Romans - Commentaries by Andrew Miller

Meditations on the Grace and Glory of the Blessed God, Divine Love and Its Fruits

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We have now come to that period in the history of God's ways with man-His " due time"-when His love as perfect is manifested in connection with the cross of Christ. The whole condition of man from Adam to Christ has been looked at in every way; full trial has been made in the long patience of God. Four thousand years of probation, and every fair trial under all the possible circumstances in which man could be placed, have demonstrated his true character and condition.

But he is not only without one good thing towards a merciful and long-suffering God, but there is in his heart and in all his ways the presence of every evil thing.

God had known this from the beginning; but it was not until after it had been fully proved that He takes His place towards the sinner in Christ Jesus, according to the greatness of His love and the riches of His grace. This is a point of immense practical importance in the history of souls. How often we have found a young believer greatly troubled and long kept from peace with God, through experiencing so much within that is contrary to Him. How can I believe God loves me-how can I believe He hears my prayers-how can I believe that I am His child with all this in-dwelling sin? This perplexity is natural, and so far it is right to be troubled on account of indwelling evil; but Satan's object is to keep the soul in this state, and to turn the mind in upon self for evidences, and so to harass and perplex the feeble in faith. Such souls have not yet learned the grand truth which the apostle is here discussing, and which is now before us-perfect love to the sinner, consequent upon, not before, the trial of man, and founded on the finished work of Christ. When this grand, consoling, peace-giving truth is known, all doubts, fears, and perplexities must immediately disappear. Nothing short of perfect rest and cloudless joy would fill the soul, and nothing could disturb its sweet repose. It is one with Christ in resurrection, beyond the reach of every foe, and possessed of His " unsearchable riches."

Had God manifested His love towards man before He had proved what was in him, He might have been afterward disappointed, as men speak, with his ingratitude and disobedience; and we might reasonably enough have been in doubt as to what God would now say, and whether He would not turn away from us and judge us as hopelessly evil. But oh! blessed! precious! yea, thrice precious truth to the soul! It was not until man had been fully tried in every way, and his terrible guilt consummated in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, God's well-beloved Son, that His love is fully revealed. If God can love, and does love the sinner in Christ Jesus after this expression of his hatred, rebellion, and wickedness, what must the love be! Again the heart exclaims, as it rests in the effulgent beams of that love which can never be darkened by a cloud, oh, mighty, marvelous, wondrous, matchless love! And like an ocean without a shore; it is measureless, boundless, whence flow the ten thousand streams of living grace for the refreshment of the weary by the way, and for the establishment of our souls in faith and holiness.

It was this love which overflowed the heart of the apostle as he wrote the first eleven verses of this chapter-the richest perhaps in divine love that have been given to us. " For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

This is the gospel of the grace of God-God's new principle in dealing with man who now stands before Him as entirely lost. All His past ways with man, dispensational and personal, down to the cross, only demonstrated him to be utterly alien in nature, and hopelessly bad in condition; consequently, the love that was henceforth displayed must be absolutely free and perfect. Nothing was ever found in man to induce, but everything to dissuade, the manifestation of divine love. But now all is changed. God retires into the rights of His own sovereignty; grace reigns; but not on the ruins of law and justice; not in setting aside the claims of God, nor in lightly passing over the guilt of man; but through accomplished righteousness towards God, and eternal life to the lost sinner by Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

This, we affirm, is the gospel on the divine side; the effects on the human side will be manifested in genuine faith, godly repentance, and a life of holiness, and would to God it were better understood; for when received in simplicity every question is settled. If I know that He loves me with a perfect love, after He has estimated all my sin and guilt, then no evil can ever spring up in my heart that He knew not beforehand, and that He has not fully judged in the cross of Christ and put out of His sight forever. But here it may be asked, Did God not love the sinner before the death of Christ? Most assuredly He did. Perfect love always dwelt in the heart of God towards man. To speak of the death of Christ as exciting or procuring the love of God towards the sinner, is a pernicious doctrine and without the shadow of foundation in scripture. On the contrary, the death of the Lord Jesus is represented as the expression of God's love towards us, and the character, or greatness of that love, is revealed by the condition of those for whom Christ died. Love, full, perfect, and active, always dwelt in His heart; and its grand object ever was the reconciliation of man to Himself. God never was the enemy of man, therefore He needed not to be reconciled; nay, rather, " He was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." Innumerable passages rush into the mind in proof of this rest-giving truth; such as, " In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world." 1 John 4:9-19.

Yes, what a mercy for us, this love was always there; and although rejected, it was not weakened. But the death of Jesus opened the way for its full revelation, and for the accomplishing of all the purposes of grace. There was no link between. God and man in the flesh; for all His love, He had only received hatred; no response was ever found in the human heart to His most tender appeals. But Christ glorified God about sin in His death; He accomplished all righteousness; He met the highest claims of heaven, and the deepest necessities of man; the law was magnified and the promise established in His Person; and He laid a righteous foundation in His death and resurrection for the perfect display of the divine nature and character, and that in respect of sin. Now God takes His own place, and manifests what He is towards the sinner in Christ Jesus. We have seen what man is, now we have to see what God is, and what the fruits of His love are.

Our attention is now directed by the apostle to what we may call the first-fruits of perfect love-the death of Christ as an object for faith outside ourselves. " For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." No more difficult truth for man to believe was ever revealed than this. It is so opposed to all human thoughts, feelings, affections, and ways, that he cannot understand it. Who ever heard of love lavishing its choicest gifts on unrelenting but powerless enemies? Thou shalt do this, and thou shalt not do that, or, abide the consequences, man can understand; it is consistent with his reason. But for love to say, after it has proved that there is nothing in its object but hatred, and a hatred too, unchangeable, and cruel as death-I have opened the flood-gates of heaven that my love may flow forth in unmeasured, unhindered fullness for your eternal happiness, far transcends the loftiest thoughts of the human mind That God should love the righteous, the good and the holy, excites no surprise; but that He should love the unholy, the unrighteous, and the evil, and give His own beloved Son to die the death they deserved, must ever shine forth throughout the countless ages of eternity as the wonder of all wonders.

But who could believe it? even with this oracle of love, man has found something to find fault with and to complain of. He cannot bear the idea of being proclaimed powerless. He would sooner far believe that he is ungodly than that he is weak. By trying, he hopes to cease being ungodly, and to become better, and he refuses to bow to the humiliating truth, that he is wholly " without strength." But this is where the gospel begins, and where man must be brought to if his soul is to be saved. He may struggle long against the truth, as many do, thinking they can do something, or at least feel that they are growing better by their own doings, such as prayer, reading the word, and attending to the means of grace. But no! God will wait till the awakened sinner bows to the result of his own history as written by God Himself, powerless for good; morally and spiritually dead; condemned already, and lying under the guilt of the death of Christ.

This then, we repeat, is the gospel; not what man is, not what God requires of man, but what God is, after He has proved man to be both powerless and godless. This believed, the light of heaven fills the soul. With his first breath the believer may exclaim, " God loves me with a perfect love, notwithstanding all I am and have done; Christ died for me, and all the benefits of His death are mine; now my salvation depends, not on my own consistency-though I ought to be consistent-but on the unchangeable love of God, and the eternal efficacy of the blood of Christ. I have simply to rest in His love, and to rejoice in the effects of the work of Christ, which fits me for His holy presence."

But what must be the guilt of those who reject the Lord Jesus, full of all grace and goodness, yea and of God Himself in reconciling love? Everything in which blessing can be found is rejected, and the soul must eternally perish by its own suicidal act. The very remembrance of such love, and so slighted; of such opportunities, and so neglected; must give vehemence to the flames that shall never be quenched, and vitality to the worm that shall never die. May the Lord have mercy upon my unconverted reader, and lead him to take his true place at the feet of Jesus, and to believe what is so plainly revealed, " When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly."

The expression, " in due time," seems to convey two distinct thoughts. 1. It was the time of man's utmost need; his guilt had reached its fullest height, and all was lost as to man. He was without strength to come out of this condition, although God under the law had showed him the way. He had nothing to look for but wrath. 2. It was the " due time " for the full manifestation of divine love in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. " When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Gal. 4:4, 5.

Meditations on the Grace and Glory of the Blessed God, Man's History and God's "Due Time"

IN these few verses we have not only the great truth of the death of Christ, but also of the love of God for the sinner. The connection of verse 5 with verse 6 is evident. " For" indicates that we are the objects of God's love, for Christ died for us. " For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." Here, the reasoning of the apostle, the way he links these precious truths together, is beautiful and assuring. He proves that the Christian's hope can never be disappointed, because the love of God is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost which is given to him. The love of God, the work of Christ, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, give abundant assurance of the believer's blessing, whatever may be the troubles of the way. The wheels of his soul have been set in motion by tribulation, patience, experience, and hope; but that which sustains the believer in the midst of the trials of this life can never fail. The love of God, as resulting in the cross of Christ and the gift of the Spirit, is the ground of his confidence, the full assurance of his hope. "And hope maketh not ashamed," says the apostle, " because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

" To God our weakness clings through tribulation sore, And seeks the covert of His wings till all be o'er.And when we've run the race, and fought the faithful fight We hope to see Him face to face with saints in light."

Thus we have in verse 5 the love of God in us -His love shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost; and in verse 6 we have the love of God for us; for when destitute of all strength, " Christ died for us." What a picture for faith to contemplate! What a treasure for the heart to cherish! What a stronghold in the day of trial!—the love of God as come into our hearts through the presence of the Holy Ghost there, and also publicly manifested in the gift, the work, the resurrection, and the glory of the Savior. And notice also that this is the first passage which speaks of the love of God being shed abroad in our hearts, or of the Holy Spirit being given to us. But God's due time was come for the full revelation of His love, both subjectively and objectively.

Although God knew from the beginning what man was, and what man would be, He allowed him to be fairly tested under every possible circumstance in which he could be placed. In the patience of God he was under a state of probation for four thousand years. Surely this was trial enough! But what was the result? That there was nothing good in man; that he was essentially ungodly; that he was unable to do anything towards his own deliverance from divine wrath, even with ordinances and ceremonies of divine appointment, as under the law; that he was like the man at the pool of Bethesda, who had no strength to take advantage of the troubling of the waters. But it may be interesting to trace for a moment the whole history of man, from the garden of Eden to the cross of Christ, where it ends, morally viewed, and which was God's due time for the outflow of His love, and for the accomplishing of His purposes, especially as to the church.

Short Papers on Gospel Subjects: With Various Incidents From Real Life, Divine Love and Its Fruits

Rom. 5:6-11.

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The expression, “in due time,” seems to convey two distinct thoughts. 1. It was the time of man’s utmost need; his guilt had reached its fullest height, and all was lost as to man. He was without strength to come out of this condition, although God under the law had showed him the way. He had nothing to look for but wrath. 2. It was the “due time” for the full manifestation of divine love in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. “When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” Gal. 4:4, 5.

The Character of God’s Love

Verses 7, 8. “For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” If the character and quality of love is to be determined by the character and condition of its object, how far divine love must transcend every illustration of human love! God only can love without a motive, save that which is within His own heart. Man must have a motive without, and his feelings and affections are thereby governed. He may be moved to esteem, to approval, by righteousness, and to affection by benevolence: but it is scarcely to be expected that any one would think of dying for a merely just or righteous man; though for a good man, a benefactor, such self-devotion might be found; but such love could not be surpassed among the children of men; this would be its strongest expression. “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

What characterizes God’s love is His sending His own Son to die, not for the righteous, or even for the good, but for sinners, for those who were deserving His wrath, not His love. Yes, here we may pause for a moment, and wonder and adore. Man required a strong motive to draw forth his love; God had none. Fresh and full, pure and perfect, from His own heart—its native fountain—it flowed forth, and overflowed all the boundaries of human sin. “Where sin abounded grace did much more abound.” There was nothing in man to call forth, but everything to hinder, the expression of His love; but the spring and the power were within, and no object without was needed to induce or draw it forth. God is love, and God only can thus love.

Do any inquire, Can God love sin? All answer, No. Can He love the sinner? Many hesitate to answer fearlessly. But what does the word say? God commendeth His love in not sparing His own Son. He thus commends, proves, makes manifest His love by Christ dying for sinners, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. So that, speaking as a believer, I have the positive certainty of how much God loves me, and what He is to me, in spite of all that I am, or have been. It was after He knew all the evil that is in me, and of which I am guilty, that He gave His Son to die for me. This is the expression of His love to me, in so far as that love can be expressed. Thus the death of the Lord Jesus is the fullest proof of my sin, and of God’s love to me. But all my evil is judged and gone—gone forever—His love alone remains. What a resting place for the conscience, as well as the heart? “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” God being righteous and holy, as truly as love, could not introduce me into His presence in my sins, therefore He laid them all on Jesus, who put them away on the cross. There I must look to see them all put away, not within; God has never said He would put them away from my heart while I am here. He looks to the cross, and sees the work finished, and so does faith: unbelief looks within, and judges by experience.

But is there not a sense, my anxious friend may inquire, in which the love of God is known and enjoyed in the heart? Most true, most blessedly true! But that is by faith, after the judgment of present things, and when Christ is before the heart as the hope of glory. Pardon and justification are viewed as past things; peace with God, and standing in grace, as present; waiting for glory as future. Then comes trial, sustained by faith in the power of the Holy Ghost. “And not only so, but we glory in tribulation also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience experience; and experience hope; and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” This is good and wholesome exercise for the Christian, but we must bear in mind that the Holy Spirit never points the soul to His own work in us—which is never finished—while we are here but to the work of Christ for us, which is finished absolutely perfect—and outside ourselves.

“The Gospel of God.”

This, we love to repeat, is the gospel on God’s part, on the divine side. God loves the sinner. What a wonderful thing for an anxious soul to find that there is love in the heart of God for him—for one who had only thought of God as a judge ready to condemn. But now he finds that God loves him, that Christ has borne the punishment of sin in his stead, poured out His soul unto death, and put away sin; that He has risen again, has ascended into heaven; that God is glorified, and the Holy Ghost has come down to make His love known in the heart by faith, and

to seal home the work of Christ in the soul. This is more than something from God, such as justification, peace, and hope, or His tender care in tribulation; it is like God Himself coming to take up His abode in the heart. To enter into the full perception of God's ways in grace with the sinner constitutes the believer's highest enjoyment, opens up a vast field for the loftiest meditations, and the greatest activities of heart and mind in the scene around us. The Father's love, the Saviour's grace, the Spirit's power, are our associates in labor. The bright regions of glory, the dark regions of hell, the priceless value of the immortal soul, are the weighty motives which govern the evangelist.

Yet, strange to say, some have the temerity to speak of the gospel as if it were merely elementary truth, and only fit to be listened to by the unconverted or newly-awakened soul. But what have we here before us? In the simple truth that "Jesus came down to be a man, and die," we have the revelation of Him who is infinite, of the God of love; and, we may say, of the depths of His heart, for He who lay deepest there God freely gave. Yet withal it is adapted to the simplest minds, and to the wants of every heart that knows its condition as lost under sin. "Thus the display of His love in the death of Christ comes down to the child, while it wholly transcends the highest soarings of poor but proud philosophy. There is the most profound truth, but it is embodied in facts which speak to every heart and conscience when the will has been dealt with by the Holy Spirit. While we were yet sinners Christ died for us; and in this God commends His own love toward us."2

The sinner that has been converted by means of this gospel has found a place of perfect rest; not merely, because he is pardoned, or his debts paid; nor even in his faith, however genuine; nor in his repentance, however deep and deep it will be when he knows what God is, and what he has been; nor in the work of the Spirit in him, though that has given him light and power; but far above all these he rises, and rests on the heart of God, through the finished work of Christ. As water rises to its level, so the living water that came down to the defiled Samaritan re-ascends to its source, giving the title and the capacity to enjoy the richest blessings which flow from that eternal spring. And as it was in her case, there is no better fitness to preach the gospel to others than the full enjoyment of it ourselves. Knowing the remedy for perishing souls, we must not conceal it. If we found a man lying on the roadside, dying from pain, and we had a remedy at hand that would remove the pain and restore him to health, it would be wicked and cruel to withhold it. True, he might be slow to believe in the sincerity of our intentions, but we should not fail to entreat and beseech until we had persuaded him to try our cure. And knowing man's love of the world, and his disinclination to attend to the spiritual concerns of his soul, we must entreat and beseech as those who see his danger, and carry with us a divine specific for every malady of his precious soul.

We have sometimes referred to the teaching of one to whom many are indebted, and we have profited by many a rich thought without acknowledging it—save to the Great Original—but as an earnest, fervent, beseeching gospel preacher he is less known. We give the following appeal—slightly abridged—as an example which we should think safe for the preacher to follow, and most suitable for the unsaved reader. May he give good heed to it, and believe to the salvation of his soul.

"Now, dear friends, I would just, in conclusion, ask you, Have you been led to come, as you are, ungodly sinners, to God? Not to bring your own righteousness, which is nothing but filthy rags; but have you come pleading the blood shedding of the Lamb of God? If you have, assuredly there is peace for you, for that is a sure token that God is for you. Or have you been acting against God all your lives, and have never found peace? Are you still tormented with a guilty conscience, and are you still rejecting and refusing salvation? I would earnestly beseech you to consider the danger you are in, and I would ask you to look before you, and see where you are going and what you are doing. You are wandering in the midst of the wide sea of this world, you are toiling through its waves, without a prospect of deliverance; and if persisted in, you will ere long sink down into the sleep of death, to wake in eternal misery....

"But be of good cheer if your hearts are set on Christ: there is your stay, the anchor of your soul. If He is such, dear friends, stand forward for Him; be not ashamed to own your relationship to Him, your dependence on Him; be decided, cut short all expedients for deferring the bold acknowledgment of your being His; confess Him before men, act for Him, and live for Him in an ungodly world..... Be not debating within yourselves when you shall avow yourselves; do it at once, decidedly. Make the plunge, and trust God for the consequence. I know it by experience that an open, bold, confession of being Christ's is more than half the struggle over. I know the devil tempts, and says, 'Oh don't be too hasty, you might ruin the cause by over-forwardness; this is not the time to confess yourself openly, wait for another opportunity.' But I say, dear friends, as one who knows that if a man, in the strength of the Lord, is just brought to say to his companions and friends, 'I am Christ's, and must act for Him,' that he will not suffer what others will feel who are creeping on, fearful and afraid to avow Him whom they desire to serve. Believe me, my friends, it is as I say, by this decided and open opposition to the world: he may at first be laughed at, and mocked, but what of that?

Christ was served so. . . .

"Oh! I once more entreat you to be candid. Be open, be decided, confess Christ's name on earth, and He will not be ashamed to confess your name before the whole assembled universe."3

The apostle having established the great truth of the love of God and its effects, as demonstrated by the gift of Christ and His death for us, now reasons, in a divine way, as to the perfect security of the believer. Justification is his true state before God in virtue of the work of Christ: "Being justified by his blood." When it is said in the first verse of this chapter, "Being justified by faith;" the meaning is, not that we are saved by faith as a virtue, but that faith includes its object, which, in this connection, embraces the whole work of Christ, His death and resurrection. This being known to faith, the believer has peace with God, the enjoyment of His favor and the hope of glory. Thus we are brought by the risen Lord into association with Himself, and in the place where He Himself is gone, and in all His acceptance, our sins are all blotted out, annihilated by the work of Christ, and the heart, unburdened, rejoices in the Lord.

But this is not all; we pass through tribulation. God leads us into it and is with us in it. He is glorified in the trial. In place of the impatience of nature, there is the endurance of grace. The will is subdued, and we learn the true character of the scene in which we move, and through which we pass on our way home. Divine love is now demonstrated, not only in the gift of Christ, but also in the gift of the Holy Ghost, and that love shed abroad in the heart. The believer has now a twofold security for his present blessing and future glory—the place which he has in God's heart; and, oh! wondrous, marvelous, mysterious, truth! the place which He has chosen to occupy in the heart that has been cleansed by the blood of Jesus. "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." This is the presence of the God of love in us. Thus we know the love of God both subjectively and objectively: we have the consciousness of the former; the latter we have displayed in the great public fact of the death of Christ for us.

The Apostle's Conclusions

From the freeness and greatness of the divine love as thus unfolded, the apostle draws the following most obvious conclusions. “Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.” Verses 9, 10.

Much more is emphatic and conclusive. The reasoning of the apostle is founded on the blood-shedding of the Lord Jesus; “Being now justified by his blood.” This is an expression of peculiar weight and solemnity, and ought not to be passed lightly over. It gives us an overwhelming view of the infinite evil and malignant nature of sin; and that blood of infinite dignity was required to discharge its claim on the sinner. “Without shedding of blood is no remission.” It also speaks of the inflexible justice of God, the integrity of His word, and of the execution of the first sentence; “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” How utterly impossible for the guilty to escape the awful judgment of God if not sheltered and cleansed by the precious blood of Jesus! As the apostle says, “How shall we escape if we neglect [not wickedly reject, but carelessly neglect] so great salvation?” Nothing but the blood of the paschal lamb sprinkled on Israel’s doorposts could save them from the sword of the destroyer. “When I see the blood, I will pass over you.” Truth was satisfied, justice was stayed, and deliverance from Pharaoh secured, by the blood-sprinkled lintels. God is holy; and as such He is against sin, and must judge it. Happy day, when the sinner sees that his own soul is lost without the safeguard of the Saviour’s precious blood. The work of grace is then in the conscience, and it will never be at rest until the doorposts of the heart are sprinkled with the blood of the true paschal Lamb. Then he is safe forever and beyond the reach of every destroyer.

