

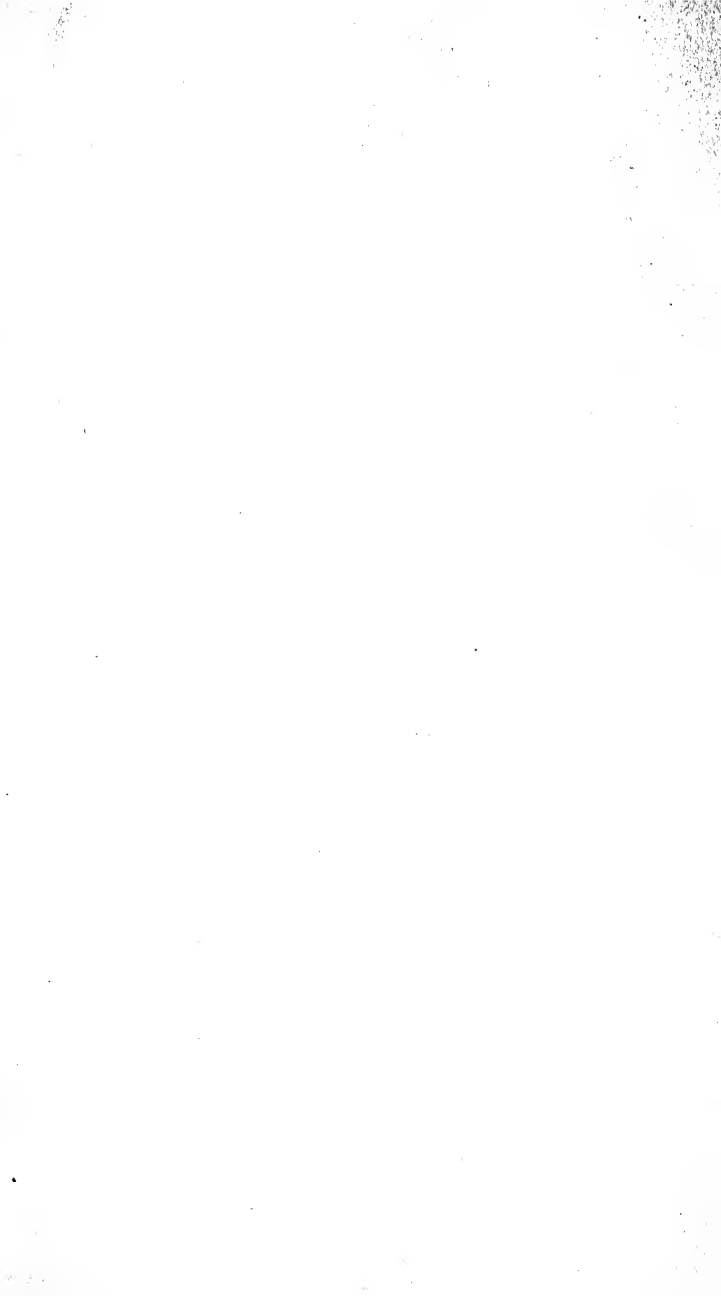
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THE

LIFE AND POWER

OF

TRUE GODLINESS;

DESCRIBED IN

A SERIES OF DISCOURSES

BY ALEXANDER McLEOD, D.D.

LATE PASTOR OF THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, NEW YORK.

FIFTH EDITION.

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY.

BY JOHN NIEL McLEOD, D.D.

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## P R E F A C E.

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PROVISION was made in the constitution of human nature for the exercises of devotion : and, accordingly, men of every age and kindred have some kind of reverence for an invisible Superior. It is upon this principle of the rational mind, not improperly called by moral philosophers, *the Sense of Deity*, that religion of all kinds is engrafted ; and the very absurdities of Superstition and Fanaticism, as well as the enlightened piety of the sanctified soul, are evidences of its existence. A correct exposition of True Religion in Man, must of course, correspond with the most important objects of Moral Science, and be admitted itself as an interesting part of sound Philosophy. “Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.” A delineation, moreover, of the power of godliness in the origin and progress of the Christian’s “new and better life,” is calculated to interest and to instruct the young believer, and to assist the more advanced disciple, in those reflections which are necessary to ascertain both the *fact* and the *degree* of his personal religion.

The Author, during a general, and even an intimate intercourse with Christians of almost all ranks and names, has frequently found himself at a loss, for a work, at once both doctrinal and experimental, to be recommended to the perusal of those who are seeking the consolations of the gospel of the grace of God, and adapted to the actual condition of society in our cities and our country. These discourses, most of which have been delivered in the course of his ministry

in this city, have been selected for the press in order to supply to the best of his ability this deficiency.

For the purpose of introducing more argument and criticism than can be properly admitted into a popular discourse, notes have been appended to the text, wheresoever they appeared to be necessary. If the volume should prove the means of instruction or comfort, to any of those who have been awakened in the midst of the gay and busy world, to any timid, doubting, or tempted believer, the author will rejoice that his *labour hath not been in vain in the Lord*, to whose patronage and blessing it is humbly submitted.

# INTRODUCTORY ESSAY,

INCORPORATING

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

OF THE

AUTHOR OF THE DISCOURSES.

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THE Sermon on Christian doctrine and practice is the highest kind of literary composition. It is so as to its theme, its construction, and its capabilities for influencing the human mind; and it is therefore matter of regret that it is so often employed as the vehicle of error, and made the means of misleading men in the great matters that concern their salvation. The professed theme of the sermon is God, his plan of saving sinners through the mediation of his Son, the heart in its unregenerate and sanctified states, human relations and duties, the future world, and indeed every thing that is really interesting to man. The subject in its comprehensive bearings grasps the universe, and the ability to handle it with habitual propriety is no ordinary attainment. It is presumed that in the composition of the sermon some definite object will be in the mind's eye, and that in its construction and arrangement, the aim will consequently be to elucidate the subject in the best attainable mode, and make it acceptable to those by whom it is heard or read. Thus an opportunity is furnished of drawing upon the mental resources, and bringing to bear the knowledge, the taste, the reasoning powers, and the practical experience of the preacher, for the production of the highest possible effect. Compositions on subjects so momentous, and constructed in such a way as to inform, alarm, persuade, and comfort, cannot fail to be powerfully influential on the lives of men. That God has been pleased to employ the sermon from age to age, as a main part of his instrumentality for bringing men to salvation, is an indisputable fact; for says Paul, "it has pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." And we have on record in the scriptures sermons preached by our Divine Redeemer himself, while on earth.

From the day of Pentecost to the close of the apostolic age, the sermon was the chief instrument in bringing sinners to Jesus Christ.

On the rise of Antichrist when sermonizing ceased, and the dumb show of imposing ceremonials, fostering ignorance and confounding by their mystery, usurped its place, spiritual religion almost left the world. And it was not until the Protestant Reformation brought back the free preaching of a free Bible that it was revived in the hearts of men, and in the professed church of Jesus Christ.

That the *spoken* sermon or discourse presents the most efficient mode of teaching divine truth, we presume will be universally admitted. Why then should not the same form be retained when the pen and the press, instead of the tongue, are made the instruments of its publication? Is there any thing necessarily connected with the form and execution of the sermon, to prevent it from being *read* as well as heard with acceptance and profit? We would not so regard it. But, on the other hand, would rather believe, that its methodical arrangement, its analysis of its subject, and the opportunity for varied and pointed illustration which it affords, are admirably calculated to fix the truth upon the memory, and impress it with power on the understanding and heart.

For the last quarter of a century, the communication of religious instruction by the printed sermon has fallen greatly into disuse; and even among ministers themselves the form of the treatise, essay, or letter has been extensively adopted. The usual reason assigned for this is, that the sermon requires too much thought to be acceptable to readers generally. We are well aware that the properly digested sermon does require more exertion of mind to appreciate it, than less formal and more familiar modes of presenting religious truth; and also, that the form which demands the least thought will be likely to be most popular. Still in this age, when the meditative part of religion is so much neglected, it is a question worthy of consideration whether it would not be better calculated to advance the interests of God's truth, and contribute to the promotion of a more considerate Christianity, if exertion were made by the Christian ministry to correct, rather than foster the injurious habit to which we are referring.

We are happy to perceive evidence in various quarters, that the taste of the religious public is improving in this particular. The occasional sermon, and the volume embodying the series are now frequently coming forth from the pens of modern divines; and in reprints of their invaluable sermons, Owen, Howe, Saurin, Erskine, and others of a kindred character are preaching the gospel to the men of this generation.

The sermons of the Rev. Dr. Alexander M'Leod on "*The Life and Power of True Godliness*" were welcomed by many, in both this country and Great Britain, when they were first presented to the world, some twenty-eight years ago. Their author was gratified by seeing three editions disposed of during his own life, and he was proposing another when he was called to his rest. The time would seem to have

arrived when, though dead, he should again speak through them, of the common salvation in the faith and comfort of which he lived and died. The writer of this essay had occasion to know that Dr. M'Leod entertained and acted upon the sentiments expressed in the foregoing observations, and the recollections of conversations with him upon the subject suggested the remarks in the present connexion. He frequently employed the pen and press in giving to the world the narrative, the catechism, the essay, and the review on theological and other subjects, but his preferred mode of exhibiting his sentiments on moral and religious topics was the Lecture or Sermon. He had highly elevated views of the character of the Christian Minister, and of the power of the pulpit in doing good to men. It was a matter of principle with him to carry as much of the pulpit as possible into his written and printed instructions, and he desired to speak through them to saints and sinners, not merely as a private man, but as a "Messenger of the Lord of Hosts."

