins in his own body to the tree.'“ 3 The blunder led him and many another to the utterly false doctrine, that Christ “as really, though not so obviously, bare our sins when he lay a helpless infant, in the manger in Bethlehem, as when he hung, an agonized man, on the accursed tree.”

O foolish theologians, who bewitched you? One may not expect all to read the Greek Testament with intelligent and reverent care, especially if persons doubt that “every scripture is inspired of God.” A single word of the text before us upsets bushels of essays, sermons, and expositions. The dark and perilous hypothesis would require the imperfect tense to give continuity of bearing our sins, which men have imagined and reasoned on. It is the aorist, on the contrary, which above all shuts out relative duration, continuity, repetition, or action commenced and not accomplished. Here it is a simple fact of the deepest moment for God and man, for time and eternity.

The hypothesis is incompatible, not merely with the word used by the Holy Spirit here and everywhere else, but with the broadest and most solemn facts which the most unlettered of believers, taught of God, receive with awe and adoring gratitude. What meant that supernatural darkness which in the hours of broad daylight wrapt up the cross from a certain point? What the cry of Him who had ever, in the fullest enjoyment of love, said “Father,” but now “My God, my God, why didst thou forsake me?” Had He not, when His baptism might have raised a question, received the testimony of the Father's absolute complacency in Christ as His beloved Son? How strange bearing up our sins in His body to the tree! Undoubtedly Christ did never so profoundly glorify God; but His bruising, His stripes, His being made sin and curse, were they all while He was enjoying His Father's love? His suffering for our guilt and God's face, shining at the same time! If He had been all His life bearing our sins, He must all His life have been abandoned by God who cannot look on sin with the least allowance. But no: Isa. 53:6 attests that Jehovah laid our iniquity on His Anointed when He hung on the tree: nothing more characteristic of the atonement, or more opposed to the perfectly enjoyed communion of His life.

Christ's work on the cross, then, is here before us, the answer of divine grace to man's need and danger, and the base of divine righteousness; but this last was left for another, Paul, to treat formally and fully. The practical aim was that which fell to the fervor of Peter, “that, being dead to sins, we should live to righteousness.” Both apostles delighted in these wondrous antitheses which gave glory to God and to the Lord Jesus, His Son.

The word , “being dead,” is so uncommon in the N. T, that this is its only occurrence. It occurs in the best classic authors, and answers to our “deceased,” rather than the ordinary word for “dead.” This the apostle Paul used for the privilege into which the Christian is let in order to know his deliverance from sin, as distinguished from the remission of his sins. The further privilege he treats from chap. v. 12 of his Epistle to the Romans to the end of chap. 8. It is too often confounded with what goes before, though it is clearly a grave question of the Christian's state which arises generally for the soul when he knows his sins forgiven. But our apostle speaks of “having died to sins,” which is quite another thing from Paul's doctrine. It is simple and practical (having done with sins), as was his province generally. It is true that the word sometimes means “having taken no part in,” and “being absent or aloof from “; but the context of any correct writer always suffices to fix what is intended. Here it proves that death spiritually is meant, because it is that we may live to righteousness. No other sense would apply here. It never implies “being freed from,” as some have said. The apostle adds a gracious encouragement as the result already achieved by Christ and given to the believer, for which he borrows the language of Isaiah, in the same chapter but a different verse, yet as exclusively descriptive of Christ's expiatory sufferings: “by whose stripes ye were healed.” Strange paradox, but no less blessedly true! It is literally the weal or rising left by the lash which many a slave knew well. How comforting to the Christian, slave or not, who rests with assurance, not on

the puerile use made of Pilate's unprincipled indignity (whatever general custom might be pleaded in excuse) to the Lord of glory, but to that which God wrought for the ungodly through the ignominious but glorious death of His Son.

1 Peter, 1 Peter 2:25

The need for the healing given to believers here recurs— “For ye were1 going astray as sheep, but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (ver. 25).

The description admirably suits those who from among the Jews repented and believed the gospel. It is substantially true of sinners like ourselves from among the nations. For as the Good Shepherd said, Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall be one flock, one Shepherd. Such were the means which sovereign grace employed and made effectual for gathering to Christ.

Few indeed are the Epistles which do not present our previously lost condition. Rom. 1 in its latter half is an awful but exact picture of the Gentile world under Greek letters and Roman polity. The heathen remains, in poets, in dramatic and other classic writings, demonstrate it in its actual and unconscious vileness, which the apostle but touches with a holy hand. Rom. 3 brings the moral ruin home to the Jews from their own law, psalms, and prophets: that every mouth might be stopped, and all the world become as it was under judgment to God. And hence, as man universally had no righteousness for God, the absolute need of God's righteousness for man if any were to be saved. The redemption that is in Christ Jesus by grace laid the ground for this justifying righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ, as it is written, toward all, and upon all those that believe. For there is no difference: all sinned; and God is showing His righteousness at the present time of the gospel, that He should be just Himself and justify him that has faith in Jesus.

In 1 Cor. 1 Jewish pretension to signs of power and Greek to wisdom are alike crushed by Christ crucified; who is to those called, both Jews and Greeks, God's power and God's wisdom. Man as he is cannot inherit God's kingdom. The Corinthians ought to have been the last to forget their shameless depravity. And these things, sad to name, were some of the saints, as the apostle reminded them; but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in (or, by) the Spirit of our God. 2 Cor. 5 might furnish a bright testimony of the same grace to the morally dead and the unreconciled; and other apostolical writings are full of like mercy to sinners. But those records suffice to prove the activity of divine love in Christ toward a guilty world. The sad fact is as true of Gentiles as the Lord told the Jews, “Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life” (John 5:40). All the evil is on man's side; the goodness is wholly with God, as the Lord Jesus fully shows. “Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37).

The straying sheep returned unto the Shepherd and Overseer of their souls. They were His, the Father's gift to Him. The Son loved them and proved His love to them at all cost to Himself: and the Father loved them as He loved the Son: a love beyond the creature's conception, yet assured by Him who is the Truth.

They did well to return to Him whose love is beyond all other love. Glory will prove and display it before the wondering world, as the Lord told them (John 17:22, 23); and the apostle attests it also for that day as a matter of retributive righteousness (2 Thess. 1:10). But His love is as fully set on them and made known to them now for the joy of faith and the strengthening of their souls; only unbelief can doubt it, a great dishonor to Him and loss to us. O what a Shepherd and Overseer is Jesus!

Who can measure the descent, if the sheep are content to return, not to the divine Shepherd Whose the sheep are, but to the church even were it ever so true according to God's word, to articles or symbols however sound, or to pious devices to fan the embers of faith and love in their souls? No, we have Him given us of our God and Father, Who once died for our sins, and is now alive again to tend and watch over our souls in His undying love, with all authority given to Him in heaven and upon earth; that we may please Him in a world of darkness as

He always did the things that were pleasing to the Father. Nor does He for a moment fail if the sheep should fail, as they will surely do if they be not dependent and obedient. Yet all are sanctified by the Spirit unto His obedience, not to that of a Jew under law, but to that of Jesus, conscious of the Father's love. For this is our portion. Yet if negligent or worse, let us not doubt His grace, but humble our hearts and sit in self-judgment on ourselves. “He restoreth my soul; He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.”

The Preaching to the Spirits in Prison, Christ's Preaching to the Spirits in Prison: Part 1

(1 Peter 3:18-20)

It may interest and I trust also profit the reader, if we not only examine this scripture but review the questions raised on it for ages. Here many a Christian finds perplexity, rejecting what does not fall in with the analogy of faith, yet unwilling to doubt what seems intimated by the letter of the word. He is ready to suspect himself of failure in spiritual intelligence and to question whether there might not be some unconscious insubjection of heart and mind to the perfect revelation of God, The chief at least of the speculations in which men of reputation have indulged in ancient and modern times will claim a notice, in the hope of satisfying the believer that human thoughts are ever worthless and that divine writ is clothed by the Spirit with self-evidencing light and power for all who have their hearts opened to the Lord and are self-judged in His sight. It will be seen too that the most exact criticism in the details of the clauses confirms the general scope derived from the context as a whole, and that grammatical precision points with equal force in the same direction. Thus from every point of view the truth comes out with a fullness of proofs proportioned to the closeness of our investigation, once we have the right object and aim of the passage clearly ascertained and held firmly before our eyes.

I. The true text is ,1 , , ,2 , 3 , ,4 ' , . “Because Christ also once suffered for sins, just for unjust, that he might bring us to God, put to death in flesh but made alive in [the] Spirit, in which also he went and preached to the spirits in prison, disobedient on a time when the long-suffering of God was waiting in [the] days of Noah while an ark was being prepared, in which few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.”

The connection and scope is evident. The apostle is exhorting the believers to a patient life of suffering so as to fill with shame those who vented their spite on their good behavior in Christ. Who could gainsay that it was better, did the will of God so will, to suffer while doing well than doing ill; and this because Christ also suffered (but He suffered once, once for all) for sins? This should be enough: we should suffer not for sins, but only for righteousness or for Christ's name sake. It was His to suffer for us, this once and forever, just for unjust persons (for such were we), that He might bring us to God. It is ours to suffer at times especially, but in principle always while in this present evil world. The connects Christ and us as suffering, but the contrast is as striking as it is morally suggestive. To understand with some as a point of comparison between Him and us under such a junction is to miss the reasoning utterly, not to speak of failure in reverence towards the Savior in that work which stands far above all comparison. This ought to have been too plain to need further reproof from , where His solitary and unapproachable place is set out. It was His alone thus to bring us near to God. The participles that follow tell us how this was done: “Put to death in flesh but made alive in [the] Spirit.”

But here a very important question arises. The article is certainly to be eliminated: what is the bearing of its absence on the meaning? If the articles were inserted, , and ., these would be the contrast of the two parts of our Lord's being as man, the outer and the inner; were it a. and ., it would be the utterly false thought that His Spirit as man was the object of quickening. The anarthrous form points to the character of the acts specified; but so far is it from denying the agency of the Holy Ghost in the quickening spoken of, that the presence of the article would be more consistent with Christ's Spirit as a man. No doubt, when it is intended to present the Holy Spirit objectively or extrinsically, the article is required (and, as far as I can mark the usages, the prep. or); it is excluded where the manner of His action is meant. On the other hand, wherever the spirit either of Christ as man or of any other is to be expressed, the article is indispensable, as may be seen in Matt. 5:3; 26:41; 27:50; Mark 14:38; Luke 10:21; John 11:33; 13:21; 19:30; Acts 19:21; 20:22 Cor. 5:3, 5, &c. Again, the following cases without the article clearly mean the Holy Spirit, but as characterizing the action rather than specifying the person, though He must ever be a person: Matt. 22:43; John 3:5; 4:23, 24; Rom. 8:1, 4, 9, 13; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:2, 15, 16, 18, 25; Eph. 2:22; 3:5; 5:18; 6:18; Col. 1:8; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Peter 4:6; Rev. 1:10; 4:2: 17:3; 21:10. The attentive reader of these instances will see that the turning-point is not the presence or absence of a preposition, as some scholars have thought. Words after a preposition follow the ordinary rules. Only, with prepositions capable of usage with a statement of manner, as , , , the anarthrous form is of course more common. Thus would mean in the power of the Spirit, the manner of being, or of being carried, built, justified, of blessing, preaching, or whatever else may be in question.

Hence the meaning here seems to be that Christ was put to death in respect of flesh, but quickened or made alive in respect of Spirit, in the power of which He went and preached to the spirits in prison. The falls in with the Holy Spirit still more as that wherein Christ acted in testimony. It is not said that He went to the prison and there preached to the spirits; but that in the power of the Spirit He went and preached to the spirits that are there. For that can signify “that are in prison” as naturally at least as that were there is certain: only the necessity of the context could really justify the latter sense. But if the context favor “that are,” it is the simple unforced bearing of the phrase. And that it does favor it is to me plain from ... which points to an antecedent time of guilt, the ground of their being now imprisoned.

It may be doubted then whether quickened “by the Spirit” best gives the meaning of the apostolic statement: for that would most naturally suppose the Spirit as an exterior agent. Still the anarthrous construction, as is certain from the numerous places cited, does not at all exclude the Holy Spirit: only it speaks of the manner of the quickening, not of the personal agent. But the thought of His power is conveyed by the phrase that follows , wherein Christ is said to have gone and preached, &c. Thereby it is pointedly contradistinguished from in verse 22, which is not qualified by or , but left in its strict sense of a personal change of locality to heaven. Thus it is excessively rash to say that the rendering of the English version here is wrong either grammatically or theologically, though it is more correct to cleave as closely as our language permits to the Greek style of expressing “Spirit” as the character rather than agent of the quickening of Christ, though agent too He was beyond doubt.

Bishop Middleton wrote with great force on the insertion of the article, but he was not equally successful in accounting for its omission. Prepositions he treated as exceptions to rule, and anarthrous cases like , , as practically adverbial. Hence in our passage, he held the apostle to mean that “Christ was dead carnally but alive spiritually;” as indeed he thought would flow from . if the article had been authentic. (Doctrine of the Greek Art. p. 430, Rose's Ed., 1855.) The only difference is, he thought, that by retaining the article we destroy the form of the antithesis between a. and . But instances already given show how imperfect this able treatise is in requiring either the article or a preposition to accompany . in the genitive or dative in order to mean the Spirit of God. Rom. 8:13 to which he himself refers refutes his position; and here Dean Alford, who is so strong against “by the Spirit” in 1 Peter 3:18, translates the same word exactly in the way condemned: “but if by the Spirit ye slay the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” So, on Gal. 5:5, A. expressly remarks on “not' mente' [Fritz.] nor 'spiritually,' Middleton, al., but by the [Holy] Spirit, [reff.] as opposed to .” the very rendering he afterward treats as wrong grammatically and theologically. Again, on ver. 16 he particularly observes that without the article may and does here mean “by the Spirit” [i.e. of God]. His reason, probably after Winer or the like, is invalid; for it is not because it is a sort of proper name, but because it is employed characteristically. There is no need to multiply proofs against the comments on in 1 Peter 3:18—proofs equally at least against Middleton. Consequently Hammond, Pearson, Barrow, &c, the divines who denied the applicability of the passage to Christ's descent to hades, were not so far mistaken as thinks Dr. . Browne, the present Bishop of Ely. They contend that the true meaning of the text is that our Lord by the Spirit in Noah preached to the antediluvians, who are now for their disobedience imprisoned in hell.

“This interpretation of the passage,” says the Bishop, “depends on the accuracy of the English version. That version reads in the eighteenth verse ‘quickened by the Spirit.' It is to be noted however that all the versions except one (the Ethiopic) seem to have understood it 'quickened in spirit:' and it is scarcely possible, upon any correct principles of interpretation, to give any other translation to the words. If therefore we follow the original, in preference to the English version, we must read the passage thus: ‘Christ suffered for us, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God; being put to death in the flesh, but quick in His Spirit; by which (or in which) He went and preached (or proclaimed) to the spirits in safe keeping,' &c.” (An Exposition of the Thirty-nine Articles, &c, 1868, pp. 94, 95.)

I confess to surprise at such a rendering as “quick in His Spirit” of . For, first, though there is an occasional looseness in the LXX, it is certain that the New Testament strictly and exclusively employs for keeping alive, for making alive. Secondly, is it not singular to reason from a non-authentic word as the original? And the Bishop of Ely (see note p. 94) knows that the best critics reject the article before . If absent, it is impossible for to mean “in His Spirit.”

Besides, the resulting theology is as strange as the grammar; for he proceeds, “There is, it will be observed, a marked antithesis between ‘flesh' and 'spirit.' In Christ's Flesh or Body, He was put to death. Men were ‘able to kill the body,' but they could not kill His soul. He was therefore alive in His Soul, and in or by that He went to the souls who were in safe custody ( ); His Body was dead, but His Spirit or Soul went to their spirits or souls. This is the natural interpretation of the passage; and if it ended here, it would contain no difficulty, and its sense would never have been doubted. It would have contained a simple assertion of our Lord's descent to the spirits of the dead.” To my mind such a sense must seem far below scripture. For what a poor inference that men could not kill Christ's soul! Why they could not kill the soul of the least of His saints, nay, nor of the most wretched of His enemies. Indeed “kill the soul” in any case is a singular phrase to use of any one, most of all to feel it worth while denying it in the case of our Lord Jesus. How different His language! “Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.” “He was therefore alive in His soul” is a feeble platitude for the issue of the clause, as surely as it supposes a wrong sense given to , not to speak of the confusion of the soul with the spirit in a way foreign to all exact speech. The interpretation therefore would be in every respect unnatural even if it ended here.

“When we follow, the gulf widens which severs truth from error. “But it is added that He not only went to the spirits in safekeeping, but that He went and preached to them. Hence it has been inferred that, if He preached, they had need of, and He offered to them, repentance. Hence the passage has appeared to savor of false doctrine, and hence its force has been explained away. But the word ‘preached,' or ‘proclaimed,' by no means necessarily infers that He preached either faith or repentance. Christ had just finished the work of salvation, had made an end of sin, and conquered hell. Even the angels seemed not to be fully enlightened, as to all the work of grace, which God performs for man. It is not likely then, that the souls of the departed patriarchs should have fully understood or known all that Christ had just accomplished for them. They indeed may have known, and no doubt did know, the great truth that redemption was to be wrought for all men by the suffering and death of the Messiah. But before the accomplishment of this great work, neither angels nor devils seem fully to have understood the mystery of it. If this be true, when the blessed Soul of our crucified Redeemer went among the souls of those whom He had just redeemed, what can be more probable than that He should have 'proclaimed' () to them that their redemption had been fully effected, that Satan had been conquered, that the great sacrifice had been offered up? If angels joy over one sinner that repenteth; may we not suppose paradise filled with rapture when the Soul of Jesus came among the souls of His redeemed, Himself the herald () of His own victory?”

It is certain, however, that the preaching of which the apostle here speaks was addressed neither to angels nor to devils nor yet to patriarchs, but expressly to those who did not hearken to it in the days of the divine longsuffering just before the deluge. The text itself therefore dissolves the airy fabric we have just seen; and proves that the preaching was addressed, like all other proclamations of the truth, to faith, but, as in this world constantly, met with unbelief and insubjection of heart in those who heard. Indeed in p. 96 Dr. B. confesses that the proof-text is not favorable to the point they would make it prove. “The only (?) difficulty, in this interpretation of this difficult passage, is in the fact that the preaching is specially said to have been addressed to those who had once been disobedient in the days of Noah. That many, who died in the flood, may yet have been saved from final damnation, seems highly probable, and has been the opinion of many learned divines. The flood was a great temporal judgment, and it follows not that 'all who perished in the flood are to perish everlastingly in the lake of fire.' But the real difficulty consists in the fact, that the proclamation of the finishing of the great work of salvation is represented by Peter as having been addressed to those antediluvian penitents (?), and no mention is made of the penitents of later ages, who are equally interested in the tidings.”

The really important thing for all to weigh is that this difficulty is created by the interpretation that Christ went in His soul and preached to the spirits in the separate state. The text itself speaks of His preaching to such as had been once disobedient in Noah's days. The only unforced inference is that these are in prison because of their disobedience of old, not that being in prison they obeyed Christ's preaching in hades. Nor is there the smallest hint that, having perished in that great temporal judgment, they were alleviated by any subsequent preaching of our Lord, but rather that they are kept waiting for a still more tremendous, because an eternal, judgment before the great white throne. They despised Noah the preacher of righteousness, but not without impunity, for the flood took them all away; but worse remains than the flood brought in upon the world of the ungodly. They are kept for judgment like such angels as sinned.

(To be continued)

The Preaching to the Spirits in Prison, Christ's Preaching to the Spirits in Prison: Part 2

(1 Peter 3:18.)

(Continued.)

“It must be confessed,” continues Dr. B., “that this is a knot which cannot easily be untied. Yet should not this induce us to reject the literal and grammatical interpretation of the passage, and to fall back upon those forced glosses which have been coined in order to avoid, instead of fairly meeting and endeavoring to solve,” the acknowledged difficulty. To my conviction there is nothing to untie, where one cleaves to the strict language of the apostle and the real bearing of his argument. For he is exposing indirectly the Jewish unbelief which would have nothing but a Messiah visibly reigning in power and glory to the exaltation of the chosen people and the confusion of their enemies. The faith of the believing Christian Jews in Him, dead, risen, and gone to heaven, exposed them to the derision of their brethren after the flesh, who felt not their sins and cared not for the grace of God displayed in redemption by the blood of Jesus. He was preached, not present but rendering testimony by virtue of His Spirit. Hence the importance of pointing to His testimony by Noah, a testimony to man as such, like the gospel of Christ, for it was before the days of Israel or even Abraham, and the most striking epoch and even period of preaching to men in all the Old Testament.