He has a safe passport to the goodly land of Canaan.

On the other hand, the expression, “justified by his blood,” proves, as nothing else could, not only the evil of sin, but the perfect love of God toward the sinner. He spared not His own Son; while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Faith in that precious blood is complete justification and eternal life to the once guilty and condemned soul. It is now “whiter than snow.” What a mercy to know and be able to say in view of the awful judgment of God against sin; “It is God [yes, God Himself by virtue of Jesus’ blood] that justifieth: who is he that condemneth?” “It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.” And faith, standing in the midst of these eternal realities, can raise the shout of victory, and send out its challenge in the face of every foe, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” He gave His Son to die; that is God’s love to the guilty. He accepted the work of His Son, and set the workman at His own right hand; that is God’s righteousness. It was righteousness on God’s part to accept the perfect righteousness presented to Him by the righteous One; and we, being accepted in Christ, are made the righteousness of God in Him.

Here we have a full gospel—justified by the blood of Jesus, complete deliverance through Him.

Not merely that our sins are all forgiven; that would only be a negative blessing. But we have positive divine righteousness in Christ, which is our title to glory. Thus the intelligent believer can say, Now I stand in the presence of God, not only without my sins, but in the absolute righteousness of God. Divine righteousness has taken the place of human sin. This is perfect love, perfect righteousness, perfect rest, perfect blessedness, and God perfectly glorified. But wrath, not love, awaits the unbelieving soul, yea, abides on him that submits not to the power of that justifying blood. Only those who believe in Jesus, and trust in His precious blood to cleanse from all sin, are delivered from the wrath to come.

Verse 10. “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.” Here the apostle pursues his subject with deepening interest and energy. The Spirit of God is leading the apostle in this verse to yet more definite reasoning and more powerful conclusions. Had God discovered any symptoms of love in us to serve Him, or any willingness to obey Him, His love would not have been absolutely perfect, He would have found a motive in us for His love. But how did matters stand? We were ungodly, without strength, sinners, enemies; so that the positive enmity of man, as hewn in these four features, but furnished the deepest occasion for the display of His all-perfect love.

From the garden of Eden to the cross of Calvary, in place of man showing any symptoms of love or of obedience, he takes no pleasure in the things of God, sees no beauty, no loveliness in His holiness, no glory in His righteousness, and dares to insult His majesty. His judgments, though a lawbreaker, he disregards; His mercies, though he would perish were they to be withdrawn, he despises; His temporal favors, he uses, or, it may be, abuses, to His dishonor; His love, in the coming of His Christ, he rejected; the testimony of the Holy Spirit to the work of Christ and the salvation which is in Him unto eternal glory, he refuses as less worthy of his thoughts than the fleeting vanities of a day. Can any reason be found in man why God should love him? Rather, is there not every reason why God should be against him? To love such, must be free, perfect, sovereign, love. The reason, the motive, the power, is in Himself. It is God’s own love: He only can love like this; and, forever be adored His great and holy name, He has loved us, He does love us with an everlasting love, and with loving kindness has He drawn us to Himself, and blessed us in His love.

Such are the blessed fruits of divine love—of the gospel of God. The believer is not only pardoned, justified, and reconciled, but he is associated with Christ as risen from among the dead; possessed of the same life, indwelt by the same Holy Spirit, standing in the same relationship to God the Father, blessed with the same inheritance, an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Christ. Nor is this rich roll of blessing all the fruit of that love, even that which may be enjoyed here on our pilgrim way. The apostle boasts of a yet higher privilege.

The Christian’s Highest Joy

Verse 11. “And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement” —reconciliation (see margin). Higher joy than this we can never have; it is infinite, yet we have already entered into it. We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ —in virtue of completed reconciliation, a blessed, conscious, happy reunion with the living God is accomplished. This verse brings us back to the beginning of our chapter, where it is said that believers have, peace with God, have access to Him, and rejoice in hope of His glory. But here we have arrived at the fountain head, looking through all the blessings conferred on us, and rejoicing in God Himself as the highest spring and object of them all. Yes! God Himself is the Christian’s joy, glory, and boast! It is not now merely in hope of the glory of God that we rejoice; nor is it in our tribulation, because of its effects, divine love being known in our hearts through the Holy Ghost given unto us; nor is it in the many blessings He has given us, but better far, in Himself.

This is grace, pure grace, grace to the poorest, grace to the vilest, grace to thee, my reader, if thou wilt only have it in God’s way. Man’s ability to meet the requirements of the holiness of God has been fully tried, but the plainer the truth, the clearer the light, the more did it

bring out man’s darkness and opposition to God. And then grace came in—it was God’s due time—and Christ died for the ungodly. We can only be pardoned and saved through faith in the blood of Jesus. When God sees the blood of the slain Lamb, He is satisfied. He sees that which has blotted out sin, vindicated His character, verified His word, and met the whole need of ruined man. And now, observe, if thou art satisfied with this precious blood alone, trusting wholly to it, as the only answer to sin’s claims upon thy precious soul the only discharge from that dread tribunal; thy soul is saved, and God is glorified.

Short Papers on Gospel Subjects: With Various Incidents From Real Life, Man's History and God's Due Time

Rom. 5:6-11.

IN these few verses we have not only the great truth of the death of Christ, but also of the love of God for the sinner. The connection of verse 5 with verse 6 is evident. “For” indicates that we are the objects of God’s love, for Christ died for us. “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” Here, the reasoning of the apostle, the way he links these precious truths together, is beautiful and assuring. He proves that the Christian’s hope can never be disappointed, because the love of God is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost which is given to him. The love of God, the work of Christ, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, give abundant assurance of the believer’s blessing, whatever may be the troubles of the way. The wheels of his soul have been set in motion by tribulation, patience, experience, and hope; but that which sustains the believer in the midst of the trials of this life can never fail.

The love of God, as resulting in the cross of Christ and the gift of the Spirit, is the ground of his confidence, the full assurance of his hope. “And hope maketh not ashamed,” says the apostle, “because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”

Thus we have in verse 5 the love of God in us—His love shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost; and in verse 6 we have the love of God for us; for when destitute of all strength, “Christ died for us.” What a picture for faith to contemplate! What a treasure for the heart to cherish! What a stronghold in the day of trial! —the love of God as come into our hearts through the presence of the Holy Ghost there, and also publicly manifested in the gift, the work, the resurrection, and the glory of the Saviour. And notice also that this is the first passage which speaks of the love of God being shed abroad in our hearts, or of the Holy Spirit being given to us. But God’s due time was come for the full revelation of His love, both subjectively and objectively.

Although God knew from the beginning what man was, and what man would be, He allowed him to be fairly tested under every possible circumstance in which he could be placed. In the patience of God he was under a state of probation for four thousand years. Surely this was trial enough! But what was the result? That there was nothing good in man; that he was essentially ungodly; that he was unable to do anything towards his own deliverance from divine wrath, even with ordinances and ceremonies of divine appointment, as under the law; that he was like the man at the pool of Bethesda, who had no strength to take advantage of the troubling of the waters. But it may be interesting to trace for a moment the whole history of man, from the garden of Eden to the cross of Christ, where it ends, morally viewed, and which was God’s due time for the outflow of His love, and for the accomplishing of His purposes, especially as to the church.

The History of Man

In the garden man was innocent; he was made in the image of God, after His own likeness; surrounded with every favor and blessing, and enjoying the kindness of God, without knowing good or evil, righteousness or holiness. He had no conscience till after he sinned; before that he could not have understood what good and evil meant. Righteousness discriminates between right and wrong; holiness loves purity, and abhors evil; but Adam knew nothing of such distinctions, he was formed to understand and obey God. “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” This was the command of God, and a test for Adam. He gave him but one command, and one of easy observance, and both Adam and Eve knew that the Lord who so loved them had a right to their obedience. Had he been told that it would be a moral evil to eat of the fruit of that tree, he might have said, “What does that mean?” But he knew that God had forbidden it, and that all depended on that command. We know what happened. Man listened to the tempter, believed his lie, forfeited the favor of God in eating the forbidden fruit, and in the presumptuous hope of being as gods, knowing good and evil. Thus man disobeyed, sinned, fell, and was driven from the Garden of Eden, and the fair creation was laid under the withering curse of sin.

Man, alas! fallen and guilty, had now a conscience, but it was a bad one. He knew good and evil, but it was to be under the power of evil, and to know that he had lost the happiness which he once enjoyed with God and with all around him. His innocence was gone, and all the sweet enjoyments of that state gone—gone forever; though God, in mercy, had something infinitely sweeter and better in store for him, through the Second man, the last Adam, head of God’s new creation, which can never be laid in ruins.

Thus we see that conscience was acquired by the fall. That which has been such an important element in the whole history of man, which has so affected his responsibility in all the relationships of this life, and in his responsibility to God, came in by sin. But in place of man being humbled thereby, we find the skeptic deifying himself because of his conscience; he professes to believe in no other law, to own no higher authority, to bow to no other tribunal, than conscience. Nevertheless, the place which conscience occupies in the ways of God in grace with the sinner is unspeakably important, and will be noticed by-and-by.

Man an Outcast

Adam is now outside of Eden as lost and ruined, but not without hope. The Seed of the woman was announced as the bruiser of the serpent’s head, the destroyer of his power, and the deliverer of the fallen pair. We doubt not that, through grace, they laid hold on the blessed hope thus set before them by their merciful Creator. But though the subjects of God’s saving grace, the helpless objects of His compassion, they had now, in addition to body, soul, and spirit, what scripture calls “the flesh” —a perverse will—the carnal mind which is enmity against God, which is not subject to His law, neither indeed can be. This is the dreadful evil which was infused into man’s nature when he took of the forbidden fruit in obedience to Satan. It was then that the enemy dropped this deadly poison of unbelief into the heart of his victim, and which, in process of time, and with the increase of the human family, filled the whole earth with corruption and violence, and brought in the

flood on the world of the ungodly.

This is the sin, the sin of universal man—the sin of Jew and Gentile, of believer and unbeliever—the root-sin of all others. And yet how little the most enlightened Christian may sometimes think of it. But what is it? It is the principle of distrust in God, and results in every form of self-will; that I like my own way, and not God's; that I am determined to have my own will and my own way, whether God wills it or not. Whenever there is this strong desire to have what we wish, the voice of the tempter is listened to. He suggests many reasons to prove that this something which we so crave after is right in itself, and so blinds the mind as to God's will on the subject. This is the very essence of sin, and the root of all other sins, because it proceeds from the unbelieving thought, that we can do better for ourselves than God is disposed to do for us, therefore we reckon not on Him, wait not for Him, but take things into our own hand, and pursue our own way. "Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me" is the language of self-will—the worst sin of the prodigal son. His wish was to get away from his father's house, his father's will, his father's ways, and revel in his own.

This is "the flesh," that evil thing which Adam knew nothing of before the Fall, but the moment sin entered it displayed itself. "And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden." Guilt on the conscience causes man to tremble at the sound of God's voice. Self-convicted of departure from Him, they sought to veil their nakedness from their own eyes, and then to hide themselves from Him. This dread, this distrust, of God is the sad inheritance which the primeval pair have bequeathed to all their posterity, but from which, thank God, every believer is delivered through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, the last Adam. There, on the cross, as a man and a sinner a child of the first Adam—he comes to his end. He dies to sin in Christ's death, and is raised to newness of life in His resurrection.

Government in the Hand of Man

After the deluge which closed the scene of man's wickedness on the earth, and the first period of his history, the dispensational ways of God begin. The principle of government in the hand of man is now introduced. It does not appear that there was either law or government in the antediluvian world; man was left to himself, and this brought out his lawlessness. But God remembered mercy, and gave many testimonies to His grace in such individual cases as Abel, Enoch, and Noah, besides the wonderful type of deliverance through Christ in the ark which Noah was so long in preparing.

God now makes a covenant with the earth. When Noah went forth from the ark, he built an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt-offerings thereon. From this beautiful figure of the sacrifice of Christ, Jehovah smelled a sweet savor, and assures mankind that the earth would never again be visited with a universal deluge. "While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease.... And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth."

These principles, now established on sacrifice, will be infallibly maintained throughout the different ages, until Jesus, after having glorified God in government for a thousand years, "shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father: when he shall have put down all rule, and all authority, and power." 1 Cor. 15:24.

But, alas! scarcely had the sword of human government been entrusted to Noah, than it fell dishonored from his hand. His humiliating failure proved that he could not govern himself. This fresh trial of man only shows what is always true—that in all things man utterly fails, and comes short of the glory of God. The Noahic dispensation closes with a new form of evil—the worship of false gods; and the God of glory calls out one man into the place of separation, makes him the depositary of promise, and the root of the olive-tree.

In tracing the sad history of man so far, we have seen his trial and failure in the Garden of Eden, with the revelation of divine mercy through Christ the woman's Seed. But man's perverse will, not corrected by conscience, not restrained by government, nor bowed in gratitude for the promised Deliverer, only sinned more and more, until, as we read, "the earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence." All flesh had corrupted his way, and the deluge destroyed the world of the ungodly. But grace again shines. The ark rests on Ararat, God's new ground after the execution of judgment. Hence we have in type the Holy Spirit and worship, founded on the sacrifice of Christ; the heart of God finds perfect rest, He sets His bow in the cloud, which embraces both the sea and the dry land, and millennial blessing is shadowed forth.

But, alas! the failure of Noah resulted in the boldest sin of man idolatry. Corruption and violence characterized the first period, idolatry the second period, of the history of man. The aim of this sin is to dethrone the living God, set up a dumb idol, and then fall down and worship it.

The Period of Promise

It is very evident from scripture that before God called out Abram the great sin of idolatry was prevalent among men, even among the descendants of Shem, the line of the chosen family.

Joshua, in his final charge to the tribes and elders of Israel, tells them that their fathers who dwelt on the other side of the flood—that is, the river Euphrates—were idolaters. "And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abram, and the father of Nachor; and they served other gods." (Josh. 24:2). This was the craft of Satan, and the most daring act of man's rebellion against the authority of God. From other scriptures we learn that these gods were demons. "They sacrificed unto devils, not to God—to gods whom they knew not—to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared." The apostle referring to this passage, observes, "But I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God; and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils." (Deut. 32:17; 1 Cor. 10:20). No language can describe the moral degradation to which man, through the subtlety of Satan, had now fallen. That which he calls his religion is his greatest folly, and his deepest sin. Demons have taken the place of the true God in his mind, and have the ascendancy over him. He bows down to a dumb idol, but Satan is behind it to receive his homage. What dreadful wickedness! we may well exclaim; and how can God bear with it? But have we not many idolaters around us even in Christendom, so-called? Many who will bow down to a piece of rotten wood, alleged to be part of the true cross, who never bowed the knee in faith to Him who died for sinners there? And may there not be an element of it nearer ourselves than we are aware of? Any object taking the place of Christ in the heart of the Christian, though unintentional, becomes his idol. Hence the needed word of warning: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." 1 John 5:21.

In Gen. 12 we are introduced to an entirely new order of things in the history of man. God's link with the old world, with mankind as hitherto, through the worship of false gods, is completely broken. It is no longer man as such, but a man called of God to the place of separation, without disturbing the world's arrangements, and to know His thoughts and purposes of blessing, even to all the families of the earth. This is infinitely more precious than all that man had lost, as the full accomplishment of these purposes depended solely on the faithfulness of God.

Stephen, in his noble address to the Jewish council, refers to the call of God as the basis and glory of their existence as a distinct people. "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran. And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee." Having thus called Abram, and led him out from Ur of the Chaldees, and brought him to Himself to the place of separation from the idolatrous world, He makes him the depositary of promise. It is a definite promise to Abram alone, who now becomes a new root, the father of the faithful, and the channel of universal blessing.

The period of promise now begins. "And I will make of thee," said Jehovah, "a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curseth thee; and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." This marks a great change in the ways of God with mankind. It is not merely the revelation of a deliverer, or of conscience judging between good and evil, or of government in the hand of man; but it is God Himself interfering, and revealing His purposes of blessing, and that, just because He is pleased to bless, and to express His love in blessing to fallen man. The promise is positive, absolute, and unconditional: the sphere of its application embraces all the families of the earth, and its full accomplishment is dependent only on the faithfulness of God. It has been delayed, we know, through the failure of man, but God will yet prove His faithfulness in the face of the whole world, by a stream of blessing which will overflow all Jewish limits and cover all lands, according to the promise which in grace He made to Abram.

It may be well to notice here the order in which the promises were given, and the special occasions chosen of God for the revelation of His purposes.

1. The promise of blessing to the Gentiles is given to Abram alone in Gen. 12, not to Abraham and his seed when numbers are expressed. "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

2. This promise was confirmed to the seed—to Isaac, type of Christ; see Gen. 22:18. The apostle, referring to this passage, says, "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." The distinction between the "many" and the "one" is clearly defined after the offering of Isaac. There can be no real blessing to the soul, or separation to God, but through death—the death of the true Isaac. There is no deliverance from sin and the world but by the solemn article of death. This chosen type of God's own love, not only in the gift, but in the death, of His beloved Son, throws fresh light on the dealings of God with lost man at this period of his history. Compared with this, all other types but feebly express the Father's love in not sparing His Son, and His perfect grace in meeting the whole need of man. It is the grand central truth of our faith, and the basis of divine reasoning. "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?" The lesser is included in the greater, and all is secured to faith in the gift of His Son. "He that hath the Son hath life." Nothing can be lacking when the Son is possessed. Rom. 8:32; 1 John 5:12.

The death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus are fully carried out in figure by the offering of Isaac as a sacrifice, and the substitution of the ram as a burnt offering in his stead. Abraham receives back his son, his only son, from the dead in a figure, which shadows forth the risen Christ after the accomplishment of His sacrifice. The promises immediately follow. "And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son; that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice." Gen. 22:15-18.

Here it is not difficult to distinguish between Jewish and Christian blessing, especially if we consider the use which the apostle makes of this passage in the Epistle to the Galatians. The numerous seed possessing the gate of their enemies refers to the Jews, as the descendants of Abraham, and in the place of exaltation in the earth, and of supremacy over their enemies. When the seed is spoken of without allusion to numbers, Christ is meant, as typified by Isaac, offered up in sacrifice, and risen again, and there we have the blessing of the Gentiles. The promise is twofold. Exaltation and supremacy in the earth is never promised to the Gentiles—only to the Jews. In the millennial age, all the glowing descriptions with which both the Old and the New Testament abound, as to the Israel of the future day, shall be fully accomplished. Thus will the Jews be blessed in the coming age in their own land, and under the scepter of their own Messiah. But the Christian is blessed in and with a risen Christ. He will reign with Him, not under Him, and shine in the same glory forever and forever.

Such will be the glorious results of the unconditional promises of God to Abraham and to his seed. But it must all be in connection with Him who died and rose again. Death is the only principle and power of separation from the world to God, and the only foundation of blessing before Jesus died we hear Him saying to the woman of Canaan, "I am not sent save to the lost sheep of the house of Israel;" but this He will say no more. In resurrection He is free to bless all who come unto Him, all who believe in Him, even according to the fullest purpose of the God of all grace. Every covenant condition has been fulfilled by Him, every covenant promise has been secured by Him; God has been glorified, sin has been blotted out, redemption has been accomplished, and righteousness established. Both Jew and Gentile have now only to believe, and become fellow-heirs with Him of all the promises of God. Nothing is withheld from faith. Blessed forever are all they who put their trust in Jesus. "Now I say that Jesus Christ was the minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: and that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy." Rom. 15:8-9.

Before speaking of the period of law, it may be profitable to notice two or three circumstances in connection with the response of Abraham to the call of God. It would have disturbed the thread of our narrative to have introduced them before, but we are unwilling to pass them by altogether. They have a loud voice for us, and are full of wholesome and solemn warning.

Reflections on the Call of Abraham

Abraham, like the unbeliever now, was living in the midst of the evil of the old world, and his family worshipping idols, when God called him.

What light may have been communicated to Abraham as to the state of things in Ur of the Chaldees, when the God of glory appeared unto him, we are not told, but now all was plain: “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will show thee.” Here he is called to separate himself from all that connected him with his natural position on the earth, and to obey the call of God, on the ground of faith in His word.

Nothing could be more simple. But did Abraham obey in simplicity? Far from it. His first step was a false one. He left his country, but not his kindred; or perhaps they did not, or would not, leave him. Abraham was soon involved in family difficulties and family trials. How constantly we find this same kind of hindrance in the case of young converts now! Sometimes it may be in the way of manifested opposition, and sometimes from their concealment of God’s call, or, in other words, of their own conversion, and decision of heart for Christ, lest they should displease those who are opposed to the truth. But things could not thus go on happily. Conscience accuses, they are ill at ease; the truth, sooner or later, must come out; or, as in the case of Abram, death may be sent to close the scene of perplexities, if not of unfaithfulness. Thus we read, “And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his son’s son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram’s wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan: and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there. And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran.” Gen. 11:31, 32.

Surely this was failure at the very outset. Terah takes the lead, Abram is a mere follower; but God had said to Abram not to Terah, “Get thee out.” This was nature, not faith in the promise and word of Jehovah. It may seem amiable for a son so to yield to his father, but it was an influence counter to the call of God. Obedience to God, not subjection to his father’s will, was Abram’s duty at that moment. So long as Terah lived, no progress was made; they dwelt at Haran, but this was not the land of promise. At length, however, God interfered. The natural hindrance is removed by the father’s death. Government takes its course, though its steps may appear slow. Grace also appears, and triumphs. The pilgrim pursues his journey, and enters the land of Canaan. Lot goes with him, though he had not been called, but he proved a great encumbrance to Abram, only, being his nephew, he was subject to him, and God allowed it.