The public teachings of the Ministers of Jesus Christ should be an announcement of their own faith, and their descriptions of the experience and practice of vital godliness should be an exhibition of their own sanctified mental exercises. "I have believed, therefore have I spoken," should be their motto. Professing to teach to others the way of life, they should afford good evidence of being themselves taught of God the Holy Ghost; and that individual tampers most fearfully with all his immortal interests who assumes to speak to others on the subject of personal religion, while he is himself a stranger to its life and power. As well might it be expected, that the man born blind should describe intelligibly the nature and properties of the light which he never saw, and whose glories he is unable to comprehend, as that the unsanctified Christian minister should delineate aright the life of faith in the soul, or commend with success to others the excellencies of a Saviour in whom he has no interest for himself. There may indeed be such a thing as repeating at second hand what may have been said or written by others, and giving as our own the elaborations of other minds, but when this is done in the name of religion, it is but a mockery of God, and is likely to be of little benefit to saint or sinner. In the Psalms of David, several of the Epistles of Paul, and other portions of the word of God, we have an exhibition of the Christian experience of their respective writers. They indeed "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," but in guiding their pens, that blessed Agent who was the author of their personal sanctification, enabled them to speak correctly of what they knew, felt, and enjoyed themselves. Having in view these inspired models, we would say, that the discourse on personal religion should be an exhibition of the gracious mental exercises of its author—a picture of his own sanctified heart—the result of his observations and reasonings on the

piety of others. The common sense of the hearer or reader tells him that such should be its character; and when the conviction that it is so fills his mind, with how much stronger confidence does he trust in, and employ it as a help to his own faith and consolation!

Who was its author? How did he live? What were the influences of his doctrine on himself? How did he die? are questions which are naturally asked when reading a work claiming some importance as a guide in the concerns of eternity; and if we can answer them with satisfaction, its influence upon us will be proportionably augmented.

If any are disposed to make such inquiries respecting the author of the sermons on the "*Life and Power of True Godliness*," we are convinced that they can be answered in the most satisfactory manner. Let his work be examined in the light of his own personal piety, of which, now that he is gone, we may be permitted to speak, and it may be confidently said of it, that it is the production of a maturely sanctified mind, which, as it was itself taught by the Holy Spirit, was well able to teach others what it is "to live by faith upon the Son of God." That such was really the case, it is our object to show in the glance which we now proceed to take of his life and character.

It was the privilege of Dr. Alexander M'Leod to be descended from an ancestry, who numbered among them many individuals distinguished for godliness—the only distinction which is worth any thing at the hour of death. His father was a minister of the Established Church of Scotland, who, though he was removed by death nearly seventy years ago, is still remembered in the scene of his labours, as an eminent man of God. His mother, the daughter of a clergyman of the same church, was a suitable companion for such a man, and while the ornaments of good education, polished manners, and extensive social influence were not wanting, the marked characteristic of both parents was an *intelligent, earnest piety*. "The seed of the righteous is blessed." The godly parents had devoted their son to the service of God, and although they both left the world while he was still in early childhood, the influence of their holy instruction and example was powerfully felt on his mind through life. The recollection of his pious parentage was always recognised by Dr. M'Leod as a powerful restraint from vicious indulgence in youth, and a joyous stimulus to Christian duty. After the death of his father, which occurred when he was little more than five years of age, the direction of his education devolved more immediately on his mother, who proved fully competent to the task. Her discipline was Christian. She taught her son to pray, to fear the Being to whom he prayed, and to prefer his service to all other things beside. Mrs. M'Leod survived her husband but nine years. Alexander was absent at school in a distant place when her death occurred, and as an evidence of the love he bore her, and of the strength of his own sensibilities, the

fact may be stated, that when her death was announced to him he fell to the floor overpowered by his emotions, and it was feared for some time that he would be deprived of his reason. To the day of his death the tear would come into his eye when he mentioned her name, and he was accustomed to make it a standing item in his thanksgivings to God that he had given him a Christian mother. How often does the mother stamp her own character upon the child while its heart is warm towards her—like the softened wax which receives whatever impression the seal makes upon it! There is evidence that from the age of five years, the most prominent ruling principles of Alexander's mind were love of prayer, and desire to become a minister of the gospel. The fact is left on record by himself, that when the death of his father was announced to him, he was on his knees at prayer. His earthly father was gone, but the Spirit of adoption, whose character he describes with so much unction in the fourth sermon of the series, was already teaching him to cry, "My Father, thou art the guide of my youth. When father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up." To the accomplishment of his desire to be a minister of the gospel, all his energies were directed until the object was secured. Love for prayer, and its consistent practice, are good preparatives for the service of God on the public theatre.

Up to the commencement of his eighteenth year, Dr. McLeod remained in his native country, and received the rudiments of an excellent classical and general education from a private tutor, and at a competent school. It then becoming necessary that he should enter upon some occupation for his own support, a friend of influence procured for him a mercantile situation, which required a voyage to the West India colonies. He, however, had no heart for such pursuits, and when on his way to Liverpool to join the fleet, he lingered at one of the islands in company with his sisters, to whom he was fondly attached, until, on his arrival at his destination, he found that the fleet had already sailed. No other situation offered itself to him but one that would have brought him into connection with the African slave trade, to which he seemed to have an instinctive abhorrence, though it was then regarded in Britain as a sufficiently legitimate traffic. He rejected it at once. The God of providence was his guide. Without communicating his intention to his friends, he promptly engaged his passage in an American vessel which he found at the wharves, and sailing in her, he at length found himself in the city of New York. He was a friendless stranger, but God had brought him to the scene of his future usefulness. Soon after, ascending the Hudson river, the fall of the same year finds him a teacher of Greek in the city of Schenectady. And on the establishment of Union College, he entered it, and was a member of its second graduating class. His college course was one of distinguished reputation; and as it was proceeding, he enjoyed the friendship of many individuals who subse-

quently became eminent in various professions. Among these were Rev. Dr. J. B. Romeyn, Dr. Linn of Philadelphia, the Hon. John Savage late Chief Justice of the State of New York, and others with whom he continued to be on terms of intimacy and confidence, while life remained.

From the remains of a diary which he kept during the period of his residence in Schenectady and its vicinity, it would seem that this was to him a season of deep attention to personal religion. It was his habit to spend a considerable portion of each day in retirement, which was given to secret prayer, self-examination, and meditation on divine things with the scriptures in the hand. The records which he has himself made of his own exercises, and which were never intended to see the light, exhibit great tenderness of conscience, a very pungent sense of the evil of sin, high admiration of the Mediatorial excellencies, and much enlargement of heart at the throne of grace. During this period, when folly and vice so generally employ the time and waste the sensibilities of youth, he was giving his best affections to God with characteristic energy and devotion. Although we have nowhere found the fact distinctly recorded, there is evidence to believe that Dr. M'Leod had made a public profession of religion before he left his native land. It is, however, matter of record that within the first nine months after his landing in the United States, and while he was in his nineteenth year, he entered into the communion of the Reformed Presbyterian church. His choice in so doing was eminently one of principle. Strong inducements were held out to him to prepare for the ministry in larger and more influential communities, but his understanding had been persuaded, and his affections attracted by the commanding system of scriptural principles which the Reformed Presbyterian church exhibits, and he joined her fellowship with due deliberation. This stand taken in early life he never regretted, and he maintained it with consistency for more than forty years, and until the day of his death. It was the habit of his life not to allow mere worldly considerations to control his movements as to religious things. In the year 1799, he was licensed to preach the gospel, along with two esteemed and intimate friends, the Rev. Drs. Wylie of Philadelphia, and Black of Pittsburgh, both of whom survive him.

In the year 1801, when Dr. M'Leod was settled in his pastoral charge in New York, there was in the city a number of eminent men in the ministry of various religious denominations. With these he cultivated intercourse. He was firmly attached to his own department of the church of Christ, but he found much common ground on which he could meet with other Christian men and ministers, and he was always disposed to take his stand upon it, and act with them for the glory of God and the extension of the Saviour's kingdom in the world. Such men of might as Living-



ston, Mason, Abeel, Romeyn, Miller, and others recognised him as their compeer; by the Christian community around he was regarded as standing in the front rank with them, and his tongue and pen were often employed in unison with theirs in defending the truth of the gospel.

In the year 1802, Dr. M'Leod appeared before the world as an author in the publication of his sermon styled "Negro Slavery Unjustifiable." This was followed the next year by a discourse entitled "Messiah Governor of the Nations of the Earth." And in 1806 to 1808, by his "Ecclesiastical Catechism," and sermon on the "Gospel Ministry," which formed his contribution to the controversy which was at that period sustained so successfully by the Presbyterian divines, against the exclusive claims of Prelacy. These and other productions of his pen contributed largely to bring him into public notice, and they prepared the way for a more extended authorship. The three years between the close of 1813 and beginning of 1816, produced the "Lectures on the Prophecies," the "Sermons on the War," and the discourses on the "Life and Power of True Godliness," all elaborate productions, evincing an intimate acquaintance with their respective subjects, extensive learning, great mental power, and considering that they were written by a laborious pastor, displaying much industry and ease in the art of composition. They all attracted much attention at the time of their first appearance, and have kept their place before the public up to this period in successive editions. We are informed of ten editions of the Ecclesiastical Catechism; the third of the Lectures on the Prophecies has been recently issued from the British press, and we are now introducing the fourth of the discourses on True Godliness. An exposition of the prophecies that has not become superannuated in thirty years is a rare book. And it is deserving of notice as evincing the permanent value of Dr. M'Leod's scheme of prophecy, that one of the main reasons assigned by their very intelligent editor, the Rev. Dr. Bates, of Glasgow, for the recent reprint of the Lectures is, "that having the rare merit of improving by age, they are more undeniably and exactly in accordance with the aspects of the European Commonwealths at the present day than when they were first written." The main design of this volume is to delineate the character and expose the enormities of the Antichristian system, as the great foe of human liberty and spiritual religion. And the touches of a master's pencil are every where manifest in the picture.

The "Sermons on the War" are in many respects a remarkable production. They were written during the late war with Great Britain, and in defence of the American cause in that contest. They discuss the morals of politics, and in them the author substantiates the right of the Christian Minister, to examine by the word of God, all questions of social morality and order affecting the interests of immortal man, and to

weigh in the balances of the sanctuary, the character, the policy, and the movements of nations, as well as of individuals. Their pervading principle is, that the morality of divine revelation should regulate the conduct of men in their civil and political, as well as in all their other relations. Dr. M'Leod was an ardent friend of his adopted country, and her invaluable civil institutions, and while he was no apologist for her evils, he brought the principles laid down in his sermons to bear with great force against her haughty adversary, and in favour of the rights and liberties for which she was contending.