This is entirely confirmed by Gen. 6:3, where Jehovah said,” My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh; yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.” Then the ark was preparing, the space of God's long-suffering; and “the waters of Noah came,” and man was destroyed from the face of the earth. And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man; for the days of the gospel are preeminently of testimony, as were those before the deluge, during which Noah prepared an ark to the saving of his house and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. But he was not a believer only, but a preacher of righteousness, more emphatically

than we find it said of any other in Old Testament times. The preaching was in the power of the Spirit, and hence attributed to the Spirit of Christ, who is ever the active person in the Godhead, as is well-known in each visitation of man before the incarnation, preparing both the way and mind for it. Compare “the Spirit of Christ” which was in the prophets of old. (Ch. 1: 11.)

This then would encourage the believing Jews, as it might well admonish their despisers. It is a question of preaching to the world still in the Holy Spirit, not yet of the public reign and government of the Lord. So Christ wrought by the Spirit then; and so He does now. As the flood came on those heedless of the preaching of old, so it will be when He comes in judgment, for He is ready to judge the quick and dead. And if they taunt the believers with being so few compared with the masses that believe not, let them not forget that but eight souls were then saved through water; which figure now saves, baptism, on one side of it death, on the other resurrection, Christ having passed actually for us, as we also in spirit by faith having a good conscience before God through Him who is not only risen but at the right hand of God in heaven, where the highest and mightiest of creatures are subjected to Christ, who is therefore as full of assured security for His own as of irremediable ruin for all who slight the warning.

In this tracing of the links of the apostolic thought and word, I am greatly mistaken if the least strain is put on any part; as I believe the true text and the exact version have been already given. It is not so with those who have flattered themselves that they adhere most closely to the words of the apostle and their plain sense.

Thus when Bishop Middleton considers the true meaning to “be dead carnally, but alive spiritually,” almost every word is misrepresented; for, to bear such a translation, the sentence should have been , though I should call such a statement absurd and heterodox. I deny that we must or can render <50 in any such fashion. Bishop Browne is as wrong in adopting such a. thought in the note to p. 911 as he is in giving “quick in His Spirit” in the text of p. 95, or in expounding it as Christ alive in His soul, in or by which He went to the souls . All this in my judgment is as loose in grammar, as in philosophy if they allude to this; as faulty also in theology, as it has not the least coherence with the context or scope of the apostle's reasoning.

If Peter too had meant to say that the soul of our Lord went to these other souls, he must have taken a most circuitous and unexampled mode of expressing it in employing the phrase , referring to just before. The statement, if not the interpretation, would be most unnatural. Taken as it stands for Christ's going and preaching in virtue of the Spirit by Noah to the rebellious antediluvians, it is in my judgment fully justified, were this necessary, by the Pauline phrase, . The latter is even a stronger instance; for there is no explanatory reference to . Further, it is not a natural interpretation to take . . as those who were, but who are, in prison, because of . . . following, which very simply attributes their being in custody to their disobedience of old. There is no need nor just ground for joining with . but with . which marks off their unbelief at the preaching from the time when they were in prison. “We are thus shown, as plainly as words can, that we are reading of Christ preaching not in person but by virtue of the Spirit to those suffering the consequences of having been disobedient in the days of Noah.

Again, be it observed, the moral aim of this supposed preaching in the unseen world is as unsatisfactory as we have seen the grammar to be irregular and the doctrine strange. For it supposes a preaching confessedly without either faith or repentance as its end; and it selects, in what seems the most arbitrary way, out of all the departed souls those spirits imprisoned because of their heedlessness, when the long-suffering of God was awaiting in the days of Noah.1 To single out such willful sinners, as the objects to whom Christ in the under-world proclaimed His triumph and their fully effected redemption, seems to me a statement as foreign to scripture as-can be conceived, and equally ill adapted to impress their danger on such as now despise the preached word.

Bishop Horsley's Sermon on the passage, which is so warmly commended both in Bishop Middleton's Treatise and in Bishop Browne's Exposition, appears to my mind little worthy of confidence. Thus he affirms strongly that the English translation of . ., though “a true proposition, is certainly not the sense of the apostle's words. It is of great importance to remark, though it may seem a grammatical nicety, that the prepositions, in either branch of this clause, have been supplied by the translators and are not in the original. The words ‘flesh’ and ‘spirit,' in the original, stand without any preposition, in that case which, in the Greek language., without any preposition, is the case either of the cause or instrument by which—of the time when—of the place where—of the part in which—of the manner how—or of the respect in which, according to the exigence of the context; and to any one who will consider the original with critical accuracy it will be obvious, from the per-feet antithesis of these two clauses concerning flesh and spirit, that if the word ‘spirit' denote the active cause by which Christ was restored to life, which must be supposed by them who understand the word of the Holy Ghost, the word 'flesh' must equally denote the active cause by which He was put to death, which therefore must have been the flesh of His own body—an interpretation too manifestly absurd to be admitted. But if the word ‘flesh’ denote, as it most evidently does, the part in which death took effect upon Him, ‘spirit' must denote the part in which life was preserved in Him, that is, His own soul; and the word ‘quickened' is often applied to signify, not the resuscitation of life extinguished, but the preservation and continuance of life subsisting. (?) The exact rendering therefore of the apostle's words would be, ‘Being put to death in the flesh, but quick in the spirit,' that is, surviving in His soul the stroke of death which His body had sustained, ‘by which’ or rather ‘in which,' that is, in which surviving soul, 'he went and preached to the souls of men in prison or in safe keeping.'“

I have given this long extract which clearly puts this able divine's objections to the Authorized Version. Now, without committing myself to the defense of what is not quite correct, I have no hesitation in asserting that Horsley, by his own mistaken view, has diverged incomparably farther from the truth. We need not go beyond the bishop himself and the passage in debate where he gives a difference of shade to the two participles which are quite as much contrasted with each other as their complementary datives. According to his own principle therefore as the first means “put to death,” the other should be “made alive,” even if its uniform usage by inspired writers did not force one to the same conclusion. Why then did not H. carry out fairly and fully his own reasoning? Because it would have involved him in the result that Christ was not only put to death in the flesh but made alive in His own soul or spirit. The good bishop of course shrank from so portentous an inference, and was therefore driven to modify the antithesis, not in but in an unnatural and unfounded interpretation put on , which even Dean A. explodes, insisting justly on “brought to life,” instead of preserved alive.

The truth is that Horsley did not himself seize the exact force of and , still less the difference produced by in the beginning of verse 20. Christ was put to death in (i.e. in respect to) flesh, as a living man here below; He was made alive in (i.e. in respect to) Spirit, as one henceforth living in the life of resurrection, characterized by the Spirit as the other by flesh, though of course not a spirit only but with a spiritual body. It is not His own spirit as man, which is far worse than the English Version here both grammatically and theologically. Grammatically it would demand ., which is a reading unknown to the best copies and scouted by all competent critics; but, even if grammatically and” diplomatically legitimate, it would land us in the frightful heresy that Christ died not merely in flesh but in spirit, and had to be quickened in that of man

which dies not even in the lost. Only the materialist conceives that spirit, if he allows of spirit, can die.

Further, if . . refers to the resurrection of Christ, it is harshness itself and out of all reason to suppose Him back again in the separate state, in the verse following, where Horsley takes to mean in which surviving soul He went and preached to the souls of men in prison. But understand it, as I believe means we should, that Christ also went iv , not now in character of Spirit, but in virtue of' the Spirit or in His power when He preached through Noah; and all is precise in grammar, correct in doctrine, clear in sense, and consistent with the context. When we are raised by and by, it will be , because of His Spirit that dwelleth in us. It was not suitable to Christ so to speak of His resurrection. He was when put to death quickened , denoting the character of His life in resurrection (not merely the agent), marking the Spirit's power in which, before He was thus put to death and raised, He went and preached to the spirits in prison, disobedient as they were once when, &c.

Who can wonder therefore that the Anglican divines in the 5th of Queen Elizabeth dropped the reference to this passage of Peter in Article iii. where they had inserted it in the 6th and 7th of King Edward the sixth? Nor need we with Bishop Horsley impute it to undue reliance on the opinion of Augustine (ep. 99 [164], Evodio), who was followed by some others of the fathers in rejecting the superstitious idea of Christ's preaching in Hades. The excellent Leighton at a later day was so far from seeing this to be the plain meaning of the passage, that he does not hesitate to say, “They that dream of the descent of Christ's soul into hell think this place sounds somewhat that way; but, being examined, it proves no way suitable, nor can by the strongest wresting be drawn to fit their purpose.”

On the other hand the figurative explanation of . is quite indefensible and uncalled for. The sense of sinners shut up in a prison of darkness while living on earth, whether in Noah's day or in apostolic times, whether of the Gentiles or of the Jews and Gentiles, must be rejected. Bishop Horsley however is as mistaken on his side when he avers that such passages as Isa. 49:9; 61:1, refer to the liberation of souls from Hades. Equally wrong is his idea that joined with . implies that the imprisoned souls were recovered from that disobedience and before their death had been brought to repentance and faith in the Redeemer to come. Contrariwise the scope is that, having once on a time disobeyed when God's long-suffering was waiting before the deluge, they are in prison. In virtue (or in the power) of the Spirit Christ went and preached to such, by a preacher of righteousness, no doubt; but it is styled His preaching to enhance the solemnity of what was then refused, as it was also in Peter's day. These spirits were in prison as having once been disobedient thus and then; and God will not be mocked now if Christ's preaching in the Spirit be rejected and He be despised in His servants. Where would be the force of the few, that is eight, souls who were saved through water, if the disobedient mass or any of them were saved none the less though outside the ark? It is certainly a suicidal citation which H. makes from the beginning of Rev. 20:13; for we know that the sea will have none to give up at that epoch but the unblessed and unholy, all the righteous dead having already been raised in the first resurrection. Nor is there the least reason from scripture to fancy that souls deceive themselves by false hopes and apprehensions after death, so that some should need above others the preaching of our Lord in Hades. It is nowhere said that thither He went and preached. The spirits are said to be in prison, and this, as having once on a time been disobedient; but it is not said or meant that there Christ went and preached to them.

It is no question then of discrediting clear assertions of holy writ on account of difficulties which may seem to the human mind to arise out of them, but of an interpretation which produces endless confusion, leads inevitably into false doctrine, and has no connection with the passage any more than with the general tenor of revealed truth elsewhere. To put such a notion, based on a bad reading, slighting the exactness of grammar, ignoring the nice distinctions of the phrases, and resulting in the most impotent conclusion spiritually; to put this on the same level “with the doctrines of atonement—of gratuitous redemption—of justification by faith without the works of the law—of sanctification by the influence of the Holy Spirit;” to say that, discrediting Christ's preaching in Hades, we must, on similar grounds, part at once with the hope of resurrection, is more worthy of a bold or weak special pleader than becoming a grave and godly minister of Christ. To urge that its great use is to confute the notion of death as a temporary extinction of the soul or of its sleep between death and resurrection is certainly not to claim much from so wonderful a fact, if a fact: whether scripture does not abundantly confute such dreary and mischievous dogmas of unbelief, without resorting to strange doctrine based on a hasty and superficial interpretation of 1 Peter 3:18-20, may safely be left to spiritual men who judge according to the word of God.

(To be continued.') —-

The Preaching to the Spirits in Prison, Christ's Preaching to the Spirits in Prison: Part 3

(1 Peter 3:18-20.)

(Continued from page 32.)

It is curious to see how an intrepid and strong-minded writer, such as Bishop Horsley unquestionably was, commits himself to untenable statements,1 once he leaves the lines of the Holy Spirit in scripture. “The apostle's assertion therefore” (says he) “is this that Christ went and preached to souls of men in prison. This invisible mansion of departed spirits, though certainly not a place of penal confinement to the good, is nevertheless in some respects a prison. It is a place of seclusion from the external-a place of unfinished happiness, consisting in rest, security, and hope, more than enjoyment. It is a place which the souls of men never would have entered, had not sin introduced death, and from which there is no exit by any natural means for those who once have entered. The deliverance of the saints from it is to be effected by our Lord's power. It is described in the old Latin language as a place enclosed within an impassable fence; and in the poetical parts of scripture it is represented as secured by gates of brass, which our Lord is to batter down, and barricaded with huge massive iron bars, which He is to cut in sunder. As a place of confinement therefore, though not of punishment, it may well be called a prison. The original word, however, in this text of the apostle imports not of necessity so much as this, but merely a place of safe keeping; for so this passage might be rendered with great exactness. 'He went and preached to the spirits in safe keeping.' And the invisible mansion of departed souls is to the righteous a place of safe keeping where they are preserved under the shadow of God's right hand, as their condition sometimes is described in scripture, till the season shall arrive for their advancement to their future glory; as the souls of the wicked, on the other hand, are reserved, in the other division of the same place, unto the judgment of the great day. Now, if Christ went and preached to souls of men thus in prison or in safe keeping, surely He went to the prison of those souls, or to the place of their custody; and what place that should be but the hell of the Apostle's Creed to which our Lord descended, I have not yet met with the critic that could explain.”

The careful reader will perceive, indeed any one when it is pointed out, the immediate departure from scriptural sense and accuracy. For the apostle does not assert “that Christ went and preached to souls of men in prison.” He speaks not of human souls generally but only of those characterized by disobedience of yore, when Noah the preacher of righteousness prepared an ark to the saving of his house. This makes all the difference possible; for there is no reference whatever to the invisible mansion of departed spirits as a whole, still less to the special place of seclusion for the good. These last are in fact excluded by the language and the thought of the apostle. His argument is against those who, as incredulous Jews were especially apt to do, made light of preaching Christ only present in Spirit, not reigning in power, and of the comparative fewness of those who professed to believe. His refutation of their taunts and proof of their extreme danger are grounded on the Lord's dealing with the men of Noah's day who similarly despised the divine warning, while those only were saved who heeded it. How few the latter, how many the former!

It is true indeed that “it is a place which the souls of men never would have entered, had not sin been introduced;” but what is this to the purpose? It applies on the side of good as of evil, of heaven as of hell; for sin, which lost living on the earth along with innocence furnished occasion for that infinite grace which gives the believer eternal life and heavenly glory in and with the Son of God, the last Adam. And if the actual condition of the departed be as regards the body incomplete, even so it is not correct to speak of our being at home with the Lord as “a place of unfinished happiness,” though the Lord Himself, the saints with Him, and those on earth are looking onward to the day of His and their manifested glory when the world shall know that the Father sent the Son, and loved us even as He loved Him; when He will gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and are on earth, in Him in whom also we have obtained inheritance, being predestinated according to His purpose; when in virtue of the name of Jesus every knee shall bow of beings heavenly, earthly, and infernal, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to God the Father's glory.

Nowhere does scripture speak of “the deliverance of the saints from” this state of things, though surely it is of the Lord's grace and the divine virtue of life in Him, that He will raise their bodies and transform what was erst of humiliation into conformity to His body of glory, according to the working of power whereby He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. This no doubt is the full answer to the cry of the wretched though quickened man (in Rom. 7): “who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?” For it is our resurrection (Rom. 8:11) which will manifest the victory over death2 through our Lord Jesus Christ, as it is His resurrection which has even now given us life in the Spirit, freeing us from the law of sin and death. “We have for our souls what we shall know at His coming for our mortal bodies. But deliverance from a place of seclusion for our spirits, to be effected by our Lord's power, is a dream wholly opposed to the scriptural representation of the saints' enjoyment with Christ meanwhile. The apostle declares that to depart and be with Him even now and thus is very much better than remaining here, though doubtless there will be more for the body when He comes: for the soul there cannot be. Therefore, while earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven, he says that we are confident and willing rather to be absent from the body and present with the Lord; that is, rather than abide here in the body absent from the Lord. Yet are we now, not shut up as were believers before redemption, but called to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free.

Hence it is in vain to urge what the old Latin language describes, since it is quite opposed to the truth; and it is a mistake to cite the poetical parts of scripture which treat of the deliverance of God's people on earth. For “the gates of brass” and “the bars of iron” (Isa. 14:2) certainly refer to Babylon not to the presence of the Lord with whom are the spirits of departed saints. So Psa. 121:5, “Jehovah is thy shade upon thy right hand,” is expressly a prophetic song for Israel in the latter day, and in no way about those deceased; as Isa. 49:2 certainly has no such reference, the context plainly giving the transition from Israel to Christ. It is a distressing misrepresentation then to call His presence a place of confinement, though not of punishment, which “may well be called a prison.” Never does God's word so call it. The converted robber asked to be remembered when Christ comes in His kingdom (i.e. in the resurrection state and the day of glory for the earth), and the Lord gives him, as a nearer comfort and intrinsically the deepest joy, the assurance of being with Him that very day in paradise. It is grievous dishonor to Him and ignorance of scripture to slight such grace, even to the length of saying that it “may well be called a prison.” Certainly it will never be so called by one who appreciates either the blessedness of Christ's love or the honor the Father is now putting on the Son. The Father's house can only be called “a prison” by the darkest prejudice. It is where Christ is now, and where we shall be when Christ at His coming takes us to be with Him as the expression of His fullest love. The presence of the Lord on high is the very kernel of joy by grace, whether for the separate spirit after death or when we are all changed at His coming.

Feeling apparently that this is rather strong language (though many of the fathers knew no better through their ignorance of eternal life in Christ and of redemption), Bishop Horsley qualifies his defense, and affirms that the original word in the text of the apostle imports not so much as this, but merely a place of safe keeping. Now what are the facts of the usage of ? Primarily it means the act of watching; hence (2) the persons that watch or guard (as in Latin and English); (3) the time; the place, not only (4) where those watching are posted, but (5) where others are kept as in ward or prison. Such, with the moral application of taking heed and being on one's guard from keeping in ward, are the chief senses in which the word was employed by the Greeks. The New Testament has it once in the first sense (Luke 2:8), once in the second (Acts 12:10), five times in the third (Matt. 14:25; 24:43, Mark 6:48, Luke 2:8 twice), and forty times in the fifth sense, including not only 1 Peter 3:19, but Rev. 18:2, where it is in the Authorized Version translated “the hold of every foul spirit and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird,” all evidently equivalent to the meaning of “prison,” which is used even of Satan's place of temporary detention. Never elsewhere does the Holy Spirit use it in the more general signification of a mere “place of safe keeping.” Is there any special reason in our text why it should here be so rendered? The assigned ground of custody being the former disobedience of the spirits thus restrained, there ought to be no hesitation in accepting the English Version as fully justified, and rejecting that suggested as unexampled in New Testament usage and at issue with the context.

It is going beyond scripture then to affirm that “Christ went and preached to souls of men thus in prison or safe keeping,” and not at all sure that He went to the prison of those souls or to the place of their custody. It is quite sure that the apostle speaks only of the spirits in prison, disobedient once when the long-suffering of God waited in Noah's days, not to souls of men as a whole in the separate state. It is sure that Christ, in the power of the Spirit, went and preached to the former, but it is nowhere written that He went to the prison or place of custody of any souls whatever and preached there. The building and the ground-work of Bishop Horsley are alike unsubstantial; his handling of scripture careless, and his reasoning unsound. Such passages as Isa. 13:7; 49:9, have only to be examined with ordinary attention in order to satisfy any candid mind that it is a question of the deliverance of captives in this world, be it literal or figurative, and in no way of men after death.

If, as Bishop Browne holds, hades or paradise are two names applying to the same state, it would seem to follow that paradise must apply to the place of departed saints, and hades to their state as separate from the body. For 2 Cor. 12:2, 4, naturally connects paradise, not with

heaven merely, but even with the third heaven, where the Lord is (cf. Luke 23:43); and Rev. 2:7 is decisive, that in this very paradise of God will the faithful have their future reward at Christ's coming, when risen from the dead or changed. It is an error therefore to think that it is another place, for the latter scripture certainly identifies the scene of the separate spirits of the saints with that of their future glorification.3 They are with the Lord now, as they will be when changed, and thus completely and forever with Him; but now as then in heaven. The ancients who denied this were as wrong as the moderns who popularly hold the soul's passing at once on its final reward with very little thought of the resurrection at Christ's second coming or of the kingdom.

But I may here add that the ancient versions are too loose to render any help worth naming. Without discussing now whether the Peschito does (as Bode and others assert) or does not use scheiul for the grave as well as hades, it is plain that “lived” in spirit is faulty for , and that to leave out “in [or in the power of] which,” substituting a mere connective particle “and” is far from the truth. “To the souls which were kept” may after a fashion represent . ., the addition of “in hades” or “scheiul” being unwarranted. There are other inaccuracies; but let this suffice. Par better here is the Philoxenian Syriac, which is thus rendered by White, “morte affectus quidem carne, vivificatus autem spiritu. In quo et spiritibus, qui in domo custodiae sunt, profectus praedicavit: Qui non obediverant aliquando, quum expectabat longanimitas Dei in diebus Noe” &c. The Arabic (Pol.) and the Vulgate alone give correctly the beginning of the verse, the Erpenian Arabic and the Aethiopic being as loose as the Peschito Syr. The Aeth. adds “holy” to “Spirit;” but it does not follow, as Bishop Middleton seems to think, that the other ancient versions did not understand exactly the same sense, though they very properly did not add the word “holy” so as to define their rendering more than the original text. The Coptic, according to Wilkins, is no better than the rest. This is his version— “mortuus quidem in carne, vivens autem in Spiritu. In hoc Spiritibus [S. sic] qui in carcere abut evangelizavit. Incredulis aliquando,” &c.