Separation to God the Path of Blessing

From the days of Adam to Abraham it does not appear that men of piety, such as Enoch, who walked with God, were called to break with nature and the world their country and their kindred; but from the days of Abraham, even until now, the principle of separation from the world to God is the only recognized path of blessing. As for the Christian now, his place is defined; his Saviour and Lord, as dead, risen, and ascended, is the measure, character and power of his separation from the world, and of his nearness to God. Speaking of His disciples, He says, “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” And again He says, “If any man serve me;” what is he to do? Seek to be an attractive public speaker? a great worker? a useful Christian? No; however good these aspects of service may be and in many cases they are happily combined with the most faithful discipleship such is not the way the Master describes the service which he most appreciates: “If any man serve me, let him follow me” —follow Me in My path of rejection as to this world, and in My path of obedience as to the will of God. Follow Me through the dark hour, the uplifted cross, and the execration of the world follow Me, through death and resurrection, into the new creation of God. “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die.” To keep the eye on the Master, to mark His footsteps, and only do the things which we believe He has given us to do, is our most acceptable service, and will be rewarded with double honor. “And where I am, there shall also my servant be; if any man serve me, him will my Father honor.” John 12; 17

This is the grace and goodness of the heavenly Master. How many true and faithful followers He has whose names are never heard of here, but who will have their own place and their own reward in the coming kingdom. The true Philadelphian, who has but “little strength” now, will be made a pillar in the temple of God ere long; and of those who have not denied His name—where human names are thought so much of—He says, “And I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.” These exceeding great and precious promises are made to those whom He describes as having “little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.” The call of Abraham was to separate him from his father’s house and his native country, that he might belong to God, and walk in communion with Him in the Promised Land. But the Christian is called to fellowship with Christ in heavenly places, and this necessarily separates him in heart and soul from all that is earthly or worldly in his surroundings, even though it may assume the fascinating form of natural affection or relative duties. Everything must be judged in the light of his heavenly calling, and of his heavenly relations to Christ. Faithfulness to Him as one that is espoused is the first and all-commanding consideration of every Christian. This relationship seems to have been in the mind of the great apostle when writing to the Corinthians, where he says, “For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy; for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.” 2 Cor. 11:2, 3.

Need we say how few there are who ever think of such a relationship, of such thorough separation? and how many there are who allow family or mere natural influence to hinder them from obeying implicitly the call of God, or from following His word after their conversion? Thousands of young converts are ruled by what their friends say, without ever consulting the word of God. The conversion may be genuine, and friends may mean well, but God is robbed of His glory, and the young believer of his blessing. Haran, not Canaan, becomes the dwelling place. But there is no advancement in spiritual things, divine ground has not been taken, and the full blessing of salvation is unknown. Substance is increased, and souls are born in Terah’s family at Haran, but there is neither tent nor altar. Until we see the call of God to be paramount there can be no true separation of heart to Him, nor looking into His word as our only sure guide in all divine things. Every truly converted soul has been as really called of God as Abram was, and has to do as directly with Him, only in a much more blessed way, so that our answer to His call ought to be all the more complete and unhesitating. We are brought near to God in Christ, nearer than ever Abraham was.

With the prophet of old we are ready to exclaim, “Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!” For God, we know, can never lower His standard to that of man’s shortcomings; He cannot alter His word, and unless we are content to come to the place which He has shown to us, we must go without the full blessing of His call. Eighteen hundred years ago the apostle, in writing to the Ephesians, earnestly prays to God that they may know what the hope of His calling is, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. The Lord grant that this prayer may be answered in the experience of many in our own day. We know of nothing so essential to the peace, joy, and happiness of the believer as the knowledge of what God has separated us from, and what He has called us to, through the power of the Holy Spirit. May we not, then, be unduly influenced by our families and our friends, but give good heed to the word, to the voice of God, which calls us to arise, to leave our position in nature on the earth, and follow the Lord fully, according to His own revealed will; it is the very opposite of fanaticism so to do, as we own no guide in spiritual things

but the written word of God.

The Canaanite and Famine in the Land

After the death of Terah, Abram was free to pursue his journey. Now he acts according to the word of the Lord. “And Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him.” He reached the land of Canaan, but he did not find it a place of rest, according to the full purpose of the God of glory: “The Canaanite was then in the land.” But God reveals Himself to the true heir, and points out the inheritance which his seed would enjoy when there should be no Canaanite in the land. And Abram, now in his heavenly position, erects an altar in the presence of his enemies, worships God in faith, and enjoys communion with Him in these revelations of His grace. “And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord who appeared unto him.” Gen. 12:6, 7.

Abram is now in his right place, and, as a consequence, God reveals Himself unto him. “There he builded an altar unto the Lord who appeared unto him.” This is the place, and this is the power, of true worship. We must be on divine ground as worshippers before the Holy Spirit is free to reveal the glories of Christ to our souls. Canaan is the type of the heavenly places where we are now in Christ Jesus; and our worship ought to be characterized by these two things—I am on the ground which God has called me to, and in the conscious enjoyment of His presence as the spring and power of heavenly worship.

In verse 8 we have the other grand feature of the man of faith—the tent. This was the symbol of his pilgrim character. But, notwithstanding these exalted privileges and blessings, he is overcome, and fails sadly, from the pressure of circumstances. “And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there.” Alas, how many have failed under the pressure of circumstances! But this is just the kind of trial to test the genuineness of faith, especially as to its object. If the living God be the object of our faith, He can never fail us, whether the famine rages in our social or in our ecclesiastical circumstances! But it does not appear that Abram even sought divine guidance on this occasion, or spread out his circumstances before the Lord, but goes of his own will into the place of danger; “for the famine was grievous in the land.” This is the only reason given for his going to the world for help instead of the living God. But such, alas! is man, man all through, man in every position, man under every possible circumstance; he is ever found to be utterly wanting before God, and to fail in the very grace in which he was called to excel.

We have now clearly seen, from God’s dealings with Abraham and his seed, that the blessing of both Jew and Gentile is secured by promises, and that, too, without the question of man’s condition as a sinner being raised. Abraham knew nothing of law, or of conditions on his part, as the ground of the promise being fulfilled. It was by unconditional promise that God gave to him the inheritance. “To Abraham and to his seed were the promises made.” It was purely of grace on the part of God, and His faithfulness will perform in due time all He has promised.

But man utterly failed to understand, to appreciate, grace as the ground of God’s dealings towards him, and being naturally self-righteous, terms were proposed which raised the question of law-righteousness, and claimed it on the part of God.

The Period of Law

Four hundred and thirty years after the date of promise the law was given. Redemption having been prefigured by the slain lamb in Egypt, and the passage of the Red Sea, the children of Israel journeyed to the wilderness of Sinai. Then, alas! insensible of their mercies, they gave up the ground of grace, and entered into covenant with God, on the ground of their own competency, to keep the law. Thus it happened.

“In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai. For they were departed from Rephidim, and were come to the desert of Sinai, and had pitched in the wilderness; and there Israel camped before the mount. And Moses went up unto God, and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself. Now, therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel. And Moses came, and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the Lord commanded him. And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do.” Ex. 19:1-8.

Up till this time all was grace. Redemption was accomplished; God had brought them to Himself. The murmurs and the unbelief of the people only served to spew the riches of God’s grace, and His tender mercy towards His poor failing people. But here the course of grace formally terminates, and obedience to the law is made the condition of blessing. This was a great change, a most important epoch in man’s history. How fully all this proves what man’s state of mind really was as to the things of God! 1. It proves that the preciousness of grace—so priceless to every Christian that knows it—had never truly entered the heart of the Jew. In place of leaving the promised blessing to rest simply on the infallibility of the Promiser, they vainly preferred to rest it on condition of their own obedience to the law. Never was man’s self-righteousness—the legality of the human heart—more fatally manifested than here, for the law worked wrath, and brought men under the curse, because of their utter failure. Had that unspeakably, inconceivably precious thing, grace, been appreciated, they would all have cried out as with the heart of one man, “May we have no such terms proposed to us, O Lord; no such responsibility laid upon us. We dare not place ourselves under such conditions, we should certainly lose our blessing. Thy grace, O Lord, is our only hope as sinners.” But no, they undertook to do all that the Lord had spoken. 2. Their conduct at Sinai also proves that they had no just sense of their own weakness in the sight of God, and no proper knowledge of His righteousness and holiness. Grace, grace without rebuke, is the only ground on which the sinner can stand, the only plea he can urge, and the only refuge in which he can find a shelter.

Why the Law Was Given

But why, it may be asked, were such terms proposed to Israel, when they had no strength to keep them? God saw that it would be good and wholesome for man to know the truth about himself, and the nature and extent of God’s claims upon him; and for this end He gave the law. It was the perfect standard of what God required of man, of what man ought to be, and the prohibition of that to which he was strongly inclined. The Ten Commandments, for the most part, are like an interdict on the human will. “Thou shall not.”.... “Thou shalt not,” is the stern, prohibitory voice of the moral law.

It will now be seen that the office of the law was to detect and register man's deeds, and put in evidence his character as a transgressor. "Wherefore then serveth the law?" says the apostle; "it was added because of transgression." From the fall, down to the promulgation of the law at Sinai, man had been left to prove what his fallen nature is without the restraints of law: after that period we see what he becomes when subjected to an authority which forbids and opposes the desires of the flesh and of the mind. Without law men were lawless, under law they are lawbreakers; and when Christ came, full of grace and truth, Him they rejected and crucified.

But to return to the question. "Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgression." Not because of sin, observe, but because of transgression. It is important to mark the difference. Again, the apostle says, "Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound." Not, of course, that sin might abound. God could never sanction anything that would cause sin to abound. But what is the difference? some may inquire. Sin is the lawlessness of the flesh, a much deeper and wider thing than transgression. Sin was in man from the fall, but transgression is the violation of a known and positive law. Who filled the world with corruption and violence? And who afterward filled it with idolatry? Sinners, most assuredly. But this was before the law entered, and they are not called transgressors. "For where no law is there is no transgression." —The apostle does not say, observe, "Where no law is there is no sin." This he could not say, for sin was as much in man before the law was given as after. At the same time let us not forget that all transgression is sin, though sin in its root and principle is never called transgression; it is not necessarily the violation of a given law.

Through the subtlety of Satan, some have endeavored to mystify the apostle's reasoning, and affirm that where there is no law there is no sin. This is a most ruinous doctrine, entirely opposed to all scripture, and intended by the enemy to encourage men in doing their own will. We know that the natural tendency of the human heart is to do its own will, in spite of God, if it can. Thus Cain went and built a city, and established himself and his family, outside the presence of God. This was sin—the lawlessness of the flesh—and long before anything was heard of law as given by Moses. "Whosoever committeth sin," according to the literal reading of 1 John 3:4, "committeth lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness." Thus it was that God saw it to be necessary and important to introduce a law that would put man thoroughly to the test, place in evidence his real condition as a sinner, and raise the question of righteousness on the part of God. It never was intended that the law should bring man into blessing; that was infallibly secured by promise through the seed of Abraham; for man, being already a sinner, and loving sin, the holy law of God could only prove him guilty, and condemn him to its penal sanction. "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." Gal. 3:10.

The Object of the Law Misunderstood

Many excellent Christians, we are sorry to add, through the blinding power of Satan completely mistake the real object of the law. Hence they look to it as the rule of life. This is a subtle snare of the enemy to draw away the heart from Christ, and back into the world. For the law has its place in this life, not in heaven. We cannot take the law as the rule of life without being on the world's, or Satan's, ground; and there he has blinding power. The blessed Lord Jesus, now in heaven, is the only rule of life for the Christian. The law, because of man's sinful condition, must be to him the rule of death. "For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God." The apostle first experienced in his soul death by the law, then death to the law, and then in grace beyond it, life in a risen Christ alive unto God. Communion with a heavenly Christ, through the power of the Holy Ghost, is the rule of a Christian's life. "For me to live is Christ," says the apostle. We may often come short of our divine standard, but to be content with a lower one is fatal to our practical Christianity. "He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk even as he walked." Thus we have the two apostles in perfect harmony on this grand practical subject. Need we wonder, then, that so many Christians are harassed with doubts and fears, when we know that the law—which never fails to curse the sinner—is their object, in place of Christ, who never fails to bless, and to bless abundantly, all who put their trust in Him?

The law looked on to Christ. "It was added because of transgression, till the seed [Christ] should come, to whom the promise was made." This explains the character and limits of the legal period in the history of God's dealings with man. It was the wholesome discovery to man himself of his real condition, that his conscience might be exercised, and that he might be well assured that there was no hope for him as a lost sinner but through faith in Christ, the heir of all the promises. For "the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." Gal. 3; Rom. 4; 2 Cor. 3

For man "under sin" there cannot be one ray of hope apart from Christ as the crucified One. He is the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by Him. He died, the just One in the room of the unjust, that He might bring us unto God. He magnified. God's law which man had broken, and endured its awful sanction, which man had incurred. Having fully met every claim of heaven, the accomplishment of all the promises is established in His Person. It is only by His precious blood that guilt can be removed from the conscience, so that the believer can say in holy triumph, "no more conscience of sins." There is no such thing on the face of the whole earth as a good conscience, a peaceful mind, a happy heart, a holy path, apart from that blessed One. As the stars disappear before the rising sun, so all thoughts, all schemes, all doings, all epochs, all dispensations, as shadows flee away before the bright, effulgent, transcendent glories of the once lowly, but now exalted, Christ of God. He is the perfect covering for the eyes, the filling up, the overflowing of the human heart. All, all is gone for man save Himself. His death shuts the door on all the previous positions proposed to man. It writes death, absolute death, on the first man. His whole history is summed up and closed in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, the second Man, the Lord from heaven.

Forget not, then, O my reader, that where thou now art, as thou now art, without waiting to do something, or to be something, look to Jesus.

Every other door of hope is closed against thee, and closed forever. There is no salvation for any soul of man but through faith in Him. Oh, momentous truth! Thy soul may be quivering in the balance, a mighty struggle may be going on; who is to gain the victory? Christ or Satan? It must be the one or the other. There is no middle path or place; it must either be Christ and the full salvation of God, or Satan and the endless torments of hell. Oh, suffer not the enemy to deceive thee, to thy eternal ruin, by the attractions of the world; there is no time to lose; look to Jesus at once, believe on Jesus at once, give thy heart to Jesus at once, surrender thy whole self to Jesus at once, take up thy cross, which is death to the world, and follow Jesus at once; then shall thy soul be saved, thy heaven secured, and thy eternal, unmingled, happiness far, far, beyond the reach of every foe. "But now in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ." Eph. 2:13.

The history of man, from Adam to Christ, may also be viewed as the history of God's grace and goodness in His dealings towards him. Condemned, indeed, we know rebellious man to be, but still, in patience infinite, God's grace lingers over him. The sentence, long pronounced, is not yet executed. But every day that sentence is suspended must be owned as another day's grace to the world. There was no

such lingering love shown to the rebel angels; their punishment was immediate and irremediable. But man! oh, living, abiding miracle of grace! is still borne with, and still allowed to prosper in this life, though he continues to despise the grace, and rebel against the majesty, of heaven; but the awful consequences of his unbelief will surely come, though the day of reckoning may be delayed. Thus the history of man is twofold: unbelief and apostasy on his part from the beginning, and patient grace and unwearied goodness on the part of God. We will now consider

Man's Responsibility Under Law

Without attempting to trace or estimate the conduct of man, the Jew, as under law, from Sinai to the cross, we will briefly consider it as set forth by the Lord Himself in His parable of the householder.

"Hear another parable: There was a certain householder which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country. And when the time of fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another." Here the Lord draws a picture of the love that has been shown, and the care that has been taken, in Jehovah's dealings with Israel. But, alas! man utterly fails; God is dishonored in every way in His law, His authority, and His grace. It is Adam and Eve over again; the same old story of human responsibility ending in total ruin. The parable of our Lord answers perfectly to the song of the prophet in Isa. 5, where he sings of the goodness of God, and the transgressions of His people. Moses also, in his magnificent song (Deut. 32), celebrates the riches of God's sovereign grace in blessing to His people Israel, and their sins and ingratitude, for which they would be sorely punished, but afterward restored to their own land, and all the nations rejoicing with them. We turn for a moment to the lovely song of Isaiah.

"Now will I sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: and he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes." This was God's tender care of Israel. He had blessed them with all temporal blessings in a pleasant land, the Lord separated them to Himself, surrounded them with His favors, gave them His law, or, as the apostle says, "To them pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises." Nothing was lacking on God's part; but the nation, as a whole, had departed from Him, transgressed the covenant, and wholly corrupted their ways. And now the appeal of Jehovah to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the men of Judah is full of the most melting grace and tenderness. "Judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes." But there was no fruit meet for God under the law; with man on the ground of responsibility there is nothing but failure, and as law must take its course, judgment follows. "And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down; and I will lay it waste." The sad song, or lamentation, of all the prophets is man's sin and God's judgment.

But dark though the picture of the prophet be, and unrelieved by one ray of grateful love, there are deeper and darker lines in the one drawn by the blessed Lord. He has to portray His own death as man's answer to God for all the favors and blessings He had lavished upon him since the day he fell in Eden. He has to refer to one servant after another being sent in the patience of God, and all meeting with the same treatment from the husbandmen. Every possible means had been tried to obtain fruit from the vineyard, but all in vain. Only one solitary hope remained. "They will reverence my son." All know what happened, and what followed. "But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him."

This was more than withholding the fruit of the vineyard—more than robbing God of His dues more than resisting Moses, or stoning the prophets; it was "the fullest outbreak of rebellious hatred, when tested by the presence of the Son of God in their midst. Probation is over; the question of man's state, and of God's efforts to get fruit from His vineyard is at an end..... Thus the death of Christ is viewed in this parable, not as the groundwork of the counsels of God, but as the climax of man's sin, and the closing scene of his responsibility."

Such was man, man under law, the holy law of God. Provoked by the restraints which the law put on his self-will, the evil that was there and at work manifested itself in the most open, daring, contempt for God's authority. The truth of man's moral state was now fully revealed, the law entered that the offense might abound. Do we not see many around us daily, but especially on the Lord's Day, sinning with a high hand sinning openly, unblushingly, in trading, in seeking their own pleasure, on the first day of the week? and that, not in ignorance, but in contempt of the known and acknowledged authority of God? But the law was given that men might know the truth about himself and about the claims of God in righteousness; both have been fully discussed, and all is in evidence now. Insensible as the Jews were to their sad condition, they condemn the husbandmen, and thus bear witness against themselves. "When the Lord, therefore, of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard to other husbandmen, who shall render him the fruits in their season."

The Moral History of Man Closed in the Cross

Thus closed the trial of man, of the Jew, of the first Adam. Four thousand years of probation had run their course. And what is the result of this long trial? Most humiliating to the pride and vanity of man—to the religious imagination and the reasoning powers of the self-righteous, self-sufficient man. The law brought out, and demonstrated in a variety of ways and conduct, what man really is. Not what man might or should have been, as men talk, but what man is as God proved. When tried by a divine standard, and under the most favorable circumstances, no good thing is found in fallen man, but the presence of every principle of evil. Search has been made, and the human heart is found to be deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? is the challenge; I, the Lord, is the answer. None can fathom the depths of its wickedness but Himself. But in the betrayal and crucifixion of Christ, man's sin rose to its fullest height. The presence of perfect love and goodness in the Person of the blessed Lord, brought out the bitter enmity of the heart against God, and demonstrated, beyond a question, that man was utterly incorrigible.

We have now reached the end of man's history, as under trial before God. His moral history closes in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Innocence lost; conscience disobeyed; promises despised; covenants broken; prophets persecuted; and, last of all, the Christ of God cast out and crucified. Henceforth man is to be dealt with as morally dead.

All blessing must now flow through Christ the Second man, and be received by faith, on the ground of sovereign grace alone. This has been essentially true from the beginning, but now that man is fully manifested, God takes His place more openly as the Saviour of the lost.

Meditations on the Beatitudes and Christian Devotedness, Membership of the "One Body", Reflections on the

Before passing on to verse 9, may I ask, When, and by what means, we actually become members of the body of Christ? This vital and important truth which has been frequently referred to in the foregoing papers, still lingers in my thoughts, and I should like to master it more fully. Most surely, O my soul, it is well for thee to linger over it, to meditate on that which is not only of present, but of eternal, importance. It is living union with Christ-the expression of thy closest relationship to Him, and to all Christians Let us begin at the beginning.

The evangelist is first in the field; pastors and teachers follow. His gift is the expression of divine love to the lost. He is to arrest, to awaken, to move souls powerfully by the word preached. He thinks of their state as lost sinners; of their misery, of their danger and distance from God, and his love rises to a burning passion. Their salvation is his one object as a workman. He pleads, he appeals, he warns, he entreats, as if all depended on the words that burn in his heart and on his lips; yet in faith he looks to God alone for blessing. There is a perfect understanding between his heart and the Lord. He walks with Him. The passionless preacher may find fault with his more zealous brother, and suggest that there is too much of the human element, and fear that it will end in the mere excitement of nature. But though this may look wise and prudent, it lacks the true element of success-the love that sends words that burn into the heart of the sinner.

