Job - Commentaries by John Nelson Darby

Letters 1, Lord's Ways With Job; Persecution; Submission to Authorities; the World and the Christian, The

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Dearest Brother,—I have learned indirectly that your meetings have been closed, at least for the time. I need not tell you that my heart is with the brethren, and how much I desire that they may in every way be guided by God in these circumstances.

We have already prayed for them here, and God, who is above everything, and who never withdraws His eyes from His own, will take care of you—I am sure of this—and will display His grace, and thus His glory, in your behalf. I entreat you to keep very near to Him, that you may know what there is to be done in His name, that you may be encouraged, and that the light of His countenance may sustain your faith. His support is worth all else. These things do not happen by chance, and nothing escapes Him.

"Affliction," it is said (Job 5:6), "cometh not forth of the dust;" and whatever the instruments may be, those who dwell in this world do not direct the course of it, nor does even the enemy of our souls, in the first place. It was God who said to Satan, "Hast thou considered my servant Job?" God saw that Job had need of the sifting; the enemy himself was but an instrument in it.

The circumstances in which the brethren are placed will surely be a trial, but, where grace works in hearts-O that it may be so in all!—for blessing. One feels that one is not of this world. The heart is compelled to ask itself, Am I following Christ for the love of Christ, because He has the words of eternal life, because as He said to follow Him is to serve Him? Am I not inclined to accept the course of the world that I may have rest in the world? Serious questions for the heart!... I need not say that, except in the case of matters in which the word is binding upon the conscience, one submits to the authorities; but we do not make terms with the world in the things of God, to make our path apparently easier. I say apparently, for one step leads to another, and it is found increasingly difficult to stop.

May God give the brethren a quiet, patient spirit; may they wait upon God and count upon Him, in the assurance that He never withdraws His eyes from the righteous, and that He will come in when the fit time has come. May they have all gentleness, but also all firmness, while waiting upon God, and let them give themselves to prayer. It is impossible that God should forsake His own, although He may try them. O that God may cause this trial to turn to blessing! May it drive the brethren to God, and bring them closer to Him; may it deepen their spiritual life, and bring them into more intercourse with Him. I count upon Him for you; I have never found Him fail His own, never.

Greet all the brethren affectionately. Let them be much in prayer to God, that will give them gentleness and courage at the same time. It is no new thing for Christians to suffer for Him who has so loved them. God has taken care of His dear children in France up to the present time. He changes not, and if the brethren are firm and patient this will turn to positive blessing. May God keep them. He is working in France and elsewhere; I do not think that He will remove His testimony from them. He may discipline us, that we may give a clearer, brighter, more heavenly testimony, but He will not leave nor forsake His own who put their trust in Him.

February, 1859.

Notes and Comments 1, Evolution

I SEE nothing in the elaborate statement at the opening of the Belfast meeting which affects the evolution system, or divinely formed species at all. Creation it does not touch, as none of them do. But more, that embryos were gradually formed in the womb was always known. That microscopic investigation has discovered segmental division, and the separation into an upper and lower set, with the lines between, may be very interesting to anatomists, adds nothing but details. So, that there are general principles of formation from lower to higher genera in the fetus growth is curious, and shows God's acting analogously, and with system, but no more, unless the contrary to the development theory, because after all men and women have human children, and cocks and hens chickens, and it shows that these analogies of formation do not make intermingled species now. Phillips in his Geology, though afraid to say so, shows there was no cross-intermingling of species. And it is one of the remarkable things that from the same materials and analogous processes, both in plants and animals, specific results are produced. The oak and the bramble grow from the same soil, but the oak does not become a bramble, nor the bramble an oak. Forms of inception, and food, and digestion are the same, and we have eggs, and upper and lower segmentary division, but a man grows into a man, and a pig into a pig.

I do not see that evolution or development, once creation is fully recognized, is anything that concerns us. We all admit it. A corn of wheat, if it has lain 4,000 years without germination, if it meets " the scent of water " will sprout. Supposing the microscope discover there protoplasm itself, or appropriating power leading to organic growth, that is what in English we call " life " in its broadest sense, tree, animal, or man; in every case protoplasm in a cell. What was there 4,000 years is evolved, appropriates extrinsic stuff, and is a plant of wheat, and will, by "seed in itself after its kind," produce more evolved wheat. Now if God pleased (and who can say He did not)—chose—when chaos reigned, to-hu (wasteness), be-hu (emptiness), to form such plants all at once from protoplasm to wheat, or an oak, and cause them to produce " after their kind," by an instantaneous act of will, what should or could prevent it? This the evolutionists do not pretend to explain, nor can they—that is, how protoplasm came there.

They—for science is always, and necessarily atheistical, when it does not honestly confess ignorance (and honest in this sense its pride seldom is), because it can only follow experimentally the series of what does exist, and can only trace it as existing, but how or why it exists can know nothing, for that is no matter of science—they, to get rid of God, will say matter is eternal, but not only cannot prove it, but a finite

mind cannot have the thought " eternity " in it, so that all that is willful falsehood. Notwithstanding, in spite of us, we know there is a cause, but that is not science. It is clearly seen change of species is another thing; God no doubt could have made it so physically, but it is not proved, and Darwin admits the proofs fail in geology, and if we are to believe the best searchers into the question it is disproved (as Phillips on " Geology of the Thames "). God may allow commixture, and mules, if He pleases in nearly related species, but this rather proves there is no such change, for no such race producing "after its kind" has been found; but it is another question.