In every version and in every edition of the text, accurate or faulty, this at least stands out irrefragably that the spirits in question are nowhere represented as those of men who had already repented when on earth, but on the contrary as disobedient. This we have seen to be very far from the only difficulty in the way of the alleged preaching in hades; but it is at least felt and confessed by the stoutest champions of that interpretation. It is quite erroneous to assume that Peter speaks here of the proclamation of the finishing of the great work of salvation, still more to say that it was addressed to the penitents of antediluvian times, even if there were no question about the penitents of later ages who are equally interested in the tidings. The apostle uses not even (which, though expressive of glad tidings, admits of far greater latitude in scripture than the good news of the finished work of salvation) but , a word equally applicable to express a public setting forth of righteousness and a warning of the destruction which must fall on the despiser. (Compare 2 Peter 2:5, “Noah a preacher of righteousness,” .") The main difficulty then really is that the text speaks only of impenitent persons; the expounder only of penitents.

Whatever the rapture with which we may suppose paradise filled when the soul of Jesus came among the souls of His redeemed, it is certain that the passage of the apostle says not one word about it; and it would be no small difficulty to produce any other scripture which does reveal it. Here it is a question of the spirits in custody for their former disobedience in the days of Noah, while a very few in contrast with them were saved, used for the present comfort of saints taunted with their paucity by the masses who despised what was preached by the Spirit now as before the flood. Possibly no doubt some who then perished in the waters may not be doomed to perish everlastingly in the lake of fire; just as one at least preserved in the ark may not have been ordained to eternal life. But all this is only profitless speculation; and those who indulge in it lose sight of the grand and plain lessons of the apostle, whether for the comfort of the faithful or for the warning of unbelievers. Before the kingdom of God is established and displayed in power, the masses have ever been disobedient to the word, and believers a little flock; but be these ever so few, let those not forget the days wherein a world of impious men perished; and this too is not the worst, for their spirits are in ward (which is never said of the righteous), the Lord without doubt reserving them as unjust for judgment day to be punished.

(To be continued.)

The Preaching to the Spirits in Prison, Christ's Preaching to the Spirits in Prison: Part 8

(1 Peter 3:18-20.)

It is confessed by Dr. J. B. that the sense brought out is self-consistent and not incompatible with any of the facts or doctrines of revelation. He only complains of the mode of interpretation as liable to objections. 1 shall show however that, far from being really insurmountable, every one of these objections is destitute of weight. Flesh and spirit are opposed; though in the same case, it does not follow that they must have the same preposition supplied in English. This would not be necessary if the same Greek preposition (which is far stronger or more precise) accompanied each of the two opposed terms. Thus, in Rom. 4:25, two clauses stand in antithesis with one another; whence many have been allured to argue, like our author here, for a necessarily similar force of with each accusative. But this is an error. For the former clause means that our Lord Jesus was delivered because of our offenses; the second, that He was raised again on account of the justifying of us (that is, in order to it): for justifying cannot be severed from faith, as the very next verse shows. (Rom. 5:1.) Indeed the notion of justification before faith would introduce nothing but confusion and false doctrine, not to speak of the evil in practice which naturally results. The Authorized Version however has not rendered ill in giving “for” with both clauses, the English preposition “for” being as ambiguous as the corresponding Greek here.

Here similarly there is no necessity to vary the English by supplying in the flesh and by the Spirit, but, if there were, it was open to the translators to have done so. The relation of the dative is not so contracted or consequently so uniform as to demand the exactly same form of representing it. Besides we have to take into account the idiom of the English tongue, which does not by any means conform always to the Greek. The reader is already aware that “in” or “in respect of” may be given equally in both the clauses; but the translators might legitimately enough have given “in” and “by” as they have done. Hence the rendering which develops the objection is invalid. “In His human spirit,” if it were ever so proper in itself, would require the article (as in the common text). But as the best MSS expunge it, so the sense resulting from its presence would have been really an insurmountable objection, as it is impossible to apply “quicken” to the spirit of Christ, any more than to His divine nature. But, as we have seen, if one translates the latter term “by the Spirit,” it is not correct to assume that we must translate the former “by the flesh.” The alleged necessity 18 just the mistake which falsifies the reasoning of many interpreters and has mystified more readers.

Strictness of parallelism is to my mind more common in the limited scope of human thought than in the word of God, who habitually, I believe, while thus comparing or contrasting, gives a further and varying side of truth in the fullness of divine wisdom. Hence the mere technicality of the schools is sure to err in interpreting scripture. It does not follow therefore that where we see two datives balanced against each other they must both be expressions, of element, agency, or instrument, though it may be wise to avoid a greater precision in the rendering than the inspired original itself carries. At the same time such a difference is not advocated in the present instance; but, as the authorized translators rightly enough elsewhere represent twice by an English “for,” so “in” or “in respect of” will be found to suit both here. Consequently there is no such difficulty connected with the version or with the interpretation already given as to weaken it, still less, as some easily frightened have supposed, to convince us that it is untenable. Nor does it become the believer to hesitate because the plain meaning of scripture seems to favor a view opposed to his prejudice, though he would do well to examine closely what is really at issue with known truth. For no lie is of the truth: all that is true must be consistent. Only we must beware of confounding our limited apprehensions with the truth in all its breadth and depth.

But let us follow the reasoning a little more. If we hold the rendering “in” on both sides, there can be no doubt that “put to death” in flesh yields a simple and excellent sense. But what of “quickened in the Spirit?” Is not this equally good and as clear as the other? Strange to say, the true and plain antithesis seems to have quite escaped Dr. B., who allows us only the alternatives of “in His spirit” (which would be quite wrong as we have often shown), or “in His divine nature,” which is an impossible version and if possible obviously absurd and false, as is admitted. But why not “in the Spirit” as presenting the manner of Christ's resurrection, characterized by the Spirit in contrast with the violent close of His life in flesh, in both cases the article being excluded by presenting each as a question of principle rather than of fact? On the other hand “put to death by the flesh” is intolerable, either as the human nature of our Lord or as mankind; but there is no need to understand either if we take “by the Spirit” to mean the Holy Ghost, which to my mind is assuredly the truth, only presented in character rather than as an objective personal agent, which is quite common in Greek, though not so easily expressed in our tongue or caught by the English reader.

Nor can I for one see anything unnatural, but rather great force and beauty, in pointing out that it was in virtue of the Spirit who thus wrought in His resurrection that Christ preached by Noah in the antediluvian world; for it was of the utmost importance for the Jews, who ever craved the visible in their thoughts of the Messiah and His kingdom, to learn that it is now as of old a question of a testimony in the Spirit to be believed or slighted, and surely to be followed by judgment, as then so now. Hence too the preference to the Spirit's mind of presenting their past example as “spirits in prison” rather than as men living in flesh, which however He does also involve in their antecedent moral condition in the world when “once” or heretofore disobedient.

Such an allusion here to Gen. 6:3 appears to my mind most apt and impressive, identifying Christ with Jehovah, as is often done in these epistles. It was natural in writing to Christians of the circumcision, and comforting them, in their sufferings and the contempt of their testimony, by the evidence given to the substantial sameness of its reception from the flood till the Lord returns in glory. This passage has in no way for its immediate object a description of the results of the Lord's atoning sufferings, bright as is the witness given to them, but rather to comfort the saints in their sufferings, apt to repine as Jews might at their trials ever since they believed in the Lord Jesus. The apostle explains to them the government of God in what He permits of sorrow to His own. Faithfulness does bring present blessing; but even if suffering come for righteousness' sake, is not the saint now blessed? It is better, if God will it so, to suffer for well-doing than for evil-doing; because Christ also once suffered for sins, just for unjust, that He might bring us to God. Such is the way His suffering for our sins is introduced, not a harsh interpolation of His having in the Spirit that raised Him preached of old to the impenitent antediluvians put into a statement of His atonement, but undeniable encouragement to downcast saints to go on suffering for righteousness, since it was His once for all to suffer for sins: with this, not they, but He only has to do, and it is done with-a work despised by sneering Jews who felt not their sins nor their need of grace like His. But if put to death in flesh, He was quickened in the Spirit, in whose power1 He had already gone and preached to the imprisoned spirits, first disobedient when the long-suffering of God waited out in the days of Noah, while the ark was preparing, wherein few, that is, eight, souls were saved through the water. They must not wonder then if few were saved now; for this has ever been a favorite taunt of unbelief, as an absent Messiah who left His own suffering would be to an incredulous Jew. So far the analogy with the times before and at the deluge is plain. So is the use of the allusion that follows; for as men were there waited on in long-suffering, it is no otherwise now; and as they are kept for a worse judgment, so will it be with such as despise the gospel. On the other hand baptism is to the believer the sign of salvation by the death and resurrection of Christ; for as He died atoningly, so we when baptized are buried with Him in those waters of death; and as He rose, we through His resurrection have what a good conscience demands, even acceptance before God by His work who is gone into heaven and is on God's right hand, angels and authorities and powers being made subject to Him, which, though in-visible, is far beyond the throne of David on earth and the subjection of Gentile foes, as the Jews looked for.

And what is Dr. B.'s explanation? Truly the notable one, that “a consequence of our Lord's penal, vicarious, expiatory suffering, was that He (!) became spiritually alive (!!) and powerful in a sense, and to a degree, in which He was not previously; and in which, but for these sufferings, He never could have become full of life to be communicated to dead souls, mighty to save. He was there spiritually quickened.” No wonder that Dr. B. has few to follow him in his view, though it is no worse than most others. But to be “quickened” is not to be a “quickening Spirit,” though both be true of our Lord. Neither does John 5:26 speak of the Lord in resurrection but as a man here below, the servant of His Father's glory; nor does Matt. 28:18 speak of one either quickened or quickening, but invested with authority only as Son of man in heaven and on earth. And if this be violent as to Christ, not less so is the notion that by “the spirits in prison” are meant “spiritually captive men.” A strange phrase indeed, as the author allows; stranger still if possible, though Dr. B. sees nothing perplexing in the statement, “that they were aforetime disobedient in the days of Noah;” as if it meant that Christ preached to spiritually captive men who were hard to be convinced in former times, especially in Noah's day. But this is to pervert, not to expound. If Dr. B. had been a scholar and had examined the passage, he must have seen that the absence of the article before arises from the disobedience being viewed as the ground why the spirits were in prison. There is no hint of an aggregate, some part of which had been disobedient in former times. In short the view is mistaken altogether; for, instead of employing “spirits in prison” as a phrase characteristic of men in all ages, Peter speaks there of a special class, disembodied and in custody or prison because they had been once on a time disobedient in the days of Noah: not a word about their being after Christ's resurrection turned to the wisdom of the just and delivered. These steps of departure from the text emboldened Dr. B. to go farther still and contrast the multitudes that heard and knew the joyful sound with the few saved in Noah's day. “Still is he going and preaching to the 'spirits in prison;' and though all have not obeyed, yet many already have obeyed, many are obeying, many more will yet obey;” and this is a comment on 1 Peter 3:19, 20, where one prime aim is to comfort the Christian Jews subject to the taunts of their enemies on their own fewness, as compared with the masses who reject the truth of the Gospel! The saved are few alas! now as in Noah's day. There is analogy, not contrast.

But this is not all. “This view of the subject has this additional advantage, that it preserves the connection of the passage both grammatical and logical.” We have seen enough of the grammar: let us see as to the “logic.” “The words of the apostle, thus explained, plainly bear on his great practical object. 'Be not afraid, be not ashamed of suffering in a good cause, in a right spirit.' No damage comes from well-doing, or from suffering in well-doing. Christ in suffering, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, suffered for well-doing.” “For well-doing!” does the author say? Happily little logic suffices to test this view of the context; for the scripture says here, in the most pointed terms of contradiction, that Christ suffered once for sins, not for well-doing.

1 Peter, 1 Peter 3:1-6

The apostle does not exhort the masters, as we find in the Epistles to the Ephesian and the Colossian saints; but he addresses wives and husbands in the next place, without speaking in particular to children and parents. The relation of wives, as of domestics; was one of subjection.

“Likewise, ye wives, [be] subject to your own husbands, that even if any are disobedient to the word, they may be gained without word through the behavior of the wives, having beheld your chaste behavior in fear; whose adornment let it not be the outward one of plaiting the hair, and of wearing gold, or of putting on apparel, but the hidden man of the heart, in the incorruptible of the meek and quiet spirit which is in the sight of God very precious. For thus also heretofore the holy women that hoped in God adorned themselves, being subject to their own husbands; as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose children ye became, doing good and not being afraid of any dismay” (vers. 1-6).

It is easy to understand, that, as with servants, so with wives, Christians who stand in the subject place might and must find frequent difficulty with heathen or Jewish superiors to whom they were so near. For the mind of the flesh is enmity against God; and it is provoked by what is of the Spirit in those whom they command. A Christian wife cannot give up a conscience toward God in matters of right and wrong; again she has objects of faith dearer to her soul than life which claim her allegiance and observance, in public as well as private ways utterly repugnant to unbelievers of every sort.

All the more is it incumbent on such believing wives as are bound to unbelieving husbands, that they should be truly and sedulously subject to their own husbands, wherever it is compatible with doing the will of God. Even in the O. T., where such unions existed, the wife was under obligation before God to be subject; whatever the rigor that the law required, whatever the horror inspired by idolatry. The eyes of Jehovah, they knew, were toward the righteous and His ears open to their cry. The face of Jehovah was against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.

But the N. T, greatly strengthens the believer's heart by the then revelation of the grace of Christ far beyond what could act of old. Not only does it fortify to suffer both for righteousness and His Name; it encourages faith by the sovereign grace which saved ourselves to look to our God and Father on behalf of others who need it no less than we once did. And if He sought and saved me, a lost sinner, may I not the more from standing in so close a relationship pray for my husband dark and dead as he is?

Here too the apostle gives a wise caution. The less spiritual Christian is too apt to forget the ways of divine grace in bringing ourselves to God, and to regard conversion as the simple effect of the truth, overlooking the various workings of the Spirit to give the word a root in the heart. The unbeliever as such slights the word and has no conception of its power when by the Spirit Christ is thereby revealed to the soul. The practical bearing has immense weight with one ignorant of God and of himself. But his conscience can value greatly, gentleness, lowliness, patience, obedience in another and especially that other his wife. He is well aware how unreasonable and unkind he has often been to her; yet she has borne it, and never complained, never reproached, but been as loving and dutiful as ever. He is forced to feel that there must be something that makes the difference in her faith which he often mocked. Hence is pressed “that even if any are disobedient to the word, they may be gained without word through the behavior of the wives, having beheld their chaste [or, pure] behavior in fear.”

It is not meant that one can be begotten of God without the word: 1 Peter 1:23 forbids such a thought as decidedly as James 1:18 and many other scriptures. But the moral weight and the gracious way of the wife tell on the hard husband; and he is won to hear, so much the more because she does not preach to him, as he calls it. How many have been thus gained to hear the gospel the day will declare. The modest purity he knows and values much, and this in fear, not boldness or self-confidence, but tempered by the dread of offending God or her husband. For here it seems put with all generality.

Next he turns to the external habits of a Christian wife, and urges the avoidance of frivolous and sumptuous ornaments. Some may deride this: but it is their carnality or worldliness which governs. Has not the Christian to please Christ and do all things in His Name? Our bodies are to be presented a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God; and we are not to be conformed to this age with its changing fashions of luxury and splendor, whatever station may be ours naturally. Christ is dearer, nearer, and more than all. And the Christian wives are not exempt. Their adornment is not the outward one of dressing hair, nor wearing gold things, or putting on dress, which are alien from Christ and a shame to saints. The real ornament is the hidden man of the heart which He sees, in the incorruption (for outside all is corruptible) of a meek and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is of much price. None of these showy objects is so, nor could all Ophir buy it.

Therefore Peter was led to speak of ancients witnessing for God in this respect. “For thus also heretofore the holy women that were hoping in God adorned themselves accordingly, being subject to their own husbands; as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose children ye became, doing good and not being afraid with any dismay.” On God their hope rested, not on themselves. Sarah stood at the head of these pious matrons of Israel; but though not alone (for there were not a few saints of like spirit), she was far from forgetting the true ornaments that became saints.

Favored as Christians were by Christ and redemption come, the wives now ought not to fall short either in moral adorning or in subjection. Sarah obeyed her husband and reverently addressed him (Gen. 18:12); she was not carried away by the common ground for vanity, though she had beauty more than most. Her children such wives now became as were doers of good and not frightened by any scare from propriety. Why should they be who know that Christ's Father is their Father, and Christ's God is theirs? Why be perturbed since He sent His servants to comfort them with the same peace He gave them? The enemy works by fear; God by His love in Christ against every source of alarm.

Hence as another wrote, even before love was fully manifested, when it was simply hoped for with confidence, souls “from weakness were strengthened, became mighty in war, made armies of aliens give way. Women received their dead by a resurrection; and others were tortured, not having accepted deliverance that they might obtain a better resurrection” (Heb. 11:34, 35).

1 Peter, 1 Peter 3:5-6

Thus the apostle cites examples; and this from the earliest days of dealing with the called out pilgrims, which would have great weight with the Christian remnant of Jews.

Exhortation had been already given against all vanity and worldly show, but with due care that the outward apparel should express “the hidden man of the heart.” No doubt the open man of his house, the predominant partner, might enjoin and be entitled to her wearing jewels or other costly array in his sphere. But here women do not usually need a husband's command. Here the word is for their own conscience. For it is not only that God, in contrast with man, looks on the heart: His wondrous light into which He called us gives the Christian woman the highest standard, and thereby enables her by grace to judge all inconsistencies in the incorruptibility of a meek and quiet spirit. This, however foreign to human nature, would not be lost even on a hard and exacting husband, Jew or Greek; for such might be the lot of those addressed, and of course the former most frequently, either of them on the watch too often to spy the faults of a Christian. But under any circumstances such a lowly spirit, seen in all its perfection in Christ, is of much price in the sight of God; and this is of all things most consolatory to the tried if faithful.

Changes many and great have passed over the world. But this fidelity led in olden days when Israel's great progenitors dwelt in tents. Yet Sarah knew to her husband's shame that her beauty commended her to a court and a King's palace for a while, and royal gifts were lavished on him whose selfish fear exposed her to dishonor but for their Almighty protector. But thus aforetime also the holy women adorned themselves as became those whose hope was in God, instead of following the fashion of the world that fleets away. Sarah is singled out as obedient to Abraham, and paying him marked honor, notwithstanding the familiarity of wedded life, which too often has a contrary effect. This example is here set impressively before Christian wives.

But the terms employed are notable: “Whose children ye became, doing good and not being afraid of any dismay.” They were far from this in their unrenewed state. The Lord Jesus does not find, but makes, us what pleases God. Selfwill reigns in those afar from Him, with ready resentment of all wrongs that may be inflicted, and submission induced through fear, self-interest, or amiability at best. What a change is wrought by the faith of God's grace in Christ! Sanctification of the Spirit, setting apart to God in a new life now given, effects obedience, not legal but after the pattern of Jesus, and faith in the sprinkling of His blood. Thus did those Jewish matrons become Sarah's children in obeying and honoring, each her own husband. It was a divine duty imprinted on the heart by their Savior. Becoming Christians, they became Sarah's children in deed and in truth. They were not merely lineal descendants, like the unbelieving Jews whom the Lord in John 8 reproached as being Abraham's seed, not his children; else they would do the works of Abraham. They became Sarah's children, “doing good and not afraid of any dismay.” On this side is woman apt to be weak.

Is there a gentle hint here of the occasion when Sarah laughed incredulously, as she covertly heard Jehovah promise she should have a son (Gen. 18:10-15)? How graciously the Spirit speaks openly of her comely bearing at that same time toward her husband! Yet did He not spare her then, when she even denied her derision. Here He only records her good conduct, and calls her children to remember it: “doing good and being not afraid with any alarm,” as frequent a cause as any other of untruth. For sudden perturbation of any kind is unfaithfulness in women professing godliness. Failing in dependence on God and communion, they fear to own the truth under such pressure. Is not the caution here given therefore seasonable and salutary?

1 Peter, 1 Peter 3:7

The address to husbands is much shorter, as we can readily see and understand. Yet is there not a little for our instruction.

“Ye husbands, likewise, dwelling with [them] according to knowledge, awarding honor as to a weaker vessel, the female, as also fellow-heirs of the grace of life, that your prayers be not hindered” (ver. 7).