One of the results of the publication of these discourses to the author himself, was to attract to him a great degree of popular attention, which to men of less balanced minds might have proved a snare. It brought him into the acquaintance of many distinguished civilians, and thus opened a new field of usefulness which he did not fail to cultivate. He had no favours to ask of politicians for himself, but he was prompt and sagacious in availing himself of the influence which his intercourse with them afforded, to promote the glory of God and the welfare of society. One of the modes of doing good through the medium above referred to, which he was accustomed to employ, was to engage in correspondence with influential men in the State, on the various questions affecting the public morals, and the interests of religion which came up for consideration, from time to time. Thus when the morality of privateering, of the multiplication of oaths in the transactions of business, and of lotteries, was under consideration in the Federal or State Legislatures, he corresponded with members of those bodies, offering his reasons against those criminal practices. His desire was to promote, as far as possible, respect for God and his law in public men and measures. A single example is presented in illustration of that of which we are now speaking. When the proposition was made in the year 1821, to call a convention for the purpose of forming a new constitution for the State of New York, Dr. M'Leod exerted himself to secure in that instrument a formal and specific recognition of the name, being, and providence of God. For the accomplishment of this object, he held intercourse and entered into correspondence with several of the members of the Convention, among whom were the Hon. Daniel D. Tompkins, Vice President of the United States, and President of the Convention, and Peter H. Wendover, Esq., one of the delegates from the city of New York. With the latter gentleman, when a member of Congress, he was in the habits of intercourse by letter. Mr. W. was himself a consistent professor of religion, and disposed to acknowledge God in all his ways. In conformity with Dr. M'Leod's suggestion he submitted to the Convention a preamble to the Constitution, containing a distinct recognition of the being, providence, and grace of Almighty God, the great fountain of power. With some unimportant modi-

fications it was adopted without opposition, and now stands as a part of the fundamental law of the land. "*We the people of the State of New York, acknowledging with gratitude the grace and beneficence of God, in permitting us to make choice of our form of government, do establish this Constitution,*" is the noble declaration. We do not say that Mr. Wendover might not have been led by the operations of his own mind to offer this dutiful proposition, nor that others might not have done the same had he omitted it; but in making the above statements, we speak what we know. It is well known that Reformed Presbyterians have always insisted that there should be a larger infusion of Christianity into the arrangements of the State, than yet exists; and Dr. M'Leod, as a consistent minister of that church, was always disposed to employ whatever influence he had with public men, in persuading them to do honour to the God of Grace, in bowing before the claims of his Son, as "the Prince of the kings of the earth." Within less than two years after the publication of the "*Sermons on the War,*" the discourses on "*True Godliness*" appeared, and they show that while the public and social bearings of Christianity were receiving attention, the main concern of personal religion was not neglected. During this period of his life, and even after his health began to fail, Dr. M'Leod was actively engaged in the execution of various plans for doing good. He made large contributions to various periodicals of the day; he took an efficient share in the management of different literary and benevolent institutions of the country; he was much engaged in the prevailing religious controversies; and during the whole period his labours in his own congregation were abundant and unremitting. He was in the habits of preaching three times on the Sabbath, and of attending to all the duties of a large pastoral charge. His evening lectures on the Prophecies, and discourses on controversial subjects, were attended by large audiences composed of Christians of various denominations, and of clergymen and other literary characters, attracted by the substantial material, and commanding eloquence of his exhibitions. And thus he was endeavouring, without regard to what it cost himself, to serve God in the gospel of his Son.

Brought in this way with much prominence before the public of New York and other parts of the country, many efforts were made to withdraw him from the Reformed Presbyterian Church, and induce him to enter the fellowship of larger and more popular bodies. Within a few years he was invited to take the pastoral charge of the Reformed Dutch Church in Garden street, and the First Presbyterian Church, New York, and less formally of other large and wealthy congregations in the city and elsewhere. He was also elected to the Vice Presidency of the College of New Jersey, and had offers of a similar character from other literary institutions. All of these he promptly declined. His uniform

language in regard to the former was, "I have taken my stand in that department of the divided church of God which I believe to be most agreeable to his word, and here will I abide,"—and to the latter, "Preaching the gospel is my beloved and appropriate business, and from it nothing shall divert me." The facts above stated, however, are evidence that he was deemed worthy by the community in which he lived, of the highest places in the church, and seats of learning.

But as our great object in this sketch is to show that the author of the following discourses was a man who himself felt the "life and power of true godliness," concerning which he assumed to instruct others, we again glance at his private religious life. It was characterized by attention to practical duty. Even while most engaged in public business, it was his habit to renew his personal covenant with God, and strengthen himself with good resolutions formally recorded. Thus on one occasion we find him resolving before God, "that he will spend less time in the society of mere worldly men, that he will give up companions who afford no religious profit, that he will seek more intimacy with God, and that he will spend more time in preparing for death." There was no ostentation about his personal religion. The ornament of humility adorned his character, but the observing about him knew that even when most employed with the labours of his public calling, he found much time to spend in communion with his Maker. Dr. M'Leod, too, had a large share of the afflictions which are the usual inheritance of the people of God. His bodily health during his whole life experienced many and severe interruptions. Relatives and friends whom he tenderly loved were removed by death. Seven out of eleven of his own children preceded him to the grave, their removal wounding most severely his exceedingly delicate sensibilities; and the untenderness and strife of professing Christians with whom he was called to act were the occasion of poignant grief. Upon the whole, his passage over the ocean of life to the haven of immortality was a stormy one. But how would the heart be able to appreciate the worth of the "Comforter," or be prepared to realize the joyous contrasts of heaven, where there is no sorrow, if it remained a stranger to the discipline of affliction! It may aid in the appreciation of the ninth sermon on "The Consolations of True Religion," and of the sixth, containing the note on the religion of infants, to know that they were composed while the heart was sore from the death of a beloved child. More than one has said of that note, as was remarked by a distinguished living civilian who is not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, when he was mourning the recent departure of a cherished daughter—"the consideration of that note has afforded me unspeakable consolation!" While, however, Dr. M'Leod was often called to suffer affliction, he was abundantly sustained by the consolations of the gospel. And one main source of his support under God, was the

judicious, gentle, and unremitting attentions of his Christian spouse, who in understanding, in chastened affection, and in mature, devoted, noiseless piety, was indeed a "help meet" to her husband. She has followed him to the world of spirits.

Not long after the publication of the Sermons on "True Godliness," the health of their author began to fail under the pressure of his multiplied labours, and although he had projected other works, he was unable to complete them. He however continued to labour on. "I do not expect to live long," he would sometimes say to his intimate friends, "and I must work while it is to-day." In the year 1824, he suffered from an attack of inflammation of the lungs, from which he did not recover for many months. This, as was supposed, set up a disease of the heart, which continued to make gradual progress until it accomplished its work of death. In 1829 and '30 he made a visit to Europe, from which he returned with some mitigation of disease, though no permanent advantage resulted. In Scotland, and Ireland, he was gratified by meeting with several very dear relatives, and in receiving the attentions of many distinguished individuals, and public bodies, and while there he continued to labour in the public service of the Church, to the full extent of his physical powers. On his return home, he resumed the discharge of his ordinary parochial duties, though they were evidently beyond his strength. And sometimes when his friends would remonstrate with him, on the injury he was doing to his health, he would reply, "I wish to die with the harness on." In the beginning of the year 1833, the congregation, whose attachments to him had remained firm and unabated through the revolutions of more than thirty years, called the writer of this sketch to his assistance in the ministry. This event, to a very great degree, removed his anxieties for the welfare of his flock, and soothed his heart, as his last moments were approaching. After its consummation, he seemed to withdraw himself almost entirely from the world, and to give his energies to the work of immediate preparation for death. Within three months of this event, he preached his last pulpit discourse from the text "*to die is gain.*" It was a picture of his own mental exercises, and full of his ordinary power. Once only after this he addressed his congregation in public. It was at the Communion, and within two months of his death. Rising to serve a table, he took, as the theme of his remarks, the "Tree of life," and while the audience was listening with breathless attention to his words of faith and love, he concluded abruptly, with the declaration—"But I feel that my labours in the sanctuary below are about to close. I shall soon go away, to eat of the fruit of the 'Tree of life,' which is in the midst of the Paradise above!"

After this period, Dr. McLeod remained in retirement; and though he suffered much, he had intervals of calm enjoyment in his own meditations, and in edifying discourses with others. His conversation was in

heaven. He was literally delivered from the fear of death, and contemplated its approach with joy. From his knowledge of the usual operation of the disease under which he was labouring, he anticipated a sudden departure. To him who now records the fact, he said, after a lengthened conversation on the subject, "You need not be surprised at any time when you leave me, to find me gone when you return." But he added, with a look of heavenly serenity and joy never to be forgotten, "Be not unduly moved, by the grace of our God I am ready for the change. They speak of the grave as the gate of death, but I call it the gate of life—and I know that when the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, I have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens!"

The closing scene at length arrived. It was the morning of the Sabbath. The writer was preparing for the pulpit in retirement. A request came from the dying father, that the household should be collected, and once more go to the throne of grace together. The writer led in the exercises; the twenty-third of the Psalms of inspiration was sung, and the departing saint joined in it with an audible voice. When the prayer was ended, he turned himself in the bed, fixed his eyes on each individual in the room, and then lifting up his hands, with distinct utterance, pronounced the apostolic benediction. The family having retired, he said to his wife beside him, "It is the Sabbath, and I am at peace." In less than two hours his spirit had calmly departed to the rest of heaven. He had gone to realize what he describes in the last of his sermons on "True Godliness." "*Personal religion was perfect!*"

While the writer was in the pulpit conducting the devotions of the sanctuary, as God was pleased to help him, the service was interrupted by the mournful announcement that the father and pastor was gone. The voice of weeping, not to be restrained, filled the house of prayer. The people were soon dismissed to their homes, and the voice of the dead, with far more power than that of the living pastor, continued to preach to many sorrowing hearts that Sabbath day.