The truth, through grace, is believed. The love of Christ has prevailed; the value of the blood is seen, the sinner bows at Jesus' feet in the meltings of godly sorrow for sin, yet confides in the thrice holy One. " Jesus loved me as I am, and died for me just as I am," is now his confession. This is faith. The blessed work is done; God is glorified as in nothing else here below; and angels sweep their harps with an ecstasy peculiar to the joys of salvation. " There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.... Which things the angels desire to look into." Luke 15:10 Peter 1:12.

Individual blessings are the first that follow faith; corporate blessings come afterward. A man becomes a child of God by faith; he is justified by faith. " Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." (Rom. 5:1, 2.) These may be called the great individual blessings of faith; wherever there is faith in Christ, these must follow. They are the four, grand, immediate consequences of faith-being justified, having peace, standing in grace, waiting for glory. But these are not all. In Eph. 1 The long list of individual blessings as the children's portion, is given before the church is referred to. The believer's first position is to be brought to the Father in all the acceptancy of Christ; his second, is to be united to the glorified Man in heaven, and share the blessings and the responsibilities of the membership of the " One body."

When the truth of God is thus believed, and the soul resting on the finished work of Christ, the believer is sealed with the Holy Spirit, and thus made a member of the body of Christ. He is brought into union with Christ in heaven, and with all believers throughout the world, in virtue of the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, as a divine Person, making all one. He who dwells in Christ dwells in us and thereby makes us " One spirit with the Lord;" and one with all that are the Lord's. " He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." They are joined together by the one Spirit. Many speak and pray about the Holy Spirit as if He were only an "influence." This is very common, but very suggestive. Wherever this state of mind exists, there can be no proper thoughts of the church as the body of Christ, and very confused thoughts of Christianity, for He is the formative and sustaining power of the body, and dwells in the Christian. The existence and personality of the Holy Ghost, we know, is not denied: but the all-important truth of His presence in the church as a divine Person, and as the bond of its unity, is not apprehended. This is the serious mistake, if not error, of nearly all Christendom, and the source of its darkness and confusion. The present period may be called the dispensation of the Spirit, and to speak about Him as an " influence " in place of a divine Person, is to misunderstand His mission and His work. " He shall glorify me," says the blessed Lord, " for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you." John 16:14.

But know thou, O my soul, and know in all the verities of faith, that the Holy Ghost does two things-first, He works in the saints of God individually: second, He works in the assembly. Whether it be our individual or our corporate blessing, both are made good to us by the presence of the Holy Ghost. As individuals, He gives us to taste the sweetness of joy and peace in believing, of happy liberty and power in service; and also, of living union with the exalted Head, and with all who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity and in truth. He never took a body like the Lord Jesus, therefore the world knows Him not; He being therefore equally in all the assemblies of God throughout the world, necessarily unites them all into one body. In this way, thou wilt see, that all who believe on the Lord Jesus, of every clime and every color, are baptized by the Holy Spirit, and made to belong to the "one body."

It need scarcely be added, that the truth of the Holy Ghost's presence in the assembly is of much deeper importance than the presence of gifts-of talented servants. Their presence or absence touches not the great truth that the Holy Ghost is there, and that He is still sovereign, and acting as He will to the glory of the Lord Jesus. Surely this should lead us to have greater faith in Him as a divine Person, and less in the presence of gifts great or small. " For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Matt. 18:20.

We will now very briefly glance at the remainder of our most instructive chapter.

Verse 9. "Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good." The apostle now enters a wider field; and looks at the Christian's path more generally. Hitherto we have been meditating on the position of the Christian as a member of the body of Christ, and the ministries of love which flow from that blessed relationship; but the apostle does not stop here; Christianity must have a' broader range; and now his exhortations bear not so much on the church collectively, as on the Christian individually. This we may call practical Christianity. In all places, under all circumstances, and in every sphere of life, he is exhorted to the discharge of all christian duties, and that not merely in outward form, but according to the spirit and truth of the divine precept.

" Let love be without dissimulation." This is the first of the apostle's general admonitions, and may be considered the foundation and summary of all the others. He who shines in this grace will abound in every good work. But here, on the threshold of this fresh line of truth, thou mayest well pause for a little, O my soul, and meditate on a love that is free from all dissimulation and guile. Wondrous sight in a world of hollow pretense! But where is it to be found in practical exercise, thou wilt inquire? God only is its source; "for love is of God." It is Himself; God is

love; not merely loving, but love. And should not His children be the expression of His nature- of His moral character? " Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." And faith goes on to say, " We have known and believed the love that God bath to us. •God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him." Here, mark well, my soul, the true character of communion, and the power of walking in love. "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God; and God in him." This is christian communion, but who could explain it? Still, the Christian should be a genuine expression of the real spirit and character of that love in which he dwells. He is formed, sustained and perfected in love. 1 John 4:7-19.

In this portion of the word, we have divine love manifested in the conversion of the sinner, the communion of the saint, and in his complete conformity to Christ forever. Love meets him as a lost sinner, makes him like Christ, fits him for communion with God while here, and perfects him for the coming day of judgment, so that he has nothing to fear. He sees his way clear into the glory beyond the tribunal of Christ, where love alone remains, for heaven is its home.

Surely then, thou wilt say, the exhortation of the apostle is a most reasonable one. " Let love be without dissimulation." What else could a Christian be but pure-hearted in his love? He dwells at the fountain of eternal love, feeds upon it, delights in it, and ought to be its full and fair reflection. What could excuse him for allowing a feigned, dissembling love to take the place and usurp the name of christian affection? A love so high in its source, so divine in its nature, so pure in its character, should be guarded by us with all holy jealousy. It is surely of the very deepest moment, that every Christian should be true before God, in the expression and the assertion of his love towards others, whether within or outside the church. To mislead, or gain an advantage over others, by a fair but false profession of love, has a character of iniquity peculiarly its own. The corruption of that which is so pure in its source, is an evil which we should constantly and diligently watch against.

But was there need for such an exhortation in the apostle's day, and is there need in ours? Alas, alas, what is it that Christians so fail in as the truthful expression in words of the inmost state of the heart? So few speak or write exactly what they are. Only one could say in answer to the question, " Who art thou 9 Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning." He could appeal to His words and say, " I am what I speak." There never was in His words the appearance of what He was not; He was absolutely, and in every particular, what He said. (John 8:25.) But of none, save the blessed Jesus, could this be said. So deceitful is the human heart, and so false is the world, that nothing but the Holy Spirit, revealing Christ to our souls through the word, and enabling us to walk in the light as God is in the light, keeps us even as believers from departing from the truth, from slipping into misrepresentation, from saying what we are not, and what we mean not.1

Know then, O my soul, and fail not to remember, that the apostle declares that only to be genuine love which is sincere and free from all guile. Nothing is more common in society generally than the manifestation of love where even an opposite disposition exists. But the Christian is to be far, far above all such hollow pretensions. Jesus is the truth, and so should His disciples also be. Self-judgment is especially called for here. Naturally we are unreal. But every one can best judge for himself whether he entertains any feeling in his heart contrary to the outward manifestation of affection. It is quite true that habit may mislead without any intention to deceive: such as the common amenities of life, the inscriptions, the contents and the signatures of our letters. Still, we must have respect to truth in the heart even when so much form prevails. It is only in the light that we are free from selfishness and dissimulation. May the Lord ever keep us there for His own name's sake!

" Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good." There is an intimate connection between the first and the last two members of this verse-unfeigned love, hating evil, cleaving to good. Where love is real, there must be the abhorrence of evil-especially if that evil touches the object of our affections-and the most persevering devotion to the injured one. To reach the full meaning of this verse, we must rise to Christ.. He is before the mind of the Spirit, and of faith. In the Old Testament (Isa. 1:16, 17) we read, " Cease to do evil: learn to do well." The language in the New is much stronger; Christ is in question. The words to abhor and to cleave to, express the highest degree of hatred on the one hand, and the most devoted attachment on the other.

Every doctrine or movement, in what is called the religious world, which tends to set aside the claims, or in any way to obscure the glory of Christ, is to be avoided by us as an evil that we abhor. So says the word of God; but what says the religious world? Any person daring so to speak, would be denounced as uncharitable, narrow, and bigoted. Scarcely any term of reproach would be strong enough to express their abhorrence of his views. The one sanctions and encourages what the other abhors, and both are Christians. Which is right? Who is to judge? The word of God. Let the reader examine and decide in the light of that word alone.

The plausible sentiment that proposes to sink all outward differences amongst Christians, to love as brethren, and to work together for the advancement of the gospel, is latitudinarian in its character, and really means a spirit of indifference towards unsound doctrine, and false views of the Person of Christ. Nothing can be worse in principle; but we are told that the end justifies the means. So have the Catholics said for more than a thousand years. " Good, in the eyes of the Papacy, meant what was good for the church: Evil, whatever was bad for the church." The difference between modern Laodiceanism and ancient Catholicism is small in principle. Neither has Christ as its one, grand, exclusive object.

May the Lord give us grace to make Himself our standard and center, and neither the church nor the gospel, blessed as they are, and dear to our hearts, in their own subordinate place to Him.

Verse 10. "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honor preferring one another." The love spoken of in the previous verse is probably love to all men; here brotherly love is particularly specified. The teaching of the Spirit in this verse seems to be, that Christians should cherish for each other, as brethren in Christ, a love as sincere and tender as if they were the nearest relatives. And this love is to be manifested, not merely in repaying the attentions of others, but in anticipating them in acts of respect and kindness. All Christians are brethren, but as they belong to different families in this life, and called by different names, there is nothing to distinguish them but brotherly love. If this fails, what is left? Our Father is in heaven. He who loves the Father, loves the brethren also. " Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him." 1 John 5:1.

But here, on a point of such practical importance, and one so difficult to practice, it may be well for thee, my soul, to pause, and inquire what the difference is between brotherly love and brotherly kindness. The apostle says, in writing to the Hebrews, " Let brotherly love continue." But he no where says, Let brotherly kindness continue. " Love never faileth." Kindness must in some cases. A brother, through the power of Satan, may be walking disorderly, or he may fall into error, and so become a proper subject of discipline; towards such an one our conduct must be changed, though our love remains the same, or even stronger. The mind of the Lord on this point is plainly given: " Mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them For we hear that there are some which walk

among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies.... If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed, yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." (Rom. 16; 2 Thess. 3) The persons here spoken of are still in communion; hence the difficulty in cherishing brotherly love, and at the same time exercising a wholesome discipline towards them. When it comes to a case of excommunication, the perplexity is less, but our love should be none the less. See Second Epistle of St. John.

"In honor preferring one another." Instead of waiting, as we often do, for others to notice us, before we notice them, we should strive to be beforehand with them in the manifestation of our christian respect, or "honor." There is in some a false modesty, in others a secret pride, which leads them to slip quickly out of a meeting, thereby preventing those from speaking to them who gladly would. And this having been continued for some time, the brethren are complained of as cold, and as showing no love to strangers. But, pray, who is at fault? Let the word of the Lord decide. In honor preferring one another simply means, to go before, to lead, to set an example.' The meaning is not exactly to esteem others better than ourselves, as in Phil. 2:3, important as such lowliness of mind is, the mind that was in Christ Jesus; but rather that we should seek to take the lead in these comely ways of our Father's house. And the heart that meditates most deeply on the love of Christ to usward, will be the first to feel that our love to the brethren is not to be governed by cold formalities, but by the measure and pattern of His love to us. Acts of kindness, the expression of sympathy, fellowship, whether in joy or in sorrow, forbearance, long-suffering, charity, are to be among the many fruits of the Spirit which should abound for the refreshment and blessing of our brethren in Christ.2

Verse 11. " Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord. The apostle, unwearied, continues his favorite theme of love. Now it is love in activity, in earnestness. Not merely love to all men, or love to the brethren, but the energy of love, as service to the Lord. The exhortation refers to religious activity, not to the active performance of our secular vocations, as many have supposed, and as the word, "business," in our text naturally suggests. At the same time, whatever the Christian does, whether it be as to things temporal or spiritual, he should not be slothful, or indulge in indolence, but in every duty manifest a spirit of zeal and devotedness. " In spirit fervent" is the Lord's word; as it was said of Apollos" This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord." Acts 18:25.

" Serving the Lord." Here we are supplied with the blessed motive to both diligence and zeal. And this is a motive which is easily carried about with us, and easily applied. Is this I propose to do-is the place I propose to go to-service to my Lord and Master? Is He saying, Do-go? Must I do this, must I go there, because the Lord would have me? This is a test, as well as a motive. "Is it service to the Lord?" We are expected to walk by faith with Him, to refer everything to Him, to consider ourselves as wholly and at all times His servants. Nothing is too great or too small for Him. We may confer with Him, not only as to our christian service, but as to our worldly employments, engagements, and difficulties.

Speakest thou thus, my soul, of thine own experience, or writest thou as from a book? Valueless, and worse, a mockery, and soon over, would all such writing and speaking be, were it not the living experience of one who is at home with the Lord as with none else. What heart in the universe has been so revealed unto us as the heart that willingly shed its blood to fit us for His holy presence, and that God, in us and by us, might be glorified? He loved me, He gave Himself for me, entitles me to the full benefit of His love, to the full benefit of His death. Yes, the believer is entitled in grace to claim the full benefit of His love, of His death. What a privilege! What a portion! Happy they who know it, believe it, enjoy it, and draw from it day by day light and strength for their path and service. And now the precept is the law of liberty-" Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance; for ye serve the Lord Christ." Col. 3:23, 24.

Verse 12. Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer." The beautiful moral connection of the three members of this verse is very apparent. In hope rejoicing, in suffering patient, in prayer persevering. The hope of the Lord's coming is the most effectual means of producing patience under present trials. The contemplation of the coming One, of His adorable Person, of our union with Him, of meeting Him in the air, of being introduced by Him into the house of many mansions, of seeing Him face to face, of hearing His voice, of beholding His glory, of knowing more fully the realities of His love and grace. Surely such contemplations are divinely fitted to soothe the troubled mind, and to sweeten the bitterness of sorrow. If we reckon, as the apostle did, that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us, we shall not be wanting in patience.

O bright, celestial morn, hasten thy coming, when the dim glass shall be removed, and when we shall see Him as He is. Now the cup of sorrow goes round. It is passed from lip to lip, from heart to heart, from family to family, and many of the children of that day are now passing through the valley of the shadow of death. Days and nights of weary watching, the loving, tender heart suspended between hope and fear; but the parting comes. All is silent. The last sigh has been heaved, and the last tear shed. Another saint has been welcomed to the paradise of God.

Hope has received a fresh inspiration. The dear departed is on before; we shall meet again. The grave must yield up its prey; the sea must give up its dead; and all be caught up together in clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so shall we ever be with the Lord. O morning of reunions! The circle to be broken no more forever. The morning song begins; all catch the flying joy, and roll round the rapturous hosanna, worthy the Lamb that was slain!

" Continuing instant in prayer." Meanwhile, come what may, we fall back upon the great resource of the soul-communion with God, in prayer persevering. We have spoken of a love

that makes all service easy, of a hope that sheds its bright radiance over the gloomy day; and now we are exhorted to live near to God, and draw all needed support from Him, while waiting for His Son from heaven. Hope and patience, and all other virtues, can only be nourished by that character of intercourse with God which is here described as "continuing instant in prayer." It is directly the opposite of every element of formality. To be continual, fervent, persevering, alone answers to the divine injunction. No duty can be well done, and no service rightly performed, without this kind of prayer.

The apostle, of course, cannot mean by this that we are always to be in the attitude of prayer. This would be impossible. Many of God's praying ones have to spend the greater part of their time in the company of the prayerless: and sometimes we may be on a journey, where we have no opportunity for private or secret prayer. Still, if we are living and walking with God in the true spirit of prayer, the lifting up of the heart to Him may not be less frequent, though less orderly.

But here, my soul, thou seemest inclined to ask a question. If the believer is already pardoned, accepted, and has all things in Christ, what is it that he has to pray for so constantly? Should not praise and thanksgiving rather fill his heart? Prayer will seldom be offered without being mingled with praise. "Prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving," will generally be combined; but praise and prayer are quite distinct. Praise is that which we offer to God; prayer is the expression of our dependence upon Him for the supply of all our need, according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Praise is the re-ascending to God of the grace that has come down to us in answer to prayer; so that the more we abound in prayer, the richer and higher will be our note of praise.

But there is nothing, let me assure thee, in the whole life and ways of a Christian that can be safely separated from prayer. It thus becomes a test of what he may or may not do. That which he cannot do prayerfully, that on which he cannot ask the divine blessing, should be left undone.

Were this test more faithfully applied, Christians would make fewer mistakes, to say nothing of error and evil. The grand end and object of prayer is to keep the soul in constant communion with God, by cultivating the habit of referring everything to Him. In this way our knowledge of God is daily increased, so that we can count on Him for the answers to our prayers, without either signs or tokens of the answer. We reckon upon Himself; confidence is created by the knowledge which He has given us of His grace and love. " 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?" What an answer, what a rebuke, to all our doubts and fears is in this noble text! Who could doubt the reality, the extent, of God's love to us, and the deep and tender interest of His heart in all that concerns us, with this grand truth before the mind, beaming with a divine effulgence under our own eyes? Dear and precious to God, above all other objects, as His own Son ever was, He spared Him not, but for us delivered Him up for three-and-thirty long years, to humiliation, suffering, and death. What must the heart be made of that could doubt the goodness of God, after such an expression of His love for us all-the whole family of faith?

But all goes with Him. Apart from Him there is no blessing. Every lesser is included in the greater blessing. Had Rebekah refused to be the wife of Isaac, she could not have been a fellow-heir with him of the large fortunes of Abraham. When united to Christ by faith, we are fellow-heirs with Him of every blessing which divine love can give, and every blessing is measured by God's gift of His own Son. What a privilege to know Christ! Who could count the number and the greatness of the Christian's blessings in Him? May the Lord, in His sweet mercy, lead every one who reads these pages to lay hold on Christ by faith as the unspeakable gift of God, and the Savior of mankind. Without an interest in Christ all is lost. Every man and woman born must either have Christ's place in heaven, or their own in hell. Let the reader decide now; which is it to be- thine or His? His will be the best in heaven, thine the worst in hell. Decide, then, O my reader, decide now, at once and forever. The Lord grant it.

But to return to our subject.

The Christian should have a large heart. He has more than himself to think of and pray for. He has the ear and the arm of the living God; and he is to use them for the help and blessing of his household, his surroundings, and belongings, the church, and the workmen of God, the gospel, the poor and needy, the whole family of affliction, and all mankind. Many are the directions and promises in God's word connected with prayer, which we cannot here enumerate; but the principal attributes of all acceptable prayer are confidence, fervor, and perseverance; always remembering that it must be in accordance with the word, and by the Spirit of God. " Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.... And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us; and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.... Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it.... All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." Eph. 6:18 John 5:14, 15; Matt. 21:22; John 14:13, 14.

Verse 13. "Distributing to the necessity of saints: given to hospitality." Communicating to the necessity of saints; and the duty of hospitality, are subjects on which we have little to say. In almost every case, circumstances must govern, as to the exercise of these virtues; and such circumstances are best known to the individual himself: we have not to judge. But whatever we do, either in communicating or in hospitality, should be done before the Lord and for His sake. The poor are a part of His legacy to the church. " For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always." Much might be said as to the highly artificial state of modern life, as throwing many difficulties in the way of carrying out the apostolic precept; still, it is always good to ascertain the mind of the Lord: and follow the wisdom of scripture, rather than the conventionalities of men.

The truth of God hangs beautifully and perfectly together. A link cannot be removed without being missed. The understanding of one truth makes another plain. Unless we have entered into the truth of the " one body," the exhortation before us must be a burden and not a privilege. Hence the murmurings and complainings of the numerous poor. All Christians are saints, and all are members of the body of Christ: and we all know that the members of the same body have the same interests, sympathies, feelings, and destinies. On this principle we take part in the necessities of saints, or should do, regarding them as our own. The poor brethren are thus made joint partakers of the substance of their richer brethren. On this text one of the commentators observes: " The apostle thus intimates that we ought to supply the wants of poor brethren with as much care as if we were assisting ourselves."3 And this, we may add, would be nothing more than the fragrant fruits, of the love enjoined in verses 9, 10.

Reflections.-We may learn from this passage. 1. That from the nature of the precept to communicate to the poor, it is perfectly clear that there was no general custom among the first Christians of a community of goods. 2. That it is only to the necessities of the saints that the rich are commanded

to communicate of their substance. What love may delight to do in distributing its riches, great or small, is left to the hearts and consciences of those who have the means. While the Lord makes the most just and tender appeals for the poor, He guards the rich. The indolent, in strongest terms, He condemns. Such is the fullness and wisdom of scripture. " This we command you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat." While it is one of our most sacred, christian privileges to communicate to those who have need, according to our ability, it would be a violation of the word of God to support the idle. (2. Thess. iii. 6-15.) 3. the management of money from the earliest times has been surrounded with difficulties. "And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations." (Acts 6:1.) The Lord give grace to those who have, and

to those who have not. The Lord was rich and the Lord was poor, and unless we have Him before us as our divine model, we shall do nothing rightly.

" Given to hospitality:" The value which the early Christians set upon this virtue is plain, from Paul's mentioning it as among the requisite qualifications of a bishop. " Given to hospitality "—following after hospitality. In Titus it is, " A lover of hospitality." Not only are we to practice it, but to seek opportunities of thus manifesting our love to the brethren. And that, not only to those we know and love, but to strangers, brethren coming from a distance. " Be not forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8; Heb. 13:2.