As the wife is called to subjection to her own husband, so is the husband to dwell with her “according to knowledge.” Thus the apostle reminds the Corinthian saints “we all have knowledge” (1 Cor. 8:1). It is characteristic of Christ to give spiritual intelligence which is far more. We do not await the day of the Lord to have divine light. We walk in the light as following Him who is the Light of life; we are already, all Christians, sons of light and sons of day; we are not, as we were, of night and of darkness. The Son of God is come and hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true. Loved of Him we are to walk in the same love; light in the Lord, to walk as children of light, for the fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth. On the one hand we are to prove what is well-pleasing to the Lord; on the other, to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but rather also reprove them, exposed as they all are by the light, for that which makes everything manifest is light.

Favored as the Jew of old was, compared with the heathen (no matter how civilized or refined as in Greece and Rome), Christianity gave an immense advance. But as one apostle, who had inwardly all knowledge beyond such as boasted, insisted that if he had not love, he was nothing, so here our apostle implies its necessity for the husband's “dwelling together” with his wife. Hence to love their wives has the first and great place in the Epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians. To fail in such love is a breach of the relationship, and unworthy of a Christian. Alienation is a practical denial of the husband's place. Faults there may be, haste, forgetfulness, shortcomings; but love as elsewhere, so here in a position so near and tender and peculiar, should have long patience and be kind; be not emulous any more than insolent and rash, nor be puffed up, nor behave in an unseemly way, neither quickly provoked nor imputing evil, and rejoice not at iniquity but rather with the truth. Love does not change nor weary; but we need not here say more. Only we must bear in mind, in thus “dwelling together,” the need that it be “according to knowledge.” The vanity of our knowing, which puffs up, is contrasted with love which builds up.

And what a source of instruction is scripture for the difficulties of the home as well as of the way! Christ Himself, as the other apostle pointed out, is the Standard.

But a few words follow which deserve every attention. The husband, as having the place of authority, is exposed to the danger of presumption and lack of consideration. Hence the force here of “awarding honor as to a weaker vessel, the female.” The very fact that such is her nature as compared with his own is the ground of the Spirit's appeal to him who is given to be her protector. Has he never learned his own weakness before God, and proved that in the sense of it by faith is his power through the grace of Christ? His therefore it is, never to despise, but to guide and cherish her and this in no suspicious spirit but the watchfulness of love, and the grace that pays her honor. But to apply this definitely to “allotting an honorable subsistence” to the wife, as Dr. Doddridge contended, has no more claim to be God's mind than his similar use of 1 Tim. 5:17 for the elders.

Another consideration consists of a still higher plea— “as also fellow-heirs of the grace of life, that your prayers be not hindered.” Though the married estate is essentially of the earth, yet those here in view were the redeemed of God, His children. “And if children, heirs also; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” Husband and wife, being Christians, are appealed to as in a relationship by grace which shall never pass away. When Christ our life shall be manifested, then shall they exchange the present exposure to sorrow and suffering in which we give God thanks, for that exceeding weight of glory, into which Christ has entered as our fore-runner, whilst we are waiting for Him. O dear brethren, recognize your blessedness, and count the heaviest trial but light affliction and momentary. Look not at the things that are seen but at the things that are not seen; for the things that are seen are for a time, but those that are not seen eternal.

1 Peter, 1 Peter 3:8-12

More general exhortation succeeds.

“Finally [be] all likeminded, sympathetic, brother-loving, tender-hearted, humble-minded; not rendering evil for evil, or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, because hereunto ye were called, that ye should inherit blessing. For he that will love life and see good days, let him stop his tongue from evil and his lips that they speak no guile; and let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it; because [the] Lord's eyes [are] on the righteous and his ears unto their supplication; but [the] Lord's face is against evil-doers” (vers. 8-12).

It is Christ alone who makes these desires possible in those who are His. But less than this could not satisfy the apostle ever in the presence of weakness and contrariety. They were called out of sin and ruin and misery to blessing, and were therefore to be the witnesses and channels of grace in a world and a race which had fallen under curse. They were already begotten again according to the much mercy of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ through His resurrection from the dead unto a living hope, unto an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading, reserved in heaven for them; and they were blessed with other privileges of love, and holiness, and dignity in the highest degree, as we have seen, according to the fullness of Christ. For He that spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

Thus it is plain that our duties flow from our relationships conferred by sovereign grace in Christ according to the glory of His Person and the efficacy of His redeeming work. They are therefore not only beyond all price but unchanging; and they are the ground of our new responsibilities. Christ by His death met and closed our old responsibilities, in which we were lost; and by His resurrection He has ushered us who believe into an entirely new standing of soul-salvation and blessing, whilst here below, and waiting for the completion of His grace as to our bodies also and in heavenly glory. We can therefore without affectation and in the Spirit bless God, and are a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For He ever liveth to make intercession for His own. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? He that bore our sins in His body on the tree, lost and dead as we were in evil, lives also to make the fruit of our lives, our praises, acceptable to God. What that issues by the Spirit from our hearts and lips can have a place, so high and momentous as our worship of God and the Lamb? No doubt love works here and downwards by the same Spirit; but we, if rightly feeling cannot but own that God has the first and nearest claim.

And if this be so, will not His working be all the mightier and purer when we consider our relations to one another, to say nothing of the claim of compassionate love toward a perishing world? The apostle calls all who believe to be “likeminded.” Rivalry, self-seeking, liking to differ or even thwart, is not Christ, but of the first and fallen Adam. When the eye of faith rests on all, Himself and those He loves, there is no difficulty. Naturally we see others' faults and overlook our own; but this is the old man; it is the reverse of Christ, Who is our new life and Whom we are called to live. Members one of another, members of Christ, how unworthy not to be “like-minded?” If nature is opinionative, what does the one indwelling Spirit aim at and effect? If we live in Spirit, in Spirit also let us walk, not vain-glorious, provocative, or envious.

Being in such a scene of wretchedness as the world and with bodies not yet redeemed in which we groan, we are exhorted to be also “sympathetic.” Surely we may and ought to rejoice with those that rejoice, but far more frequent is the demand on our sharing the grief that abounds, and especially for righteousness or Christ's sake. It is our common portion as Christians to suffer with Him, even if we may not have the experience of suffering for Him. In any case sympathy in these holy sorrows is sweet and strengthening.

“Brother-loving” is a plain call, as belonging to the same family of God. Are we not to love them personally beyond our affection to our natural kin, as the bond is deeper and of divine nature and everlasting? Assuredly the enemy strives continually to bring in contention and misunderstanding, and every other means of hindrance; but the duty is as incontestable as the relation. How it is to be exercised depends on each case, for which we need the word and Spirit of God. For as John clearly shows, it is no mere human impulse and must not clash with the truth of God or with obedience.

“Tender-hearted” suitably follows. There is no worth in God's eyes if we love but in word or tongue, and not in deed and truth. We are to learn of Him who never relieved by power only, but His spirit entered into and bore up before God the infirmities and the diseases which He removed.

Nor is “humble-minded” the least though last in these qualities which the apostle sought to be in exercise. And where can we find its perfection but in the same Lord and Savior? Nor could the days of His flesh be recalled without the vivid and humiliating remembrance of the

sad contrast even in the honored Twelve, so often and to the last disputing which of them should be accounted greatest. “I am meek and lowly in heart,” said He, and it was ever true. Man's ambition was wholly alien. “Ye shall not be so; but let the greater among you be as the younger, and the chief as he that serveth.”

Again the apostle charges the saints not to return evil for evil, or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary to bless, “because for this thing were ye called that ye might inherit blessing,” So marked is the contrast of the Christian with Israel when they undertook to earn blessing by keeping the law; as the apostle Paul set before the saints in Galatia, who had made the same sad mistake. “For as many as are of works of law are under curse” (Gal. 3:10): not as many as broke law, but as many as are pledged to that principle.

It is by grace alone, that we, Christians, are saved, or any can be; and it is through faith, not of works. Called also to an inheritance of glary, are we not witnesses of blessing? We know that one of our own poets expresses what nearly all felt as unbelievingly as himself: “Man never is, but always, to be blest.” Christianity is the standing proof that they knew not the truth. It was the less wonderful in A. Pope, as he never rose out of superstition and dead form even to apprehend the gospel of God's grace.

But grace gives the Christian to understand and make good the moral government God carries on with His children. The apostle in vers. 10-12 cites Psa. 34 for this even now; though Israel must await another day when their heart turns to Him whom they rejected in their unbelief. Evil and guile wholly misbecome the life of believers. If they dishonor their Lord like the Corinthians, they fall under His chastening; and this may take the shape of sickness and death. Nor is it only words that are warned against. He urges from that scripture that they should turn away from evil and do good, seek peace in practice, and this earnestly, because Jehovah's eyes are on the righteous, and His ears to their supplication, whereas His face is against evil-doers. Now the mind of the saint is as truly to please God, as the carnal mind is not nor can be. The believer is in living relationship with Christ, the duty follows, and the Holy Spirit works in power.

1 Peter, 1 Peter 3:13-16

ZEAL for what is good is apt to disarm the honestly hostile; but in case it should not be so, how blessed to suffer for righteousness! Christ was perfect thus; in what was He not?

“And who shall injure you if ye become zealous of the good? But if even ye should suffer for righteousness, blessed [are ye]; and be not afraid of their fear, nor be troubled, but sanctify the Christ as Lord in your hearts, ready always for answer (or, defense) to every one that asketh you a reason for the hope that is in you, but with meekness and fear, having a good conscience, that in what they speak against you as evil-doers, they may be ashamed that revile your good behavior in Christ” (vers. 13-16).

Man that is born of woman is of few days, as Job says, and full of trouble; he is fallen and sinful with death before him soon, and, after this, judgment forever. Impossible to face his real state conscientiously without continual unhappiness and awful forebodings for all eternity. Nothing within or around one can afford him solid satisfaction, still less be acceptable to God who is good and does good. His goodness therefore leads to repentance, and effectually in Christ only; for herein was the love of God manifested in our case, that God hath sent His only-begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him. It is clear that, if we are spiritually dead as being all of us lost sinners, this is our first great want, to receive a new life that we might live to God; and this life, as it is seen in its perfection and fullness in Christ, so it is given by Him to every one that hears His word and believes Him that sent Him. The Son quickeneth whom He will; and thus the believer has life eternal, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life.

But God's love as known in the gospel goes very much farther even now; for the believer might have life, life eternal, and be burdened by the sense of his past sins and of his present weakness and unworthiness. In the gospel God removes this distress by purging his conscience, and fills with peace through faith in Christ's sacrifice. Therefore is it added in 1 John 4:10, Herein is love, not that we loved God (which we surely do as now living in Christ), but that He loved us, and sent His Son as propitiation for our sins. This alone is perfectly efficacious, and the Spirit seals us in virtue of it, so that we are brought into liberty and spiritual power by grace.

Henceforward, therefore, delivered from evil we become zealous of the good; and who shall injure us if it be so? The worst of mankind are struck when they see the proud rendered lowly, the violent meek, the quarrelsome peacemakers, the frivolous and pleasure-hunting grave, the corrupt pure, the covetous liberal, the careless or even blasphemous godly. But no doubt an evil eye under Satan's power may refuse all moral evidence and impute every such change for good to hypocrisy, and only hate the more those who leave their own wretched and wicked ranks to follow Christ. They do therefore seek to draw His confessors into evil ways old or new; and if they fail in ensnaring, they will not fail to detract and persecute; for all that desire to live piously in Christ Jesus are surely persecuted, or (as our text says) “suffer for righteousness' sake.” But “blessed are ye” says the word. It is God's mercy and their honor, as delivered by Christ out of the present evil age according to the will of our God and Father.

Accordingly the saints are exhorted not to” fear their fear, nor to be troubled.” Why should they, who now are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, and called out of darkness into God's wonderful light? Calling Him Father (for such He truly is) Who without respect of persons judges according to each one's work, they would pass the time of their sojourning here in fear, because they are so favored and blessed, yet in a wilderness of trial and pitfalls and dangers. From “their fear” who hate and malign, once their own fear, they are set free by the Savior; and they owe it to His honor not to be troubled, seeing that at His cost they are blessed supremely by His God and Father who is ours also. Instead of such unbelieving fear and trouble naturally they can and do exult though now for a little while, if needed, put to grief by various trials, all of which His grace turns to account (Rom. 8:28) to those that love Him, to those that are called according to purpose.

What then is the resource and remedy? “But sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord.” Sanctimoniousness in manner or outward acts, far from availing, is a snare and a shame unworthy of a Christian, as far as possible from pleasing God, though it may deceive himself if unwary and others too. But to give Christ the holy place due to Him, and supremely as Lord, in our hearts, truly pleases Him Who would have us honor the Son even as we honor the Father. Without Him thus constantly set up and apart in our hearts, we are exposed to any and every idol whereby the enemy deceives the world; but with Christ thus the object of our inmost affections, how kept and blessed! So we see the fruit and accompaniment in the words that follow, “ready always for an answer to every one that asketh you a reason (or, account) for the hope that is

in you with meekness and fear." What account can creature give so satisfying, even to God, as the Lord Jesus and His redemption? In Him we have the righteousness found nowhere else, yea, we are become God's righteousness in Him; so that, as the same apostle says (Gal. 5:5), "we through the Spirit by faith await," not righteousness as if we were not justified, but "the hope of righteousness," that is, heavenly glory with Christ. But this very blessedness, so undeserved by any, calls us to meekness and fear in confessing it, lest a rough or presumptuous spirit might dishonor the God of all grace or ourselves the recipients of His rich mercy.

1 Peter, 1 Peter 3:17-18

In a fallen world and a sinful nature, with God on one side and Satan on the other, there must needs be suffering, and especially for the saint till Christ take His great power and reign. Satan is still the ruler of the authority of the air, the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience. So far is the enemy from having lost his bad eminence, though defeated by our Lord perfectly dependent and obedient, it was by the world's rejection of Him that he became the ruler of the world, yea, the god of this age, as we read in 2 Cor. 4:4. No doubt exceeding his commission by inciting the world to crucify the Lord of glory, he has, as it were, sealed his own everlasting ruin in that precious blood. For to this end, as to others of greater moment still, Christ died, that through death He might annul him that has the might of death. But the full execution of the sentence awaits (not the coming age merely when the Lord will reign and he is shut up in the abyss, but) the end, when he is cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the Beast and the False Prophet had been consigned a thousand years before; and they shall be tormented day and night for the ages of the ages.

Here in the present evil age (Gal. 1:4) the Christian pre-eminently is called to suffer, not merely under divine discipline when he fails, but because he has a new nature as possessing life in Christ, and is faithful to God. Why should the fact seem hard? This the apostle here meets and explains.

"For [it is] better, if the will of God should will [it], to suffer [for] well-doing than [for] evil-doing. Because even Christ once suffered for sins, just for unjust that He might bring us to God, put to death indeed in flesh, but made alive in [the] Spirit" (vers. 17, 18).

How simple yet weighty and conclusive is scripture! Who that considers it, when declared, can doubt that it is better to suffer when we are doing well than when we deserve chastening for ill-doing? Yet it is not at first obvious to him who, feeling the iniquity done him, is apt to complain of the hardship. Christ suffered throughout for righteousness, for truth, for love; and we have it as our privilege to share these sufferings of His, as the apostle Paul pressed on his beloved Philippians: "To you was granted in behalf of Christ not only the believing on him but the suffering for him also, having the same conflict as ye saw in me and now hear of in me" (1:29, 30). Peter too had already in chap. 2:21 presented Christ as a model in this, but there as here, distinguished from that following in His steps, the foundation of all which He only could lay, in that He bore our sins in His body on the tree, that dead to sins, we might live to righteousness (ver. 24). So here the apostle turns to what is and must be solely His: "because even (or, also) Christ once suffered for sins, Just for unjust."

For sins it was His alone to suffer. He suffered but once in this atoning way where none could follow; for it was not from man because He was faithful to God, but from God because of His grace to man, whatever it might cost in bearing God's righteous judgment of man's sins. For on His holy head Jehovah made to light, as Isaiah says, the iniquity of us all. "It pleased Jehovah to bruise him," not only to put Him to grief, but "to make his soul an offering for sin." Thus only could we be pardoned righteously and saved. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes are we healed. What pathos as well as force in the apostle's cheer for suffering as doers of good and not evil, that He suffered for our sins once and once only. Let this suffice: so perfectly was it done, as He alone could bear that burden, intolerable to Him above all, yet borne by Him that they might be, as they are, borne away for all that are His. Let us therefore now suffer only for what is good on our part.

But there is more. Christ also suffered once for sins, Just for unjust. He was alone in that one act of suffering supremely at God's hand. It was for unjust or unrighteous men; Alas! here all were unrighteous, all sinned; and those who by grace benefited through faith would be the first to own it of themselves. Henceforward they are righteous, and so live by faith, as through it they became so; nor do they forget that they believed on Him that justifies the ungodly, and thus their faith is reckoned for righteousness. Such was His grace.

Think too of the efficacy of His suffering thus, "that he might bring us to God," not yet actually to heaven but meet for it, and therefore "to God" Who is far more than heaven. Christ on the cross cleared us from both our evil works and the evil root and sap, sin in the flesh that produces them. We are therefore no longer far from God but brought nigh, as he had said in chap. ii., a holy and a royal priesthood with a better reality of nearness to God by the blood of Christ than the Aaronic priest had typically. To assert a sacerdotal class on earth now between the Christian and Christ is to deny the gospel. None can wonder who believe in the glory of His person who was put to death in flesh, and made alive, or quickened, in the Spirit. His death rolled away the evil before God, and His resurrection proclaimed the victory to faith.

If any one desire a fuller discussion of these remarkable expressions and of what follows, he may find help in a small treatise entitled, "The Preaching to, the Spirits in Prison" (Weston, 53, Paternoster Row).

1 Peter, 1 Peter 3:19-20

HERE we have need of vigilance that we yield not to fancy, but be subject to the words of the Holy Spirit in their exact bearing and in accordance with the context. For they are often taken up loosely and with bias in favor of a preconceived idea or with a view to a desired end. To ensure light we need the single eye; and this can only be where Christ is the governing object. The relative refers to the Spirit in virtue of "which" Christ was made alive after His death. Now of course a very different fact is added, but equally dependent on the Spirit.

"In [virtue of] which also he went and preached to the spirits in prison, disobedient afore-time when the long-suffering of God was waiting in Noah's days, while an ark was being prepared, in which few, that is eight souls, were brought safe through water" (vers. 19, 20).

We are here given to understand that Christ in the Spirit preached to those whose spirits are imprisoned because when they heard His warning they were disobedient; which time is fixed as before the flood which punished them here, as they are now kept like others for judgment hereafter.

The Greek preposition is here required in order to accurately express in or by what power Christ went and preached to the spirits in prison. It was not in person but by virtue of the Spirit. This is remarkably confirmed by the language of Gen. 6:3: “And Jehovah said, My Spirit shall not always strive (or, plead) with man, for he indeed is flesh, but his days shall be a hundred and twenty years.” Here we learn to what the apostle alluded, not only Christ in Spirit (and we know He was Jehovah beyond doubt), but the term of the long-suffering of God in Noah's days. For to this the divine statement refers, not to man's life, which even after the deluge was far longer as yet, but to His patient pleading while the ark was in preparation. 2 Peter 2:5, with 1 Peter 1:11, lends much help to the clearness of the sense intended; for as Noah is beyond any man of old designated “preacher of righteousness,” so we might expect for the power at work in him the same Spirit of Christ which in the prophets testified beforehand the sufferings Christward and the glories after these.

The truth meant in the passage is thus made quite plain and consistent, not only with the exact demands of the context but with the rest of scripture. There is if possible less difficulty here than with Eph. 2:17, where it is said of Christ, that “He came and preached peace to you that were far off, and peace to those that were nigh.” No sensible person sees more in this than Christ, not personally but in Spirit, preaching to Gentiles as well as Jews, after His ascension. This was plain enough; but in our text, lest it might be understood by the imaginative or the superstitious, grace furnished the qualification “in which” [Spirit] He proceeded, not into the prison, as some have conceived, but preached to the spirits that are in prison. They were living men on earth when the Spirit pleaded with them in Noah's days while preparing the ark.

With this precisely agrees “disobedient as they once, or aforetime, were,” during that long space of forbearing, compassion, and testimony. Again the structure of the phrase is the one proper to express the moral cause or reason why they are now in prison. Instead of penitence and faith, when Jehovah's Spirit strove, they were disobedient: a fact which our Lord (Matt. 24:38, 39) turned to a warning like His servant here. A similar fate will befall the heedless at the coming of the Son of man in the consummation of the age. There is no room in doctrine any more than in fact or in the phraseology of Peter, for the strange notion of ancients or moderns that Christ in person went to Hades after His death for the purpose of preaching to the spirits there. The strangeness is heightened by the fact that the only ones said to be the objects of His preaching were that generation of mankind which had been favored with the pleading of His Spirit in Noah. Such a favor when they were alive would much more naturally have weighed against the alleged visitation after death, even if other scriptures did not prove its needlessness for saints and its unavailingness for sinners.