Dr. M'Leod died on the 17th of February, 1833, in the fifty-eighth year of his age, and thirty-fourth of his ministry.

We had not intended, when we commenced this essay, to write a life of Dr. M'Leod, nor have we done so. An old and intimate friend of the deceased, entirely competent to the task, has already done that work, and it will be submitted to the public eye in due season. Our simple purpose has been to illustrate the principle of our introductory observations—to show that Dr. Alexander M'Leod has stamped his own character upon his "*Discourses on the Life and Power of True Godliness.*"

THE

DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERS

OF

EVANGELICAL RELIGION.

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INTRODUCTORY.

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SERMON I.

LUKE ii. 10.—*I bring you good tidings of great joy.*

THE pleasure which a great and good mind always takes in the contemplation of what is extensively beneficial, will account for the interest which the holy angels feel in the work of redemption. Those mighty agents, guided by vast intelligence in all their acts, are indeed commanded by the Lord to serve him in his government; but, so far from feeling duty a burden are they in ministering to elect men, that they take care to demonstrate their own joy, in every step of the progress of the sinner's salvation. The loss of members, which the celestial society sustained by the fall of rebel angels, is made up by the introduction of redeemed men into their high fellowship; and in this they rejoice: But, the superior developement, which is made in the covenant of grace, of the Persons and the perfections of the Godhead; and the superior felicity which is consequently diffused through the intelligent creation, principally account for the angelic ecstasy which accompanied the delivery of the evangelical message announced in my text.

On the night of Christ's nativity, a messenger, probably Gabriel, is sent from heaven to inform the shepherds of Bethlehem of the event which had just come to pass in the city of David. These men had succeeded to the occupation of the son of Jesse, and, after many ages had passed away, occu-

pied the same fields of the wood, which oft had echoed the tones of his harp, before he was called from private life to superintend the concerns of an empire. If they partook of his spirit, they thought, like him, of the promise made unto the fathers. That promise is now accomplished; and fear came upon them when the ethereal messenger stands before them. A circle of light of undescribable splendour surrounded the humble pastors, while the *Angel said unto them, Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy.*

He proceeded to deliver his message. He assured them, that the Messiah of the prophets, the Saviour of sinners, the Anointed of the Lord, was actually born of a woman in Bethlehem-Judah; and he minutely described the condition in which the shepherds should find him. Upon communicating these tidings, he was suddenly joined with a multitude of the heavenly host; and the astonished shepherds beheld them, in the light of the glory of the Lord which shone around them, and distinctly heard them singing, with inimitable melody, *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men.*

*Glory to God* in heaven, and *peace to men* on the earth, are two distinct objects of consideration. They did appear irconcilable; but they are made to unite harmoniously in one principle, now clearly exhibited in the incarnation of the Son of God—*Good will towards men.* In this union, every good mind will rejoice.

May we, brethren, following the example of the shepherds, after the angels were gone away from them into heaven, say one to another, "Let us now go and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us." We too shall find, that the gospel of Christ is, what the text affirms it to be, glad tidings of great joy.

The mere fact, of the humble birth of the Son of man in Bethlehem, irrespective of the design of his appearance, would not, it is true, prove an occasion of such joy to all people: it is the appearance of Messiah according to the purpose and the promise of God, and the certainty of his accomplishing the work given to him to do, that laid the foundation of the hope of man and the joy of angels. It is on this account, the celestial minister called his message to men, "good tidings;" and it is on this account, that we still call the Christian religion, by its familiar name, the Gospel. Admitting then as truth, without any additional proof, what the angel said to the shepherds, That Christianity is indeed good



news, let us illustrate the assertion by a review of its peculiar advantages. We who now preach this gospel have particular facilities for such illustration. Not only do we know that Christ came into the world; but, we also know, that he lived to obey and magnify the law in our room; that he suffered unto death to satisfy divine justice for our sins; that he arose from the dead, and ascended to the right hand of God to administer the blessings of redemption to his covenant seed: and that he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him.

I proceed, then, to lay before you, with all the distinctness of which I am capable,

#### THE PECULIAR EXCELLENCES OF THE GOSPEL.

In announcing my design, I feel myself compelled, in order to prevent undue expectation on the part of my audience, to explain the sense in which I use the terms employed in the proposition.

Gospel, from the German Got-spell, signifies a good word, and corresponds precisely with the original expression in the New Testament,\* literally rendered, as in the text, good tidings. It is the word of Christ in the revelation of his grace: It is Christianity itself, very justly, as well as emphatically, called Evangelical Religion.

The peculiar excellences of evangelical religion are those good things, which belong exclusively to Christianity; and which also are superior in value to any thing which appertains to any other system of religion whatsoever. Every religion, however mischievous in its tendency, and false in its principal doctrines, holds up to view some good things in common with divine revelation. The Jew, the Pagan, the Mahometan, the Deist, and the Heretic who bears the Christian name, may each consistently preach and write many sound sentiments, recommend general morality, and urge the necessity of preparation for a world to come. Any of these may, consistently with his own religion, descant with fervour and with eloquence, though not evangelically, yet in terms resembling sermons from the Christian pulpit, upon the importance of devotion, of penitence, of self-denial, and of benevolence, and so display distinguished talents and erudition. True religion has, nevertheless, its own characteristics.

\* *Ευαγγελιον*, in old English, Evangel, or Evangely. The verb *ευαγγελιζομαι* employed by the angel to the shepherds, I evangelize, is very correctly rendered, I bring you good tidings—I preach the gospel.

It has properties which distinguish it from every other system; and these properties excel.

It is not the object of this discourse to explain the good things which evangelical religion holds in common with any other system; nor shall I undertake to show how far other systems may be indebted, either more immediately or remotely, to Christianity for every good thing which belongs to them. It is my design to distinguish the gospel of the grace of God from every other system, by specifying its own peculiar excellences.

Christianity, alone, establishes friendship between God and man in a Mediator—Provides perfect satisfaction to divine justice for the sinner's transgression—Secures a change of mind from sinfulness to holiness by supernatural power—and, Communicates a full title to a place in heaven on account of the merits of another.

These are its peculiarities. These are the excellences of evangelical religion. Judge ye whether the message, that announces them to fallen man, be justly denominated good tidings.

1. The Christian religion alone proposes to man friendship and communion with God in a Mediator, and effects reconciliation by providing a Mediator perfectly qualified for the purpose.

The most general, and at the same time, the most correct idea, which can be formed of religion, is a friendly *connexion*\* between the reasonable creature and the Supreme being: and every system, ancient and modern, true or false, which bears the name of religion, proposes such a connexion between God and man, as shall secure to the children of men the favour and protection of the Deity.

Socrates, and I select his remarks in illustration, because he was the wisest of the heathen, declared, just before he swallowed the poison that produced his death, his conviction of the immortality of the soul, and of the future happiness of those who live in the practice of a divine life.

An idolatrous devotion constituted the religion of this distinguished man. "We may," said he, "say our prayers to the Gods as it is our duty; and implore them to make our exit from this world and our last stage happy: for I have al-

\* Religion, is from the Latin *Religio*, and that from *Religare*, to bind; because it is the bond of connexion with God. Lactantius ait religionem dici a religando. Sunt dicti religiosi ex relegendo; ut elegantes ex eligendo, tamquam a deligendo diligentes, ex intelligendo intelligentes.—*Cic. Nat. Deorum*.

ways heard say, that we ought to die peaceably, and blessing the Gods." His last words were an injunction upon his special friend to sacrifice, on his account, a cock to Esculapius: and yet, idolater as he was, with all his reputation for philosophy, he gave utterance to sentiments which are not excelled by many professed ambassadors of Jesus Christ. "Athenians, I honour and love you; but I shall choose rather to obey God than you—the divine providence will not be wanting—upon departing out of this life, two ways are open to us; the one leads to the place of eternal misery, the other conducts those to the happy mansions of the Gods who have retained their purity upon earth, and have led in human bodies a life almost divine."

A mediator, too, by whose aid God is rendered propitious, is admitted by other systems of religion than that which is evangelical. A *Μεσιτης*, as the Greeks call a mediator, an intercessor, or an umpire in case of controversy, was often employed by the ancients in settling strife. The idea is also familiar to men of our own age, both in public and in private life, in putting an end to contention between individuals and rival or belligerent commonwealths.

It is easy to transfer this idea to our relations with the Deity. The inferior divinities of Pagan mythology, the demons of Plato and Socrates, and other famous philosophers of the heathen school, the interceding angels and saints of the great Apostacy which, unhappily for the repose of the world, and the purity of the church, bears the Christian name, are so many mediators, employed by the disordered fancy of sinful mortals to restore them to, and preserve them in, the favour and friendship of their gods.

The gospel is distinguished, from those systems of religion, which admit not a mediator, and from those, which propose to effect reconciliation with God by such means, not only by revealing a Mediator of superior excellency, but also by securing the favour and friendship of God *in* him. There is one Mediator between God and man. In him God is reconciled to man. In him man is reconciled to God. In him God and man unite, agree, and have fellowship one with another. Both the parties are not merely influenced to friendship by a proposed arrangement of the causes of variance, but they are both in fact in the Lord Jesus Christ, and *in* him are inseparably united to one another. *As thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.\** This

\* John xvii. 21.

is the fact which alone essentially distinguishes the mediation of the gospel from every other kind of mediation whatsoever. It is a peculiar excellence of the evangelical faith.

Employ, my fellow-sinners, whatever other agents or instruments you please to procure the favour of Jehovah for your souls and bodies; multiply and exalt mediators indefinitely; and still you will find it labour in vain to propose a parallel to the man Christ Jesus. Assign, also, to this same personage, all the employment and dignity of which you can conceive, to the exclusion of the idea of union with God in him, and still you have denied the evangelical faith, and rejected an essential part of the good tidings of Christianity.

God, the only Lawgiver of the universe, is offended at the intelligent creature who prostitutes his rational powers to oppose his equitable government. God is holy, and cannot behold moral evil without abhorrence. God is just, and will not clear the guilty: but he is also gracious, and has provided a Mediator—his own Son. *God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* The Redeemer is divine. Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Possessed of the divine nature, he assumed the nature of man. Forasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself took part of the same. God was manifest in the flesh. Thus uniting in his own person the nature of both the parties at enmity, he is a fit Mediator between them: and both meet, willingly in fact, as well as by nature, in him. In him it pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell. God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. We too are brought to him, come to him, and are found in him. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.