According to our modern notions, and the habits of our English homes, we limit the meaning of the word to social, convivial, intercourse among neighbors. In the days of the apostles it had a much wider and even an opposite meaning. It was one of the most sacred duties of the Christian, but often one of extreme danger. In times of persecution it was a high crime to entertain the excommunicated. And, as many of the faithful were banished from their own country for the Lord's sake, it became a special privilege to receive them, and a service to the Lord never to be forgotten. (Matt. 25) It was also a duty of necessity in those early times as places of public entertainment were unusual. In the East, such houses are still rarely to be met with, and the ancient custom of hospitality continues to be there regarded as one of the most sacred institutions of the country.

But notwithstanding the change of times and customs, it is still our duty and our privilege, to entertain strangers, and to assist them in their business, like Phoebe of old. No change in the habits of men, the customs of nations, or the edicts of tyrants, can ever set aside or weaken the authority of the word of the Lord, or of any one of His precepts for the ordering of the ways of His people. May we walk by faith, not by sight or habit. And may the Lord's own light shine more and more from the living pages of His holy word, for our faith and guidance in all things!

Verse 14. "Bless them which persecute you: bless and curse not." The apostle now introduces the Christian into an entirely new line of practical Christianity. His whole life and ways are to be characterized by blessing, not cursing. This precept carries us far beyond the power of nature. And it is only in proportion to the Christian's conformity to the good and perfect will of God, that he is enabled to manifest this practical grace towards his enemies. He has been exhorted to the exercise of love and benevolence among his brethren in Christ; but now he must go a step further, and bless, but never curse, even his enemies who are persecuting him. To possess this spirit, and to practice this precept, is to be a heaven-born child of God. " But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." Matt. 5:44, 45.

This is surely a noble calling, and most ennobling to the Christian. He is a child of the ever blessed God; he is blessed with all spiritual blessings; his present and future is unmingled blessing, and he is called while here to imitate his heavenly Father, in returning blessing for cursing. The whole history of popery flashes across the mind while meditating on these few words; but that evil system meets its utter condemnation here. " Bless your enemies," says God. "No," says popery; "anathematize them both in this life and for evermore." It was by cursing, not blessing, that it reached such heights of power during the middle ages. But, on the other hand, thousands of God's martyred saints have spent their last breath in the flames in praying for their persecutors.

Speaking of the papacy as distinct from the true saints of God in the Catholic church, it must be manifest to all that notwithstanding its high pretensions to piety, it is essentially infidel. For example, " Marriage is honorable in all," says the word of God. " No," says Rome; "it is not only dishonorable, but a soul-damning sin for a priest to marry." Still, the word of God is there: "honorable," not in some, but "in all;" priest as well as people. Again, "Let the tares grow with the wheat until the harvest," says the Lord. " No," says Rome; " the tares of heresy must be rooted out by fire and sword." And so in many other things, which it would be out of place to pursue here. We return to our meditations on the truth of God before us, " Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not."

The repetition of the precept adds greatly to its divine energy and importance. We must look at it fairly, however difficult to obey in its true sense. It is the peculiar privilege of the Christian to pray for all men..; friends and enemies. God has given him this place of honor here-to bless others by means of his prayers. He should be like a vessel from which flow the precious blessings of Christ to the enriching of many around him. So far from wishing or praying that evil may overtake our persecutors, we must sincerely pray to the Lord to pardon and bless them. Nature would return evil for evil, and cherish vindictive feelings; but grace says, following the example of the blessed Lord and His martyr Stephen, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Verse 15. "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." We have been exhorted to the exercise of love, the discharge of the duties of benevolence, the forgiveness of enemies, and now we are admonished to sympathize in the joys and sorrows of our fellow:men, but especially of our fellow-Christians. These are the comely ways of the household of faith. Being rooted and grounded in love, these graces naturally flow forth as from their native fountain. What could possibly be more unlike the spirit of Christianity than a selfish indifference to all interests but our own! How much more like the blessed Master is the Christian who enters into the joys and sorrows of others as if they were his own! This is the true expression of the communion of saints-the unselfishness of those who are walking in the light of God's own presence-the only place where we lose our selfishness. " If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another." Outside of His presence we are selfish; in His presence we feel and act in the divine nature.

There is nothing so much to be deplored, so much to be guarded against, as the disposition that keeps a watchful eye over its own interests, but is blind and unbelieving to the interests of others. The Christian is saved by grace, he stands by grace, and ought to be the witness of grace in his spirit, words, and ways, at all times, and in all things, from the least to the greatest. His speech is to be always with grace, seasoned 'with salt. Grace is never to be absent; the whole bearing of the Christian is to be in grace, and " always." Salt to be introduced occasionally. The needed faithful word must not be withheld; but even then grace must shine. (Col. 4:6.) If we would faithfully express the spirit of the blessed Master, we must be gracious and generous in word and deed, and that, as far as possible, without partiality. But we shall soon find out that in nothing are we so feeble as in sympathy. The blessed One of John 11 only can fully meet the need in sympathy.

These are homely thoughts for thy meditation, O my soul. Could they not be more accurately defined? thou sayest. No, nothing can define thy path in grace but the eye and the heart, of Christ ever with thee. He must be before thee as thy pattern. Thy work can never be correct if thy model is not perfect. Hast thou learned to feel the joys and sorrows of others, as though they were thine own? Look again at thy Model: read, study, meditate on the unselfish love, the boundless grace, and the tender sympathy of thy Lord and Master in the Gospels. See Him there, in

the majesty of divine goodness, yet meek and lowly in heart, supplying the poor with bread, and stooping in perfect grace to the fallen, the friendless, and the outcast. In all this He bath left us an example that we should walk in His steps. May the Lord give thee, my soul, and all of us, to know more of that true christian fellowship, which weeps with them that weep, and rejoices with them that do rejoice. There is really nothing more Christ-like, because there is nothing more, unselfish, than genuine sympathy. Does the welfare and happiness of others inspire us with joy? Do their afflictions and necessities affect us with sorrow-with a sympathetic sorrow that can only find relief in relieving the necessities, and in filling the heart with gladness that was bowed down with sorrow? May it ever be ours, to heighten the joy and to lessen the sorrows of others!

Verse 16. "Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits." The apostle now presses and amplifies the important question of harmony among Christians, but especially among those who are locally united as the assembly of God. " Be of the same mind one toward another." This plainly means that in the things of God there ought to be oneness of mind amongst His children. But we are here addressed as the children of faith, as those whose thoughts and affections, whose motives and objects are formed and governed by the word of God. When this is the case, there must be concord; the word of God being one; but whenever it is a question of human opinions, there must be discord, for each one will have his own opinion.

Oh, how shall we bewail the absence of unity even among the children of faith, who profess to own no authority in divine things but the word of God! We may indeed take up a sore lamentation, for even in the most scriptural communities, the wretched will of man, not content with the word of God, broaches new thoughts, and ere long presses with vehement zeal its fully formed theories. Personal influence must then take the place of the word of God, and as each mind must necessarily give the new idea its own complexion, the original thought will be multiplied into as many forms as the minds that have received it. Such are the fearful, but unavoidable consequences of departure from the word of God. If the Master held fast by what was plainly written, surely so should the disciple. " It is written-it is written," was the silencing reply to the tempter. " God says-God says," should preface all we advance on divine subjects. Nothing is easier than to quote scripture when we have it, but nothing is more difficult when it is not there.

We are aware that many speak of essentials and non-essentials; but there are no such distinctions in the word of God. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and what He has written for us can never be non-essential. But all theories and observances springing from the human mind, however garnished with scripture, are not only non-essential but dishonoring to the word of God and ruinous to faith. Our ancestors, the reformers, clung tenaciously to many of the traditions of the old religion; but seeing it was wrong to hold them as traditions, and not willing to give them up, they searched for scriptures to justify their holding these loved relics. They found them in Rome, and then sought scripture to sanction them. In this way many things were imported into the christian church from the worship of pagans in the third and fourth centuries; and into the reformed churches from popery in the sixteenth. And even those Christians who have left all human for divine ground, may have brought more loved relics with them than they are aware of.

The Spirit's unity is " One body;" but human opinions have formed bodies innumerable. Scripture assumes that Christians are endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit-the unity of the Spirit's forming; and so presses unity of feelings, objects, and interests. " Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus. That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...." "Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind...." " Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you." Rom. 15:5, 6; Phil. 2:2 Cor. 13:11.

What meaneth-thou mayest well inquire, my soul-what meaneth this often-repeated precept, with so many of a kindred nature? "Be of the same mind one toward another." Rather, far, would we not answer. The heart sinks in shame, that a precept so becoming the children of one family, one hope, one destiny, should have been in all ages so utterly disregarded. And why? Pray why? Certainly not from zeal in pressing home the plain, simple word of God; that will stand on its own integrity and authority; but the self-importance which our own conceptions when promulgated give us, leads us on to a character of zeal which overlooks all other questions. Hast thou ever seen a man rise into a great heat from earnestly pressing the word of God home to the conscience? Possibly not. But how often hast thou seen the disciple of some supposed new light when closely questioned give way to anger, and, it may be, wind up in fierce contention? But the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of the Lord.

Return, O my soul, to the word of God. Reverently bow to that holy word; receive nothing into the chambers of thy heart that thou findest not there. Have nothing to care for or contend for but Christ and His will, so far as thou knowest it. When that which is beyond thy comprehension is pressed upon thee as Of great importance, calmly listen, inquire, take it into the divine presence, and if it be of God, embrace it and hold it from Him. But if it be not of God, if it is not in His word, it is nothing to thee. See that thou boldest nothing from man; neither contend with thy brethren as to details which affect not the grand solid foundations of christian communion.

" Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits." The great idea in the first clause of the verse is amplified in the last three. Mutual disagreement is to be avoided on all occasions, and a spirit of kindness and union to be carefully cherished. And, inasmuch as there can be no greater hindrance to unity and love than pride, he now exhorts the saints not to be ambitious, but humble, and to watch against self-conceit.

It is natural for man to be aspiring to things above him, and to look with a measure of contempt on lowly persons and lowly pursuits. But the Christian must judge himself as to how far this worldly spirit has been mortified within him. We are cautioned against setting our minds on high things; or allowing our minds to be occupied with them; but rather, as the apostle says, " Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." It is difficult for the best of Christians to cast off completely the influence of rank and station in this life. Nothing seems to have a more tenacious grasp on the natural mind. It dies not but with the death of the body.

The phrase, " condescend to men of low estate," is not considered by the critics a happy one. It means rather to associate with them. The idea of condescension is quite contrary both to the teaching of the Lord and His servant; for it supposes the maintenance of worldly superiority in our own hearts, because it means showing kindness to the lowly in a patronizing way. " The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they

that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve." Luke 22:25-27.

What a contrast to the self-exalting and disdainful spirit of the world! How blessed to see it exemplified in the human path of the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy, and enjoined by a servant of His whose qualities of mind and heart have found few, if any equals among men! Nowhere, perhaps, where they let out their thoughts and feelings, can one find the very opposite so painfully as among the Rabbis. Their scorn for the unlettered poor is unbounded. But indeed it is too natural to man as such. Hence we have exhortations to Christians. " He that saith he abideth in him ought himself so to walk even as he walked.4

The meaning of the last clause, "Be not wise in your own conceit," is intimately connected with what has been already said. Still, every word of scripture has its own place, its meaning, its own application. Self-conceit, not unfrequently, is the offspring of weakness and ignorance. The mind becomes inflated from a fancied superiority to those around us, the opinions of the lowly are disregarded, and self-confidence naturally follows. So far as this species of pride manifests itself among Christians, the prosperity of the church is destroyed, and the blessing of the individual effectually hindered. May the Lord give us the spirit of a little child, humble, docile, dependent. " Be not wise in thine own eyes," says the wise man; "fear the Lord and depart from evil...." "Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes," says the prophet, "and prudent in their own sight." Prov. 3:7; Isa. 5:21.

Verse 17. "Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men." The apostle, having enjoined the christian duties of the brotherhood, now forbids the smallest indulgence in a contrary spirit towards anyone. Nothing is more natural to man than to return evil for evil. It has been observed that those of the most indolent and passive dispositions may be aroused to the strongest feelings of revenge, under the sense of injuries, real or supposed. This is the old nature, not the new: law, not grace: the first, not the last Adam. But whose are we? Whom do we follow? Which is it, law or grace? The Christian is called to be a witness, not of the first, but of the second Man; not of law, but of grace. He is to be the witness of grace for His absent Lord in this selfish, self-seeking world. If he falls from the exercise of this christian virtue, he may be ensnared by the enemy to show a spirit of revenge and retaliation.

How lovely, how heavenly, are the ways of grace! but oh! think, meditate, my soul, on the offensive, contemptible ways of wretched self. Seek, O seek, to be like Him, " who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously. Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes we are healed." (1 Peter 2:23, 24.) Did He bear my sins in His own body on the tree? Did He die for me and put them all away? And shall I, who have been freely forgiven ten thousand talents, unmercifully insist on the last farthing being paid of the hundred pence owing to me by my fellow-servant? Could anything be more unseemly in the eyes of heaven? But surely, thou wilt say, none who know Christ could ever cherish this spirit. None who are walking in the light and the joy of His presence; but if we are not living in the enjoyment of this grace ourselves, we shall be but poor witnesses of it to others. Nothing short of living, abiding, daily communion with the blessed Lord and His grace, will keep us above the temptations of making everything minister to the aggrandizement of self.

If professing Christians were to be tried by this test-returning good for evil, acting in grace-how many who have assumed that fair name would be found to have no real claim to it! But forget not, my soul, the word on which thou art meditating: " Recompense to no man"-no man, whatever he may be-" evil for evil." And remember also, that thou canst not be long in this world and engaged in its affairs, without having this grace brought into exercise. The golden rule, " Do unto others as you would that others should do unto you," is much too equitable, much too heavenly, in its character, for this world. Nevertheless, the Christian must walk so as to please Christ and to be a true witness of His Spirit, even though he should suffer earthly loss.

" Provide things honest in the sight of all men."

The critics tell us that our translation of this verse is not very happy, as it suggests an idea foreign to the meaning of the Greek. Paul does not mean to direct us to make provision for ourselves or families in an honest manner, which is probably the sense commonly attached to the passage by the English reader; but to act in such a manner as to command the confidence and good opinion of men. In

this view, the connection of this with the preceding member of the verse is obvious. " We must not recompense evil for evil, but act in such a way as to commend ourselves to the consciences of all men." That transparency of character and conduct in providing things good or comely, which

raises the Christian far above the idea of suspicion seems to be the true sense of this interesting clause. We may have heard Christians say when spoken to about something that seemed rather crooked, " Well, I have a good conscience myself on that point, and I don't care what any one else thinks of me." But this spirit is entirely contrary to the spirit of the precept before us, which literally means, "above suspicion before all men." And this agrees with the word of the apostle to the Thessalonians: " Abstain from all appearance of evil." The very opposite of the artifice so often used in order to gain our object. It is not enough that we abstain from what we know to be wrong, but we ought to avoid everything that would be a ground of just suspicion. Thus Paul wished others to be associated with him in the distribution of the alms of the church, " having regard to what was right, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men." 2 Cor. 8:20, 21.

How wonderful, we may well exclaim, is the wisdom, the fullness, and the minuteness of scripture! What phase, what intricacy, what secrecy, what subtlety of character, does it not lay bare in the open light of heaven! It is easy being a Christian in the church; even a negative one, if quiet and peaceable, may pass muster well; but oh! how difficult it is to be a true Christian in the world, and in all the activities of practical life! Oh, to be above all just ground of suspicion even

by the unbelieving, suspicious world! Lord, help! Keep us near to thyself; keep us looking at every word, and acting in the light of thy presence; may our prayer be constantly ascending; may thy grace be constantly descending; maintain us thus in communion that we may be strengthened day by day. Preserve thy many children, O Lord, from the ten thousand snares by which they are surrounded; may they not do their work to be seen of men, but may they be careful in all their ways to avoid that which would bring a reproach upon thy holy name. And if at any time they may be falsely accused, may they have grace to commit themselves to thee, Lord, who judgest righteously.

Verse 18. "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." All who know what human nature is, what the affairs of life are, know the difficulty of living at peace with all men. The apostle acknowledges the difficulty and limits the injunction by saying, " If it be possible." But the precept is plain and the duty most important; and the believer, notwithstanding the difficulty, is to do all in his power to live at peace with all men. " As much as lieth in you"-as to what is of you, as far as depends on you, live in the spirit of peace with all. The Christian is called, not only to preserve peace, but to be a peace-maker; and a blessing of peculiar honor and dignity belongs to all such. "

Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God." To recompense evil for evil necessarily leads to contention and strife, while peace is the happy fruit of a forgiving disposition.

But here, again, my soul, thou must weigh up things. Consider, I pray thee, that from the wickedness of those by whom thou art surrounded this may sometimes be impossible; but let nothing fail on thy part; ever guard against giving any occasion to any one to complain of thee. Living near to God is the surest way of living in peace with men; for when a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him. Avoid the snare of courting the favor and the praise of men, for this will surely lead thee to unfaithfulness in thy testimony. Some, in this way, may think themselves possessed of the spirit of peace; but it is rather a spirit of selfish indifference to the claims of Christ, and the salvation of our neighbors.

Much as thou art to seek after peace and pursue it, neither truth nor principle must be sacrificed to maintain it, either with the world or with Christians. The love of popularity is a great snare to many; even a Peter might be drawn aside for a moment by it; but Paul could not have peace on such terms. (Gal. 2) The great apostle, much as he loved peace and desired it, knew very little of it during the whole period of his life, because of his faithfulness. But though he had little outward peace, he was kept in perfect peace with God because his mind was stayed on Him. May we all know this solid, lasting peace with God, which the world neither can give nor take away.

Verse 19. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." This is a kindred precept to the previous inj unction, not to render evil for evil: still, it is varied and amplified. The Christian, under any provocation, must never avenge himself; we must leave that matter to God, who, in His own good time, will certainly avenge His "dearly beloved." Nothing can be more touching and beautiful than these terms of endearment. Just when provoked and excited to retaliation by wicked and unreasonable men, the voice of tenderest love is heard rising above the strife of human passions: "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath." Retire from the scene; give place to my government, because of the injury you have received. It is my prerogative to punish. " Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." See Deut. 32:35.

The knowledge of God, as the avenger of His people's wrongs, is not intended to awaken in our hearts the smallest desire that the divine vengeance should overtake our enemies. This we must watch against as a secret desire, for we are prone to count on the divine vengeance falling on those who have injured us; and such expectations are closely allied to the hope that it may come. This must be guarded against; it is natural to us, and bordering on the principles of the world. It is a most unhappy thing to be dwelling, either in our own minds, or in conversation with others, on the injuries-supposed or real-which we have received. How much happier to forget them, and commit ourselves and all our affairs into the hands of the Lord! To advance in arms against our enemies; to watch for their halting; to wait our opportunity to give out what we have been nursing within; to exaggerate their failures, that they may receive double for their sins; to rejoice inwardly when we think they have been repaid in their own coin, is to indulge a spirit entirely contrary to the mind of the Lord in the passage before us, and to the whole genius of Christianity. To the Lord alone rightfully belongs the prerogative of vindicating the innocent, and of punishing the guilty.

If this be the true meaning of our precept, and the word of the Lord can never be broken, what shall be the vengeance of God, ere long, on those who are constantly injuring, slandering, and persecuting the children of God-who make them the butt of their ridicule, and the objects of their jest and reproach? The injuries which they have sought to inflict on the unoffending disciples of Christ shall recoil upon themselves ten thousandfold. How little such people think of the awfully solemn fact, that wrath and vengeance belong to God!

But thou hast first to look to thyself, my soul; for who amongst us can say, No malice dwells in my heart; no desire to see an enemy fall; no secret rejoicing at the humiliation of a rival; no tendency to be my own avenger? Ah, no, these things are all deeply rooted in thy natural heart, and nothing but the faith that commits all into the Lord's hands can keep them from being openly manifested. What, then, am I to do with an enemy when he is before me? Hear the word of the Lord.

Verse 20. " Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals offire on his head." The true Christian, notwithstanding his inoffensive walk, may have enemies, but he must not be the enemy of any man. Such is his position of grace in this world. He is called by the loftiest motives to be the true friend of all mankind. Instead of being his own avenger, he bends before the storm, looking to God, and seeks to render good service to his enemy in his need and distress. " If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink." He not only abstains from vengeance, he manifests love. How truly sublime is the standard of the grace of God for His children's ways! He returns good for evil, kindness for injury, blessing for cursing. The expressions, feed him and give him drink, are figurative of all the duties of benevolence. By these means he seeks to conquer the enmity of his persecutors, and even change them into his friends.

" For in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." Amongst the many interpretations which have been given of this somewhat difficult passage, we accept the one most generally received, and which best suits the whole context. To heap coals of fire on an enemy's head is to care for him, feast him, and treat him kindly, as the most effectual means of subduing him, of melting him down. Who ever conquered an enemy's heart by revenge? How many have been conquered by love? What was it that dissolved the hardness of our unyielding hearts? A Savior's love. " Let the effort be tried," says Charles Bridges; " surround the intractable metal beneath and above; not only putting it over the fire, but heaping coals of fire upon it. Few hearts are so obdurate as not to melt under the energy of patient, self-denying, burning love. If thine enemy will not recompense thee for all the good done to him, concern not thyself with that. The Lord shall reward thee. The God of love will honor His own image in His own children."