If evolution, as daily seen, takes place in four weeks where necessary conditions exist, or waits four years till they do, it is evident divine power could at once produce, I mean produce, so as to set the principle at work, in a moment. The fetus they tell us on its train goes through all classes of life from beginning to end in nine months; be it so. Why not in nine seconds—be formed so as to do so? But men producing fishes, or fishes producing men, have not been found. It is a mere hypothetical conclusion of what may have been, but this is not science. Science may arrive at a general principle of what is, and so find what will be on the principle which is known in existing facts. But permanent change of species has not been found; varieties from circumstances are common, union of kindred species forming none may be found, but " after its kind " in nature remains " after its kind."

Now Gen. 1 takes up the facts as apparent and no more—does not touch the " how." There are species—horses are not oxen, nor cats dogs, nor men apes—they may tell us they were or may have been, but, as I said, that is not science; but Gen. 1 takes up the positive and unquestionable facts, and does only one thing—reveals the creative authorship of God, and that is all—the "after its kind" is the statement of what is which we all know; more real science than the modern pretended science, and adds what confessedly is not and cannot be the subject of science—creation—and which Scripture says is of faith. A more precise account is given of man, because there was a moral relation between him and God; his body was distinct from his soul, and when made, God breathed into his so-formed body and he was in relationship with God, as nothing else was. This was, though creation, more than mere animal creation. " Let the earth bring forth " was for mammalia. God formed man out of the dust. Os homini sublime dedit (He gave to man a face that looks on high), and then connected him livingly with Himself. But what I had on my mind here was, that Moses took up the ostensible facts, and does not touch the " how " (save with man who is in relationship with God), but merely that God, the Creator and Orderer of all that was apparent, ba-ra created, a-sah formed, ya-tzar made (as a potter); He creates all, and then the earth being to-hu be-hu, He brings it into order with everything, from plants to man. Hence when what orders times and seasons is set in order, he adds, " He made the stars also," but that is all. The creation of angels is not mentioned, they do not belong to this creation.

The creating is brought out I think as distinct parts of the general statements. First God created the heaven and the earth, then He goes on and orders it as earth with its bringing forth. This is to the end of the fourth day. It was the habitable earth, the waters being separated, and the earth, as ordered of God, standing out of it. Then comes the creation of what peopled the waters, it was what belonged to and was of them, but still was a distinct and new part of creation, the lower, and in a certain sense, unordered part. Then comes the higher class of living creatures, from the earth to which they belong. This was a bringing forth, but of the highest kind; still it was a to-tze (let bring forth).

Then comes a quite distinct act; God takes counsel in Himself to make man in His image, and creates him. So that the earth is looked at as the proper object of what had been created originally, and the account is continued in it; but then the separated waters have their own special notice, of which, though not the dwelling-place of man, the great things were God's creation; and then apart from all, though on the sixth day, but no to-tze, man " created " is repeated three times. Nor do I think " created to make " is without special intention; all was His creation, but with a view of ordering it before Him.

The men of science forget that they can deal with phenomena only, and the evolution, if they so please to call it, of what exists; with existence they have nothing to do; evolution and fixed laws have nothing to do with it either. Fixed laws are learned from the constant course of things, but the constant course of things supposes the things whose course goes on, and even to have gone on long enough to call it a fixed law; man may see the perfection, and universality of it, and conclude perhaps it is a fixed law, but he cannot by science go beyond the constant order of what is.

Evolution is true to a certain point, the fetus or sperm becomes a man or a beast in due time. I have seen no evidence of change of species by it, not certainly, in historical time, in geological mummies and fossils there is no change of species; it is not science but fancy.

Further, though man ventures pretty far, and no man denies variety in species, big cows and little cows, and horned or unhorned, yet it seems to me that fixed laws and evolution are difficult to reconcile. It is all well to fancy that circumstances so act on an ape that he takes the human form, and say that this operation of fixed laws must have produced that consequence, habit begetting a second nature; but it is not science—phenomena and deduction from it.

Species are, and the fixed law is that they remain species, and always have; change into other species, arbitrarily, from circumstantial influences, is not a fixed law of nature. At first it is an accident, if it has a natural effect, i.e., the consequence of an antecedent, but this is individual, and goes no farther than will, and need; there is no change of race in it. All apes did not shorten their arms, and turn hands into feet together, and, if one did, we should have as many races as circumstances, i.e., there would be no fixed laws at all; but the truth is, the thing, as far as known phenomena go, is disproved really.

But the main point I would insist on is, that science only begins when the system of uniform succession of consequents from antecedents exists, so that the whole system exists, and exists under an order of fixed laws, and science can go no farther than the discovery of them—is absolutely and necessarily confined to them—means only that—and if it presumes to go farther, wholly ceases to be science; accounts for nothing, and has no ground to go on in accounting for anything, beyond a course of things already in existence, having such fixed laws; as to existence, and fixed laws, or any knowledge about them, it is out of court—ceases to be science if it attempts to touch them.

Science could not even say that in another Universe bodies, instead of having what we call weight, gravitation, or ether, or what it may be, which are only names after all, are not in a self-repelling gas which drives them away from one another; science knows what is, and no more. Existence cannot be said to be a consequent from an antecedent, nor even fixed laws—what goes on according to them may be.

But mere fixed laws, and consequents from antecedents reveal causation—mean that a certain effect follows because another fact is there. Therefore I must pursue causes, evolutionary ones, if you please; and existence must have had a cause, and the fixed laws or causes must have had a cause, for all facts we have ever ascertained flow from antecedents.