These, then, brethren, are good tidings communicated to us from heaven: They alone reveal a Mediator, who is both God and man, and in whom we have secured to us, by covenant, the intimate and perpetual friendship of a reconciled God.

2. Christianity is the only religion which provides perfect satisfaction to divine justice for all the sins of them who are reconciled to God.

Satisfaction for transgression is, in all cases, necessary to the re-establishment of confidential friendship. It is indeed more magnanimous in the intercourse of man with man to pardon than to punish private injury. In this world of imperfection,

it is more grateful to behold, amidst scenes of sin and wretchedness, instances of grace and mercy, than indications of severity and vengeance. Notwithstanding this benign feeling, which is no doubt occasioned by the constitution of mercy which heaven hath established, in subserviency to the covenant of grace, for the government of the present world, it is still remarkable that no confidence can be mutual between the offender and the offended unless the former has given, and the latter has received, satisfaction. The man who has committed an injury, and has not virtue enough to make reparation, acting upon this principle, is always the enemy of the once injured person, and he who has been aggrieved, although he may forgive, will not confide in the aggressor until, by apology, by compensation, by penitence, or general character, he becomes satisfied as to the friendship of his antagonist.

There are cases, too, occurring in the intercourse of man with man, and of nation with nation, when an evil once committed, or an injury inflicted, cannot be undone or repaired. The penitent may return property, and so repair the injury committed by robbery; but murder is without remedy, because life cannot be restored by created power. Punishment, due in all cases to transgression, must be remitted where satisfaction has taken place; but unexpiated guilt necessarily excludes the criminal from favour under a righteous jurisprudence.

Such ideas of moral order are always more or less familiar to those who have moral faculties; and they are applicable also to our relations with Deity. Men, in every age, feeling themselves transgressors of the law of God, have sought out for some means of expiation; and every species of religion proposes something, either in the character of man, or to be obtained without him, which shall serve as an atonement for his iniquities. While the fanatic proposes his own inward raptures as a covering for his imperfections, men of colder temperament hold up the supposed excellences of their character to shield them from the punishment invited by their misconduct. By far the greater part of mankind, however, look around them for some gift to present to their deities, in order to conciliate their favour. Sacrifices and offerings of this description constituted a great part of the devotional exercises of the heathen world. Voluntary abstinence, pilgrimages, prayers, and penance have also, as well as the slain victim, been severally employed by superstition in giving satisfaction for sin.

A review of the several systems of religion which have from time to time appeared among men, will sufficiently show the universality of some sense of moral evil, and of the necessity of having something to appease the divinity; but it will also show that the sentiments of men unenlightened by the gospel, have, always upon these subjects, been partial and inaccurate. All who do not embrace the evangelical doctrine, with the exception of those few friends of immorality who esteem no crime worthy of punishment, unite in the distinction, which our Reformers exposed in the Catholic Apostacy, of sins into venial and mortal. Christianity alone reveals the necessity of perfect satisfaction to divine justice for every act of transgression, and points out the sacrifice by which it is actually made. If there be any one principle more clearly revealed, more important, and more frequently inculcated than another, it is this: *Without shedding of blood there is no remission.* There is no venial sin: for every sin deserves the wrath of God, both in this life and in that which is to come; and, the Redeemer of Israel, in bearing our punishment, satisfied the demands of justice for every transgression. No other religion, but the gospel, provides such satisfaction. This is of course one of its peculiar excellences. It is good news to the poor awakened sinner, that the blood of the Covenant cleanses from all sin.

I use, my brethren, in this connection, in preference to the word *atone*, the expression "satisfy divine justice" for our sins, not merely out of deference to the excellent compilers of our acknowledged ecclesiastical standards, but chiefly because this phrase, although rarely used in modern pulpits, has not been as yet rendered indefinite or unintelligible. It is scarcely possible to live in the habit of saying, that Christ satisfied divine justice for our sins, and yet deny that they needed such satisfaction. It is scarcely possible to live in the habit of saying, that Christ satisfied divine justice for our sins, and yet affirm that justice also admits of their punishment after it is satisfied. It is not possible for the reasonable creature to believe, that the *Surety* satisfied divine justice for the sins of those who are suffering in the everlasting fire the punishment of those very sins. I readily admit, that the two expressions, "Satisfaction for sin," and "Atonement for sin," are, in their proper, if not in their modern use, perfectly synonymous; and that both exclude any subsequent punishment; that each implies the reconciliation of the parties at variance: and yet, somehow it has come to pass, that very discerning men have made

themselves familiar with ideas of an atonement, which they revere as complete, although it neither satisfies justice nor procures reconciliation. So powerful is the influence of habit, that we use terms, without knowing their import, because we have been accustomed to them. But sure I am, that no man will, in the common concerns of life, in the courts of law, or in the public transactions of nations, consider that atonement as complete, which is not satisfactory, nor that satisfactory, which does not set future controversy aside, produce reconciliation, and exclude further punishment.

Atonement, of whatever kind, always implies a previous understanding between the parties, that what is offered, as such, by the one, shall be received, as satisfactory, by the other. A *Sacrifice* may indeed be made and is often made, without any antecedent agreement, and without any subsequent acknowledgment; but *Atonement* cannot possibly be considered irrespectively of a contract stipulating that the sacrifice shall be accepted as compensation for the offence. The offering, presented with intent to conciliate, may be in itself of little value, or it may be of transcendent worth; it may be effectual or ineffectual to its purpose, if no previous agreement exist: but atonement, being the satisfaction required and given for the injury; it is impossible to conceive of it as either indefinite or ineffectual. This would be to deny the doctrine of atonement altogether. It is probably the mistake of not distinguishing between the *sacrifice* itself, and the *effect* produced by it, that has occasioned so much diversity of opinion among Christians relative to the extent of the satisfaction given to divine justice by the death of the Son of God. The Sacrifice is intrinsically of infinite worth; but, the atonement produced by it, is defined by previous compact—The eternal Covenant of Redemption and of Grace.

It is then a peculiar excellency of evangelical religion, that it secures reconciliation with God upon the footing of perfect satisfaction made to divine justice for all the sins of Christ's spiritual seed. The Son of God became the Son of man also. He is himself the Priest, himself the Sacrifice, himself the Altar which sanctifies the gift. He acted in the name and in the room of his people. He said, It is finished: and God is well pleased. *He, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God; and by this one offering, he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.*

3. Evangelical religion, alone, secures to man a change of mind, by supernatural power, from sinfulness to holiness.

The benefits of pure morals are obvious to every one: and every scheme of religion proposes some restraints upon vice. The very idea of society, includes the use of means for the preservation of order, the maintenance of justice, and for the reformation or punishment of transgressors, in order to promote the public morality. Plans for instructing youth, in useful knowledge, for restraining their eager passions, and for establishing among all classes habits of regularity, have, in every part of the civilized world, been esteemed and recommended. The sense of right and wrong, so universal among mankind, refers, however, to a higher authority, than the spontaneous regulations of social life. Conscience derives its force from the consideration of some invisible superior, who is at once the Lawgiver, the Witness, and the Judge of moral conduct. Men's ideas of morality cannot, therefore, fail to be greatly affected, by the opinions which they entertain respecting the attributes of the object of their adoration: and the moral tendency of the doctrines, if it can be correctly estimated, furnishes an excellent criterion, at all times, of its truth and its worth. However numerous and powerful may be the other causes which affect the condition of morals in any community, we are able generally to learn from it the character of their gods and their worship; and for the same reason we may also conjecture what is the state of morality among a people from a knowledge of the attributes which they ascribe to their Deities. The licentious votaries of Comus, of Venus, and of Bacchus, as well as the ferocious followers of Thor, of Woden, and of Freya, will bear upon their hearts the image of their respective gods.

From the state of Society, from time to time, among the descendants of Abraham, it is not difficult to ascertain, whether they were most in the habits of worshipping the Lord God of Israel, or of bowing the knee to Baal, and sacrificing to Moloch.

While the moral tendency of the Christian religion evinces its decided superiority to every other system, it is peculiarly characterized by making effectual provision for the reformation of the heart and the life. This provision consists, not merely in furnishing the best instruction and the most powerful motives to a life of righteousness, but, principally, in giving absolute effect, to these means of improvement, by the power of the Holy Ghost. Revelation makes present always, to our immortal minds, one infinitely glorious God; the Creator and Governor of the universe, in whom we live, and move, and



have our being, and in whom all things consist. It makes him present to us, in the midst of our wants and our enjoyments, exclusively the object of our fears and our hopes. Jehovah, possessed of all perfection, without one discordant attribute, is himself wisdom, goodness, power, truth, love, immense, unchangeable, and eternal. This, Christian, is your God. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, one God: He is the object of your adoration; to him you are baptized; and from him you receive the blessing.

When God created man, he did not leave him to live at random. He impressed a law upon his heart. He reiterated his precepts with an Almighty voice from the flaming heights of Sinai. He wrote them on Tables of Stone. He gave them to us in the Bible: and he hath made an everlasting impression of them on the tables of our renovated hearts. *Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This is the Covenant that I will make with them; after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them.*

Christianity provides directions for every relation and every condition of life. It is a rule of conduct to the magistrate and minister, to the father and the son, to the husband and the wife, to the neighbour and the stranger; and especially to the whole household of faith. It is a lamp suspended over the path of the poor, the industrious, and the opulent, which gives light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. It allays resentment. It cherishes contentment. It encourages magnanimity, benevolence, and beneficence; and sanctifies the disposition to piety and truth, until the man of God be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

Evangelical religion describes holiness in the clearest terms; requires it by the purest precepts; illustrates it by the best examples; and urges it by the tenderest motives, and under the most awful and solemn sanctions: But it is peculiarly distinguished from every other kind of religion, of whatever name, by certainly providing for the communication of holiness to the mind of sinful man, by supernatural power. In this, the gospel stands alone. In recommending morality, other systems may imitate, though they cannot equal it; but, this alone provides the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.