Few hearts, we believe, in ordinary life are so hard as to be able permanently to resist the influence of such love; but those who have read the exterminating wars of the papacy, and the rooting out of heresy by fire and sword, know well that the heart of Jezebel knows no relentings, but only grows harder and colder in the presence of beseeching, weeping, bleeding love. The hearts of the men of Jezebel, as one has said, " are sheathed in the triple iron of pride, cruelty, and bigotry;" and, we may add, can never be penetrated by the most overwhelming scenes of human love or suffering. But as the burning coals of returning good for evil, and the most patient kindness, have failed to melt them, they must answer to God, to whom wrath and vengeance belong. Those who refuse to be subdued by a love that burns like coals of fire must suffer the burning wrath of God forever. " Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest. This shall be the portion of their cup. Let burning coals fall upon them: let them be cast into the fire: into deep pits, that they rise not again." Psa. 11:6; 140:10.

Thus we see that true Christian kindness brings matters to a point. If the persecutor is softened, broken down, by the grace of the persecuted, so much the better for both; the end is gained; all is happy. But if he harden himself, and despise the patience and love that returns good for

evil, his guilt is increased, and his judgment is of God.

Verse 21. "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." This short verse should be the Christian's MOTTO through life. How beautiful, how heavenly, how unselfish, how Christ-like, when displayed in all its practical effects on the many details of real life! How God-like, who overcame all our evil with His good in Christ our Lord! "And now he would have us to be imitators of him in this grace, which wins the victory in his sight and to our own consciousness, even when we may seem most down-trodden before the world. For this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith-faith working by love." 1 John 5:4.

The burden of this beautiful chapter of precepts is plain. We are never to conquer evil by evil, but to treat our enemies with kindness. In the world we shall often have to experience evil in some form, but we must never allow ourselves to be provoked to the indulgence of a spirit of retaliation. The first display of temper is a defeat; the enemy has gained a victory. Men in general suppose that to resent an injury is only to spew a proper spirit. But the Christian's rule is Christ; not to be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good.5

REFLECTIONS ON PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

We may search all the books of the most admired writers in the world; we may examine every code of morals, ancient and modern; but where shall we find such maxims as have just been the theme of our meditations? How unlike all human thoughts, laws, and systems! And even where the letter of the human law may correspond with the divine, the grand motive to its observance is wanting. The men of the world could not possibly understand the motives by which these duties of love are enjoined; such speak of what are called the laws of honor. The Christian may forget-alas! the great majority seem to have forgotten altogether-that these precepts of love naturally flow from the great doctrine of salvation by grace, and that he is thereby created in Christ Jesus unto good works, and ought to be their living expression. We may be very self-complacent over some small matter in which we made a fair show of returning good for evil, or at least in ceasing to quarrel with our fellow-Christian; but did we "put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering. Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." (Col. 3:12, 13.) It is natural to be well pleased with ourselves when we have taken no active part in the dispute, but mere negatives are infinitely below the sublime thought of the position and aggressive love of Christ in His disciples. " He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." (1 John 2:6.) This is the Christian's standard, and God will never lower it to suit the selfishness of man.

The harmony between the Old and the New Testament on this great subject of christian morals is perfect. Love in all ages must be the same as to its nature; it is too expressive in its character to be satisfied with mere negatives, or bare desires. The natural man would as soon think of cutting off his right hand as stretching it out to feed an enemy in distress; but not so the true disciple of Jesus, who died for His enemies.

We have a fine instance of this divine love in operation in the prophet Elisha; 2 Kings 6:21, 22. The Syrians, who had been smitten with blindness were led by the prophet into the midst of Samaria. The king of Israel, judging this to be a favorable opportunity to be revenged on his enemies, exclaimed, "My father, shall I smite them, shall I smite them? And he answered, Thou shalt not smite them: wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master. And he made great provision for them; and when they had eaten and drunk he sent them away, and they went to their master. So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel." This was God-like; this was divine; but most foreign to every thought of the king of Israel. " Shall I smite them, shall I smite them?" being repeated, argues a readiness to shed blood on the part of the king. " Never," says Bishop Hall, in his Contemplations on this passage, "Never did the king of Israel see a more pleasing sight than so many Syrian throats at his mercy But the charitable prophet soon gives an angry prohibition of slaughter. Thou shalt not smite them.... If it be victory thou aimest at, overcome them with kindness. Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink.

" Oh, noble revenge of Elisha, to feast his persecutors! to provide a table for those who had provided a grave for him! These Syrians came to Dothan full of bloody purposes to Elisha: he sends them to Samaria full of good cheer and jollity. Thus, should a prophet punish his pursuers. No vengeance; but this is heroical, and fit for christian imitation. The king of Israel hath done that by his feast which he could not have done by his sword. The bands of Syria will no more come by way of ambush or incursion into the bounds of Israel."

We have another equally noble example of the power of love in the most degenerate times of Judah. 2 Chron. 28:1-15. The prophet, Oded, met the children of Israel carrying into captivity two hundred thousand of their brethren, the children of Judah and Jerusalem, including women, sons, and daughters. But in place of slavery, through the touching appeals of the Lord's prophet, they were all set at liberty, and not only at liberty, but with every mark of tender affection. " And the men which were expressed by name rose up, and took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them, and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses, and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm-trees, to their brethren; then they returned to Samaria."

We will only notice one other passage in the Old Testament, the one from which the apostle quotes, showing clearly that both were inspired by the same Spirit, and that the one stamps the other with divine authority. " If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink; for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee." (Prov. 25:21, 22.) Having dwelt at some length on the general bearing of this text, we would now conclude our reflections by earnestly entreating all our readers not to entertain the thought, so common, that all these precepts are impractible; that they are only ideal, something to be admired, but never to be actually practiced. This is unbelief, the suggestion of Satan, the language of the world and of our own corrupt hearts. Rather let us adopt the language of the apostle, and say, " I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me;" and surely this among the rest. May the Lord Himself give us to drink deeply into His blessed Spirit, so that the duty which now appears to be an impossible task, a heavy cross, may become our pleasure, our delight, our willing service. Phil. 4:13 Peter 3:8, 9.

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The calling and responsibility of the Christian, then, is to " prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." This is to be his one grand object as to the whole path of his service in this world. But how, it may be asked, is this end to be gained? The truest answer would be-like-mindedness to Christ. " Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." And again, " Lo, I come to do thy will, O God." Paul says positively, " But we have the mind of Christ." And if we are to walk so as to please God, we must walk even as Christ walked. And this, according to John, is what we ought to do. " He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." Phil. 2:5; Heb. 10:9; 1 Cor. 2:16 John 2:6.

The measure of the soul's obedience to the will of God is Christ; He must be the alone object before the mind. But to prove that will 'practically, we must be whole-hearted for Him, and be strengthened by the power of His grace acting on the renewed mind. The Holy Spirit, who only can show us the mind of God, must be ungrieved. We must be continually on the watch against the inroads of the world-the spirit of the age-and gradually growing in grace and in the knowledge of the divine will in all things.

Christian devotedness is thus complete in truth; he whole man is consecrated to the Lord, and laid upon His altar. The body is yielded up, the mind is transformed, and the will of God discerned; the man as a whole is devoted to God.

Elsewhere the apostle prays for the complete sanctification of the entire man, which we must just glance at in passing. "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." In this remarkable passage, it is the expressed will of God, that those who have been saved through grace, and brought into relationship with himself, should be entirely consecrated to Him. This, surely, is devotedness without limit. It is the will of our God, that the Christian, in every part of his being should be wholly sanctified, or consecrated, to Himself as " the very God of peace." What grace, what love, what goodness, thou mayest well exclaim, O my soul! It is overwhelming! As water rises to its level, so God would have thee, in every thought of thy mind, in every part of thy being, rise to Himself as thy proper object, resource, and rest.

The soul is usually spoken of as the individual; as," The souls that came with Jacob into Egypt." The body is the instrument of the soul's expression and action; and the spirit, of its capacity and power. John the Baptist came in " the spirit and power of Elias," not in the soul of Elias. Such is man in all the parts of his being; and the apostle prays that each part may " be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." He does not say, observe, unto the day of death, but, "unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." This may shew thee what an important place the coming of the Lord had in the mind of the apostle, or rather in the mind of the Holy Spirit, and what an important place it ought to have in the minds of all Christians. It is an essential, or at least, a most influential part of christian life. Its place in this passage is perfectly beautiful. The believer, who is now but in part sanctified, shall be wholly then, and in every part of his being-body, soul, and spirit. What a wonderful thought this gives us of what we may now call, poor humanity. Then it will be perfected in each part, ennobled by grace, conformed to the glorious image of Christ Himself, who is the Head and Source of this new life in the glory.

Who would not heave a sigh and drop a tear over the blind indifference of those who are pursuing a course that must lead to the utter ruin, and the eternal degradation, of humanity in the depths of hell! How exalted in heaven, how lowered in hell! Stop, dear reader, stop, and think! Where wouldst thou be forever? Hurled down the deep descent into the fiery gulf of the burning lake, or carried on the wings of love to the bright regions of glory?

It must be the one or the other. There is no middle path here, there is no middle place hereafter. What is thy governing object now? Christ or the world? This determines thy future state. If the world be chosen in place of Christ, and its pleasures preferred to His cross in following Him, thy condemnation will be just, and thy deep debasement but the natural consequence of thy inexcusable folly. But, oh, what a wreck! that fair and stately vessel-humanity-body, soul, and spirit, which might have entered the port of life under the banner of a Savior's love, and amidst the joyous welcomes of many a well-known voice on that shining shore, now lies a hapless wreck on that dark, distant, dreary shore, the lake of fire. Think, oh think, dear reader! Would tears of blood be too much to shed over such a melancholy wreck of our common humanity? But think also, I pray thee, of a resurrection body, characterized by four things-" incorruption, glory, power, spiritual." This is the noble vessel by which the saint in glory will express himself; the soul, the proper seat of affection, now purified and all its capacities enlarged, what love will it take in and give out! The mind, elevated and dignified by union with Christ, walks above the myriad hosts of shining ones who had never sinned, and in intelligent relationship with God, meditates on His glory. And what must the noble workings of that mind be, when moved, guided, and sustained by the Holy Spirit? This is the sure and happy portion of all who believe in Jesus now, and give their hearts to Him. Blessed privilege, precious opportunity; there is no time like the present! Let Him have thy heart now, my dear reader, thy whole heart, and forever!

Oh! happy Christian, thou mayest well give up the tinseled vanities of time for the glories of eternity! But even now thou knowest thy place in the glory. Christ, in His Person, and in His present position in the presence of God, is the expression of thy place there. Every believer has his place before God in Christ, and in the righteousness of God, which He accomplished in Christ, having glorified Himself in that obedient, blessed One. And now, God would have all who are brought into this relationship with Himself, to have no object before their minds but Christ in the glory, so that we may do His will, and be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 3. "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." The Christian's walk, according to the first two verses, should be characterised by devotedness and obedience; and according to the verse before us, by humility and dependence.

These four graces, watchfully maintained, in the presence of God, would certainly produce a very complete Christian; one very like his Lord and Master, who, though entirely devoted to the glory of God, was meek and lowly in heart. We should naturally suppose, that when there is such devotedness to God, both in body and soul, there would • also be great sobriety of judgment and lowliness of mind. But, alas! it is not always so. The one is far from being a necessary consequence of the other. On the contrary, there is always a danger of the flesh coming in and availing itself of the power which such devotedness gives, either to assume a tone of superiority and high-mindedness, or to affect a false humility and speak contemptuously of self. This is manifest on every hand at the present hour, and it is written on every page of church history. Of this tendency the apostle was fully aware, and warns against it, as we learn from the peculiar tone and energy of his style in this verse.

The words, " For I say, through the grace given unto me," have more the tone of apostolic authority, than the affectionate entreaties of a brother, as in the first verse, " I beseech you, therefore, brethren." But we must not suppose that the style of the one verse is less perfect, less consistent, less affectionate, than the other, but that the character of the exhortation, in the wisdom of God, required a different tone and style! Firmness is perfectly consistent with humility, and faithfulness with the strongest affection.

The apostle stands, as it were, at the center of practical Christianity. He sees its bearings on every side. His mind is filled with the higher principles of entire devotedness to the will of God, and also with the humbler gifts, which were to find their expression in the gracious ministries of love among the saints. He writes with decision and energy to secure both. The former he had faithfully enjoined in the first two verses; and now he is about to expatiate with great minuteness on the latter. The third verse is his stand-point. He clearly sees and feels as one standing in the light of God, that high-mindedness would be ruinous to the first, and an effectual hindrance to the second. The will of God being the object of christian service, whether in the higher or humbler sphere, real devotedness must consist in the denial of self, and in humbly waiting on God to know His good and perfect will in all things. The human will must be set aside, if we are to enter into the meaning, importance, and application of this condensed treasury of practical Christianity.

Thou wilt now see, O my soul, a divine reason for the changed style of the great apostle; and thou wilt also see that he is most personal in his application of this weighty truth. He does not merely address the church as a body, but he appeals to every one among the saints at Rome; the least as well as the greatest. This will show thee how prone all are to over-value themselves, even in the church of God and in their service to His saints. Oh, what deceitful hearts we have! What need for watchfulness!-for constant communion with the truly humble and blessed Lord, who " loved us, and gave himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God of a sweet smelling savor."

But there is an opposite error into which many fall, and which must be as carefully avoided by the Christian. This is an affectation of humility by speaking of oneself in a depreciating manner. When a man speaks of "his small measure; of being the most unfit person for the important work he has in hand;" we feel that he is either insincere or unwise. God never requires the exercise of a gift which He has not bestowed. This species of false humility must be watched against by all who would walk with God in integrity of heart. God is real and He must have reality in us; He is true and He must have truth in the inward parts. Nevertheless, there are those who honestly, but unduly, depreciate their gift and fail to act for God and His people. This is a false modesty, and also a serious evil, and one which the Lord must judge sooner or later. But now, mark well, my soul, the wisdom of holy scripture. This alone, by God's grace, can give thee a well-balanced, a well-adjusted mind.

" Think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." The first thing is to find thy true place in the presence of God according to thy faith in Christ, and then thy own place amongst thy fellow-servants. The measure of faith with which each believer is blest, in the sovereign grace of God, becomes the proper limit, within which he is to occupy himself according to the will of God. Surely the man who has the greatest faith, who is a father in Christ, and who knows most of the word of God, will rise to his own level among his fellow Christians, where the Holy Spirit rules. The Lord give us to know the measure and character of our gift, what He has

prepared us for; that we may be preserved from all extremes. In this as in all things the Christian's path is a narrow one, and requires spiritual discernment. Nothing short of constant communion with Him who closed His life of perfect obedience on the cross, will keep us in the place of true humility, obedience, and dependence. O Lord, lead Thy servants over Thine own path, preserve them from the indolence that falls asleep, from the energy of nature that would go too fast, from a false modesty that refuses to do Thy bidding, and from the want of modesty that would yield to the impulse of the natural will. May we never forget, that " unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of Christ."1 Eph. 4:7.

Verses 4, 5. "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." The apostle having laid down the great principles of individual christian devotedness, now descends to all the forms which the ministry of love assumes in the Christian, according to the various positions in which he stands, and to the spirit in which he ought to walk in every relationship. The theme before thee now, O my soul, is christian service.

Thou wilt do well to pause here for a little, and meditate on the foundation of this service and its peculiar character. It is by no means generally or well understood. Still it is always well to ascertain, when revealed, the divine reason of things, the spring from whence they flow. " So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." The Christian's relation to the body of Christ, and to all other Christians as members of that one body, forms the true basis, and the wide sphere, of christian duties as detailed in chapter xii. This was an entirely new thing in the ways of God with men. We have nothing corresponding to it in the Old Testament, nor even during the life of the blessed Lord on the earth. There were saints of God from the beginning, souls born of God, but they were never formed into one body till after the cross and ascension of Christ. When He was glorified at God's right hand in heaven, the Holy Ghost came down on the day of Pentecost, and united Jew and Gentile into one body on the earth. The body was then formed in union with the exalted Head. This is the church. It is something more than merely believing, they are members of Christ's body, and of one another on the earth. See especially, 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 2:13-16.

The doctrine of the unity of the church as the body of Christ is most fully unfolded in 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians. Here it is only referred to in a practical point of view, and that, in connection with the duties of the members individually-duties that flow from their position in the one body, being severally members one of another. This is the new platform laid down by the apostle for the new order of christian ministry, which has its immediate sphere of exercise within the limits of the church as the one body. In illustration of this union and responsibility, he refers to the wonderful structure of the human body. "For we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office." Every member has its proper place, and its proper function to perform in the human body; and every member is valuable according to its healthful activity and usefulness. Though all the members are not of equal importance, yet none are useless. The smallest and least honorable is necessary to the others, and should be treated with even more consideration, as the apostle elsewhere teaches. " And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, upon these we bestow more abundant honor." The foot may be less comely than the eye, but the eye could not perform the peculiar function of the foot, therefore the eye must honor the foot for the valuable services it renders to the body, though it may be covered with dust by the way.

But enough as to the figure, its completeness will more fully appear as we proceed with our chapter.

In the meantime, let me invite thee, O my soul, to a closer acquaintance with thy Lord, as Head of the church, before looking at the various gifts in the members. They all flow from Him who provides for the spiritual supply of His people's wants. He is the source of their blessing in

virtue of their union with Him. Oh, wondrous truth! Oh, blessed reality! Oh, happiness complete! Christ as the exalted Man in the glory, the measure and fullness of thy blessing! Thou art one with Him Having glorified God on the earth, having blotted out sin, abolished death, vanquished Satan, risen again from the dead, He ascended up on high as the Head of His body the church. He entered heaven, not on the ground of His own essential righteousness, not as God, nor simply as man, but " by his own blood." This was His title to the throne; His own shed blood. " When he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high." And this is thy title; He goes in on the ground of His people's title. We are "made nigh by the blood of Christ." This is the great truth that goes to the very depths of the heart of faith. Only think, and still think; meditate, and still meditate; until thou art far beyond thy depth in that ocean of love which flows around that cross and around that throne. What seest thou? The Man Christ Jesus on the throne. What is His title to be there? The putting away of sin by the sacrifice of Himself. What, then, is He to thy heart as the Man in the glory? He is the witness that my sins were all put away on the cross; that God's righteous judgment against my sins has been borne and vindicated; that I am before God in Christ, in the righteousness of God Himself; that Christ, in His person, and in His present position, is the expression of my place and portion there! To know Him, is to know my own place in the glory. But what more can I say? It is an ocean without a shore. And it is true of all believers-of every member of His body, the feeblest as well as the strongest. The apostle John sets his seal to this, " As he is, so are we in this world."

But grace has no evil eye. We forget not the Christless soul, the portionless, the godless, the homeless soul. This wealthy portion may be thine, my dear reader, even though thou art the chief of sinners. It was for sinners, and for sinners the chief, that Jesus died. All, all, is thine if thou wilt only believe. The gospel is preached to faith. In the finished work of Christ and His exaltation, thou hast a solid ground for the immediate pardon of thy sins, and the complete salvation of thy soul. God has glorified Himself in Christ, and He is waiting to glorify Himself again, in the full remission of all thy sins through faith in His well-beloved Son. This is all; honor the Son; embrace the Son! honor Him as the one that suffered to save thee from everlasting suffering in the lake of fire. Yes, this is all; honor Him with thy faith, thy confidence, thy worshipful adoration. Is it difficult to love one who so loves? to trust one who was faithful unto death? who is God as well as man?

But be assured, if thou art still careless, that great and wonderful as the work of Christ is, it is of no value to thee without faith. But its full value is thine the moment thou hast faith in Him. He has borne the judgment due to sin, He has done all that is needed for the glory of God and for the salvation of the sinner; the work is absolutely complete. He who knew best, said, " It is finished." Believe it, it is true; believe it now, and thou art saved, saved forever. Oh! turn not, I pray thee, a deaf or a careless ear to the joyful sound. Oh!! hear the joyful sound of heaven in that one word, Come! COME! COME! Love waits, love lingers; sin and Satan are also here! The awful judgment of God is hanging over this doomed world; hanging over thee; flee, then, oh! flee, to the only shelter from the impending storm, from wrath to the uttermost, the sure. shelter of the Savior's blood. Rest on this word whatever thy frames and feelings may be, " The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin." 1 John 1:7.

Verse 6. "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith." The subject of "gifts," as brought before us in 1 Cor. 12, Eph. 4, and Rom. 12, is of the deepest importance to the student of the New Testament, and to all who would understand the constitution of the church of God, and who would be found acting therein according to His mind. But it would be quite out of place to attempt even a brief sketch of so great a subject here; we will merely notice the difference between the gifts in Corinthians and Ephesians, before proceeding with our chapter.

In Corinthians, they may be regarded, for the most part, as the manifestation of divine power, and as signs and wonders for the unbelieving. " Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not." The Corinthians being unspiritual and fond of display, over-valued the sign-gifts because they were a manifestation of power before the world, and gave themselves a certain importance. It was no doubt thought a very grand thing to be able to speak in tongues without having learned them, and to work miracles. But this vanity is not peculiar to the Corinthians, though eloquence and intellectual attainments had always a great charm for them. The servant of the Lord now, as well as then, has to watch against investing himself with the importance of his gift and thereby attracting attention to his person. And this may be even when there is true devotedness, and when the Lord may be using his gift for blessing to others. Riches, time, influence, learning, and natural eloquence, are gifts, as well as miraculous power to speak in languages not previously learned, and ought to be used for the glory of God and the good of others, remembering that we are accountable to Him for every gift He has bestowed upon us.2 The servant who misapplies any gift or talent which the Master has conferred upon him, is unfaithful to his trust; he may be misspending, or using for his own importance and advantage, that which has been entrusted to him for the glory of the Lord and the welfare of His people.