What is the antecedent to existence and fixed laws? You tell me—you leave me in the dark, for I cannot conceive a cause which is not caused; I agree you are there in the dark, and must be. Own it, that is all, and that your science can only know present phenomena, and not God, and we are agreed. But men of science are afraid of being honest in these things.

The argument, as to infidels, is mere stupid presumption, and is merely this: Science, i.e., man's mind, cannot go further than antecedents and consequents; it comes to a point where it has to stop, for, after all, they cannot deny this, therefore there is nothing beyond.

Collected Writings of J.N. Darby: Ecclesiastical 3, Matthew 16

Whatever may help to make the mind clear on passages used to support the errors of popery and Puseyism, is of use at this moment-at least to supply an answer to those whose minds are less exercised on such subjects, even though their own faith may be settled by positive truth. God's goodness may preserve a soul from popish error; but as to doctrine, where redemption is not clearly know, I have always felt that there was nothing to secure the soul from its inroads. Its positive superstitions and errors may suffice under mercy to lead the mind to reject it, and for this we may thank God; but as to peace and acceptance, a vast portion of the evangelical world is so little removed from the popish faith that one can never be surprised (in the present confusion and prevalence of superstition) if people fall into the snares its agents lay for souls. Even the doctrine of the Reformation, " assurance of salvation," held then by all, and condemned by the Council of Trent as the vain confidence of the heretics, is condemned by a vast body of protestants nowadays as presumptuous, and is possessed by few in simplicity of well-grounded faith, though the number of these be, thank God, increasing. Where redemption is clearly known, where what Christ positively promised is possessed, " In that day ye shall know that I am in the Father and ye in me and I in you," the whole system of popery and ritualism falls to the ground, having no possible place in the mind. Popery and ritualism profess to patch up continually the conscience for those who are still far from God, leaving them to answer for themselves in the day of judgment: the true believer is with a perfect conscience in the presence of God. He is accepted in the Beloved, and has boldness to enter into the holiest now, and knows that God will remember his sins and iniquities no more.

Where this is the case, all the appliances of popery have no possible place. But how few of those opposed to ritualism are there! A Jew had his sacrifice for every sin; a Roman Catholic has his absolution when occasion arises; the Christian has by one offering been perfected forever, though he may humble himself and make confession to God for every failure. But the evangelical world will speak of re-sprinkling with the blood of Christ; or, if Calvin be listened to, be taught, where failure has occurred, to look back to baptism, or will account the Lord's supper a means of forgiveness (for forgiveness of sins is attributed to sacraments in reformation-theology). On these subjects the protestant theology is too vague and too inconsistent to meet the positiveness of the deadly and faith-denying errors of popery. The cardinal point of complete redemption, of Christ's having by one offering perfected forever them that are sanctified, of our being accepted in the Beloved, of Christ's appearing in the presence of God for us our abiding righteousness, is unknown or feared; and you have the pretension of positive priestly absolution in an uncertain conscience: in both an uncertain salvation; the doctrine of scripture is lost. We cannot insist too much on the godly life of the redeemed, but scripture will never use it to weaken the truth or completeness of redemption. Sacraments are most precious in their place, but not to undo or neutralize the efficacy of that of which they are the signs. Warnings and exhortations are, thank God, abundantly given for our path, as redeemed, through the wilderness, and as to our dependence every instant on grace to carry us through, but never to make us doubt the faithfulness of Him who exercises it in bringing us to the end of our journey, confirming us to the end that we may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our sin and condemnation have been learned, but also Christ's substitution for us, and the truth that we are made the righteousness of God in Him; so that the question of our righteousness before God never can be raised again, for Christ is it always, and always before God for us. Our weakness we learn every day, but to know that Christ's strength is made perfect in weakness. Failure, alas! may occur, but it gives occasion to Christ's intercession, to His washing our feet; chastening may be needed from our not judging ourselves, but it is applied that we may not be condemned with the world. There is abundant exercise and testing and trying of the life given; but because Christ lives we shall live also.

My object is not now however to pursue the testimony which scripture gives of a complete and accomplished redemption into the enjoyment of which in its sure efficacy we now enter by faith (in itself a far more interesting subject), but passages and subjects which might perplex the mind in reference to forgiveness and ecclesiastical authority. It will lead us into some inquiry as to the government of God and the discipline of His house; the kingdom of God and the so-called power of the keys. We may take the well-known passage in Matt. 16 as our point of departure.

The essential difference of the synoptical Gospels and John's is that the three former show us Christ presented to the responsibility of man, and especially of the Jews in this world, with the result; while John's assumes the Jews to be reprobates, and develops sovereign grace and electing love in connection with the person of the Son of God as a man in this world, which, and not merely Judaism, is now seen as its sphere, and the gift of the Holy Ghost consequent on His going away. There is this peculiar to Luke amongst the first three, that in the first two chapters we have the deeply interesting picture of the godly remnant in Israel; then Christ traced up to Adam (not from Abraham and David) and grace comes out as revealed to man in Him more fully.

In the Gospel of Matthew (which especially speaks of Christ as Emmanuel, Messiah), the narrative, which develops great principles more than facts in historical order, is arrived, in the chapter I refer to, at the point where the Jews had practically rejected the Savior; so that (verse 20) He charges the disciples that they should no longer tell that He was the Christ, and proceeds to show His disciples that He must suffer; and the substitution of the Church and the kingdom of heaven for the Jewish system (in chap. 16), and the coming glory of the Son of man in His kingdom (in chap. 17) are brought before us by the Spirit of God. The Church and the kingdom of heaven form, consequently, the weighty revelation of the Lord in chapter 16. On this let us dwell for a moment.