Fallen man is, by nature, a sinner. *He is dead in trespasses and in sins*—"wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body. By this original corruption," I use

the words of our ecclesiastical standards, "we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good. Man, by his fall, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good—He is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto." Man is indeed naturally a moral agent. Intellect, he possesses; Conscience, he possesses; Will, he possesses. He is, consequently, a subject of moral law and government. He has the power of perceiving what is before him; the sense of right and wrong; and liberty of choosing his own course of life. These are moral faculties; they constitute him a moral agent. They are natural faculties; they are a part of the constitution of human nature: But no exertion of these faculties, unassisted by supernatural power, can possibly produce holiness. Enlarge them as you will; strengthen them, indefinitely, if you please; without divine grace, there is no ability to will or to do what is spiritually good. However powerful the intellect, it is still spiritually blind. However acute the moral sense, it is still the guilty conscience. However efficient the will, it is still but vigorous in evil. This is human nature corrupted. Give it what degrees of power you will; increase it again ten thousand fold; let it at once exert all its ability: This augmented natural ability, in all its exertions, is evil continually. It is impossible it were otherwise; for it is nature still. Whatsoever is born of the flesh, is flesh: and the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. It is still corrupt nature. *So then they that are in the flesh, cannot please God.* There is no remedy, but a change of nature: and a change of nature requires supernatural power.

To be carnally minded, is death. Yes, brethren, it is death; and if there be natural ability in fallen man to effect upon himself regeneration of nature, then is death no longer the extinction, but the creator of life. Then, too, shall bodies form themselves from the dust: souls shall become their own creators: the dead shall by their own ability burst forth from their tombs: worlds shall call themselves into existence; and we shall cease to insult your understandings with the delusive evangelical message.

But, no! brethren; rather let every mouth be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God. I bring you good tidings. What is impossible with man, is possible with God. Although by nature dead, your life is hid with Christ in God. And you hath he quickened, who were dead in tres-

passes and sins: For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works. It is the Spirit that quickeneth. Whatsoever is born of the Spirit is spirit. He that began this good work shall carry it on to the day of Jesus Christ. For whom he did predestinate, them he also called; whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified. We all with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, shall be changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.

4. Evangelical religion secures for believers a title to a place in heaven, on account of the merits of another—the merits of their Redeemer.

By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Every religion, I am aware, proposes to its devout followers, exemption from endless punishment, and happiness in the world to come. So far, these systems occupy common ground with the gospel; and alas! many who profess the faith of Jesus Christ, are contented to occupy no more, through life, than common ground with them. They found their hopes of future happiness, upon some inherent or acquired excellency, distinguishing themselves from others of their fellowmen. These qualities, of their personal character, upon which their hopes repose, may, indeed, as custom, or education, or convenience dictates, be represented as conferred upon them by favour from on high; and thus, while they speak in terms of modesty, and cast the veil of affected humility, over their pride; they still rest their hopes of admission into heaven, upon some attribute of their own moral character, whatever may be the manner in which it was communicated or acquired. Ascribe, as you please, my hearers, the good qualities of your heart and life, to your natural constitution, to your improvement of opportunities, to your friends, to your education, to your church or country, to the general providence or the special grace of God; refer your personal goodness to whatever source, if you rest upon it your title to celestial blessedness, and make it the foundation of your faith and your hope, you subvert the gospel, and are not yet essentially different from the heathen. The righteousness of Jesus Christ, the Mediator, is alone the condition of the gracious

covenant which provides for the salvation of human sinners. Upon that only is the promised beatitude suspended by Jehovah: that alone constitutes the title of believers to the everlasting inheritance. Good qualities, supernaturally communicated, do indeed belong to believers: good works, by the grace of God and the influence of the Holy Spirit, are certainly performed by them: Without personal holiness, no man shall see the Lord in heaven: Our sanctification, even unto perfection, is our *fitness* for the company and the enjoyments of the celestial mansions; but the merits of Christ's obedience and death, is alone our *right* to the possession of eternal glory. Other foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

It is a peculiar part of the evangelical message, to offer, upon the divine authority, this good title to miserable and condemned sinners. The reception of Christ's righteousness, is the reception of the title to happiness. Union with Jesus Christ is alone the means of communion with him in his perfect righteousness; and this union is effected by faith in his name. *He that believeth shall be saved. There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.* Had our own superior improvement of means, been the ground of our acceptance with God, or the cause which made us to differ from our fellow-sinners, then indeed should we have cause to boast of that superiority. Then should we reverse the language of the saints, and say, Lord, unto us, Lord, unto us, be at least a share in the glory. Were our title, to repose among the blessed, founded upon our own intrinsic merit, in obedience to the divine law, then too doth righteousness come by that law, and Christ is dead in vain. We, however, have not so learned Christ. God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord. He loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood; he made us kings and priests unto God; and unto him be the glory for ever and ever. AMEN!

#### CONCLUSION.

From this review, of the distinguishing excellences of evangelical religion, *we* may derive an argument for preaching the gospel of God with fidelity; and *you* may learn how to receive the glad tidings. Let us join these two together in the concluding remarks.

Seeing the gospel of the grace of God is *good news* to all people, it is an *honourable office* with which its preachers are invested; and it is *worthy of all acceptance*.

Angels are not unwilling to consecrate their time and their talents to the publication of this gracious message ; and shall not we, who hope for the salvation of our own souls, take pleasure in delivering to you the truth as we have ourselves received it from the Lord ? No time, no talents can be better or more agreeably occupied than in this employment.

To preach, is to *publish as a herald*, not merely an amnesty for the rebel ; not that he may be introduced in oblivion of the past into a new probation : it is to publish permanent pardon and perfection of blessedness, procured for the chief of sinners by the Son of God, and freely offered in his name for ever and ever. In preaching the gospel we *announce facts* certified to us by the testimony of God ; we *declare the doctrine* revealed for the instruction of men in righteousness ; and we *offer to sinners everlasting life*. If these subjects are not worthy of our best exertions, when we stand forth on the Lord's day to address the assembled people, it is impossible to conceive of any thing that should command attention or inspire with persuasive zeal.

The FACTS, which it is our privilege to announce to our brethren, are of the most interesting kind. They are supported by evidence not to be questioned—the divine testimony. They respect God, and man, and the only Mediator between God and man, together with all that Jehovah has done for the salvation of his fallen, offending, and unworthy creatures. *Come, hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.* The existence and perfections of God ; the existence, the fall, the guilt, the corruption, and the misery of man, are facts presupposed in the revelation of grace ; but they are distinctly asserted in the sacred volume, and repeatedly set forth as articles of our faith. The appointment of a redeeming Head before the world began ; the appearance of the Son of God in our nature ; his birth, life, death, and resurrection ; the perfection of his atonement ; the efficacy of his intercession ; the glory and power of his exaltation ; his superintending providence ; his miracles ; his gracious influence on the souls of his sons and his daughters, all are facts, declared in his word, which we are employed to announce for your information, and which you are under obligation to receive with full assurance of faith in the veracity of God.

In announcing the peculiar facts, asserted in the revelation of divine grace, we are neither to forget nor to conceal, that many of them are mysterious and inexplicable by man. This

inexplicability is, however, no reason why we should not proclaim the fact, or why you should not believe it when proclaimed in the name of the Lord. It is no apology for infidelity. When we make a demand upon your faith in a matter of fact, it is not in the *explanation*, but in the *reality* of the fact, that we require you to believe. We call your attention only to the evidence that so it is; and we do not pretend in every case to understand or to explain how this comes to be the case. You see the sun. This is the fact. I understand the assertion. You, too, understand and believe it, on the testimony of your own senses. But the unlettered man knows nothing of the laws of vision; nor is the philosopher capable of explaining the nature of the solar ray and of the body from which it emanates: much less can he declare the manner in which the soul holds communion with matter in the perception of outward objects. We are surrounded with mysteries. Every phenomenon in the natural world, every event in the moral world, leads immediately or ultimately to something inexplicable. It must be so. We are finite creatures. However proud and aspiring, we have but limited capacities. The ministers of the gospel may not pervert this principle for the purpose of uttering absurdities, or demanding of their hearers faith in contradictory assertions.

We are not to explain what we do not understand, nor to utter any proposition which is not intelligible. It is impossible to believe any assertion further than its meaning is comprehended. Facts inexplicable are nevertheless daily admitted; and the admission is reasonable. The *evidence* is one thing, and the *explanation* another.

There are three great facts, to be announced by evangelical ministers, against which, on account of their importance, almost all heresy militates. The union of three persons in the Godhead, the union of two distinct natures in the person of Jesus Christ, the union of all believers with their Head and Lord. They are great mysteries, inexplicable indeed in many respects, but asserted in language perfectly intelligible. The evidence of these facts, is the testimony of God that cannot lie.

“There are three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one God.”  
“The Redeemer of God’s elect, is both God and man in two distinct natures and one person.” “All believers are spiritually and mystically, really and inseparably united to Christ.”

These are the great mysteries of our religion. There is

no error of importance in relation to personal piety, which does not militate against some one of those scriptural facts. They are, however, all asserted in the word of God. The terms of the assertion, are as easily understood, as the following familiar expressions: the grass grows, the tide flows, and the wind blows. The assertion in all these cases meets with full credit, although we should never be able to explain or comprehend the whole doctrine of vegetation, or of the currents of the air and the ocean, in all its parts and principles. And it is as reasonable to believe what God declares in his holy word, as it is to credit what he reveals to our senses in the constitution of the world. With confidence and with delight, we preach these facts in the congregation; and with faith you embrace them. So did the apostles. *We believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.*

2. Preaching the gospel also includes a DECLARATION of THE DOCTRINES OF INSPIRATION for your instruction in righteousness. Every fact asserted, is itself a doctrine to be taught; and all the facts upon record in the Bible are designed to establish and illustrate principles to be expounded and applied. *All scripture is profitable for doctrine.* The lights of revelation, kindled by the grace of God in the church which he hath redeemed, are committed to the ministers of religion, that, as lamp-bearers, they may hold them up constantly burning in the sanctuary. To us it is pleasant, brethren, and for you it is safe, that this light be kept pure, and constant; that it be made to shine on the heart and the path of every pilgrim; and that it be diffused over all lands. Vain is their worship who teach or observe, for their doctrines, the commandments of men: But the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The manifestation, the defence, and the application of truth; of religious truth; of revealed truth—this is the great work to which the ministers of Christ consecrate their time and their talents, their studies and their discourses. It is both their business and their joy. If the truth should be obscured, or concealed, or perverted, although the forms of religion should continue, religion itself would become dark, and cold, and deadly. *If the gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.* It is in the light of the Sun of Righteousness that believers grow up as the calves of the stall. The doctrines of true religion, coming on the renewed intellect in the Holy Ghost and with much assurance, the

saints advance in holiness and in comfort through faith unto salvation.