The truth is that the fabulous notion of such a preaching by Christ after death in Hades contravenes all scriptural truth elsewhere, and is only extracted from the passage before us by violence done to its separate clauses and its scope as a whole, in no way carrying on the divine argument but interpolating a wholly incongruous interruption. For the only character given to those who heard the preaching is that they were then disobedient, as the ground of their imprisonment: a strange reason for singling these out for the favor of the Lord's going to the prison on their account.

If it be an outrage on orthodox doctrine to suppose such a preaching to such an audience in in such a place, condition and time, it is even more plainly opposed to the terms of the apostle, if one foist in the idea that the Lord preached to the O.T. departed saints. Not a word implies a believer among the spirits in prison. All attempts in this direction from Augustine down to Calvin, and near our day to Horsley, as to others since, are utterly vain. The clear bearing of the teaching is to contrast the disobedient mass of spirits (in the prison of the separate state for such) with the few who in the ark were brought safe through water.

The unbelieving Jews who objected to the fewness of the Christians were thus powerfully met, as well as their contempt for preaching as having no serious effect, whether believed or rejected. Was Christ acting now by the Spirit, instead of that manifestation of power and glory which they longed for in unbelief of what God is doing by the gospel? Let them remember how He wrought before the deluge, and how it fared with those who disobeyed His warning. There is thus no real difficulty in the passage when the general analogy of Noah's days is apprehended; any more than in the details of the most correct text, with the strictest attention both to grammatical rendering and sound doctrine. No event in the O.T. could be found more apposite to warn scoffing Jews in the apostle's day than that which befell the disobedient in Noah's time of preparing the ark. How different the effect of Jonah's preaching to the men of Nineveh! Yet their repentance was but transient, and the end of the great city followed. But the deluge was not all for those who rejected the Spirit of Jehovah that warned by Noah. Their spirits are in prison waiting for the judgment, wherein no one is just before God. They are lost forever. It is only by faith that a sinner is justified. The disobedience of unbelief is final; it braves God's mercy as well His wrath, and most in such as have the scriptures.

It is the hasty assumption of Christ's preaching to the departed in Hades, which clashes not only with the truth in general but with this context in particular, rendering it in all the minute points of the words both halting and irreconcilable, when adequately looked into. The result too is an allegation extraordinary, suggesting a doctrinal inference at issue with God's word everywhere else. For it attributes a work to Christ which is superfluous for saints no less than sinners; and for these last is apt to become the basis of a spurious hope, as inconsistent with all that our Lord when here declared for those that die in unbelief, as with that which the Holy Spirit has taught since redemption. Another evil effect of this misinterpretation is, that it sets ingenious minds to essay a shadowy confirmation from such texts as Psalm lxviii. 18, Isaiah xlv. 2, xlix. 9, in the O.T., and to deny that Paradise is heavenly in the N.T. One error leads to another and perhaps many. It is well to maintain the hope of the blessed and holy “first resurrection” at Christ's coming, but there is very great harm in denying the intermediate bliss of the saints departed to be with Christ. Scripture is perfectly plain and sure as to both.

1 Peter, 1 Peter 3:21-22

The water of the deluge leads to the spiritual meaning of baptism in ver. 21: the figure of death judicially; whether for the world that perished thus, or for the believer salvation by grace through Him Who went down for our sins and rose that He might be the true ark for us. The water was the instrument of God's judgment in destruction. Those in the ark were saved through it, but this only because they submitted to God's word and were secured by the ark. But the ark prefigured Christ, not the church as some vainly imagine; for no such thing existed then, nor, if it had, could it have saved, but rather consists of those that needed the salvation which is in virtue of Christ's death and resurrection.

“Which 1figure (or, antitype) also now saveth you, baptism, not a putting away of filth of flesh, but a request of a good conscience toward God through Jesus Christ's resurrection; who is at God's righthand, having proceeded into heaven, angels, and authorities, and powers being subjected to him” (vers. 21, 22).

It is of all moment to understand the mind of the Spirit; for superstition has caught at words here also to support its delusion. But we must read scripture in the light of other scriptures, as well as of the context, if we are to walk in the truth. All scripture, we may say, points to the Savior and faith in Him for salvation of the soul. Nor is any part of it plainer as to this than the foregoing doctrine of the Epistle before us. Christ is pointed to as the quickener of men dead in trespasses and sins, Christ the Son in communion with the Father, made known in the Holy Spirit's power through the word (John 3:5; 5:21-25). So in the first chapter of our Epistle the apostle says, “Having purified your souls in obedience to the truth unto unfeigned brotherly affection, love one another out of a pure heart fervently.” How could this be, considering what man is naturally? “Having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, through God's living and abiding word. Because all flesh [is] as grass, and all its glory as flower of grass; the grass withered, and its flower quite fell; but the Lord's word remaineth forever. And this is the word preached unto you.” Hence in James 1:12 it is written, “Of His own will He (the Father) begot us by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.”

These are but a few of many scriptures which one might cite from the Gospels and the Epistles; but they amply show that, as life is in the Son, so He is the giver of life to the believer, and this now not only for fellowship with the Father and with the Son, but for walking in the light, cleansed by the blood of Jesus. Baptism has its place of deep interest and importance; but scripture never attributes quickening to it. This is a very old and inveterate error of Christendom. All the so-called Fathers who speak of life-giving assign it to baptism. It was the error of darkened times long before the Popish day; and its necessity was founded on the wholly misunderstood words of our Lord in John 3:3, 5. This was so universal after the apostles that Hooker lays down, in opposition to Cartwright (Eccles. Pol. v. § 59), “that of all the Ancient, there is not one to be named that ever did otherwise either expound or allege the place than as implying external Baptism.”

Now it is a striking fact that, beyond the allusion to the disciples baptizing as John did long before our Lord's death and resurrection, and His subsequent commission to baptize all the nations, the Gospel of John avoids even the mention of Christian baptism and the Lord's supper. Its design was to bring out, not the blessed institutions of Christianity, but the life eternal and the gift of the Holy Spirit with their precious issues. No institution is ever said to give life, nor can any restore the communion which indulgence in sin may have interrupted. In John 3 the Lord urges the absolute necessity of being born anew, that is of water and spirit, in order to see or enter the kingdom of God. Being by nature a child of wrath, a new nature is requisite. Water, as in John 15:3, Eph. 5:26, refers to the word of God brought home by the Spirit in faith and repentance. This Nicodemus as a Jewish teacher should have known, especially from Ezek. 36:25, &c.; whereas neither he nor anyone else could have known of Christian baptism, instituted years after.

It is similar with John 6:53, &c., which means communion by faith with Christ dead for redemption, as verses 32, &c., speak of Him incarnate. The language in chap. 3 goes far beyond baptism, as that of chap. vi. far exceeds the Lord's supper. This last ought to be evident to anyone who bows to scripture. He who so applies this passage ought to affirm, that none can have life eternal without the Supper, and that none who partakes of it can fail to have life eternal: both statements as dangerous as they are false.

Still baptism, is the expression and confession of part in Christ's death; or as the apostle Paul puts it, “Know ye not that we as many as were baptized unto Christ Jesus were baptized unto His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism unto death.” This is its meaning: Christ's death, not life, which hangs on faith in Him. So too in the Lord's Supper we announce His death till He come; for this is as it ought to be a constantly recurring feast, as Christian baptism is expressly once only. Christ must come, not by birth alone, but by water and blood with the Spirit given as witness. Till then Christianity could not be, because God had not been glorified nor sin judged in His death. He was straitened, however great His grace, glory, and moral perfections, till that baptism was accomplished. The Christian institution followed.

Baptism was as Peter taught “for remission of sins,” as we read in Act 2:38. Hence Ananias was sent to “brother Saul,” already having life in Christ risen, and bade him arise and get baptized, and have his sins washed away, calling on the Lord's name. So here “Which figure,” for this it is, “also now saveth you, baptism.” But the apostle carefully adds, “not a putting away of flesh's filth, but a request (or, demand) of a good conscience.” For the life of Christ given to the soul seeks and can be satisfied with nothing less. And as He Who is and gives us life eternal suffered for sins, we also receive the rich blessing of His death in all its value. It figures therefore not life, as says tradition ever dark and misleading, but salvation, the present salvation of our souls, and pledge of the glorious change for our bodies at Christ's coming. Baptism sets forth our passing out of the fallen estate into the new standing of salvation “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” All was holy and acceptable in Him incarnate; but such was our guilt, such our ruin, that nothing short of His resurrection could bring us into salvation. “Verily, verily, I say to you, Except the grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit.” Remission of sins and salvation are thus part of our blessing. Baptism as the initiatory institution proclaims it; and so does the Lord's Supper throughout, as we wait for Christ; but it all depends on the efficacy of His death and resurrection to our faith.

We can thus see the consistency of the truth in Christ. For in Him God came down to poor lost sinners, that believing in Him they might live who were dead. But in Him dead and risen we come to God, cleared by His atoning blood and in the power and acceptance of His resurrection. And here it is that Christianity finds its basis and character. We are thus not merely safe, as all were who had life; but now we “are saved,” and become God's righteousness in Him, Hence Christian baptism follows Christ's death and resurrection. A good conscience toward God is the thing demanded, when we are alive in Him to God: our clearance by His work of redemption. “Request” or “demand” (not “answer”) is the true force of . And what a grand demonstration of it is in Christ on God's right hand, the same Christ Who suffered once (it was enough) for our sins and bore them away, and proceeded in due time into heaven and its highest seat of honor, angels and authorities and powers subjected to Him, instead of disputing His righteous title. There they indeed pay Him divine homage, as Heb. 1 declares according to O.T. prophecy, and the Revelation discloses in its visions of heavenly glory, seen by John and made known to us, to act now on our souls. For all things are ours, things present and things to come. May we profit by a privilege so wondrous!

We may remark too, that (though God was pleased to give an advance of privilege and truth by Paul in Rom. 6 and Col. 2, as compared with Peter's testimony in this text), the words in Heb. 11:7 coincide with “now saveth you.” “By faith Noah, warned oracularly concerning things to come, prepared an ark for the saving of his house.” This was the figure. But the true salvation to which baptism points figuratively is of a divine and everlasting character on the foundation of Christ's death and resurrection. Whatever be the place and value of baptism, the same Paul thanks God in 1 Cor. 1 that he baptized only a few at Corinth, lest any should say that they were baptized to his own name. How could he

possibly say this, if thereby any get life eternal? And further, that Christ sent him not to baptize but to preach the gospel, by which, in chap. iv. 16, he says that in Christ Jesus he begot them. Whereas in chap. x. 1-12 he warns them by the examples of Israel's history that neither baptism nor the Lord's Supper avails to hinder falling in the wilderness through unbelief and the sins to which it exposes. See also Heb. 3, 4. The astonishing thing is, how any saint can have become so bewitched by human pretensions, and so dull to the infinite work of grace (engaging as it does all the Trinity to save a guilty sinful man), as to receive an evident delusion of the enemy. As God in Christ alone could save, so nothing short of His power can keep souls through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

The Preaching to the Spirits in Prison, Christ's Preaching to the Spirits in Prison: Part 10

(1 Peter 3:18-21.)

There is another work1 to be noticed before I bring this paper to a close, because it seeks to yoke our text with the general bearing of the unholy scheme of universalism. Not that there is anything intrinsically which calls for a notice, but that the work bears witness to the prevalence of infidel thought now put forth without a blush by professing ministers of Christ and spread far and wide by those regarded as respectable publishers. The usual guarantees of orthodoxy fast vanish away.

“That even as to the saints, the intermediate state between death and the resurrection will be one of progression I firmly believe, and on that point I shall have something more to say in my next sermon. But what of those who die in either utter ignorance of the truth as it is in Jesus or in conscious rejection of it? If ultimately all things are to be reconciled to God; if the kingdom of Christ is to eventuate in the restoration of all things, then it is evident in regard to those who are not saved from sin and brought to God in this life, there must be some provision for their rectification and restoration in an after state of existence. Let it be admitted that holy scripture does most clearly and distinctly teach that all things in heaven and earth are to be gathered up again into one in Christ, and that by Him everything is to be brought into subjection to God, that in His name everything is to bend and every tongue to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father; let this be admitted, and I do not see how the inference can be escaped, that, even though there were no specific revelation on the point, there must be some provision hereafter for the reconciliation and restoration of those who in this life have not been reconciled and restored:” (Pages 135, 136.)

It need surprise none that in his next sermon Mr. S. has not one word to prove the alleged progression of saints in the intermediate state. “The life then (says he) of the sainted dead, we may believe, is one of blessed hope and holy expectation; and if, as before said, if be one also of nearer communion with God and Christ, we may believe it to be a life of progress and development,” &c. (Page 150.) But supposing we believe nothing of the sort without scripture, what has he to say? Nothing. The idea of growth then is wholly unwarranted by revelation, and contrary to every instinct of the believer, who weighs the force of what scripture does say of our sojourn here below as the place of growth, exercise, and testimony. I turn however to what is of even graver concern, the perversion of the scriptures which speak of reconciling and restoring all things, to draw a similar conclusion as to the impenitent and unbelieving in the teeth of the plainest and most solemn warnings of God. Every believer must feel the utter fallacy of such arguments.

Then, on the one hand, Col. 1 distinguishes between “you hath he reconciled” and reconciling of all things. But even so they are only the things on the earth and the things in the heavens; not a word about the things infernal, not to speak of persons who are nowhere before us in this reconciliation of all things. It is a question of the universe; not of men, but contradistinguished from the saints who are already and expressly said to be reconciled, whereas the reconciliation of all things is of course future.

On the other hand, when the Spirit of God treats the subjection of every creature to the Lord, infernal beings are just as distinctly added to those heavenly and earthly (Phil. 2), because the point there is the compulsory bowing of every knee and the confession of every tongue. Reconciliation is carefully avoided here; for judgment is just as certainly a means God the Father will use to enforce the honor of His Son on the unbelieving (John 5), as the gift of eternal life bows the heart of the believer now before His glory and His love.

Eph. 1 quite confirms this evident and important truth. For though we are there shown the mystery of God's will, according to the good pleasure which He purposed in Himself for the administration of the fullness of the times, to gather up together (or, head up) all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth; we see, first, that infernal things are quite left out of this blessed gathering under His headship; and, secondly, that the saints, or the church, do not form a part of all things, in heaven or earth, but are associated with Christ in His inheritance over them all. Compare not only verse 11 but also 22, and indeed scripture in general. It is the universe distinguished from those who reign with Christ over it all.

Thus the awful revelation of the unending punishment of the ungodly and unbelieving remains intact and unqualified; and the mischievous and wicked folly is exposed of such as would distort the disclosures of the regeneration of creation, or “restitution of all things” into a spurious hope for the final recovery of the lost. Not a hint of such expectations appears in scripture. The alleged passages refer to the inheritance or to the judgment, not to the heirs or to salvation. To the deliverance of the groaning creation of which Paul speaks in Rom. 8, the prophets bear witness, not one, not a single shred of the New Testament, to the reconciliation and restoration of those who in this life have not been reconciled and restored. With this falls all possibility of such inference.

But Mr. S. thinks that there is a sort of direct intimation in the passage before us, wherein Peter tells us how Christ went and preached to the spirits in prison. His short paraphrase however is quite wrong; and he only adds to the number of those he characterizes as trying to make the text mean almost anything but what it does mean, if taken in the simple literality of its words. I utterly deny for reasons already given that it means or speaks of a preaching to spirits in another state of existence. A superficial glance might infer so, not a careful or exact examination of what is said.

“Suffering death (says Mr. S., p. 138) as far as the flesh was concerned, his body being put to death upon the cross, but continuing to live in respect of his spirit, which did not die, but passed from the body on its dying, and descended into hell, that is, hades, the place of disembodied spirits, ‘in which also,' says the apostle, that is, in his spirit, ‘He went and preached to the spirits in prison.'“

Now this paraphrase is manifestly and hopelessly inaccurate. “Continuing to live” is a false rendering of , which is the less excusable as the Authorized Version in every hand gives the only correct translation. Again, “in respect of His Spirit” is ignorance or neglect of the true text, which has no article in the Greek; if “His Spirit” were meant, the idiom would require it. As it is, the Holy Spirit is intended, though this rather as a characteristic state than drawing attention to the person who so wrought in power. Compare Timothy 3:16, where, as here, it is hard in our language to avoid the article; but it is the Spirit that is meant, certainly not His spirit. Lastly, the interpretation of the clause is false; for as a whole it points to our Lord's resurrection, not to His spirit's passing from the body on His dying, to say nothing of foisting in here a descent into hell or hades, of which the passage says not a word, but “in which also” (that is, Spirit) He went and preached to the spirits in prison. That is, Christ in Spirit went and preached to them. Not a word intimates that the disembodied spirit of Christ went there; not a word that He went and preached in the prison, disembodied or not; not a word that, when preached to, they were spirits in prison. There would be precise phrases in the Greek tongue for expressing any of these ideas, which the paraphrase assumes; as they are not employed, the only fair and sound inference is that they were not meant, and that the paraphrase departs from the simple literality of the words, which I am quite content to take as they are, refusing every sense save that which flows from their precise grammatical import.

Nor is it allowable to Mr. S. to cite the late Dean Alford for what these words mean, for he expressly declares that they do not mean “universal restitution” (Mr. S.'s hypothesis), any more than the Romanist dream of purgatory. “It is not purgatory, it is not universal restitution; but it is one which throws blessed light on one of the darkest enigmas of the divine justice: the cases where the final doom seems infinitely out of proportion to the lapse which incurred it.” Did the Dean realize his own thought? In my opinion he did not; for the real difficulty to speculating benevolence is not God's visiting the antediluvian rejecters of Noah's preaching in the destruction of the deluge, but the everlasting punishment of all unbelievers. There is no darkening of divine justice in the former, any more than a ray of light cast on the latter in this passage. It is implied indeed that besides perishing by the deluge their spirits are kept shut up for the day of judgment; but I can hardly imagine that this is the “blessed light” Dean A. cherished in His lively and poetical mind. It is certain at least that he explicitly denies that the word means that universal restitution which Mr. S. would draw from them: what he himself inferred is left, purposely or not, in the utmost vagueness. So it is apt to be where we have not consciously the known truth of God. He even throws out the hint, of which Mr. S. does not fail to avail himself, consistently enough on the scheme of universalism; most inconsistently on Dean A.'s, if indeed he had anything definite before his mind. “And as we cannot say to what other cases this may have applied, so it would be presumption in us to limit its occurrence or its efficacy. The reason of mentioning here these sinners, above other sinners, appears to be, their connection with the type of baptism which follows. If so, who shall say that the blessed act was confined to them?” (Com. in loco.) To me the real presumption seems the fancy of an efficacy which the context disproves, and the hinting at an enlargement of its occurrence without the smallest evidence. Undoubtedly that the Spirit of Christ preached to those spirits in prison was a “blessed act.” All we know of the result for those preached to is that they were “disobedient,” and suffered its consequences in being kept” shut up (as Dean Alford says) “in the place of the departed awaiting the final judgment:” a description which in no way suits the departed saints, who are with Christ in Paradise and come not into judgment. One may boldly say that the “blessed act” Dean A. fancies of our Lord's preaching in hades to the disembodied unbelievers of Noah's day not only was not repeated to any other class but has no warrant from scripture in the case reasoned on. It never once was a fact.

It is useless after these remarks to quote all the argument of Mr. S. in which he enlarges for his own purposes the words thus rashly flung out by the late Dean of Canterbury. But the reader will learn how things grow worse and worse in this line from his conclusion (p. 139): “Yet it is these notable sinners who are especially mentioned as having been preached to by Christ on his descent into hades. If to these, then surely to all, may we believe, was the announcement made,” &c.

Nor am I disposed to give the least weight to the reasoning Mr. S. reproduces from Professor Plumptre's sermon. It is absurd to argue, as he and some of the Fathers do, from Eph. 4:9, 10. Not a word connects the spirits of the departed with the lower parts of the earth. Nor is it the reverence of believers to God and His word to quit revelation for analogy and human reasons, whatever one may use for stopping the mouth of an infidel, if we can.

Once committed to the uncertain guesses of the mind, how can one avoid being tossed as waves and carried about by every wind of teaching? “May we not be permitted to indulge the thought (says Mr. S., p. 142) that as the Lord Jesus in his spirit went, in the interval between his death and resurrection and preached to the spirits in prison, so possibly this may form part of the blessed occupation of the saints in hades? They rest, indeed, we are told, from their labors, so far as weariness is connected with them, and yet their works do follow them. May it not be that the work in which they delighted here, that of winning souls, shall follow them there? If, it has been well observed [in Professor Plumptre's sermon, if the future is to be the development and continuation of the present, if we are not to pass from a life of ever varying relations with our fellow-men, each bringing with it opportunities for self-discipline and for serving God to an absolute isolation, may we not so get one step further and believe, as some did in the earliest ages of the church, and as others have thought of late, that those whose joy it has been in life to be fellow-workers with Christ, in leading many to righteousness, may continue to be fellow-workers there, and so share the life of angels in their work of services as in their ministries of praise? The manifestations of God's righteous judgment and of His changeless love may thus, using men and angels as His instruments, help to renew throughout His universe all who are capable of renewal!”