All is founded on the revelation of the Person of the Son of God. Various opinions were formed by men as to Him, but the Father Himself had revealed to Simon Bar-jonas that Jesus was the Son of the living God. On this rock Christ would build His Church. The true force of verse 18 is, " and I also say." That is, The Father had told Simon what Christ was, Christ tells him what he, Simon, is. He is Peter, or a stone. But on the doctrine of His person as Son of the living God Christ would build His Church. It was on a risen Christ; for this was the public witness that He was Son of the living God, and all the power of Satan, who has the power of death, should not prevail against what Christ thus built. The

important thing here to note is, that Christ and Christ only is the builder. No man has anything to do with it, nor is that which Christ builds yet finished. It is a building which continues till the whole temple is complete according to the mind of God. So, when Peter speaks in his epistle (1 Peter 2:4, 5), he says, Unto whom coming as unto a living stone, ye also as living stones, are built up a spiritual house. We have no human builder. So in Eph. 2, Ye are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord. In all this we have no builder save Christ, and the building is only growing up to a temple in the Lord. I have spoken elsewhere of the contrast of this with 1 Cor. 3, where we have the agency and responsibility of man. Paul is a wise master-builder; some might build with wood, hay, and stubble, but be themselves saved; others corrupt the temple of the Lord and be themselves destroyed. Into this I do not enter farther here. But they are looked at here as the temple of the Lord already, and God's building, not merely growing to it.

What we learn from Matt. 16 is that in the building against which the gates of hell do not prevail man takes no part-it is Christ who builds; while in that in which man's responsibility is engaged, wood and hay and stubble may be built in and the work destroyed by fire. To confound these two things (a confusion on which the whole pretensions of popery and Puseyism are built up) is most mischievous, and makes God answerable for man's evil work, and bound to maintain and sanction it. It is a very wicked doctrine.

Further, there are no keys to the Church. It and its building have nothing to do with the keys. Christ builds and does not build with keys. The keys are the insignia of the administration of the kingdom. These were in a special manner entrusted to Peter individually; but the passage gives him nothing to do with building the Church at all, nor does he pretend to it when he refers to this passage in his epistle. He partakes in a remarkable manner of that on which the Church is founded. He is a stone, has part in the nature of the living stone, the Son of the living God, the truth on which the Church rests; but that is all. Of the kingdom of heaven he had the administration specially entrusted to him. The kingdom is not the Church, and never will be. In a general way, we may say, those who compose it have a part in the kingdom, and will hereafter reign in it as they now suffer for it. It is the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ now; hereafter the kingdom and glory. Christ, as John the baptist, had preached the kingdom of heaven as at hand, as did the twelve (Matt. 10:7). When at length it was set up, though in no outward power, Peter had in an especial manner the administration of it, as we see in the Acts. The Lord added to the Church daily (then openly) such as should be saved. This was His own work; but we see Peter, whether in testimony to Jews or Gentiles, or ordering the choice of deacons, or dealing with Ananias and Sapphira, having the administrative lead in the work. And what he preaches is the Lordship of the ascended Man as a present thing (in chap. 2), and His return in power to accomplish the prophecies (in chap. 3). The assembly was there, and the Lord added to it; but the testimony was to the Lordship of Christ, made Lord, and returning in power. In the case of Cornelius the Church does not come in question. Peter never preaches once that Jesus is the Son of God. He is exalted, made Lord and Christ. In this administration of the kingdom, Heaven put its seal on his acts. Whatever he bound or loosed was bound or loosed with an authority which Heaven sanctioned. I will speak of forgiveness in a moment; but in general what was established by Peter's apostolic authority in the administration of the kingdom had Heaven's seal put upon it. But in Matt. 16 the keys have no connection with the Church, and Peter has nothing to do with building that Church against which the gates of hell shall not prevail. Scripture never confounds the kingdom and the Church.

Further, binding and loosing is not confined to forgiveness, even if, in a collateral way, it may include it, and it is only in such a way that it does. Whatever Peter establishes by the authority committed to him was sanctioned in heaven, as was also whatever two or three did as really met in Christ's name. That too was sanctioned in heaven as much as Peter's administrative acts; but only what was within the competency or left to the service of the place he was put in, or of the two or three gathered in Christ's name. Heaven's sanction on what they did does not mean that they could determine all that heaven could. The sanction of all that an inferior authority does is not saying that that inferior authority can do all that its superior is entitled to do or has to do. Many things may not be left to it. It is a question of what is rightly left. Thus, " What you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven " does not include binding anything in heaven. Whatever in Christianity belonged to heaven itself, whatever was done there, Peter and the Church had no power whatever. He bound things on earth and only there; his commission did not go farther; what he did in these, that Heaven sanctioned; but he had nothing to say to what was bound or loosed in heaven itself. And this is of all importance when we come to certain points. He, Simon Bar-jonas, had the administration of the kingdom confined to him, backed by Heaven's authority: a most important and solemn charge, but that was all.