3. Preaching the gospel of God with fidelity implies **THE OFFER OF LIFE AND IMMORTALITY**, in Christ Jesus our Lord, to every sinner.

The assertion of matter of fact, and the exposition of doctrine, both lead to this application. Hereby, the door of faith is set open to the Jew and the Gentile, the bond and the free. Every gospel hearer is invited, commanded, entreated, to come to the Lord our Redeemer for eternal life. Christ is the gift of God. In him alone is salvation. He is the Covenant, and in him are all the promises of God. He himself, with all his grace and his blessings, is freely offered to sinners of the human family. In making this offer—the gospel offer, we require of you no previous qualification. We offer him unconditionally to sinners. We preach the gospel to every creature. We wait not for your previous reformation; for your previous conversion; for your previous repentance or conviction. In him alone are life, and righteousness, and holiness. You are sinners. You have need of a Saviour, whether you are sensible of it or not. The greater your insensibility, the greater your need. “Christ came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and turn unto the Lord. He that believeth shall be saved.” We offer Christ and salvation to you upon the authority of God, because you have need of him: for no other reason derived from your own character, but that you are by nature in an estate of sin and misery. Evangelical preaching, by making such an offer, *sets open the door of faith* to the sinner, more clearly, more freely, and to a greater extent, than any system of heresy ever can consistently do. We make this unconditional offer upon solid grounds, and without coupling it with false doctrines. We offer salvation in Jesus Christ to the chief of sinners, as a matter entirely and exclusively of the grace of God; not upon the ground of God’s ignorance of those who shall accept and be saved: *for the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his.* Not upon the ground of man’s innate ability to receive the offer: *for no man can come except the Father draw him.* Not upon the ground of the undeterminateness of the number that shall be saved: *for as many as are ordained to eternal life, shall believe.* Not upon the ground of an indefinite, unsatisfactory, uncertain atonement irrespective of God’s



covenant ; for Christ laid down his life by previous contract, and the blood of atonement *is the blood of the Covenant*. No, beloved brethren, we do not offer you the salvation of God upon false principles ; but upon the authority of the divine commandment requiring us to do so ; and in the full assurance, that as to matter of fact, there never was a single instance, and there never will be an instance, in the history of the universe, of a sinner, embracing the offer by faith in Christ Jesus, who shall not certainly inherit eternal life. The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it, *He that cometh shall in no wise be cast out ; To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God*. So we preached and so ye believed, that the teacher and the taught may rejoice together in “the glad tidings of great joy.” AMEN.

## THE NATURE AND ORIGIN OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

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### SERMON II.

JOHN iii. 7.—*Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.*

THE great importance of the Christian religion is universally admitted by all who have intelligence enough to form an opinion for themselves upon the subject. Those who have, for centuries, laboured in vain to disgrace and to destroy it, confess their belief of its vast influence over human affairs; and they who, from whatever motive, have appeared, from time to time, in its defence and propagation, acknowledge its excellency and its usefulness. Those, who are happy enough to feel its power, are not, of course, ignorant of its inestimable worth. They know assuredly, that this is the *one thing needful*; that, compared with its enjoyments, *all other things are but loss*. What inquiry can therefore be more worthy of the reasonable creature, than that which has for its object the principles of Christianity?

There are three ways, my dear brethren, of considering, for our own improvement, that religion which we believe, enjoy, and inculcate. In all these we have in the holy Scriptures an infallible guide. We may consider it, As it was laid down, before the world began, in the divine counsels—As it was taught, secured, and exemplified in the life and death of our Lord Jesus Christ—and, As incorporated in the belief, and experience, and practice of renewed man.

The first of these modes is the most scientific, and is usually pursued in teaching the students of theology a knowledge of the sacred system: the second is most commonly followed, in their pulpit exhibitions, by those preachers who are determined not to know any thing among their hearers save Jesus Christ and him crucified: and the third is occasionally employed, both from the pulpit and the press, with design so to apply as

well as expound the Christian doctrine, as to discover to the anxious inquirer his own actual condition in relation to personal religion.

It is the last of these modes which I have resolved to pursue in the series of discourses which I now propose to deliver. I begin with a description of that wonderful change which is effected upon sinful man by divine power, when he first becomes a true Christian. To this object my text directs your attention. *Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.*

You will find, by inspection of the passage of Scripture in which these words occur, that they were originally addressed by our Saviour to a man of Israel, of high distinction in Jerusalem, whose name is Nicodemus. The whole conversation is interesting and instructive; and the circumstances under which it took place, give aid in its illustration.

Our Lord had now, for the first time in the course of his public ministry, made his appearance in the capital of Judea, the centre of ecclesiastical polity, and the place where God recorded his name. Here stood the temple of the Lord; and here the males of Israel, assembled from all parts of the world, met three times in the year to observe the prescribed solemnities. It was on the feast of the Passover, the most remarkable of their holy convocations, when the Son of God ascended Zion Hill, and entered into his Father's house, in the presence of the Sanhedrim, the officiating priests, and the worshipping hosts of Israel. Humbled as he was, voluntarily appearing in the form of a servant, he displayed to their astonishment, in the Temple of Jehovah, the purity and zeal of his heart, the dignity of his office, and the divinity of his mission. He spake with authority; he banished from the gate those who by their merchandize polluted the sanctuary; and he performed miracles which led many to believe in his name. This took place on the day after the paschal supper, *the first and high day* of the subsequent festivity. It is probable, that before the rulers of the Jews had recovered from their astonishment, or had time to concert plans of opposition to the cause of Christ, that in their conversation about the events of the day, they generally admitted the extraordinary mission of Jesus, as a prophet of God, if not the Messiah: and it is certain, that Nicodemus visited him at night, to obtain further knowledge upon this important subject. He was himself a member of the council; of the sect of the Pharisees; and, if the Talmud be correct, also a priest, and at this solemnity the officiating minister who presided over the waters that were

employed for sacred purposes, and which, by figure, represented the purity of heart and life required of the worshippers of God, and communicated by the Holy Spirit to all who believingly ascend the holy hill. Whether from timidity, or from zeal to embrace the first opportunity, he approached, under the shades of night, the lodgings of the Son of man, and addressed him with great candour and respect. The reasonings which he employed as the ground of his own convictions, and those of his associates, are certainly worthy of a man of understanding and personal integrity. *Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.* The Redeemer immediately replied to this respectful address, by urging the necessity of regeneration to a life of holiness and happiness: *Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* The sudden manner in which this doctrine is introduced by our Saviour, in reply to the salutation of the counsellor, has puzzled the commentators to account for it to their own satisfaction: But if Nicodemus was indeed, during the day, the officer who presided over the dispensation of baptismal water, in the numerous Jewish purifications, as it was his business to explain the doctrine of inward holiness in expectation of the kingdom of God, the immediate introduction of this subject will appear perfectly in character. This also shows the aptness of the allusion to water in connexion with the Spirit in verse fifth; and resolves the difficulty under which critics have laboured from finding the definite article\* used in connexion with "*Master of Israel,*" in the tenth verse. He was, on that day, the teacher of Israel in this very doctrine of holiness, of the nature and origin of which he was still himself so completely ignorant.

Nicodemus Ben Gorion was rich, intelligent, and influential. He was a man of candour, of diligence, and of irreproachable morals. He was eminent as a professor and a teacher of revealed religion, and consistent in his conformity to the established ritual. He was not only what passes in the church for a good religious man; but, moreover, a dis-

\* Ὁ Διδασκαλος, *The teacher of Israel*, by way of eminence. As such, our Saviour spoke to him; and the application of the true doctrine, of the nature and origin of the religious life, under such circumstances, to Nicodemus personally, gave peculiar point to the whole conversation. How many teachers still dispense baptism, and preach about conversion and holiness, while ignorant of the nature of regeneration!

tinguished minister in the sanctuary ; and yet, he was an entire stranger to the life and power of godliness.

No wonder, then, that he appeared confounded at the doctrine of the new and second birth : no wonder he would be struck by the pointed application, which our Saviour made to *him*, of the principle which he previously laid down in relation to every man, *Ye must be born again*.

The text leads me to describe the nature of regeneration or the second birth—and the necessity of it to him who would enjoy the benefits of religion.

I. The nature of the change, required in the text, is to be explained from the scriptures.

Thoughtless men who have been brought up, from infancy, in a Christian land, do not inquire into their own state ; but are contented to live in the profession of Christianity without anxiety for any thing more than the name or the outward forms of religion. They may, it is true, have heard and believed the superiority of the Christian faith to infidelity and idolatry, and so be proud of its excellencies, while they view with detestation or pity the Deist or the ignorant Heathen. They may, sometimes, have caught fire from the altar of party, and have flamed with zeal for the propagation or defence of their own system, and so become satisfied, that they are earnest in the faith, and active in the duties of Christianity, while they are utter strangers to true religion. Generally, however, they bring down religion to the standard of their own formality ; and discard entirely that holiness of heart and of life which is essential to its existence. Those who have come to mature age without the knowledge or belief of the evangelical doctrine, are more apt, in making a profession of religion, to attach importance to the terms, by which conversion is represented ; but they, too, equally with the former, are liable to deception ; and in danger of mistaking any alteration in their views, their feelings, or their conduct, which may have a devotional tendency, for the change of mind effected by the Spirit of God. It is, therefore, of the greatest importance to all, to understand the true nature of the Christian life in its origin and progress to perfection.