The apostle evidently mourns over the Corinthians because of their failure as to the gifts of God. Their love of display before the world, rather than the enjoyment of God Himself in His word, and the edification of His saints, was a grief to him. He therefore endeavors to convince them of their mistake, by showing them that tongues are one of the lowest forms of the Spirit's operations, and prophesyings one of the highest. After contrasting the two at great length, he half reproachfully says, " Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue." The refreshment, comfort, uplifting of the heart-the edification of the saints, should be the one grand object of the christian teacher. He who ministers Christ and His work to the soul, out of the fullness of his own heart, is the minister who always edifies and never disappoints. The sign gifts in the early church were for a distinct purpose and ceased when that object was accomplished. " God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will." Heb. 2:4.

In Ephesians the character of the gifts is very different. The blessed Lord, as Head of the church at the right hand of God, is seen as the giver. In Corinthians the Holy Spirit is the dispenser of the gifts. This marks the difference; the former is affection, the latter is power, ecclesiastically viewed. Besides, the gifts of Ephesians abide with the church, "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." In Corinthians the gifts may be regarded as spiritual powers; in Ephesians as spiritual persons. "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some pastors and teachers." The two aspects of gifts, however-the power of the Spirit and the affections of Christ-are perfectly harmonious. Power is needed, but a Person, not a power, is the true object of the affections of the church in all ages.3

In Romans, the character and application of the gifts are somewhat different from both Ephesians and Corinthians. Here it is more the question of ministry in connection with the membership of the body. Responsibility flows from being members of the body of Christ, and every one members one of another. This is a truth of such vital, practical importance, that I would have thee, O my soul, give it thy best and thy most prayerful attention. The connection is so intimate both with the Head and the many members, that all are affected either favorably or

unfavorably by thy service. "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."

And forget not, I pray thee, that though the outward manifestation of the church's unity be broken up, and in this respect a ruin, thy responsibility is the same. The standard of divine truth remains unchanged, and couldst thou admit a lower standard than the good and perfect will of thy God and Father? The " one body" is not in ruins. None but real Christians have the privilege of membership here; but as all such are members of that body, whether they be externally united in christian fellowship or not, our love ought to be cultivated and cherished towards them, simply on the ground of their union with Christ. This is the only truth that will deliver thee from the strange principle of independence in a unity, and from all sectarian partiality. We ought to add our hearty " amen" to the prayer, " Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."

(* Haldane on the Romans, vol. iii. p. 83.)

The apostle's comparison of the human body to believers as one body in Christ is beautiful and appropriate, and also illustrates the character of christian ministry within the limits of the known members of that body. This truth, however, be it observed, does not touch the Christian's individuality as a man in Christ, or as a man of God amongst men, or as an evangelist to the regions beyond, or in any way as to his personal responsibility and blessing. We are now speaking of the nature and sphere of christian service as defined in the chapter before us. And here the apostle shows that it would be as unreasonable for all Christians to have the same gifts, as for all the members of the human body to have the same office; that the diversities of gifts and offices are necessary to the perfection and usefulness of the body of Christ. " There are diversities of gifts," says the apostle to the Corinthians, "but the same Spirit." This weighty truth was much needed at Corinth and everywhere. Like them we are disposed to talk a great deal about the greater gifts, and leave very little room for the exercise of the lesser. But we must remember that although the gifts differ in measure and character, they all come from the same source. And wherever there is such a state of things, either from pre-arrangement, or from strong partialities, as to shut out the lesser gifts, the Spirit is quenched, the assembly loses the benefit of the diversity of gifts, and ceases to act in accordance with the mind of God.

Hast thou a gift, my soul? Remember then, that the sphere of its exercise is the church of God, without reference to locality.; but see that it is a gift-a positive gift of God-not an imitation of others, lest thou shouldst become a troubler of the saints of God, a hinderer, not a help to their worship.

We will now take a brief glance at the various gifts here enumerated by the apostle, and may the Lord give thee spiritual discernment to see which, or how many, are thine.

" Whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith." The general idea of prophesying is the foretelling of future events, though not limited to that office. We accordingly find the term prophet applied in a more general way in the Old Testament. The bearer of the message from God, whether relating to things present or things to come, is called a prophet; and so is the interpreter of the divine message. Of Abraham it is said, " He is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live." (Gen. 20:7.) Moses, as the great interpreter of the mind of God to the Jews, is frequently spoken of as a prophet.

In the New Testament, those called "prophets," and classed with apostles, had a perfectly distinct mission from Old Testament prophets, and must carefully be distinguished when studying the word of God. " And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets." These were the two classes of workmen whom God especially used at the very beginning, when laying the foundation of the church; hence they are sometimes called "foundation gifts;" but there is no reason to believe that they were long continued to the church, though at different periods in her history there have been men raised up to do something like the work of apostles and prophets; such as the different periods of great revivals, and the Reformation. The apostles were the inspired, infallible, authoritative messengers of Christ; the prophets were only occasionally so, but explained to others with great clearness, what they themselves had learned from the holy scriptures, or from inspired men. "Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge. ." " He that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort." Thus we see they had a special gift for the proper expounding of all scripture, and for the proper application of it to their hearers.

The New Testament prophet was also as the mouth of God, delivering the particular communication he had received, whether designed for instruction or exhortation. No form of ministration gave the hearer such a sense of the immediateness of the divine presence as prophesying, or such a certainty that the mind of God was being expressed. Thus it was the most intimate and direct dealing of God with the soul through man as His messenger. As an illustration of the peculiar power of this gift, nothing can be clearer than the case of the woman of Samaria. " Go, call thy husband," was the voice of God to her guilty conscience. She felt she was in the searching light of His presence, and at once confessed her sin. All was reality now, she concealed nothing. " The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: for thou hast had five husbands and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly." These words brought the conviction home to her heart that she stood revealed before God Himself, and that He who spoke to her was His prophet. " The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet." John 4:16-19.

And now, after thy careful and repeated meditations on this precious gift, what are thy thoughts as to its value? Only one deep, earnest, fervent desire to possess it. Lord, give me this power, is my constant, heart-felt prayer. A thousand times I have mourned my feebleness here. Highest in character, and most desirable of all the gifts, as it gives the anxious inquirer to feel that God is speaking to him, not the servant; that it is the voice of God he hears, not man's; that it is the authority of God he must bow to, not the conclusions of the preacher. There may be many teachers and preachers, whose ministrations may be a comfort and blessing to others, but who are strangers to this divine art-this power of putting the soul in direct contact with God Himself, and setting the soul in the light of the divine presence.

Only one other thought, and we pass on. Whatever gift, or gifts, we may have from the Lord, all must be used in subjection to Him, and regulated by His word. Even prophecy must be " according to the proportion of faith." We must never go beyond our measure; if we do, we shall end in the flesh, though we commenced in the spirit. Unless a man's teaching is in full accordance with scripture, he has no right to consider himself entitled to the confidence of others, however great his gift. So says the apostle, " If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." This is authoritative and unchangeable. The Lord give us to judge all by His own word; whether speaker or hearer, teacher or taught, we have no other standard.

Verse 7. " Or ministry, let us wait on our ministry; or he that teacheth, on teaching." The terms minister and ministry are sometimes employed in reference to the apostles, to teachers, and to all who serve in the gospel; and sometimes in a more restricted sense, as to the office of deacon

and the deaconship. The latter seems to be the appropriate application of the word " ministry" here. The deacons were a class of officers who were to attend to the poor and the sick, and the external affairs of the church generally. (See Acts 6:1-3; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8-13.) And if a man's gift lay in ministering thus to the saints, he was to attend to it. Or ministry, let us wait on our ministry." This is a real service of love, and one most acceptable to the Lord Jesus Christ and to His poor saints, and he who is thus privileged, will show his wisdom by occupying himself in his own gift, and not be attempting that which he is neither called to nor qualified for. Great wisdom and spiritual discernment are required, in order to

use the office of a deacon well;" and distribute wisely that which may be called one's own money, or money entrusted to us by others. We must look at "the poor of the flock" from the Master's point of view, and love them through His affection.

" Or he that teacheth, on teaching." The teacher is one who not only knows and enjoys the truth himself, but has the gift of so unfolding it as to lead others to see it, enjoy it, own its weight and importance; at the same time, the teacher must not be confounded with the prophet, nor teaching with prophesying. The apostle is particularly energetic in keeping everyone to his own work in the unity of the body, and from engaging in a service for which he has no divinely given fitness.

The first thing to be ascertained is the character of our gift, and secondly its measure. And he who serves diligently according to its nature and measure, will be recognized and esteemed by his brethren, and owned of God for help and blessing in His assembly: but on the other hand, if a brother is vain of his gift, mistakes its nature, or pushes it beyond its measure, he is not led of the Spirit, he is acting in the flesh, and when this is felt, his ministry must be unacceptable. And what follows? He complains that his gift is not appreciated-for he has a real gift-whereas, it was the forwardness of nature that was rejected, not the godly exercise of his gift, " according to the proportion of faith." This is one of the bitter roots which sometimes spring up and trouble the assembly of God. The Lord give us all to watch against this with a godly jealousy, so that there may be no ungracious criticisms, unworthy partialities, hard judging, on the one hand, or vain assumption on the other. Lord, give us to be only too happy to serve Thee however small our gift, if it be only to hand a hymn-book to a stranger, or conduct him to a seat. The thought, oh! the wondrous thought-Jesus died for me! is enough to gird thee for the humblest work. Never forget this, my soul, and it will always keep thee humble and always girded to serve.

Teachers, though in some respects resembling the prophets, are expressly distinguished from them. " And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." The apostles were the inspired communicators of God's mind to man, and invested with power to govern in the name of the Lord. The prophets were not only occasionally connected with the revelation of truth before unknown, but used of God in the important work of so expounding and applying scripture, as to set the soul in the light of His presence. Teachers are distinguished from apostles and prophets, inasmuch as they were not necessarily inspired, and are classed with the regular and permanent gifts of Christ to His church. The word of God is the standard by which all teachers must be tried, however great their gift or acceptance. And He gave some, " evangelists, pastors, and teachers." These we have still with us, thank the Lord, and many of them working for Him, notwithstanding the general confusion and broken state of the professing church. Fitness to teach is a gift of the ascended Lord, and which all ought to possess who take the place of teachers. No mere human appointment or education can make a man a minister of Christ. How truly happy to be able to say with the apostle, " Our sufficiency is of God, who bath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life." 2 Cor. 3:5, 6.

Verse 8. " Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity." The teacher has chiefly to do with the understanding, the exhorter with the conscience. It requires great grace to be an exhorter, and equally great grace to receive the word of exhortation. The gift is now rare in the church of God. Few have grace to bring the keen edge of the word down upon the conscience, and at the same time make the person feel that love rules, and that his good is the only object in view. Exhortation includes admonition, consolation; urging to practical duties, dissuading from the neglect of duty, pointing out shortcomings, applying the promises or the threatenings of scripture as the case may be. But we need not dwell on the difficulties of the exhorter, and the still greater difficulty of submitting to the exhortation. They must be apparent to all. Personal feelings are apt to arise and false motives to be imputed; still, the apostle presses the exercise of the gift as needed and wholesome for the members of the body of Christ. The Lord grant that in this day of high-mindedness, of insubjection to the word of God, our lives may be a constant testimony to the will of Christ, and our diligent attention to the things of the Lord both publicly and privately, a constant exhortation to our fellow-Christians. Then it will be not only, Do as I say, but do as I do.

"He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity." The apostle is here speaking of gifts, not of office; and of the manner in which the various duties of Christians, as members of one body, ought to be performed. He whose gift is riches, and who giveth of his substance for the wants of the poor, or the work of the Lord, is to do it with simplicity. Here pause a moment, my soul; allow thyself to be arrested by this weighty caution. Nothing is more difficult than to distribute money according to this word of the Lord. " Simplicity" here means "singleness of heart, fearing God;" and again, " In singleness of your heart, as unto Christ." (Col. 3:24; Eph. 6:5; 2 Cor. 1:12.) How searching is the word of God It guards against ostentation, love of praise, wrong motives, improper objects; and on the other hand, it warns us against all evasive pretexts, such as, " Not convenient, I have so many calls, I am not able to give." At the same time, the Christian is but a steward, whether he distributes what may be called his own, or the bounty of the church, and he is entitled to look for " simplicity and godly sincerity" in the applicant as well as in himself. There are many plausible appeals made for money, which, when carefully examined, are found to be neither simple nor sincere. He must also watch against the artful pleader putting his soul in bondage, and making him unhappy. There is only one remedy for all the difficulties connected with giving, as for all other things. The giver must walk before the Lord with purity of motive, free from all improper designs, and waiting to do His will with an honest, impartial simplicity. When the eye is single, the whole body is full of light; perplexity with darkness flees away, the mind of God is discerned, and the clear light of heaven shines on the steward's way.

"He that ruleth, with diligence." Those who are called to exercise the gift of ruler or leader in the assembly of God, are required to do so with the closest attention and zeal. Much sorrow, alienation of feeling, coldness, irregularity in attendance, might be prevented by the watchful and faithful discharge of the ruler's duties. Prevention is better than cure; and in nothing more so than in a community of free, intelligent, but sensitive minds and encompassed with many infirmities. He needs a skilful eye to watch the countenance, to mark the movements, and to

notice the first change in conduct. One may be observed hurrying off rather quickly at the close of a meeting, so as to avoid speaking or being spoken to. Why is this? It was not so lately. On inquiry, it is found that offense has been taken from supposed neglect, or the heart has been wounded by the apparent partiality of the ruler himself. Misunderstanding prevails.

Such a state of things calls for immediate, faithful, wise, and tender dealing. There may be faults on both sides; grace must reign; still, that which is right must not be overlooked. But carelessness, indolence, on the part of the ruler at such a moment, might be ruinous to the peace and the prosperity of the assembly. The strong must bear with the weak, and everything like partiality, especially on the part of those who have influence in a meeting, must be carefully avoided. Though we cannot love all alike, we must not manifest our love to some to the grief and wounding of others. Vigilance and fidelity must be the watchword of the ruler, but he must not forget to cherish and manifest the love of Him who died for the flock, and rose again to fold in His everlasting embrace His blood-bought sheep and lambs.

"He that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness." This is a fine gift, and one much to be coveted by all who visit the poor and the afflicted. We are not only to show mercy, but to show it with such a cheerful spirit, as to manifest that, if it be a consolation to them, it is a pleasure to us. The value of any service of love rendered to the children of sorrow, mainly depends on the spirit in which it is done. It should be our watchful study to spare the feelings of the poor in our acts of benevolence, to soothe the sorrows of the sick, to shed a bright radiance in the chamber of suffering or death, and always to leave behind us the sweet fragrance of the name of Jesus.

Meditations on the Beatitudes and Christian Devotedness, Cause of Weakness the Source of Strength, The

There are some Christians who think it very humble to be doubting at times their own salvation: but such are always weak Christians, and constantly in danger of being conformed to the spirit, the conduct, and the customs of this present evil age. So long as there is uncertainty as to our own salvation, there will be occupation with self in place of Christ. This is ruinous as to testimony and consistency. When we are looking to ourselves our feelings, doings, experience-the old nature is active. When we are looking to Christ, His love, His finished work, His place in the glory, the new nature, is active. And this makes all the difference between the two Christians. The former is fighting with his own heart that loves the things he is to strive against, but his difficulties increase, and because there is no joy, there is no strength. The latter being set free from self, and looking to Jesus, finds in Him a positive power for conflict and service. When the eye is fixed on Him all other objects are shut out. The new nature and the new object acting thus upon each other, our joy abounds, our strength increases; all useless weights are laid aside and the sin that easily besets us, and we run with patience the race that is set before us. This is the only true principle of the transformation here spoken of.

" But be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable and perfect will of God." We have briefly glanced at the negative side of the second verse- non-conformity to the world, separateness from its maxims and its ways. We now come to the positive side-the renewing of the mind. This is all important. It is the renewal of the whole inner man; the deep springs of the heart which only the eye of God can see. He looks for the renewal of the understanding, affections, and will. Our old ideas which ruled the mind before we knew God and His Christ must all be given up, and new thoughts, new motives, new objects, new feelings, new intentions, as springing from our one new object-Christ in the glory-must have full sway over all the faculties of the mind, as well as over all the members of the body. There must be a complete transformation within and without, by the renewing of the mind. The Christian is a new man in Christ, " which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." Col. 1:10.

Most mysterious, but blessed indeed is the Christian's position as here viewed! He must live, and think, and judge, in his new nature, by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. At the same time he knows that the old nature is encompassing the new on every side, and which, though dead in the reckoning of faith, and according to the judgment of God on the cross, is still alive in fact, and will never fail to strive for its old seat of government in the mind and ways of the believer. This keeps him on his watch tower; from thence he discovers the movements of his enemies, and the mode of their attack. But he remembers the word, " Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." He is no longer in the flesh-though the flesh be in him-but in Christ as risen and exalted, and he knows it. This is the strong tower into which the righteous run and are safe. Thy strength, remember, O my soul, lies not in the number of thy privileges and blessings, but in the Person of thy Lord. Could the enemy beguile thee to count up thy many blessings as a believer, and meditate on these as thy riches apart from the Person of Christ, thou wouldst be little better than David when he numbered his men; or like John and James who were thinking about a good place in the kingdom. Paul desired Christ-" That I may win him." Oh! think of Himself-the blessed Lord! think of the place He has in the favor of God; oh! think with what perfect complacency the Father's eye rests on His well-beloved! and then think of thy place in Him, thy acceptance in Him, thy home, thy rest, thy peace, thy happy welcome in Him, forever and forever. This sums up all blessedness and sets the heart at rest forever-oneness with Christ.

We must now return for a moment to the practical working of this great principle in every-day life. Without the inward renewal which the apostle here insists upon, there could be no discernment of the mind of God, and no real separation from the world. The outward difference between the believer and the man of the world, must flow from the condition of the mind as renewed and strengthened by grace. Otherwise, it would be the merest formality. The path of separation is too narrow for the natural eye to discern. No broad lines are laid down in the word of God to mark the Christian's way through this world; the spiritual eye alone can see the way out of it. " There is a path," says Job, " which no fowl knoweth, and which no vulture's eye hath seen." Chapter 28:7.

Meditations on the Beatitudes and Christian Devotedness, Meditations on Christian Devotedness

While many in the present day are teaching and writing much on the important subjects of consecration, devotedness, and holiness of heart and life: and while many are more or less affected by the general interest which these inquiries are creating; it may be well for thee, my soul, to retire for a little into the sanctuary of thy Lord's presence, and there learn what has been long written on these and kindred subjects. Be assured there is nothing new under the sun. These various aspects of christian character, with the motives and objects by which they are created and sustained, are fully revealed in the word of God. The true ground also on which they rest, thou wilt find there. Oneness with Christ

as the last Adam, the exalted Man in the glory, must be thy standpoint, otherwise thou wilt " see men as trees walking "-thou wilt be confounding that which has its roots in nature with that which is of the grace of God in truth.

Know then, and assuredly believe, O my soul, that thou art one with Him who bore thy sins on the cross, who is now on the throne, and who is coming again to take thee up to be with Himself in His home of love and glory. Wrong ground—a mistaken point of view-leads to great confusion and self-contradiction, to the mixing up of law and gospel, faith and experience, self and Christ. No matter how good our eyesight may be we cannot see without light. Thou must be in the sunlight of thy Lord's presence to see the true foundation and the divine course of all things. And there, O wondrous truth! O privilege infinite! O blessedness unspeakable! thou art at home-at home, as thou art nowhere else-in the concentrated light of heaven's noonday brightness. He is thy righteousness, absolute and complete, in the presence of God; He is thy eternal life, thy peace, thy joy, thy rest, thy glory. Thus arrayed in the moral glories of thy Lord, and basking in the beams of His complaisant love, what hast thou to fear? And know also, O my soul, that all this is true now -true to faith, though not to experience, and always true in the sight of God.

In proof of this, take the two highest notes in the New Testament as to the Christian's position. One is sounded by the apostle Paul and the other by the apostle John. 1. " But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and bath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Here pause for a moment and meditate, not only on thy place in Christ, but on the " rich mercy" and the "great love" of God, which set thee there. What can be sweeter to thy thoughts than this precious truth? And there it is, believe it fully. 2. " Herein is our love [or love with us] made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as he is, so are we in this world." This is a plain statement and must be received in the simplicity of faith. It surely means, that as He-Christ-is, in God's sight, so are we, though still in this world and encompassed with many infirmities. And this should teach thee never to look to self or experience if thou wouldst know thy place and acceptance in the presence of God; but always to Christ as the measure and expression of thy portion there. There is only one other passage that I will bring before thee at present, and this we will call, the dowry of the bride. " But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Here thou wilt see, that by the will and wondrous grace of God, Christ Jesus is made unto the Christian-every Christian-wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

Surely this is a rich inheritance for the individual Christian, the church of God, the bride of the Lamb! And forget not, I pray thee, that these blessings are thine now in Christ Jesus, Head of the new creation, and of the church, which is His body and His bride. Eph. 2:4-6 John 4:17 Cor. 1:30.