The same, in its own sphere, is committed to any Christian assembly-two or three gathered together in Christ's name, for such is the assembly spoken of in Matt. 18 but no one dreams that such an assembly can bind beyond its own sphere of action, and determine things in heaven. What it does according to Christ's institution Heaven holds for good, but that does not confer a power of binding beyond the reach of its commission. Heaven's sanction of what is within is not the same thing as giving a power beyond its limits. I come now to the case of forgiveness.

All true Christians are forgiven, have received the forgiveness of their sins; and God will remember their sins and iniquities no more. God has quickened us together with Christ, having forgiven us all trespasses. " I write unto you," says John, " little children [addressing all Christians], because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake." This can neither be bound nor loosed by any one, for God has settled it. Remission of sins is the portion of every one who has the true standing of a Christian. He is accepted in the Beloved. We have redemption through Christ's blood, even the remission of sins. Through Christ (we read) all that believe are justified from all things. Christ is made righteousness to us of God. In the Old Testament this was not made clear. There was occasional forgiveness, and the full acceptance of the person was not revealed, any more than the full character of sin. A sacrifice could be offered to atone for faults committed: for some there was no remedy. A prophet might be sent to proclaim the putting away of sin. It was administrative forgiveness. The righteousness of God was not revealed. In the gospel it is. There was the forbearance of God, who did know, of course, why; but the end of Rom. 3 makes this point quite clear, that the actual remission of sins according to the revealed righteousness of God came in by the gospel: " Whom God hath set forth a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness, that he might be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." This is a most important sentence on this subject. God had been righteous in forbearing as to the sins of the Abraham’s and David’s and others, because of the sacrifice of Christ; and that righteousness was now declared, and the ground of it seen. It was by Christianity God's righteousness (we read in Rom. 1) is now revealed; and Christ has been made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Hence peace and remission of sins were to be preached in His name; all who believed were justified. The prophets witnessed that, through His name, whoever believed in Him should receive remission of their sins, and this was now come and announced in the name of the Lamb slain, with the blessed testimony for those who received it, that their sins and iniquities would be remembered no more; that, sitting at the right hand of God, Christ was the perpetual witness there that the work was accomplished and owned of God, of which the Holy Ghost testified down here, come forth in virtue

of Jesus being up there, and that Christ sits uninterruptedly there, because by one offering He has perfected in perpetuity those who are sanctified.

It is not at all a question as to sins committed to-day or to-morrow, but of a work done before we had committed any, into the present efficacy of which with God we enter, an efficacy which is of perpetual witness before God: that, further, we are in Him, accepted in the Beloved, of which our life will be the practical proof for others, seeing that, if we are in Him, He also is in us. This is not an administrative matter. It is the condition and standing of every true Christian. Peter preached this, and Paul preached this, as we may read in Acts 2, 10 and 13, and the passages I have quoted from Rom. 1 and 3, and Hebrews to. They preached it, and so far as causing heathens or Jews to be received by baptism, administered it externally, though the latter act was accomplished by any and every Christian when the occasion presented itself; the apostles did it very rarely indeed. But a Christian was a forgiven accepted person according to the value and efficacy with God of Christ's work, which never varied. He was accepted at all times in Christ according to the abiding value of Christ's work. We have forgiveness: " all that believe are justified " are apostolic words. Once a person was a Christian, Simon Bar-jonas had nothing to do with administering this.

This leads me to another point in connection with this passage. It is a personal matter with Simon the son of Jonas. He was blessed by the revelation from the Father, and the keys of the kingdom were given to him; he was Peter, he only so designated of the Lord. To him, and to him only were given the keys or administration of the kingdom of heaven; what he, Simon, bound on earth would be bound in heaven, what he should loose would be loosed. He was the first confidential and divinely guided servant of the Master of the house. That was wholly personal to him, as the revelation of Christ by the Father to him was.

But the sanction of Heaven on loosing and binding on earth is declared, in another place, to belong to another depository of power where it is not personal, which does not refer to the kingdom but to the Church, and which (if granted of God's grace) may be found at any time while Christianity subsists, namely, wherever two or three are gathered together in Christ's name, because Christ is there in the midst of them. This is no personal authority of any or all the members, but of an assembly because Christ is in their midst. The language of the passage is so plain that there would be no difficulty to any one, if habits of thought had not clothed it with a meaning which its language leaves no room for. If a brother should offend, the offended one was to seek to gain him; if this failed, he was to take one or two more, so that it might not rest on the injured one's statement alone, if it had to come into judgment. If this failed, he was to tell it to the assembly; if he refused to hear the assembly, he was to be counted as a heathen man. The Christian assembly took the place of the synagogue, and, where the assembly had acted, the judgment (till repentance) was final; the offender was held to be outside as a heathen. First, one was to go, then he with others, then the assembly to be informed of it. It was the discipline of the gathered saints in any given place; and, to make the matter precise, we are told that, wherever two or three are gathered in His name, Christ is in the midst of them. Nothing really can be simpler. There is not a word of clergy, nor ministers (however useful these latter may be by their gifts for service), nothing even of elders, though these had their local functions also. The point is that, where two or three are gathered in Christ's name, Christ is. This then is the abiding seat of the exercise of that authority in its due sphere whose acts are sanctioned in heaven. The same authority given personally to Simon Bar-jonas was that authority conferred on the two or three gathered together in Christ's name, and exists wherever two or three are so gathered. This is a very important point. The perpetuity of the loosing and binding power is in two or three gathered together. It was personal in the chosen apostle and continued in none. It is a mistake to think that forgiveness alone is binding or loosing. What the apostle wrote was to be received as the commandments of the Lord.