Thus sadly is it our lot to see in these last days a fallen but no longer slumbering Christendom, that the anile fables of early legend-mongers find ready acceptance among those who turn away their ears from the truth. The Holy Spirit has prepared us for these and all other aberrations. For as surely as the wise virgins have obeyed the midnight cry, “Behold, the bridegroom: go forth to meet him,” the foolish are going hither and thither to buy that “unction from the Holy One,” the lack of which no religious truth, no sentimental activity, can disguise from consciences still unpurged, from hearts which have never found rest in Christ the Lord. As we wait for new heavens and a new earth, may we be diligent to be found of Him in peace without spot and blameless, and account the long suffering of our Lord's salvation! Whether it be the Epistles of Peter or of Paul, the untaught and ill-established wrest them, as also the other scriptures, to their own destruction.

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1 Peter, 1 Peter 4:1-6

Here, as in chap. 2:24, our apostle urges death to sins in its practical reality. It is not (as the apostle Paul, in Rom. 6 and elsewhere, teaches) the Christian privilege of having died with Christ to sin, but the duty which flows from His death as a fact in the spiritual realm; that we should no longer serve sin but walk as righteous men after Christ's example. Both speak to the same end.

“Since Christ then suffered [for us1] in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind; because he that suffered in flesh hath ceased from sin, no longer to live the rest of time in flesh to men's lusts but to God's will. For the past time [is] sufficient to have wrought out [or, purposed] the will 2 of the Gentiles, walking as ye had done in lasciviousness, lusts, wine-bibbings, revels, carousings, and unhallowed idolatries; wherein they think it strange that ye run not with [them] into the same excess of profligacy, speaking injuriously, who shall render account to him that is ready to judge living and dead. For to this end was the gospel preached to dead men also, that they might be judged according to men in flesh, and live according to God in spirit” (iv. 1-6).

To Messiah, the greatest of all sufferers, the apostle turns the hearts of his brethren. It was all the more impressive that of Him it had been verified to perfection, and in the cross above all. For till the veil was taken from the heart of the righteous remnant, the Jew saw nothing but triumph and glory for Him, as well as for His people. And what a large part of Holy Writ bore witness to it! Yet His death was the simplest, plainest, and the most irrefragable proof, that unbelief had hidden from their eyes the divine testimony to His suffering throughout the .T., Law, Psalms, and Prophets. Risen from the dead He opened the understanding of His disciples to understand the scriptures and thus to judge their own dark one sidedness. As He said to two of them on the resurrection day, “O senseless and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets spoke! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory? “Long before His crucifixion He had told His disciples of the Son of man being in His day as the lightning shines from under heaven to under heaven to the surprise of a guilty world; “but first he must suffer many things and be rejected of this generation” (Luke 17:24, 25).

There was revealed an unequaled Sufferer, not Job, not Joseph, not Moses, nor David, nor Jeremiah, nor any other of the prophets; but all these perhaps in some stage foreshadowing the suffering One to come. But all this is infinitely short of the wondrous truth of the cross. For He, the Holy One of God who knew no sin, was made sin for us, and suffered, not for righteousness as saints might and did, but from God for our sins, as He alone could. And hence, when rejected of the people, betrayed by one apostle, denied by another, forsaken by all we may say, God forsook Him, as His own lips declared. So it must be if sin was to be adequately judged, and a perfect ground laid in His death to reconcile the foulest sinner to God, cleansing him from every sin by His blood. As the apostle testified to His blood in 1:18-21, so does he now to the practical power of His suffering to give power against sin: “Arm yourselves with the same mind.” Never had He pleased Himself, though in Him was no sin. Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God. Such was His life in every detail; it was a pure meal-offering, a holy oblation, to God His Father, whose glory He sought in the least thing as in the greatest, and in the humblest, truest, and deepest of all ways—in obedience. And so it was in that with which nothing can compare, in His atoning death, where God had all His nature glorified even as to sin, and made Him sin for us that we might become His righteousness in Christ.

Great, and varied, and infinite are the results of His suffering; yet here the apostle speaks, not of its being the efficacious means of bringing us to God as blameless and spotless as Himself, but of its practical power against sin day by day. “Since Christ then suffered in flesh, arm yourselves with the same mind.” Christ never yielded, but suffered being tempted; holy Himself, He kept sin outside. He had no sin in the human nature which He took. But how were we to be met who had it within and were guilty without? He died for us, yea for our sins; He was forsaken of God that this judgment might be complete; and in this judgment the apostle Paul adds that God condemned the root of all, sin in the flesh, in Him a sacrifice for sin, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not according to flesh but according to Spirit.

Peter here draws from Christ for the Christian the great abstract principle, “because he that suffered in flesh hath ceased from sin, no longer to live the rest of time in flesh to men's lusts but to God's will.” Allowing all the difference between the Savior and the saved, this truly applies to His followers. When we sin, it is our own will that is active to His dishonor. One suffers in refusing to sin; one judges and hates and thwarts the will of flesh, and suffers, but does not sin. If by grace our mind is set on God's will at all cost, sin does not enter. It is suffering in flesh, and therein is separation from sin. And this is the simple normal state of the Christian with the heart resting on Him that went down below all depths for him. When the heart loses sight of Him, one shirks suffering, and the will asserts fleshly activity, and actual sin follows. But we are sanctified by the Spirit to the obedience of Jesus, no less than to the sprinkling of His blood. We are left here to do the will of God, now that we are Christ's.

There is another consideration the apostle sets before us, and truly humbling it is. “For the past time is sufficient to have wrought out the purpose [or, will] of the Gentiles, walking as ye have done in lasciviousness, lusts, wine-bibbings, revels, carousings, and unhallowed idolatries; wherein they think it strange that ye run not together into the same excess of profligacy, speaking injuriously; who shall render account to him that is ready to judge living and dead” (3-5).

There is no doubt that these wicked ways were characteristic of the Gentiles, not of the Jews; but those of the dispersion, living among the heathen, were apt to be corrupted by their environment. Like their fathers of old, the descendants, especially outside the sharp supervision of Palestinian eyes, were too easily drawn into gross lusts and passions, and thence, with a bad conscience shutting out God and His judgment, adopted unhallowed idolatries, such as amulets, charms, and the like. This is what the apostle charges as a fact in former days, on those who now bore the Lord's name. It was natural for the heathen so to live; it was shocking that such of them as owned Jehovah had so walked: they now knew that they were no better than others. The apostle, while exhorting to consistency with that holy name, reminds the saints that their Gentile neighbors counted it strange that they did not run the same common race of impure and selfish indulgence, so generally linked with idolatrous customs. Instead of approving the change, they indulged injurious imputations, as the world still does in its form of Christendom. In this they but follow the prince of the world, who is a liar and murderer, the marked contrast of Him who is the Truth and the Life-giver, to whom they “shall render account.” But he puts it with all impressive force, when He is described here as “having it in readiness to judge quick and dead.” Can any believer name a single visible event that hinders His coming?

It is indeed a certain, solemn, yet simple truth, that the Lord Jesus Christ is ordained, or determinately appointed, to this office by God. As Peter preached at Caesarea, Paul at Athens declared that God now enjoins men that they shall all everywhere repent, because He has set a day in which He will judge the inhabited earth by the appointed Man, having as pledge to all afforded His raising Him from the dead. To the believer Peter taught in chapter 1: 21 that His resurrection is to give him faith and hope toward God, delivered from all fear of judgment. To unbelievers, Paul at the Areopagus preached it to be God's assurance that the day hastens when Christ will judge living men as well as dead:

the first when He comes in His kingdom, the second just before He gives it up for the eternal state (Rev. 20). For it is the same Who bore our sins in His body on the tree that is now raised from the dead; because God was glorified in that sacrifice of Himself for the putting away of sin, Who is the fore-runner for us entered into that within the veil; as He will come to receive us to Himself, that where He is, there we may be also.

But He is ready to judge, not those even now associated with Him, but “living and dead” who disbelieved and despised Him. He brings salvation to those, judgment to these. How the word of God sweeps away, not doubt only, but delay “My lord delayeth” is the heart's language of mere professors. How sad that believers should plead excuses for the unbelief which our Lord stigmatizes! True hearts love His appearing and would rather hasten the day, solemn as it is.

It is His judging that is linked with verse 6, and helps to rid it of the difficulties with which superstition loads and darkens it. “For to this end the glad tidings went to dead persons also, that they might be judged according to men in flesh, and live according to God in spirit.” From the hour that man fell by sin under death and judgment, God had in His grace a gospel to shelter and give life according to God; which is therefore in the last book of scripture called “an everlasting gospel.” To this clung faith from the first; and it was added to and cleared gradually throughout the O.T. till the death, resurrection, and glory of Christ gave it fullness. And those who now dead heard it in the course of ages had their responsibility so much the more increased. If they abode in their sins through unbelief, they will be judged by the coming Lord according to men in flesh. Grace exempts from that sorrowful condition by the faith of the glad tidings, and life is in Christ for all who believe, who therefore live to God in spirit. For Christ gives life no less than pardon. Those who feel their need of God's grace do also submit to the humbling sense that they deserve judgment. Thus it is that repentance and faith ever go together.

We may add that the passage similarly mistaken in chap. 3:19, 20 does not speak of “glad tidings” like this, and has thus another bearing. It was simply Noah's proclaiming the coming deluge as “a preacher of righteousness” and affected those who perished for their disobedience and are kept for judgment. But we hear of “glad tidings” here; and therefore as the context proves, it applies to all in the past who have heard the gospel. This if refused left them in their natural state as men in flesh, fallen men, to be judged; while those who by grace heard the good news that was sent live according to God in spirit by virtue of that word which quickens by the faith of Christ, and produces the good fruit proper to that life practically. Any one acquainted with the language must own the strict accuracy with which the apostle Peter, certainly not a man of letters or learning, was led to the precisely accurate and on the one hand, and to the appropriate on the other.

1 Peter, 1 Peter 4:7-11

Founded on the Lord's readiness to judge, in all its solemnity for man, is the reminder of the approaching end of all things which now subsist. This is supposed in such an intervention.

“But the end of all things hath drawn nigh. Be discreet therefore and watch (or, be sober) unto prayers,1 and before all things having your love toward each other fervent, for love covereth2 a multitude of sins; hospitable toward one another without murmuring;3 according as each received a gift, ministering it toward each other as good stewards of God's various grace: if one speak, [let it be] as oracles of God; if one ministereth, as of strength which God supplieth; that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, whose is the glory and the might unto the ages of the ages. Amen” (vers. 7-11).

The Holy Spirit keeps as constant and proximate, not only the bright hope of the Lord's coming for the saints, but the close of man's day for the earth. The world refuses or ridicules the warning. Even saints forget it as a living word from God for every day; and when mingling with human interests and men's thoughts, get weary, are ashamed of the truth, apologize for or gloss over the words of the Lord and the apostles, so as in effect to say, like the evil bondman in his heart, “My Lord delayeth:” alike the cause and the consequence of growing worldliness. Even watching for executive providence in the meantime undermines and destroys the separating and heart-elevating power of waiting for Christ.

But the word here flowing out of faith in the impending end of all things is, “Be discreet therefore,” that is of sound mind spiritually; “and watch,” or be sober, “unto prayers:” a very different attitude from absorption in the newspaper, and in each exciting movement west or east, so often to fade and disappoint the superficial readers of prophecy. Hope like faith looks to God, expects in patience, and does not make ashamed. The Christian ought never to forget that he is a Christian, and follows the crucified but glorified One, content—yea rejoicing—to endure till we reign together with Him at His appearing and kingdom. It is not our place to thunder and lighten, as those under the law were bound to do, at the revolt of Israel and at the passing enormities of the Gentile powers. When we are translated, it will be for the godly remnant on earth to take up the cry once more, “How long, Sovereign Master the holy and true, dost not thou judge and avenge our blood on those that dwell upon the earth?” Blessed saints will they be, but no more Christians in the full sense than the O.T. saints before us.

The saints now are exhorted to watch unto prayers; as another apostle bade his dear Philippians, with the Lord at hand, be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let their requests be made known unto God. Thus should the peace of God that surpasses all understanding guard their hearts and their thoughts in Christ Jesus. Such is true Christian experience. Still more wide and deep is the word in Eph. 6 where the apostle says “with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication.”

“But before all things” (for it ought in practice to take precedence of all), he adds, “having your love toward each other fervent, because love covereth a multitude of sins” (8): this last clause an application of Prov. 10:12. As hatred makes the worst of everything, love is entitled to bury things out of sight; and God endorses it as answering to His own nature. Needless to say that holy discipline retains its needed but sorrowful action.

Next (ver. 9) the apostle would have them, as another form of love, “hospitable unto one another, without murmuring.” Surely grumbling and grudging did not become a holy and a royal priesthood. Practical outgoing of heart in this way promotes fellowship, and strengthens the bonds of grace. It yields a fine contrast to man's selfishness, which seeks its own things, and complains of all else.

Gift too (vers. 10, 11), used according to God, subserves the same end as well as much greater ones, even the perfecting of the saints, for ministerial work, and for building up the body of Christ. But our apostle as usual is eminently direct and practical. “As each received a gift,” they were to minister it toward each other, “as good stewards of God's varied grace.” This is just what human organizing hinders. How sad for saints to sanction any meddling with God's will and ways It is not the right of each that is pleaded, but the obligation from gifts of God to use whatever it be in responsibility to Him. “It is required in stewards that one be found faithful” (1 Cor. 4:2) from the greatest to the least: else God's rights are infringed, and His grace is thus far suppressed.

The apostle divides gifts into two general classes, speaking or service otherwise. “If one speak [let it be] as oracles of God.” This does not merely mean according to scripture; which might be misdirected, and thus even do harm; as e.g. encouraging, when reproof was due, or the inverse. Not even a gifted man ought to speak without the assurance of God's mind for the moment and case in hand. How much would be spared, were this divine rule truly felt! Then again, “If one ministereth, as of the strength which God supplieth.” Creature advantages might be a snare on both sides. Even in temporal service, which is thus distinguished from the word, the right strength is that which comes from God, and not human ability, attainment, rank, or wealth. We may compare with this latter “ministry,” “giving,” and “showing mercy” in Rom. 12, and “helps” in 1 Cor. 12. It is remarkable how scripture in this differs, as usual, from the thoughts and language of Christendom. For so ignored is scripture, even by men zealous in dispensing it in all possible versions throughout the world, that they confine “ministry” to public speaking, and never consider that God thus dignifies all real service which is not of that oral character.

But “gifts” in either way are so designated by inspiration; and their free and holy exercise claimed as coming from such a donor; “that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, whose is (not merely “be”) the glory and the might unto the ages of the ages. Amen.” For thus the fervent spirit of the apostle poured itself out, as he wrote these things to the saints in Asia Minor; and God has kept them for us also.

1 Peter, 1 Peter 4:12-14

The apostle next turns definitely to suffering of the severest kind which they were called to endure, not as a question of right or wrong, which any upright brother might and does face, but for Christ's name which in a greater degree draws on faith.

“Beloved, be not surprised at (count not strange) the fire among you that cometh for your trial, as though a strange thing were happening to you; but inasmuch as ye share in the sufferings of Christ, rejoice, that in the revelation of his glory also ye may rejoice exultingly. If ye are reproached in Christ's name, blessed [are ye], because the [Spirit] of glory and the Spirit of God resteth upon you: [on their part he is blasphemed, but on your part he is glorified]” (vers. 12-14).

Blessed is a man that endureth temptation or trial, and the more fiery it may be, the more blessed he that endures; because when thus proved he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord promised to those that love Him. The danger is of entering into temptation, as even the apostle knew too sadly, when he forgot the Lord's warning in the confidence of his own love, and denied Him thrice. But grace began to restore him, when the Lord re-called to His poor servant His admonitory words, and never stopped till he could be so re-instated before his brethren, as to have His sheep and lambs entrusted to his care. Nor was this all. For the redeeming work of Christ so completely purged him, as it does every worshipper (Heb. 10:2), that he could boldly charge the men of Israel with their denying the Holy and Just One. Once for all purified, he had no longer any conscience of sins: that sin and every other were effaced forever. Such is the Christian's initiatory privilege.

Who then was more fitted than this apostle of the circumcision to strengthen the hearts of his brethren at the fire among them coming for their trial? They should not count it strange but an honor from God, especially as they had, what the apostle had not when he was tried, the Holy Spirit dwelling in them, as the fruit of Christ's accomplished work. Had not the Lord said to His disciples, “Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from them, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as wicked, for the Son of man's sake”? Had He not bidden them to “rejoice in that day and leap for joy; for, behold, your reward is great in heaven, for according to the same things did their fathers to the prophets”?

The apostle had already exhorted them (in chap. 2:20, 21) to endure as a grace and honor if one for conscience toward God endured griefs, suffering wrongfully. For as he admirably argued, what honor is there, if when sinning and buffeted ye shall endure? But if doing good and suffering ye shall endure, this is grace, or acceptable, with God. There too he points to Christ's suffering for us, as the great model to follow. This he followed up more briefly but with sharp pungency (in chap. 3:17, 18), as better, if God's will should will it, to suffer as doing good rather than doing evil, with the same One before our hearts in His once for all suffering for sins, as He alone could. Here he goes beyond suffering for righteousness and as well-doers; and in accordance with the fiery persecution in view, he reminds them that inasmuch as ye share, or have fellowship in, the sufferings of Christ, it was theirs to rejoice, that in the revelation of His glory also they may rejoice with exultation. The Spirit was afresh applying what the Lord at the beginning laid down on the mount, the surpassing excellence in His eyes (and who such a judge?) of being reviled and persecuted with every wicked thing lyingly said against them for His sake. Blessed they that were persecuted for righteousness' sake, because theirs is the kingdom of the heavens (Matt. 5:10); but in the next verses 11, 12, He rises higher, and addresses personally, and no longer as before in the abstract, “ye” that suffer for His sake. These were to rejoice and exult, because their reward was great in the heavens.

Here too His servant was given to add, “If ye are reproached in Christ's name, blessed [are ye]; because the [Spirit] of glory and of God resteth upon you. Christ was not here, but in the glory of God; and thence came the Spirit, sent by the Father in His name, and by Himself from the Father to abide with them and be in them (John 14, 15). How fitting and full of comfort the reminder! He was the seal of their accomplished redemption, and the earnest of the glory coming to them. He is the Spirit of God, which is more and better than glory. Such was the Spirit that rested on them, both for energy to endure and for joy now and evermore. No doubt, it is generally true of all the sons of God, for He is the Spirit of sonship, which believers receive since redemption (Gal. 4:4, Eph. 1:13, 14); but it is here said with emphasis to sustain the sufferers for Christ's name. The latter part of the verse is quite true, and said in substance elsewhere; but omitted as the words are by the best MSS. and most ancient Vv. and looking like a gloss, they are here bracketed as of doubtful authority. There is an addition also to the Spirit of glory and of God, “and of power” in A P, half-a-dozen cursives, some ancient versions, &c., even expanded in to; but the Vatican MS. and other good witnesses oppose; and indeed it seems still less in accord with the context.

The apostle had put forward the sufferings of the saints as fellowship with Christ's sufferings. They could not share His grace without sharing what this entailed on Him in an evil world where God is hated quite as much as He is dreaded by a bad conscience and an unbelieving heart. They were therefore to count persecution no strange thing, but to be expected where sin pervades and prevails, where darkness is put for light and light for darkness, where good is called evil and evil good, where sweet is accounted bitter and bitter sweet. If the foundations be destroyed, what can the portion of the righteous be but the rejection which their Lord had? The disciple is not above his teacher, nor the bondman above his lord. Every one when perfected shall be as his master. It was saintly privilege and to be accepted with thanks and exultation. It was to be reproached in His name, the Spirit of glory and of God resting on them that their groans might have a divine and unselfish character, and themselves be strengthened with all power according to the might of His glory unto all patience with joy.

Now he turns to the moral side, after an earnest exhortation against the dangers for a Christian in the midst of the worst examples. Assuredly if God judges, it is for good reason; and judge He must, according to His holy nature, what is inconsistent. with it, and lifts itself proudly and rebelliously against Himself. Already too men slept, and the enemy sowed darnel, and the evil could not be expelled till the consummation of the age when the Son of man takes it in hand with power and glory. The Holy Spirit was sent for the good news, the saints, the church, but not to apply remedy to the ruin. This is reserved for the Lord who will at His appearing bring in times of restoration of all things, as the prophets spoke and God through them since time began. 2 Thess. 2, one of the earliest communications to the church, is explicit that the mystery of lawlessness was already at work. This is the succession that is never interrupted, though kept in check by the Spirit of God till He departs, and the apostasy ensues, which culminates in the lawless one fully displayed in his audacious taking of his seat in God's temple, showing himself that he is God.