We will now turn to our beautiful chapter, where we shall meet with similar truths, though not in the character of a distinct subject, but as the native result of our union with Christ, and of looking to Him as our one and only object in our journey through this world.

Verse 1. I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God which is your reasonable service. The first lesson here to be learned is a very important one-the apostle's style of address. How graciously and tenderly he entreats the saints at Rome as brethren I Great apostle as he was, he places them all on the same level with himself. This, of course, is true of all Christians as regards their pardon and acceptance in Christ, however varied their condition may be as to the manifestation of the divine nature. " One is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." (Matt. 23:8.) But how endearing is the apostle's manner, compared with the high, imperious style of many who profess to be His successors, or at least to be ministers of Christ! " I beseech you therefore, brethren;" this is true humility though accompanied with divine authority. Only nearness to the Lord can give both. But what an example for all Christians, for thee, my soul, when having to do with the poorest of the flock!,

We will now notice the foundation on which the exhortation rests-

" The mercies of God." True christian devotedness evidently flows from the devout consideration of the mercies or compassions of God to the poor outcast sinner. The apostle appeals to the hearts of the brethren as being happily acquainted with the riches of divine mercy to lost and ruined souls. The effect of meditating on this aspect of God's character is transformation to His image, and devotedness to His glory, as our holy, acceptable, and reasonable service. Most blessed, precious privilege! And this holy imitation of the divine character, be it observed, is not the result of our own efforts, but flows naturally from the blessed truth that we are made partakers of the divine nature, as taught more fully by the apostle elsewhere. " Be ye therefore followers of God," or, literally, imitators of God, " as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also loath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor." Here pause for a moment and meditate deeply; the subject is vast and most practical. Talking of devotedness, of holiness, of consecration, what is thy standard? Is it thine own possible attainments by unwearied watchings, fastings, diligence, or what? Self in a thousand ways may be thy governing object, but wrong in all. Could God present a lesser or lower object to His children than Himself, as morally displayed in the Person and work of His beloved Son? Impossible " It would dishonor Himself and the grace He has shown us: and it would be the most grievous loss to His children beloved, whom He would train and bless yet more and more even in this scene of evil and sorrow, turning the most adverse circumstances into an occasion of teaching us what He is in the depths of His grace, and filling ourselves with the sense of it, so as to form our hearts and fashion our ways.... Neither law nor even promise ever opened such a field as this. The very call so to imitate God supposes the perfect grace in which we stand: indeed it would be insupportable otherwise." 1

But one word of inspired authority settles the whole question to faith forever: " Be ye therefore imitators of God as dear children." This is thy standard and the measure of thy devotedness. Being the children of God we are partakers of His nature, and ought never to admit a standard lower than the nature of which we are partakers. God was manifested in Christ Jesus, the express image of His Person. It is in Him that we see our new nature, presented in all its perfection, and in all its fullness, but in Him as man, and as it ought to be developed in us here below, in the circumstances through which we are passing. It is indeed humbling to think that we have answered so little to the call of God to be imitators of Himself as His children. But he has given us an object in which He manifests Himself that He may lead and attract our hearts to follow Him: and this object we know as the one who loves us and gave Himself for us, and the only object the Christian should ever have. " There is a sense," says one, " in which God is, morally, the measure of other beings -a consideration which brings out the immense privilege of the child of God. It is the effect of grace, in that being born of Him, and partaking of His nature, the child of God is called to be an imitator of God, to be perfect as his Father is perfect. He makes us partakers of His holiness; consequently we are called to be imitators of God, as His dear children. This shows the immense privilege of grace. It is the love of God in the midst of evil, and which, superior to all evil, walks in holiness, and rejoices, also, together in a divine way, in the unity of the same joys, and the same sentiments."2

We now return for a moment to the subject of mercy after this rather long digression, but the one passage throws much light on the other and gives greater breadth of truth to the mind.

The word " mercies " is here used in the plural, because it signifies, not mercy as an attribute of God simply, but the compassions of God which have been fully developed in the different instances already enumerated. At the same time, it may have a special reference to verse 31 of the previous chapter, where we find Jews as well as Gentiles concluded in unbelief that God may have mercy upon all. " Even so these [the Jews] have now been unbelieving with regard to your mercy [the Gentiles] in order that they should receive mercy." Thus the Jews having forfeited all right to the promises through unbelief, must be brought in at the end on the ground of mercy. And this God will do when He has brought in the fullness of the Gentiles. But it is the privilege of the Christian to meditate on the mercies of God as displayed in redemption, as well as in His dispensational ways. It was pure mercy that thought of him in the counsels of eternity, that gave him a place in the purposes of God, that wrote his name in the Lamb's book of life, that watched over him in the days of his unbelief, that called him by His gospel, that gave him deliverance from sin and condemnation; that gave him the Holy Spirit, union with Christ, and the hope of His coming; and thereby communion with God the Father, and the enjoyment of all the unspeakable blessings of His grace and love.

This is a great subject. Hasten not over it in thy meditations, O my soul. It is highly practical and may go far to form and consolidate thy thoughts of practical Christianity. Strange to say, the interests of religion are supposed by some Christians to be better secured when the soul is under law and occupied with its feelings and doings, than when it is under grace and feeding on the truth of the divine compassions towards it from first to last. But heed not this false alarm, it is the old cry of this world's wisdom, " The grace of the gospel leads to licentiousness;" but what is it that the fleshly mind will not pervert? Even " the mercies of God " are used as a refuge for living in sin. " God is merciful," we hear people say, " and if we do our best, and live a good, moral, sober life, and show kindness to our neighbor, He will not condemn us with the openly wicked." After this style many speak, but it is always the language of those who are careless about their souls, and who have no heart for Jesus.

True, most true, God is indeed merciful and gracious, but the boundless mercies of God are no refuge to the soul apart from the work of Christ. God has shown His mercy to the guilty in giving the precious blood of His own Son as a safe refuge for the chief of sinners. But if this shelter be neglected the whole universe cannot provide another. The testimony of God Himself is, that " The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin." The blood is the sure token of judgment passed, of holiness, righteousness, and justice satisfied; of the forgiveness, cleansing, and complete salvation of the sinner. But we must now turn to the latter half of our verse.

" That ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." The apostle leaves no room here for the liberty of the flesh, or for going back to the law as a rule of life. The believer is to be formed morally by the knowledge of God, and consecrated to Him as his reasonable service. It is of the body, or outer man, that the apostle expressly speaks. " That ye present your bodies." The body is here viewed as the sacrifice, and the believer as presenting it; so that the whole man is to be yielded up as an offering to the Lord.

But if thou wouldest well understand this character of devotedness, thou must study and master chapter vi. There we learn that Christians are, first of all, to reckon themselves dead indeed unto sin, and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. They are brought into this position by death and resurrection, as set forth in baptism, in virtue of the finished work of Christ. " Therefore

we are buried with him by baptism unto death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Baptism is the symbol of Christians having part with Christ in death. He died for sin, they died to sin in His death. This is the grand fundamental truth of entire devotedness and practical holiness. " How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" Such is the reasoning of the Spirit of God. All true Christians believe that Christ died for our sins, but comparatively few believe or enter into the truth that we died to sin in His death.

But the consequences of not apprehending this plain truth, which the youngest confessor of Christ

is supposed by the apostle to know, are immense and innumerable. From the first struggles with self in the newly awakened soul, to the highest efforts of the pietists and the mystics, the root is the same; it is occupation with self in all. Whether it be the young believer longing after peace with God, or the advanced believer straining after holiness and perfection, they are looking for it within. The eye is turned inwardly in search after feelings, or a consciousness of having arrived at a higher state of christian life. But this is not all. When death to sin is not seen, there can be no real separation from the world, especially what is called the religious world. Hence we may often be surprised to see godly men mixing with the world and helping on its plans and improvements. But the whole system of self-occupation, of seeking to improve the first Adam condition of man, of seeking to attain complete sanctification in the flesh, is judged by the simple truth, that the Christian died to sin in Christ's death, and that in his baptism he owns this, and is bound to walk as one already and always dead to sin. In a tone of disappointment the apostle appeals to his brethren at Rome, and asks the question, " Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized unto Jesus Christ were baptized unto his death?" As much as to say, Have you forgotten the meaning of your baptism, are you ignorant of so elementary a truth?3

In the latter part of the chapter we have this great principle applied in detail, which shews that the body and every member of the body is to be employed in the service of God. It is not enough to say of any one, " He is very true at heart, but fails in his personal attendance at the various meetings of his brethren, and otherwise in using his tongue, his hands, or his feet, in the Lord's service, and thinks he may be excused because of circumstances." Many too are ready to say, who have found a reason for remaining at home, " I was with you in spirit, I was helping by prayer." While this may be true and good in some cases, in others, we fear, it may be self-delusion. The service of the body is as fairly required of the Lord as the prayer of the heart. It is well to know the Lord's claims on the body-on our personal service and presence. " Yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments unto God." The idea of a sacrifice is surely that of entire consecration-of body, soul, and spirit. The devoted victim under the law was slain and laid on God's altar. The act was complete-a complete surrender. Christians are to present their own "bodies" as a "living sacrifice" in contrast with the sacrifices of the law which were put to death. It is a self-sacrifice; but "with such sacrifices God is well pleased;" and the only sacrifice that is holy and acceptable to Him now. All others are profane. The sacrifice of the mass, so-called, and the whole system of ritualism, are a practical denial of the finished work of Christ, and most offensive in the sight of God. "It is finished," was the shout of victory; all was accomplished. " For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified." Heb. 10:14.

Since the one sacrifice of Christ was offered, sacrificial and ceremonial worship, with the long ritual of the Jews' religion, has passed away. These were types and shadows which came to their end by the coming of the Messiah. " The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth." God looks for intelligence in His servants according to the true light. The sacrifices of old had no conscience, no intelligence, no self-judgment, but the " living sacrifice" of Christians is called-" your reasonable service."

But some may still be ready to inquire, " In what sense can it be said that we died to sin in Christ's death, for I feel that sin is as really in me now as it was before my conversion?"

Most surely it is there, and seeks to rule as formerly; this is just what the apostle refers to and warns against. " Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof." So long as we are in the "mortal body," sin will be there and will seek to reign, but we are to reject its claims and refuse obedience to its desires. Our new place of blessing in Him who died and rose again, takes us far beyond its dominion. " For in that he died, he died unto sin once; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God."

Now mark what follows; all believe this verse to be quite true of the blessed Lord. None believe that He died to the love or the practice of sin, but to sin itself. But what does verse 11 Say? " Likewise reckon," not, observe, realize, that we could never do, but, " reckon"-account, "ye also your. selves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Surely nothing could possibly be plainer than this in the reckoning of faith. " Likewise"-in like manner, plainly means, that the believer is to reckon himself dead to sin and alive unto God in the same sense that Christ is. He who denies this, does violence to the word, casts an indignity on the work of Christ, and reaps, as the fruit of his unbelief, a harvest of doubts and fears.

Know then, O my soul, and be well assured of this great truth;-that death is thy only deliverer from sin, and resurrection thy only way to the new creation. We die out of the old state in His death, and rise into the new in His resurrection. This is deliverance. True, happy, heavenly deliverance! Within the gates of glory, in the reckoning of faith, thou mayest breathe freely and sing thy song of victory. No enemy can ever cross the grave of Christ. It is the grand terminus of sin, Satan, death, judgment, the world and the flesh. " The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Oh, glorious liberty! Oh, blessed reality! To be within the gates of thy glorious land, O Emmanuel! To know that no enemy can ever invade thy peaceful borders; that no evil can ever enter there; that no serpent will ever lurk in thy Eden -the blooming paradise of God; that no tree of the knowledge of good and evil shall ever grow there; is our unmingled blessedness, our eternal security.

And there we stand with Thee, even now, by faith, O Jesus, Savior and Lord; we only await Thy coming to take us there actually. " A little while," and faith and hope must give place to the grand reality, the heavenly promise. " And they shall see His face." Faith's deepest hold of truth, and hope's highest expectations, are all fulfilled; we have seen his face. This will be thy heaven of heavens, O my soul; to see Him as He is. But what of thy faith and hope now, tell me? All is well; all is well; every wish is met, every desire is satisfied. I stand with Him who is Head of the new creation. One with Him in whom I died as a child of Adam; one with Him who bore my sins that I might be forgiven and have peace with God. Yes, I say it in the integrity of faith, on the authority of the Lord's own word" in Christ Jesus." And my place and portion there are measured and expressed by Him. This I know, that I am one with Him in life, righteousness, privilege, blessing, glory; and where He is, there I shall be; and what He is, that I shall be forever. John 14; 17; Rom. 8

Oh, happy soul, richly endowed and blessed, thou needest nothing more, only to feed on what thou hast and delight thyself in Him. But thinkest thou ever of those who have missed their way in this dark world, and know nothing of thy happiness? O seek to win such hapless souls to thy Savior. Every soul that thou winnest, will be as another precious stone in His diadem of glory. This is the happy work of the lover of souls-to gather precious stones from the rubbish of this world for His crown; they can be found nowhere else. And are there not many lost souls around thee to whom thou mayest speak, if thou canst not take a public place in testimony? Jesus says, " Come," to the weary and heavy laden; and thou mayest say, " Come;" and even to the chief of sinners Jesus said, "Make haste, and Come." O wondrous words of purest grace, from the living lips of the blessed Jesus! "Make haste, and Come." This could not mean to-morrow, but just at once. A child knows what "make haste" means, and why should sinners doubt and linger?

Hearest thou these encouraging words, my dear reader? Wilt thou come—come just now?

Happily for Zaccheus, he made haste and came. And what did he receive? Salvation! But suppose for a moment he had lingered, doubted, reasoned, delayed, until it was too late, as many did then, and do now? What would the consequences have been? Salvation lost, the soul lost, Christ lost, heaven lost, and all the blessedness we have been describing. But what would be the sharpest sting of the undying worm?-self-reproach. The awful sentence would recall the past, justify the Judge, and fill the condemned soul with speechless agony. " Because I have called, and ye refused: I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded: but ye have set at naught all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when darkness and anguish cometh upon you." Prov. 1:24-27.

Oh, then, my dear reader, as thou wouldest not have this fearful sentence read to thee, with heaven's gates closed and hell's gates open,-come now to Jesus, " make haste and come." Nothing could more express the Lord's earnestness with lost sinners; nothing could more ensure thy sweet welcome to Him: but alas, alas, nothing could more deepen thy agonies, nothing could more fill thee with unmitigated misery, if thou refusest, than thy reflections on that gracious word, "make haste and come." The work of redemption is finished, all is done, thou hast only to yield thy heart to His love, believe His word, and trust the blood that can make thee whiter than snow. But on no consideration delay. O haste thee, haste thee, while the door is open, to-morrow may be too late, the door may be shut, and thy precious soul lost, lost forever and forever. " Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Rev. 22:17.

Having so far cleared the -ground, and shown the foundations of christian devotedness in service, we will now go on with verse 2.

Verse 2. " And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." The connection between the first and second verses is manifest and beautiful. We have the body in the one and the mind in the other; the whole man is brought in. We are also reminded thereby, that mere bodily exercise, though consisting in the diligent observance of rites and ceremonies, would profit nothing without the renewal of the mind. The inner as well as the outer man must be formed morally for God, and His service. Hence the one grand end for the Christian to gain is the discernment of the will of God; and the highest expression of christian life in this world, is the life that is most perfectly subject to the divine will. We have to prove-though we

may be long in doing so-that this and this only is good, acceptable, perfect, and well pleasing in His sight.

This then is thy life lesson, O my soul; and thou wilt do well to study these two verses carefully and together. Meditate deeply on each member of each verse, they are peculiarly full of the most practical truth for the Christian. Obedience, devotedness, subjection to the Master's will, are the truest features of the life of Christ in thee. This is to be thy one grand object-thy constant care-to be like Him! Lord grant a growing transformation' to Thine own image both within and without And now, observe, that the first thing thou hast to learn is how to guard against the evil course of this world.

"And be not conformed to this world." This is a hard lesson to learn. To be personally in a place where the habits and opinions of men rule, and yet to be outside of it morally-in heart and spirit -where the will of God rules is thy lesson. Nothing but the grace of God and a close walk with Him could make thee triumph here. Imagine for a moment, a young Christian fresh in his first love and in the bloom of his new eternal life, actively engaged from morning till night in the city of London, where gold is worshipped, and where everything else is sacrificed to the idol. Nevertheless, non-conformity to the spirits around him must be maintained; and when the hour of closing comes, non-conformity to their ways. Evenings reveal whose we are and whom we love and serve. The happy Christian is ready, with all his heart, for the prayer, the worship, or the instruction meeting, And many such there are, the Lord be praised!

The secret of our strength is the knowledge of Christ and the heart's occupation with Him. We learn to say in such circumstances, Christ is this to me, Christ is that to me, Christ is everything to me, thus it is all and only Christ. And no better school can there be to teach us watchfulness and dependence on Him. The experience is good, we learn our own weakness and folly in the midst of those who would rejoice in the smallest compromise, and become more and more cast upon Christ, and learn more and more of the depths of His grace, the value of His word, and the glory of His Person. Or, as the apostle John puts it, " I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one." 1 John 2:14.

The Christian Spirit: January 2005, Humility and Dependence

Romans 12:3

“I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.”

The Christian’s walk, according to Romans 12:12, should be characterized by devotedness and obedience, and according to the verse before us by humility and dependence.

These four graces, watchfully maintained in the presence of God, would certainly produce a very complete Christian, one very like his Lord and Master, who, though entirely devoted to the glory of God, was meek and lowly in heart. We should naturally suppose that, when there is such devotedness to God, both in body and soul, there would also be great sobriety of judgment and lowliness of mind. But it is not always so. The one is far from being a necessary consequence of the other. On the contrary, there is always a danger of the flesh coming in and availing itself of the power which such devotedness gives, either to assume a tone of superiority and high-mindedness, or to affect a false humility and speak contemptuously of self. This is manifest on every hand at the present time, and it is written on every page of church history. Of this tendency the Apostle was fully aware and warns against it, as we learn from the peculiar tone and energy of his style in this verse.

The words, “I say, through the grace given unto me,” have more the tone of apostolic authority than the affectionate entreaties of a brother, as in the first verse, “I beseech you therefore, brethren.” But we must not suppose that the style of the one verse is less perfect, less consistent or less affectionate than the other, but that the character of the exhortation, in the wisdom of God, required a different tone and style! Firmness is perfectly consistent with humility, and faithfulness with the strongest affection.

The Apostle stands, as it were, at the center of practical Christianity. He sees its bearings on every side. His mind is filled with the higher principles of entire devotedness to the will of God, and also with the humbler gifts, which were to find their expression in the gracious ministries of love among the saints. He writes with decision and energy to secure both. The former he had faithfully commanded in the first two verses, and now he is about to go into great detail concerning the latter. The third verse is his standpoint. He clearly sees and feels, as one standing in the light of God, that high-mindedness would be ruinous to the first and an effectual hindrance to the second. The will of God being the object of Christian service, whether in the higher or humbler sphere, real devotedness must consist in the denial of self and in humbly waiting on God to know His good and perfect will in all things. The human will must be set aside, if we are to enter into the meaning, importance and application of this condensed treasury of practical Christianity.

We now see a divine reason for the changed style of the great Apostle, and we also see that he is most personal in his application of this weighty truth. He does not merely address the church as a body, but he appeals to every one among the saints at Rome —the least as well as the greatest. This will show how prone all are to over-value themselves, even in the church of God and in their service to His saints. Oh, what deceitful hearts we have! What need for watchfulness—for constant communion with the truly humble and blessed Lord, who “loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savor.”

But there is an opposite error into which many fall and which must be as carefully avoided by the Christian. This is an affectation of humility by speaking of oneself in a depreciating manner. When a man speaks of “his small measure, of being the most unfit person for the important work he has in hand,” we feel that he is either insincere or unwise. God never requires the exercise of a gift which He has not bestowed. This species of false humility must be watched against by all who would walk with God in integrity of heart. God is real and He must have reality in us; He is true and He must have truth in the inward parts. Nevertheless, there are those who honestly, but unduly, depreciate their gift and fail to act for God and His people. This is a false modesty and also a serious evil, and one which the Lord must judge sooner or later. But now notice the wisdom of Scripture. This alone, by God’s grace, can give a well-balanced and well-adjusted mind.

“Think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.” The first thing is to find your true place in the presence of God according to your faith in Christ, and then your own place among your fellow-servants. The measure of faith with which each believer is

blessed, in the sovereign grace of God, becomes the proper limit, within which he is to occupy himself according to the will of God. Surely the man who has the greatest faith, who is a father in Christ, and who knows most of the Word of God will rise to his own level among his fellow-Christians where the Holy Spirit rules. The Lord give us to know the measure and character of our gift, what He has prepared us for, that we may be preserved from all extremes. In this, as in all things, the Christian's path is a narrow one and requires spiritual discernment. Nothing short of constant communion with Him who closed His life of perfect obedience on the cross will keep us in the place of true humility, obedience and dependence. May the Lord lead His servants in His own path, preserving them from the indolence that falls asleep, from the energy of nature that would go too fast, from a false modesty that refuses to do His bidding, and from the lack of modesty that would yield to the impulse of the natural will. May we never forget that "unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Eph. 4:7).

A. Miller (adapted from Meditations on Christian Devotedness)

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