A special case in connection with this is that of forgiving sins, only collaterally connected, after all, with the general authority of binding and loosing conferred on Simon. Forgiveness is much more directly connected with the communication of the Holy Ghost and the mission of the apostles in John 20. Matt. 16 has no direct reference to it. In Matt. 18 it comes as necessarily administratively involved in it, of which anon. John 20 was the general mission of the apostles, which, as we have seen, had the forgiveness of sins for a principal object; indeed, as to the individual's state, repentance and remission of sins embraced the whole circle of its testimony, both of course in the name of Jesus. The apostles acted with the Lord's authority in this matter, Paul (as is fully declared by himself) coming in to partake of it from Christ Himself. But this forgiveness had a double character.

All Christians (as we have seen) were a forgiven people. They had redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. John would not have written to them but that they were all forgiven. " I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake." God has quickened us with Christ, having forgiven us all trespasses. We are personally forgiven and accepted, our sins remembered no more, we are perfected forever. Either this is true or scripture is not-so true that there is no more offering for sin; if they are not forgiven completely and forever (as regards the imputing of sin to us, and just divine wrath against the sinner as to judgment), they never can be, because there is no more offering for sin, and without shedding of blood there is no remission. I do not talk of sins past, present, and future, for I ought not to think of sinning in future; it is a misapprehension, leading to a reference to the time of the fault and the then change of the state of the individual needed for forgiveness, but shuns its meritorious cause, instead of seeing one perfect work accepted of God as its ground, a work perfect and complete as accomplished by Christ for believers before or believers after, before believed in a hoped for, now accomplished and believed in, righteousness, revealed and accomplished propitiation. If I will speak of time, all my sins were future when Christ bore them. But the true way is to see a complete work accepted of God, in the acceptance and sweet savor of which we always stand. God for Christ's sake (in Christ) has forgiven us. This was the grand testimony of Christianity. Called thereby to repentance, men had received the remission of their sins by faith in Christ and they were to be remembered no more. They were justified. But, besides reconciliation with God and man by the precious blood of the cross, there is the government of God's children.

God withdraws not His eyes from the righteous, says Elihu to Job and then enlarges upon the ways of God in chastening the righteous, and their restoration to blessing on their humiliation under His hand-just the lesson Job had to learn, and which is taught us in that book. The three friends insisted that this world was an adequate witness of the dealings of God with man as to good and evil, and hence that Job was a hypocrite. But we learn in it that when a man is righteous in God's sight, then it is that the dealings of God have their place for his practical profit and the acquirement of self-knowledge; that whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. This connects the idea of forgiveness or the contrary (not at all with imputation of sin as guilt, and condemnation as the consequence), but with the present infliction of chastisement, in displeasure doubtless, wrath if you please, in the righteous. If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged of the Lord, but when we (Christians) are judged, we are chastened of the Lord that we might not be condemned with the world. When this chastening, or the forgiveness which is connected with relieving any one from it, is confounded with the forgiveness by which we are accepted and reconciled to God, redemption is not known at all: I do not say, intentionally denied, but not known at all. A conscience

purged by the blood of Christ has no more to do with guilt, or with the question of salvation. If he is not cleansed, forgiven, justified completely and forever, he never can be, for Christ cannot die again; and, as the apostle reasons, were it not so, He must suffer often, for that only puts away sin. He suffered for our sins, the just for the unjust. Christ is his righteousness, and he is in Christ before God. But for this very reason God will not allow any evil in him. He chastens for our profit that we may be partakers of His holiness.

Let us see what scripture says of forgiveness in respect of these dealings of God with the righteous, whether using the word forgiveness, or practically referring to the thing. The whole book of Job is a history of it. I quote particularly chapter 33, " He openeth the ears of men and sealeth their instruction, that he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man. He keepeth back his soul from the pit... he is chastened also with pain upon his bed.... If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand to show unto man his uprightness, then he is gracious to him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom... He shall pray unto God, and he will be favorable unto him, and he shall see his face with joy." Here the man is not spoken of as righteous; but the dealings are in grace for correction; and when set right, the hand of God is removed from upon him. In chapter 36 it is expressly the righteous man who is dealt with. Again then He opens their ear to discipline, and if they obey and serve Him, they shall spend their days in prosperity; if they obey not, they shall perish with the sword and die without knowledge. The Psalm are full of this principle; it is, so to speak, their main subject, though founded on atonement. " Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, 0 Jehovah, and teachest him out of thy law; that thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity," Psa. 94. " Jehovah hath chastened me sore, but he hath not given me over unto death," Psa. 118. " Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions."

In the New Testament we have a positive intelligent intervention of the saints in the administration of this forgiveness. First, indeed, men are called upon to judge themselves that they may not come under chastisement (1 Cor. 11:31, 32). But we have two cases where other saints have to say to it, besides apostolic power: discipline, and the supplication of brethren, or the elders' prayer of faith. And first, in respect of discipline, the wicked man had been put out from the midst of the assembly. This, while purifying the assembly from evil, had brought the offender to his senses, and he was profoundly humbled about his sin. The apostle directs the assembly to forgive him; the punishment had been sufficient, and they were again to show their love to him. It was no question of his being the righteousness of God, or of his part in it, but of the government of the Church, and the maintenance of its holiness here below. The wicked man could not enjoy in his wickedness the blessed privileges that belonged to it. He was excluded; now, humbled and penitent, he was to be forgiven. It was the present administration and government of the Church down here, and sanctioned of heaven. At the same time the apostle uses his apostolic authority; and as he had judged the case himself, so now he forgives (2 Cor. 2:7, 10). He had the same authority as that given to the apostles in John 20, and the assembly at Corinth was to exercise concurrently its own in dealing with the case. The apostle was careful there should be no jar between the two. This is the force of verses 10, 11.