Hence says our apostle, “Because the time [is] that judgment begin from the house of God; and if first from us, what [shall be] the end of those that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous is with difficulty saved, where shall the impious and sinful appear? Wherefore also let those that suffer according to the will of God commit their souls in well-doing1 to a faithful Creator” (vers. 17-19).

So it had been in the awful judgment which befell Jerusalem and the Jews as described by Ezekiel. “Begin at my sanctuary,” said Jehovah, where man assumed indefectibility; and such is the vain confidence of tradition, in the face of the plainest testimonies to the contrary in the Gospels, the Epistles, and the Revelation. The glory of Jehovah refused to dwell in His house defiled by abomination, and yet greater abominations, the last of which was that eastern attitude which has ever stamped the idolator, never the true worshipper of our God and Father. No doubt, salvation ever was of God and in sovereign grace; and this in Christianity is made more evident and indisputable than it ever had been. But God from the first maintained His title to judge every departure from Him; and none ought to be so ready and so thorough in confessing their sins as those who own that all they enjoy and boast is of His grace. Whereas the plague-spot in Christendom, as in Israel, is to claim for its most guilty and apostate state the immunity that belongs to the counsels of grace. Never was Judah loftier in its pretensions and louder in its sense of security than on the eve of unsparing judgment. And now it is still more guiltily the fact with Christendom.

Here it is where even real disciples sadly fail. Party-spirit blinds; for what is Christendom but a scattered group of parties? As another apostle taught, there were schisms even then; and there must be heresies or sects as it really means, the inevitable effect if not corrected by self-judgment; and these we now see all around and unblushing. Those that carry the head highest can hardly deny it. Their own association is of course the true one, if not quite immaculate in their eyes; but they must know of souls on earth more than themselves subject to the word and Spirit of God, devoted to Christ's name, and separate from the world. This might pierce their conscience, and lead them by grace to discover the overwhelming ruin underneath the haughtiest prejudice. But the darkness which besets all who yield to the fatal assumption of indefectibility in the Christian profession hinders the entrance of divine light as to this into their souls. The testimony of Paul has been alleged; here before us is that of Peter. Jude is in prophetic vision as distinct and pregnant, as he is brief. “Woe to them, because they went in the way of Cain, and gave themselves up to the misleading of Balaam for hire, and perished in the gainsaying of Korah.” John penetrates deeper than all when he calls it “the last hour” of many antichrists come, the heralds of the antichrist.

But where is this felt by saints generally and confessed with grief before God and with shame before men? If they go so far as to protest against this evil or that, they are satisfied with their part, even though they in fact join in with what they own as deplorable, or alas! seek to explain away.

Let them heed the way of the godly in Israel, though surely the Christian is bound to go farther still and judge more profoundly through far more light. From Moses to Samuel how much is there to learn in presence of the people fighting against God! From Jeremiah and Daniel, from Ezra and Nehemiah, what agony over the remnant's short-coming, what bearing the burden of all Israel's sins, of people, priests, and kings! Is the church to have no such sense of responsibility? Is the Christian, because he has eternal life and is justified, to have no sorrow because of the beautiful flock of Christ harried and scattered, and of the rashness, heats, and self-will which oft caused it?

Undoubtedly scripture provides to faith and fidelity a clean path outside corporate as well as individual defilement. But if there be not a spirit mourning and broken that precedes recourse to it and that is kept up ever after, a hard and cold self-righteousness will rush in there, the sure proof of failure that only adds sin to sin, and that forebodes worse evil still. If we are of the church, Christ's body, it is a heartless thing that we are only to feel what wrong we have personally done. The true principle is that, if one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; and of this suffering the spiritual are deeply sensible. But the self-satisfied is quite indifferent. He has his party, and is content. In Christ we see the perfection of His love in this respect as in all others. He bore on His spirit the burden of every woe He relieved by His power: how much more did He feel all the unworthy selfishness which impeded and weighed down His beloved ones! We are entitled and bound by grace to share this divine affection with Him. The faith which refuses sin works by love to warn the saints who yield to it, but also to intercede on their behalf. Christ would have us wash one another's feet; but what lowliness and love we need to do it aright!

Now if judgment begin from the house of God, as it does and ought (compare Amos 3:2), what must be the end of those that obey not the gospel of God? This is the only obedience to which the unforgiven is called. What a proof of blind wickedness that any sinners should refuse! For the gospel of God is the glad news of full remission of his sins in the blood of Jesus. Yet what thousands and millions dare hell-fire rather than believe on Him. What shall their end be?

No wonder that the apostle speaks of the righteous saved with difficulty. Yes, the obstacles are many and immense; and there is no good thing in them, that is, in all naturally theirs, while even as saints, what weakness and exposure! “Who then can be saved?” said the disciples, when they heard of special difficulty for the rich, who, as they thought, had such advantage over all others. But Jesus looking on them with His unfailing love replied, “With men this is,” not difficult, but “impossible “; but (thanks forever to His name!) “with God all things are possible.” Salvation is of God, as His is the gospel which proclaims it to everyone, poor or rich, that believes. But all the more appalling is the lot of those who not only violate His law but scorn or neglect His gospel. Where shall the impious and sinful appear?

God is not only the One that raises the dead, as already shown us in Christ for the deliverance of our souls; He does not cease to prove Himself “a faithful Creator” to such as suffer on earth. “Wherefore also let them that suffer according to the will of God commit their souls” to Him thus “in well-doing.” He is tender to His creatures; how much more to His children, suffering wrongfully for a little while! The sentiment is closely in keeping with the testimony to such Jews as were now Christians.

1 Peter, 1 Peter 5:1-4

Now the apostle turns to such as took the lead in governmental care among the saints, as he had already exhorted gifted persons (chap. iv. 10, 11), after urging the more general call to fervent love and ungrudging hospitality (8, 9).

“Elders [therefore] that [are] among you I exhort that [am] fellow-elder, and witness of the sufferings of Christ, that [am] also partaker of the glory about to be revealed: tend (or, shepherd) the flock of God that [is] among you, exercising oversight,1 not by necessity but willingly,2 not for base gain, but readily, nor as lording it over your allotments, but becoming models of the flock. And when the Chief-shepherd is manifested, ye shall receive the unfading crown of glory” (vers. 1-4).

As the apostle's heart may well have bounded in writing the early verses of chap. ii. which recalled the memorable passage in his life when the Savior gave him his new name, did it not also swell with deepest gratitude and lowly praise in now writing to elders as he recalled the grace that before his brethren reinstated the one who had thrice denied Him? Feed My lambs; tend (or, shepherd) My sheep; feed My sheep (John 21:15, 17, 18). Yes, Peter was brought to feel and own that his love to the Savior of which he once boasted had so utterly failed, that only the Lord who knew all things could see it at the bottom of his self-confidence. Notwithstanding all, the Lord did know that he dearly loved Him! To him then and there He confided what was dearest to Himself, His lambs and His sheep, to tend and feed His flock. In like love he in his measure appeals to elders as a fellow-elder. Though apostle he takes common ground as far as this was possible, as grace gladly does to further its unselfish purpose. All service, as well as rule, is founded on love; and the love of the servant flows from that of the Savior. But self needs to be judged in its pride, vanity, and worthlessness, in order that love may be divine and true.

Men soon perverted service into lordship, though our Lord took pains to anticipate and warn of the danger, and to implant the principle of grace which is suited if held in faith to guard from it and form the heart according to God. So bold and inveterate was this evil that it followed the apostles themselves up to the last Passover and the Lord's Supper. “There was also a contention among them which is accounted the greater. And he said to them, The kings of the Gentiles have lordship over them; and they that have authority over them are called benefactors. But ye [shall be] not so; but he that is greater among you, let him become as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.” Blessed Lord, Thou Thyself wert in the midst of them as He that serveth! then on earth, now in heaven, by-and-by in glory, not only in that day but forever. When the kingdom is given up, all things having been subdued, even then wilt Thou the Son be subject to Him that subjected all things to Thee, that God should be all in all! This will be perfection in all fullness, as it is Thy grace to make it good.

But what corruption in Christendom, a loud contradiction of Christianity, to turn the service of the Lord into worldly rank and means, to emulate the pride of life with claim of superiority over rival grandees, in the name of the Crucified One, who here had not where to lay His head, and laid down that it is enough for the disciple to be as his teacher, and bondman as his lord!

Nor was it only departure from scripture in worldliness; it is as plain ecclesiastically. For the accepted tradition among the ancient systems, Catholic and Protestant, is that to the bishop or overseer belongs the authority of ordination, consecration of persons and places, and excommunication. Now the written word is positive, that what is called ordination belonged solely to apostles, or an apostolic delegate, like Timothy or Titus, commissioned for definite action in a given time and place. Even when the church looked out God-fearing men for external or diaconal service, like the seven in Jerusalem, the apostles set them over this business (Acts 6:3). But the church in scripture never chose elders; nor did elders, but only an apostle or an envoy by his authority. Hence we read (in Acts 14:23) that the apostles Paul and Barnabas on their return to the gathered saints chose for them elders in every church. Is it needful to say that at a later day Timothy and Titus followed this model, when authorized to act similarly where Paul could not be? Their instructions are simple and clear, as we can see; and they were faithful. Even the competent advocates of Episcopacy acknowledged that in apostolic times there were elders in each local assembly, and that these elders were bishops, the distinction which is found in the second century being unknown in the first, not even a leader among equals. “The” bishop first appears in the letters of Ignatius, who (if not the inventor of that hitherto unknown official, nay in defiance of all scriptural facts and order) is the first to assume its existence and lofty position. His jurisdiction was limited to those in the city. The diocesan bishop later was another and considerable step away from scripture, as were other superior dignitaries, as the church lost its true character and sunk into, or rose in, the world, till the rivalry of the bishops of Rome and Constantinople became a struggle for primacy in honor of old or new Rome, as mistress of the earth, the office as set forth, in God's word being long forgotten and despised.3

For therein eldership is never confounded with gift, whether the of Rom. 12, 1 Cor. 12, and 1 Peter 4, or the of Eph. 4. For this depends on Christ as the giver, and the Holy Spirit as the power, and never required human choice or appointment, as elders did. The Lord gave them direct. Neither evangelists nor pastors and teachers admitted of intermediate action, any more than apostles or prophets (who constituted the foundation, and therefore were not continued). Apostolic succession is a mere romance, conceived in honor of the bishop when elevated, after the apostles were gone, into an oversight of the overseers, to say nothing of all others, and in fact a creator of them, and thus present that three-fold singularity of which so many have been and are enamored, the bishop, presbyters, and deacons, undergoing another transformation of presbyters into priests, a change still more opposed to Christianity and the church.

The claim to ordain like an apostle or his delegate would be soon made. To consecrate persons and places would and did follow ere long, although altogether foreign to the New Testament, and as clearly borrowed from the heathen rather than Judaism, which recognized but one sacred center. The title to excommunicate was a bold contradiction of the Lord's will and word in committing that solemn responsibility to the assembled saints judging in His name (1 Cor. 5). The apostle Peter dealt personally with a husband and a wife who were guilty of a hypocritical lie to which both had agreed. The apostle Paul could and did deliver blasphemers or other great offenders to Satan; but we may be assured that neither would usurp the function of the assembly in putting away from itself those members that were guilty after previous warning if persisting unrepentant in sins incompatible with His presence. And we have the latter enjoining on the assemblies distinct action in clearing the saints of what was thus done to their defilement and His dishonor. He (though at a distance) had reliable testimony and quite enough to judge the deed; but he insists on the necessity of their judging such evils as he indicates. “Purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, even as ye are unleavened. For our passover hath been sacrificed, Christ; wherefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.... For what have I to do with judging those that are without? Do not ye judge those that are within, whereas those that are without God judgeth? Put away the wicked man from among yourselves,” Such is the Lord's commandment to the assembly, not to “the bishops,” not to the elders, not to the gifts, many as they were there, but to the entire church in Corinth. Who can deny it?

Elders then are here exhorted by him as fellow-elders; but one who was “witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also partaker of the glory about to be revealed.” It is a fitting and precise description of the facts, and exactly in keeping with his Epistle. He was truly one of “the apostles of the Lamb,” as we hear of them in Rev. 21:14. It has been well remarked, how distinct was the place which divine grace gave to Paul; for his it was in the sovereignty of God to be witness of the glory of Christ, and also partaker of His sufferings, beyond the lot of any other in both respects.

It was and is of all moment to regard “the flock” as God's; and all the more, because it is the habitual way even of excellent souls to forget this truth and assume that the sheep whom they feed and tend are their flocks. Such a thought betrays an unwitting denial of God's rights, and falsifies the relation of His sheep, and engenders erroneous interpretation of His word to the hurt of His servants themselves as well as of the saints. Take the common misuse of Heb. xiii. 17, implying that those that guide, or have the rule, have to give account of the souls who are exhorted to obey them, The truth is, that the guides are called to watch in their behalf as having to give account, not of the sheep, but of their own conduct toward them before the Lord. Again, the unity of the flock of God is undermined by not a few who talk without the least warrant of its consisting of many folds. The Lord on the contrary is showing in John x. not only that He quits the Jewish fold, and leads His sheep out, but that He has other sheep not of that fold, Gentile believers; both of whom were about to constitute the one flock, as He is the one Shepherd. There was to be no such thing henceforth as a fold, still less many folds, but His new flock. The one flock of Christ contains all Christians. The sheep might gather to His name here, there, and everywhere, with many an under-shepherd; but as He says, “They shall hear my voice; and there shall be one flock, one shepherd.” This is Christian truth.

“Tend the flock of God that [is] among you, exercising oversight, not by necessity but willingly, nor for base gain but readily.” It is not under law but grace, and the zeal of love brightened and cheered and strengthened by the crown of rejoicing in those tended, in the presence of the Lord Jesus at His coming, the contrast of base gain in this life.

Of another danger they are warned: “nor as lording it over your allotments, but becoming models of the flock.” If the property which flesh counts our own is not really so to the man of faith, but rather the goods of the Master entrusted to his stewardship, how much more have elders to beware of lording over the allotted charge as if it were theirs? No, they are to become models of the flock in the constant remembrance that it is God's flock, and that they must render account to the Lord how they guided His sheep, as well as of their own walk day by day.

Who then, said the Lord, is that faithful and wise steward whom his lord shall make ruler over his household to give portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say to you, He will make him ruler over all that he hath (Luke xii. 42-44). So the apostle speaks here: “When the chief-shepherd is manifested, ye shall receive the unfading crown of glory.” Alas! ere long the blessed hope faded from their hearts, and the work of oversight was changed into a title of earthly honor and emolument, and the position a lordly installation if not an enthronement; so that Peter, if allowed to see things as they are now, could not recognize the office, as it was according to God, under what it is become according to man in Christendom. Is this to exaggerate, or to say the truth in love? How deep the fall!

1 Peter, 1 Peter 5:5

The apostle was fond of the word “likewise” in a spirit of grace where nature would never have thought of it but rather resented. Thus the latter part of chap. 2 in this epistle is addressed to domestics; and as he had pressed on the saints in general submission to every human institution for the Lord's sake, so he urges it on them particularly to their master in all fear, not only to the good and gentle but also to the crooked. For this is grace; and we are called, every one of us, to walk in it as we were saved by it. As law characterized Israel, grace should stamp the Christian, even as Christ was full of grace and truth; and who walked submissively as He? To endure when sinning and buffeted, what glory is it? But if when doing good and suffering ye shall endure, this is grace with God. And there too throughout His life Christ is the model, and above all in His death, where He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that being dead to sins we might live to righteousness: an all-important issue, to convict those who misrepresent, hate, and deride grace. “Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands” (chap. 3:1), says the apostle, and in ver. 7, “Ye husbands, likewise, dwell with them according to knowledge.” Such was the order in which the Holy Spirit appealed.

Here the exhortation was first on the apostle's part as fellow-elder to the elders among them; and then he adds, “Likewise, ye younger, be subject to elders,” which evidently goes beyond those in official place to all whose years clothed them with title to moral respect if spent in faithful service to the Lord. Indeed it is to be noticed that among the Jewish saints, and in Jerusalem itself, we have no record of a formal introduction by apostolic authority as ruled in the Gentile assemblies (Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5). They are first mentioned as subsisting in Acts 11:30 and recognized in their place by Barnabas and Saul. The fact is strikingly confirmed by Acts 15 wherein they are repeatedly

mentioned with honor. Yet the peculiarity alluded to is no less plain in the critical text of ver. 23, which is the opening sentence of the decree determined at the council. It runs, if we heed the Vatican MS., the Alexandrian, the Sinaitic, the Rescript of Paris, and Beza's of Cambridge with other good support, not as in the A. V., “The apostles, and the elders, and the brethren,” but “The apostles and the elder brethren “; and this is adopted in the Revised Version, as by Alford, Lachmann, Tischendorf, Tregelles, Westcott and Hort, &c. The reading of the later copies, seems due to conforming the phrase with ver. 22. But this was implied here, as it was there expressly asserted to be “with the whole assembly.” Nor was it the least likely that the ecclesiastical copyists would have dared to introduce a phrase so alien to their habit of helping on hierarchical distinction. Even Luther, Calvin, and others down to our day have felt constrained to yield to the larger sense of elders and youngers in this context.

“Likewise, ye younger, be subject to elders; and all of you bind on humility to one another; because God setteth himself against haughty ones, and giveth grace to lowly” (ver. 5).

Both exhortations have fallen too often on deaf ears. When the apostles passed away, the presbyters easily persuaded themselves, that order called for one of their number to receive or take a chief place over his fellows in a city; especially as the angels of the seven Asiatic churches in the Apocalypse could by a ready mistake be thus construed, until it rose by degrees to be a diocese of any extent. A presbyter, says a grave commentator (in loco), is not called a bishop by ancient ecclesiastical writers, but a bishop is often called a presbyter. Had he overlooked the fact, that the Holy Spirit in Acts 20:17, 28 does call the elders of the church in Ephesus “bishops” ()? Does not inspiration outweigh all ecclesiastical writers put together and demonstrate their unsoundness when they venture to differ? So the apostle addresses the saints “in Philippi with bishops and deacons.” Titus 1:5-7 is almost equally plain. No doubt it is as much opposed to Dissent as to Episcopacy, “the minister” being as antiscriptural as the traditional trio, bishop, priests, and deacons. After the death of the apostles the lawlessness secretly working before grew apace and became bold. The sole divine authority as to this attaches to what they authenticated in the scriptures.

As the elders by unbelieving development sunk into various sorts of clerical irregularity, so did the youngers lose all sense of their due place of subjection. It was an early error that they began to choose bishops on the plea that the multitude of the disciples were allowed to choose men full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom for the apostles to appoint over their diaconal work. For where elders or bishops were appointed among the Gentile churches, the disciples never chose, but the apostles for them, as in Acts 14:23; or if an apostle could not go, he wrote (not to any church but) to an apostolic man like Timothy or Titus, to appoint elders. For the principle is as plain as it is important. As the church contributed its means, it was allowed to choose those it confided in for due administration. But apostles, not the church, had spiritual discernment of the qualities suitable to preside or rule; and they therefore chose elders. Besides, there were endowed with power men that were the gifts of Christ, such as evangelists, pastors, teachers, &c., who were never appointed (like elders locally), but acted freely in their work as they were led by the Spirit in the unity of Christ's body, the church.

In our day both the clerical spirit and the democratic are so rampant that there is all the more need to heed the gracious appeals of the apostle. Let those who guide never forget that the flock is, not theirs, but God's; and that they are to be models to the flock, not lords. Let the younger be subject to elders on principle, instead of seeking their own will or innovations so natural to youth. No doubt blind guidance ends in a ditch; but such direction is not of a Christian type, which is rather the seeing leading the seeing, with eye and heart fixed on Christ, who thus gives singleness of purpose.

“Yea, all of you bind on humility to one another.” The more numerous authorities read “all of you, being subject to one another, bind on humility,” but some of the best MSS. and versions drop “being subject,” which results in what has just been given. “Clothed” is too vague here. It is a word unique in N. T. usage, and occurs but rarely elsewhere. The figure is taken from the apron a slave girt on to do his work earnestly without soiling his dress. The Lord from a far different motive stooped lower still when He girded Himself with a linen towel to wipe the feet of His own which He washed clean from defilement. This was holy love; and this alone constrains us to bind on lowly-mindedness, to which we are all exhorted by the apostle who had not forgotten his sad ignorance and error on that memorable and touching occasion.

But he also fortifies the call with the solemn admonition, that God opposes Himself to haughty men, and gives grace to humble, the same quotation word for word as in James 4:6. See Prov. 3:34, and Rom. 12:16. Thus indeed it is a moral principle on both sides which runs through scripture; and it is a lesson for every soul in the church from day to day which none can afford to overlook. It is the more needed, because there is a ready danger of being haughty under a misapplied idea of position and duty, and of losing the grace God is so willing to bestow through failure in cherishing that lowliness which is only found perfectly in Christ.