The intervention of any Christian, in favor of a sinning brother, we find in 1 John 5. A sin may bring death on a Christian, bodily death in this world, and that in a twofold way irremediably, so that he cannot be prayed for because of the character of the sin (such were Ananias and Sapphira); or, it may result in death, if he be not humbled; as we find in Job, " because there is wrath beware, lest he take thee away with a stroke." If they obey not, they shall perish; that is, when He opens their ear to discipline. The Christian is expected here to discern where the sin has a character which draws out terror and indignation, not intercession. But if it is a sin not to death, though unrepented of, it may lead to the sinning brother's being cut off, taken away with a stroke; then prayer is to be made, and the life of the sinning brother will be spared. He is in this sense forgiven. The threatened result of His sin is turned aside by the intercession. So, in Job 42:8, the effect of God's displeasure is to be averted by the intercession of Job. In James it is the elders' prayer of faith. A Christian was sick, he was to send for the elders of the assembly, and they were, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord, to pray for him, and the prayer of faith would restore the sick to health, the Lord would raise him up, and, if he had committed sins, they would be forgiven him; evidently implying that if those sins had been the occasion of his sickness, it would not hinder the efficacy of the prayer, but the sins would be forgiven, and the man restored to health.

We have thus the various phases of administrative forgiveness. God, in His government, no longer held the offender liable to judgment according to that government exercised here below, not as a question of acceptance in Christ, but the government of His children. It might be chastening from Himself, or it might be also the assembly's discipline. It does not refer to final judgment: the believer has boldness for the day of judgment, because as Christ is, so is he in this world; but he is (as calling on the Father, and knowing he is redeemed by the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without spot and without blemish) to pass the time of his sojourning here in fear, for the Father judges every man according to his works. Now, as regards the final judgment, the Father judges no man, but has committed all judgment to the Son; but there is the judgment of our ways in the path towards the glory obtained by Christ for us. There is a judgment of the ways of all. The unrepentant are heaping up wrath against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men, but God withdraws not His eyes from the righteous, and it is our God who is a consuming fire. Where true gold is, it purges away the dross. There may be tribulation for good, in which we can glory; there may be chastening for actual transgression, under which we have to humble ourselves; there may be discipline which applies correctively to our state, and even, as in the case of Paul, anticipates the evil for our blessing. We have to distinguish the absolute forgiveness and acceptance of the believer from the forgiveness which applies to divine discipline, or even church discipline when we are accepted, the effect of the eyes of God being on the righteous. The denial of the fullness of the former is the great plague of modern Christianity. It will be resisted and calumniated as every important truth will; but if the word of God be true, being justified by faith, we have peace with God, and are purged, have no more conscience of sins, by one offering are perfected forever. This the Old Testament saints did not know. Christianity is the revelation of the righteousness of God. It is that that made the apostle boast of it (Rom. 1:17). It was then that righteousness was declared. God's discipline, and the assembly's judgment (for it judges those within), forgiveness as to present displeasure with the conduct of the children, come in when acceptance is perfect and apply to the righteous and accepted children. In the Old Testament these were not distinguished with the same clearness, because the full remission of sins was not yet revealed,1 nor divine righteousness; so that this distinction could not be brought out, for it depended on that remission and standing in righteousness, our entrance into the holiest through the rent veil. Hence even protestants who have not the consciousness of this standing are at a loss as to forgiveness.

Some remarks may have their just place here. First, it may be remarked that all the chastening is from God's hand, even when wicked men are the instruments urged on by Satan. God it is who has set Satan at work as an instrument, as we see in the book of Job. The interpreter, the man of prayer, may be the means of removing the evil, but no human authority imposes any. Chastening discipline is the judgment of the Lord, a Father's hand upon His child; it has nothing to do with the Church, nor the Church with it. The Church or assembly only acts on proof of evil by putting out from itself, and so clearing itself, and bringing back when the person is humbled. It judges those within, and forgives when there is just ground for it. The Lord chastens in love, to make us partakers of His holiness. He forgives and removes the chastening, when

there is just occasion for that. An individual's prayer may avert death when wrath is there, or the prayer of the elders of the Church, if the prayer of faith may restore to health when sickness is discipline, and forgiveness be granted. God may see occasion to inflict permanent chastisement, as Jacob halted all his life. Full remission of sins was not known under the Old Testament; its announcement is of the essence of Christianity, and peace with God through justification. An unjustified believer is a contradiction in terms: all that believe are justified; but justification, if it be more, is certainly imputing no sin. Blessed is the man whose iniquity is forgiven, whose sin is pardoned; blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputes no sin; but to him that believes in Him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is imputed to Him for righteousness.

Let me add that delivering to Satan is an act of power; putting out a wicked person is a duty attached to the faithfulness of the assembly. No doubt exclusion from the assembly of God is a very serious thing, and leaves us exposed to sorrow and just trouble of heart, and that from the enemy: but direct delivering to Satan is the act of positive power. It was done in Job's case for his good. It was done by Paul in 1 Cor. 5, though acting in the gathered assembly, for the destruction of the flesh; and again, without reference to the assembly, in 1 Tim. 1, as to Hymenmus and Alexander, that they might learn not to blaspheme. All discipline is for the correction of the individual, though to maintain withal the holiness of the house of God, and clear the consciences of the saints themselves.

We must not confound what the Church binds being bound in heaven, with the Church being able to bind and loose all that Heaven can. What the Church (that is, two or three gathered in Christ's name) binds in the sphere committed to them according to the word, that is sanctioned by Heaven. But the Church has nothing to do with forgiving sins, in the sense of not imputing guilt, or making a person righteous; this Heaven (that is, God Himself) has done as regards the believer, and the Church can neither bind nor loose it. It has no power or jurisdiction in this sense at all. It has a sphere of discipline in which it forgives or judges, and its righteous acts in that sphere are sanctioned on high. And it is important to remark, that the binding and loosing is, in Matt. 16, conferred on Simon Bar-jonas in the administration of the kingdom of heaven. He has nothing to do with the Church there. That Christ builds. When the Church forgives, it is an assembly, it may be of two or three gathered together in Christ's name. The apostles could administer forgiveness, and did, in receiving into the Church of God persons called in by grace (John 20). Paul acts in the same power, and owns it in the assembly then in respect of discipline; the distinction of which from not imputing guilt I have already noticed. Simon Bar-jonas binding and loosing had nothing to do with the Church. Two or three gathered in the Lord's name do it in church matters. It has nothing to do with any supposed authority of the Church as a whole.

Letters 3, Bereavement; What Death Is to the Believer; Infidelity

My answer has been a little delayed by moving, and then the press of parting for the Continent, where I now am on my way to Italy and then Switzerland. I was much affected by your account of dear -, and his deal.

It shows what a world we live in, but what a gracious God we have. Death is written upon our fairest hopes and our fondest joy; but where sin and death have come in, grace and the Son of God have come in after them to more than make up what was done. If we look at what is eternal and real, then at dear and -, both with Christ, and soon to be manifested in glory through sovereign grace: bright hopes cut down, fine expectations and affections blighted here, but the death to them only the seed of what never ends, in joy and rest with God and Him who loved us, and at all cost to Himself obtained it for us. Most thankful was I to hear of -'s confessing Christ before he went. I was not surprised. Sorrowful as his path had been, it was much through that amiability of character which does not know how to resist, and his affections for home remained constant. None of these things are grace; and the former-for such as we are and the world around us -is a channel of evil; but neither are positive will in evil. But all is in that word that he owned Christ according to his need of a Savior, and it is very gracious of God to have given you all this comfort. What a difference for the heart if all had ended in darkness, or even far away where none might have been to speak to him! It really is a very great mercy, and I am most thankful to God for it, that your——'s course should have ended in owning the blessed Lord, resting for forgiveness on Him Ah, it is good to have Him, with the love in which He gave Himself for us, without which none of us could subsist, for after all there is no difference. I rejoice that your father and mother have received this consolation; God has been very gracious to them, for death cannot be staid save by sovereign power immediately exercised, but love is sovereign and free in that grace which saves. Death is the wages of sin, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Blessed be the God of all grace! and we wait here or there to be like Jesus and see Him as He is. The more one goes on and gets out of the vain show in which men walk and into reality, the more Christ is everything. As it is said, death and destruction have heard the fame thereof (of wisdom) with their ears: they have not got it, but they tell a tale that ends falsehood if it be not yet truth, and that is something. Infidelity may do to amuse and deceive the mind while the spring of life flows, but when it begins to ebb, and more when it dries up, what can it do or say? You may be an amiable, clever animal with it, not by it, but a divine affection never crosses its path.

Remember me kindly to—-and all at the house, and tell them how seriously I take in all their troubles and sorrows. Still God has been most gracious to them, and even in human things makes everything work together for good to those who love Him. The Lord be with you, dear——

Affectionately in the Lord

Paris, February, 1874

Letters 1, Lord Working in Blessing; Sifting, The

The Lord is working for an entirely different purpose, I am satisfied, than those who are active in the matter, think. Confidence in His acting is what made me desire it should be left to its own developing.... Wisdom is not always with the prudent; "The fear of the Lord that is wisdom, and to depart from evil that is understanding."

I will (D. V.) send you the Genesis. I found the first number here on my return; I have just looked at it, only having returned yesterday, having been up the country to meet the brethren at Arache and Haute-Loire, and the workmen of some nine or ten departments, with whom I studied for two weeks, besides the general meetings, with much blessing I hope and good to all. I think of sending you an original paper on Antichrist, in the way of inquiry.... Be of good courage, the Lord is evidently working. In these countries it is evident to all. Do not be anxious about the

church, as if the Lord did not care and act for it—be anxious for it. It is our life. The Lord is working for good in England, I do not the least doubt, and in waiting His time His hand will be seen, and with my whole heart I desire it may be in blessing on many I believe to be going wrong. If not, they will suffer sorely, though doubtless ultimately blessed if His, as I doubt not. But a sifting must be. I feel no surprise whatever as to any one. My only surprise, if such a word be permitted, is God's own abundant grace to myself. But it is a sorrowful thought that many whom we cannot doubt to be saints are blind to the privilege and testimony of God. The Lord give us grace to know how to win, as how to be faithful ourselves. Nothing but His Spirit can guide us. I am again at chamber work, so I hope soon to be able to send you the papers I mention.

Ever your affectionate brother,

In our perfect, blessed Master.

Montpellier,

April 3rd, 1849.

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