1 Peter, 1 Peter 5:6-7

Humility is a precious quality in the saints; and like other virtues it is apt to be debased by the enemy, and mistaken by themselves according to their own thoughts. It is of moment that we should discover its real nature as made sure and clear by Christ. For He is the true light who makes all persons and all things manifest; without Him its Christian character is not realized. How often it is understood to consist in our being brought to see and detest our own evil! But this is far from the standard of Christianity. For we are thus occupied with ourselves, however right it be to bewail our manifold failures and grievous shortcomings. Certainly it is far better than to be deceived into the notion that we have attained a high stage of holiness, and to thank God that we are not as other men. In its grossest form the error is fed by recourse to a director of conscience, into whose ear we can pour our confessions and seek profit from his ghostly counsels, even if we go not on to the extreme of looking for authoritative relief by his absolution in the Lord's name from time to time. Again, while souls cling to the invention of the weekly class and its leader to hear and advise on the rehearsed experience of good or bad, others who belong to an opposite pole strive to gather a scanty comfort from dwelling on their felt unworthiness, and to find lowliness in all manners and measures of self-condemnation.

Now the work of Christ, on which the awakened soul is brought to rest, is not only perfect in itself, but it perfects him; as Heb. 10:14 explicitly declares with many other scriptures of differing form but similar import. By one offering Christ has perfected continuously—not merely forever, but without an interruption—those who are sanctified, or set apart from the world to God by the faith of Christ. This was hard for an Israelite to accept, accustomed as he had been to fall back on his sin or trespass offering, and the priest's action in sprinkling the blood, offering the fat, and eating his part of the victim, while burning the rest with fire unsparingly. It was so significant a type, identifying himself

by his hand laid on the head of the offering, with Jehovah's authority to the priest to atone for him and assure of forgiveness, that one can understand the need of the utmost certainty in order to relinquish the shadow for the substance. But herein are the expressed will of God the Father, the accomplished work of the Son, and also the applied witness of the Holy Ghost in Jer. 31:33, 34—a predicted remission of sins now so complete, that there is no more offering for sin.

The efficacious bearing of Christ's sacrifice is as immense to faith, as the glory of His person and the depth of His suffering for sin. It is this which lays the ground for Christian humility; because it gives a purged conscience before God. Till then it was no more than an exercised conscience, and thereby a humbling process in the measure of our spiritual feeling. But in the work of Christ it is God who condemned sin in the flesh, not morally alone as in all that He was and did, but as a sacrifice for sin, that it might be utterly effaced in His sight, as indeed we become His righteousness in Christ. Hence the worshippers once purged have no more conscience of sins. They are entitled and meant to see themselves so clear in His light as to have done with themselves, and free with a pure conscience and a peaceful heart to enjoy the fullness of Christ. What a deliverance to have done with self! It was humbling to feel and have to own how vile we learned ourselves to be. Is it not a truer deeper humility to know in His light that our careless perhaps and certainly unworthy failure, cost Him to be as it were consumed to ashes in God's unsparing judgment of our iniquity laid upon Him? and that we are, that I am, not worth thinking or talking about? How easy this ought to make it for each to esteem the other as better than himself! Such is the basis of Christian lowliness of mind. It is through divinely given faith: “Humble yourselves (or be humbled) therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time, having cast all your anxiety upon him, because he careth for you” (vers. 6, 7).

It was that mighty hand of God which made the sinless Jesus sin for us, when He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities. So Israel will yet confess, the generation to come when this unbelieving and adulterous generation shall pass; and Christ's words are more widely and manifestly verified than ever. We who now believe, whether Jew or Gentile, while He is unseen, delight to see the truth as before God; and blessed, as Himself said, are they that saw not and believed. We rest on the depth of that atoning work when darkness shrouded the cross, and His voice attested that God hid His face and forsook Him, the rejected Messiah, the Son of man giving His life a ransom instead of many, yea for all, that we who believe might be healed by His stripes, and made meet to share the portion of the saints in the light.

Under that mighty hand which has thus wrought and given us everlasting redemption are we called to be humbled. We fail alas in the abiding sense of this marvelous light into which God called us. But therein it is our privilege to walk, as 1 John 1:7 tells us; and it is our fault only if we do not walk consciously there. Thereby is that humility secured to which we are here exhorted. Would there be defect if our souls were ever realizing that most solemn yet most gracious presence? Yet it is into this grace that faith in our Lord Jesus has brought us, and gives us to stand (Rom. 5:2).

Nor is less than this the proper and constant standing of the Christian. It is our shame to forget or slight such favor. And those who deny the new privilege (out of a Puritan jealousy on behalf of the O. T. saints) are indifferent servants for the honor of Christ or the Christian faith. It may sound lowly for the believer to cry, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of this body of death?” But this ignores that it was a passing state, and that the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus set me free from the law of sin and death. Thus my confession now on failure becomes a deeper self-loathing. O blessed man that grace has made me, what shame to Him as well as to me that I should now defile my feet! that I, perfectly atoned for, should have sinned against grace as well as holiness, and need to be sprinkled with the water of separation to restore my communion! What agonies my sinful folly cost the Savior

In God's blessed presence let us be ever humbled, and all the more because it is always open to us through the rent veil. We contributed nothing to Christ's cross but our sins: the grace therein was God's sovereign grace. The effect of Christ's work is that divine righteousness which we became in Him; and we boast (for it is more than “rejoice”) in the glory of God. And indeed He will exalt us in due time. For it will be the day when Christ shall be manifested, and we also shall with Him be manifested, in glory. While He our life is hidden, it is inconsistent and incongruous that we should now look for any glory in this world, least of all from that world whose princes crucified the Lord of glory. As loyal to the crucified One we wait for the appearing of His glory, in order to share it with Him. For did He not tell us, that the glory which the Father had given Him He has given to His own that they may be one as the Father and the Son are one, that they may be perfected into one; that the world may know (not believe, as now) that the Father sent the Son, and loved the saints even as He loved the Son? Then the world shall behold Him and them in the same heavenly glory. Never will there be our perfection in unity till then, and only of that future day does the Lord say it. Truly God will exalt us in due time. Our call is to suffer meanwhile with Christ, and also for His name, that we may be also glorified together.

But of another privilege the apostle here reminds us in connection with being humbled now and waiting for His glory in the day of Christ. He says, “having cast all your care on him, because he careth for you.” He assumes this relegation, in faith, of our every anxiety on our God and Father, who loves to bear burdens too great for His weak ones, for whom He has joys and service which demand freedom of spirit for their right aim and end. How enfeebling is the unbelief that fancies it our duty to be weighed down outwardly and inwardly Why, Christian, have you not rolled upon Him the weight that oppresses you? Is not His word to us plain and certain? Does He not care for you—He that gave His Son for your sins, He that numbers all the hairs of your head?

1 Peter, 1 Peter 5:8-11

Here again the apostle exhorts to be vigilant and to watch. In his former injunction (iv. 7) it was in view of the end of all as being drawn nigh; here it is because of danger from their great adversary.

“Be vigilant, watch: 1your adversary [the] devil as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour; whom resist, steadfast in faith, knowing that the same sufferings are accomplished in your brotherhood that [is] in the world.”

It is of interest to note how distinctly the enemy is presented as the power of evil with which we have to cope, no less than our God and the Lord Jesus to care for us. Here, as the apostle regards us not as the Epistle to the Hebrews in view of the sanctuary, but as at the same time exposed to the peculiar stress of the desert, he appropriately sets forth our adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion walking about, and seeking

whom he may devour.

To the Roman saints, exhorted to be wise for that which is good, and simple as to evil, the word is that the God of peace shall bruise Satan under their feet shortly, and the grace of Christ meanwhile with them. What a blessing had they so continued, instead of human wisdom and ambition, leaving room in time for the most loathsome system of impurity, imposture, pride, and bloodshed!

To the Corinthian assembly, not adequately weaned from philosophic wisdom and the persuasive words of excellent speech, the warning is, as the serpent beguiled Eve by his craft, lest their thoughts should be corrupted from simplicity as to Christ. False apostles can thus pass as ministers of righteousness, as Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.

The Ephesian saints, carried on to the highest plane, are characteristically reminded of the victory over the ruler of the authority of the air, the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience, now led captive but having wiles, with towering pretensions in the heavenlies, against which we need the panoply of God. The Colossian saints have a somewhat similar reference, though much shorter.

Nor need we here dwell on the hindrance of Satan to the apostle, or on his temptation of the saints in Thessalonica, as spoken of in the First Epistle; nor on the awful prediction of his future power at the end of the age as in the Second.

We can passingly notice what more affects leaders, the fault and the snare of the devil endangering an overseer, as in 1 Tim. 3:6, 7; and the possible recovery from his snare, as in the Second Epistle (2:22, 26), for adversaries that repent.

In Heb. 2:14, 15, he is the one that has the might of death annulled through the Savior's death; and in the Revelation he is shown fully both as to the church and in the world to his utter ruin.

We are entitled to resist him as the Epistle of James (4) also urges, however loudly he may roar, and menace with destruction. He is a conquered foe, as faith knows; and the name of Him we confess is ample to terrify him. But confidence in our wisdom, or righteousness, exposes to inevitable defeat. Our strength is in Christ, whose grace suffices, and power is perfected in weakness. Therefore we are bid to resist, steadfast in faith. Some understand “in the faith;” but I question the strength in such an encounter of faith thus objectively viewed. It appears rather to be encouragement given to our subjective faith in the Lord. Our apostle is eminently practical, however important it is that we be sound in the faith. It is no strange thing to be thus assailed. So he reminds us that we know that the selfsame sufferings are accomplished in the brotherhood that is in the world. They have like relationships to God which expose them to persecution through the spite of Satan against Christ, even more than against themselves.

If the apostle does not hide from the pilgrim the power and malice of the enemy in this desert world, what fervor characterizes him when he sets God before us in that love which is above every danger and difficulty, turning all for good to those that love Him!

“But the God of all grace that called you unto his everlasting glory in Christ Jesus, after having suffered a little while, shall himself perfect, stablish, strengthen, ground: to him [be or, is] the glory and the might for the ages of the ages. Amen” (vers. 10, 11).

It is more than a closing prayer, a most confident assurance based on a full knowledge of God as revealed in Christ, and on the already accomplished work of redemption displayed in the power of His resurrection. As Peter began the epistle, so he concluded it. He, like Paul as to his beloved Philippian brethren, had confidence in this very thing, that He who began in them a good work would complete it until Jesus Christ's day. Satan might roar and devour. But, as Paul wrote to the Roman saints, if God be for us, who against us? He that spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him grant us all things? Who shall lay acccusation against God's elect? God is He that justifies: who is he that condemns? Christ is He that died, yea rather that was raised, who is also at God's right hand, who also intercedes for us: who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? According as it is written, For Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we were accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay in all these things we more than conquered through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The apostle of the circumcision followed the apostle of the uncircumcision in tracing all blessing to the God and Father of our Lord. Jesus Christ, not rising to the height before us in Ephesians but alike pointing to the same source in his opening words. As the resurrection was the mighty key-note to the one, the ascension gave the heavenly mark to the other. Both were led of the Spirit to present the divine source flowing in the richest streams of goodness suited to the varying circumstances of the saints addressed. None is so characterized as Paul by revealing the eternal and immense counsels of God for the universe with the glorified Christ at the head of all things, heavenly and earthly, and the church, His body, above any question of Jew or Greek, the sharer as His bride of all given to Him.

Yet Peter was inspired here to speak of “the God of all grace,” a title of peculiar significance and for all saints wherever and whatever they might be; but how divinely wise and suited to the Christian elect of the Jewish dispersion Many of them had, no doubt, heard Paul and his companions who long labored in their part of the East, as Peter had not. Paul indeed was called to write elaborately and powerfully to the believing Hebrews, and bring them definitely out of the old legal elements which had so straitened and hampered them, before judgment was actually accomplished on the earthly city and sanctuary. So on Peter devolved the task of feeding and tending by his epistles those sheep who needed comfort and confirmation, now that their great teacher was no more to see their face.

Thus, while there are the clearest tokens of identity between what Peter writes and his preachings in the Acts of the Apostles, he too teaches here, as we have already seen, much beyond what was then required or seasonable. This wondrously beautiful summary before us reflects that advance with all due meatless and forcible compression

Not the God of our fathers which glorified His servant Jesus, but “the God of all grace that called you unto his everlasting glory in Christ Jesus.” It is not merely the God of the promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but the God of all overcoming love as manifested in Christ Jesus, superior to, not weakness and failure alone, but the hatred of the enemy seemingly successful to the uttermost in the cross, which His grace turned to be the ground of deep and righteous judgment of sin, yea, making them, the believers, now as spotless in His eyes as the Lamb, through His precious blood. Nor this only; for He called us, not to salvation of souls alone, great as this grace is, but to His everlasting glory in Christ. For it is a glory which far exceeds the earthly kingdom, for its thousand years of righteousness reigning, and Satan shut up, and

creation rejoicing after its long thraldom of vanity and groan. The God of all grace, who called saints to His everlasting glory in Christ Jesus, is the best security against all that creature can or cannot do meanwhile; and the more, because as Father He carries on a constant, watchful, and righteous government of His children all through the wilderness (chap. 1:13-17).

But there is another needed and weighty consideration. As Jews they might associate with the Christ immunity from suffering and promotion to high honor; but as Christians, their portion is to share His sufferings for righteousness and love and truth. No mistake more common in Christendom than looking for present reward and distinction and ease through the gospel and the church. But it is a hateful lie of Satan. The Corinthian saints slipped easily into this snare, to the apostle Paul's pain and horror (1 Cor. 4:8-14); it was still more natural for such as had been Jews. So the apostle Peter seeks throughout to impress suffering as the necessary path of the Christian, and "after having suffered a little while," as his beloved brother to the Hebrews (x. 32-39), fortified by not a few even of old (xi. 3538) but above all by His case who sums up all as our perfect exemplar (xii. 2, 3). It is through suffering in faith and patience that we are disciplined and bear fruit to Him who deigns thus to prune the branches of the vine.

And what more emphatic than the cheering declaration to which he that wrote put his soul, as one who had proved it so truly in his own experience that the God of all grace "Himself shall perfect, stablish, strengthen, ground." Could those addressed, could we, lose one of these mighty encouragements? Could we allow them to lack the most definite meaning, or to be heaped together as a fagot deriving its virtue from the binding together of the weak? Are they not each strong and expressive, to give without bands the utmost possible confidence in His all-sufficient love to us? It is much that He will "perfect" those who in themselves lack all, in the sense of a complete furnishing and adjustment. It is more that He will "stablish" those who need to be turned inside out, as Peter once in his self-confidence, to lean on Himself and His word by faith. It is precious that He will "strengthen" those that know themselves as weak as water spilled on the ground, and changeable as the wind. It is if possible more, that He will "ground" on the Rock that never moves, those who learn deeply their nothingness, and worse still.

Be it ours to join with his immediate object, in the apostle's ascription of praise and thanksgiving, "to Him be (or is) the might unto the ages of the ages. Amen." Assuredly "the glory" is His also, but the connection here seems to strengthen the testimony of the few witnesses (A. B 23, ancient Latin copies, &c.) which express only His "might" in the face of the adversary. The great majority however read "the glory and the might," which was a frequent phrase, as in 1 Peter 4:11, Jude 25 enlarged, and Rev. 1:5. But "dominion "answers to , rather than to as to which translators vacillate.

1 Peter, 1 Peter 5:12-14

The Epistle thus concludes.

"By Silvanus, the faithful brother, as I account, I write to you in (by) few [words], exhorting and testifying that this is God's true grace in which stand (or, ye stand). She that is in Babylon elect with [you] saluteth you, and Mark my son. Salute one another with a kiss of love. Peace to you all that are in Christ" (vers. 12-14).

It is of interest to learn that Silas, or Silvanus, the fellow-laborer of Paul in Achaia and Macedonia was the messenger through whom Peter sent his first Epistle to the saints of the Dispersion. Once Peter had himself been far from faithful to the Christian truth of liberty for Gentile as for Jew that believed the glad tidings; and Paul withstood him to the face. For it was not to walk straightforwardly according to the gospel, but to compromise it to the Lord's dishonor. Now Peter writes fearlessly to confirm with his apostolic testimony the yet bolder and deeper witness which the apostle of the uncircumcision had borne in Asia Minor, through one who was in his estimate as in Paul's a faithful brother, a suited link between them. It was to hold fast the Head from whom all the body, ministered to and united together by the joints and bands, increaseth with the increase of God.

His words were few but weighty from one who was justly looked up to by Christian Jews who had already profited in those Gentile lands by him whose province lay there especially. But God took care that so conspicuous a pillar of the circumcision as Kephas should write without doubt and fervently in the same strain of grace to the sheep whom the Lord confided to his love and care. Who can fail to recognize an unjealous largeness which was quickly forgotten, or rather never known, in haughty Christendom with its little yet ever-growing fences, bound up by official pride, miscalled rights, far from the Lord's mind as possible.

Nor can any description of the Epistle be more exact than "exhorting and testifying that this is God's true grace in which" he calls them to "stand." It is what every intelligent saint cannot fail to discern as distinguishing Peter's letter beyond James, Jude, John, or even Paul, though each wrote from the heart, with solemn sense of divine authority, and in abundant love to the saints, each with his own distinctive excellency as a good steward of God's various grace, and as of strength which God supplied. How earnestly Peter exhorted! How freely and pertinently he testified as from his Master, full of grace and truth, to the glad tidings of God's true grace! Yes, in his glowing words is no exaggeration. He adhered to what he bore witness at a great earlier crisis (Acts 15). He believed, and would have them to believe, "through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved as they," not merely they even as we: then a noble testimony in Jerusalem above all.

He believed in the same grace still. It is not man conceding or yielding, it is not fearing nor yet pleasing man. It is God's true grace, in which, he says, "Stand," as he did not doubt they were standing. Nor was it needless so to exhort as a last call. What one of our own poets says of his imagined angel, a saint should here and now surely be,

We owe it to God, and to our Lord Jesus; but His grace can alone make us thus stand.

The subjoined salutation is strikingly instructive. Not from the Apocalyptic Babylon did Peter write, but from the great ruined city in the East, to which Jews strangely clung, when the natives migrated elsewhere. Many Jews still lived there as they did for hundreds of years after as before, and there had a famous school of Rabbinical lore, which issued in their most copious Talmud completed about 500, A.D. There, it appears, Kephas led about a sister wife, like the other apostles and the brethren of our Lord (1 Cor. 9:5, 6); as scripture fails not to inform us, and thus gives the lie to the false and demoralizing tradition which Romanism prefers to the plain and holy word of God. For this seems the real bearing of "the co-elect sister in Babylon" who salutes those addressed, no less than Mark his son.

The apostle, we see, was careful not to speak of “the church” as such in either of his Epistles: they are essentially individual in their character. It was an oversight, therefore, to interpolate “the church,” even in italics. We have no ground to think there was an assembly there, and can readily conceive that the apostle (with his wife, and Mark caring in love for them both in advanced age) should yearn to impart the gospel to the benighted Jews, so, dear to him in that distant quarter, far away from the fabulous Episcopate of which tradition dreamed in the West. How forced and unnatural to borrow from the future symbol of John in Rev. 17 for an epistle so simple, fervent, and matter of fact, as this of Peter unquestionably is!

Assuredly, too, one likes to think of Mark in happy and devoted service, as none other than he whose early failure is recorded when he ventured in zeal beyond his then faith to accompany Barnabas and Saul on their first circuit among the Gentiles. If he then so soon grew weary or discouraged, he at a later day, when it was peculiarly sweet to the apostle of nations, became serviceable to him for ministry (2 Tim. 4:11), and even before this had won back his confidence (Col. 4:10). As his mother's house had been a house of prayer, when his spiritual father's life was in extreme danger, he is now the attendant on those so long dear to him, and shares their visit of love for the gospel's sake as well as the saints, where of old their forefathers had been sent in captivity. Any other Mark, like any other Silas, we might expect to be distinguished from each of those familiar to us in scripture; whereas those we have already known appear in this new phase with emphatic propriety.

It was meet in this world of selfishness and sin for the apostle Paul to invite the saints in Rome, Corinth, and Thessalonica to salute one another with a holy kiss; and not less so that Peter should bid the Christian Jews, scattered in lands devoted to dark paganism, salute one another with a kiss of love. The affections are apt to grow cold, as the world's spirit prevails; and Jews needed the intimation as well as Greeks and Romans.

And how precious is “peace” as the suited portion to us all that are in Christ! How unseemly among such is difference and dispute, self-seeking, and strife! Were Christ the object as He is entitled to be, these things could not be. Peter had not forgotten His words, so welcome to their hearts on the resurrection day, “Peace to you; and having said this He showed them His hands and His side. The disciples rejoiced therefore, having seen the Lord. He said therefore again to them, Peace to you: as the Father sent me forth, I also send you.”

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