I proceed, accordingly, to give you ample evidence of *the Fact, that there is such a change—That it is produced by the power of God's grace—That it is a spiritual change communicating a new life—That this life is instantaneous in its communication, although progressive in its effects*.

1. The Christian religion effects, upon all its actual sub-

jects, a change of mind for the better.\* It is, indeed, universally admitted, by all who pay any respect to the doctrines of the bible, that this is the case. However they may differ as to the nature, the extent, and the importance of the change, there is no disputing the fact.

A little attention, too, paid to the scriptural expressions by which the change is designated, is sufficient to show, that it does not consist in a mere outward alteration of conduct or connexions; in exchanging one set of speculative opinions for another; in transient exercises of will upon novel objects; or in any evanescent emotions, whether of love, or of hate, of grief, or of joy. Let me not be misunderstood. A change of appearances there is: a change of feelings there is: a change of acts and of exercises there is: but this is not all: there is also a change of nature.† *If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*‡ It is not a new covering for the old man, or a new lining for the old vessel. It is a new man, a vessel of mercy for the master's use.

The names applied in the sacred oracles, to the change which gives origin to the Christian life, prove that it does not consist in appearances, or in mere exercises of intellectual or active power. It is called, in language neither hyperbolic, nor designed to mislead our sober judgment, by such names as indicate an entire renovation of the human mind as to its religious character.

It is a *Regeneration*: Tit. iii. 5. According to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. It is a *Quickening into life*: Eph. ii. 5. Even when we were dead in sins, (God) hath quickened us together with Christ. It is a *New birth*: John iii. 3. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. It is a *Renova-*

\* *Μετανοια*. A change of mind for the better.—*Camp. Diss.*

† It is such a change of mind as renders it natural for man to feel, and to will, and to act differently from what he did, or could possibly do, before it came to pass. Hear the words of a man of sense and piety speaking of this subject. "By a principle of nature in this place, I mean that foundation which is laid in nature, either old or new, for any particular manner or kind of exercise of the faculties of the soul; or a natural habit, or foundation for action, giving a person ability and disposition to exert the faculties in exercises of a certain kind; so that to exert the faculties in that kind of exercises may be said to be his nature."  
—*Edwards on the Affections.*

‡ 2 Cor. v. 17.

*tion of the intellectual powers of man*: Col. iii. 10. The new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him. It is a *Renovation of the active powers of man*: Ezek. xxxvi. 26. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you. It is, in fact, a **NEW CREATION**: Eph. ii. 10. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

2. The change designated by these expressions is effected exclusively by the power of God.

The uniform testimony of scripture proves this to be the case: The experience of the saints in every age is a constant admission of the fact: and, indeed, from the nature of the subject, it is impossible it were otherwise.

I begin, brethren, with the testimony of him who made you, who cannot be deceived himself, and who practises deception upon no man. He is best able to describe the cause of that holiness in man, which prepares him for eternal felicity; and to unfold the character of the regeneration, without which we cannot see the kingdom of God. His word is the only foundation of your faith. Upon it I rest for proof of my position. Search the scriptures. Every where you find, not only that *the preparations of the heart in man are from the Lord*; but also that all other agency is, in this case, ineffectual without his grace and power: *so then, neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase*. It is easy to multiply quotations; but the limits which I have set to myself in this discussion do not permit that I should cite more than three witnesses to the truth which I affirm. These, I hope, will by you be deemed sufficient. The testimonies of a prophet, of an apostle, and of Jesus Christ, the faithful and true Witness, are adequate to the purpose. The Prophet exhibits the Author of regeneration, and describes the nature of the saving change. The Apostle, describing the same work, not only ascribes it to the power of Jehovah, but excludes the pretensions of other causes. The Redeemer of men asserts the same doctrine, and refers the effect to the Almighty, whom we all adore. Hear and believe.

Ezek. xi. 19. "Thus saith the Lord God—I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you, and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and I will give them an heart of flesh; that they may walk in my statutes."

John i. 13. "The sons of God—that believe in his name

—*which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*”

John v. 17, 21, 24. “Jesus answered, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work—So the Son *quickeneth whom he will*—Verily, verily, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me—*is passed from death unto life.*”

Thus, we see very plainly, that the conversion of the sinner—his translation from death into life, is *by the working of his mighty power*, who raised our Saviour from the dead.

The experience of believers, in every age, admits and enforces this precious truth. Very few who make a profession of Christianity have acquired the hardihood necessary to declare, without hesitation or disguise, that they owe their conversion and sanctification to their own exertions, or to other created power. Indirectly, indeed, many discover their pride and their folly, by ascribing much to their own talents and sobriety; but I have never met a man who affirmed as a fact, that he was himself born again without supernatural interference in the case. By far the greater part of those who ever practise prayer to God, are in the habits of supplication for mercy, and confessing upon their knees, that the glory of converting sinners belongs to the Supreme Being. Assuredly, the man who feels the burden of guilt, and smarts under a sense of his wo, will look, not unto the creature, but the Creator, for renovation and peace. *Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.*

It is astonishing, (if any inconsistency in matters of religion, however extravagant, can astonish us) that men, capable of so much reason as to distinguish the right hand from the left, should, at the same time, admit *as a fact*, that their own conversion is by the power of God, and yet maintain *as a doctrine*, that the conversion of others must be by the power of man. Collect the testimonies of all Christians: inquire singly of each individual believer; nay, of every man and woman who professes to be born again: Ask the question plainly, Is it God, or some other one, that has given you the new heart? and all will acknowledge, that as a matter of fact, this change is of the operation of God. And yet, somehow or other, many will presently set to work, torturing their own ingenuity and the words of divine revelation, in order to find some means of avoiding the consequences of this admission, as if they were eager to explain away a concession made with reluctance. The pride of life, the spirit of party, the power of error, may effect this much; but there



is no danger, that any child of God will refuse in heaven to join in the celestial music of the ransomed, while accompanied with the triumphant harp, they sing, *Not unto us, Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be the glory of our regeneration.* There, at least, we shall all see eye to eye; there, brethren, we shall lift up the voice together without discord.

While the Spirit of God testifies, both in the word of truth, and in the hearts of the saints, that they are *born of God*, we are enabled to reason, from the nature of the case, the impossibility of effecting otherwise a saving change upon the mind of fallen man. Regeneration, if it ever take place, must be by supernatural power. No other cause is adequate to the effect.

Means of conversion and of growth in grace are appointed of the Lord; and they are wisely and mercifully adapted to the rational nature, and relative condition of fallen men; but outward ordinances have not, in themselves, any efficient power over the mind, nor can they derive it from the will of the man who doth administer them to others. They fail, generally, in the effect of renewing the heart; they have failed, in every place, under all circumstances of age, information, and interest; and they always must fail, unless accompanied by the divine efficiency, in producing any other improvement than what is competent to the old man. The understanding may have ideas about religion communicated and augmented: the conscience may be alarmed or soothed, and rendered more acute: the affections may be moved even to ecstasy about religious objects: and the will, powerfully exercised, may set the whole man in motion; but yet it is only the improvement of the carnal mind, still retaining its blindness and its enmity, *That which is born of the flesh is flesh.\**

No other creature can act upon the mind of man in any

\* From the very nature of the mind, it cannot be influenced by impulse as matter is impelled by force. Volition does not admit of an efficient but a moving cause. The mind is by nature active. Volition is its own act. It is the mind itself that wills; and the reason why it wills one thing and not another, depends upon the motive. By the very principle which excludes the possibility of any other efficient cause of human volition than the natural activity of mind itself, the necessity of a moving cause for every volition is infallibly established. It is therefore manifest, that whatever power ordinances exercise over the mind, it is only as motives, they act. Now, a motive acts only as it is perceived and felt. It must both *appear* to the understanding, and appear *affecting* to the heart, in order to *move* the will. It sanctifies neither the one nor the other. It affects the natural mind, according to its nature: but it does not alter that nature, or produce regeneration. Renovation is of the Holy Ghost.

other manner, than addressing the intellectual and active powers with ideas and motives of action. You may enlarge the measure of my knowledge, and you may interest my feelings in every degree of which they are capable, you may, by the powers of moral suasion, incline me both to will and to act according to nature: but still that very nature retains its depravity until I am sanctified by the Spirit of God.

Do you ask, Is not the will of man free? Has it not power over all other faculties? Has it not a self-determining power? Is it not able to sanctify itself? I answer, Man is a free agent. You have a will of your own. You exercise it freely. You are under no compulsion. And yet you are a sinner. I answer again, the will cannot act without motive. Make the experiment. It is impossible. Willing without a motive, is willing nothing. Deceive not yourself. Your will is corrupt. It is set upon evil continually. The sinful will cannot regenerate you, or make itself holy. You must be born again. It is not of him that willeth, or of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.

Do you reply? Although I have not the *will*, I have the *power* of sanctification. I have the *natural ability*, although I have not the *moral ability* of self-regeneration.

Again, I say, deceive not yourself by words without meaning. What! You, an unregenerate man, have natural power to regenerate your own heart? Make the experiment. If you succeed, you will be alone in heaven. No other man ever hath borne himself again. No other man hath quickened himself. No other new man hath created himself in Christ Jesus. Have I mistaken your meaning? Perhaps you intend to be understood merely as saying, that you have natural faculties, and are a subject of moral government. Be it so. If that is your meaning, why not say so? In that case, there would be no misunderstanding. Yes! you have natural faculties, and moral faculties also. You have understanding: You have conscience: You have affections: You have a will; but not the power of either, or all of them together, whether natural or moral, call them what you choose, is adequate to your own regeneration. Boast not of an ability which has no power in relation to the case in hand. With all your *natural ability*, even if you had the *will*, you could not make yourself *a new man*. The will is either corrupt, and it cannot produce holiness; or it is holy, and regeneration has already taken place. Upon either supposition, the truth remains uncontrovertible. "It is not by works of righteous-

ness that we have done, but according to his mercy he hath saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost."

3. The regeneration of the sinner is a spiritual change, communicating new life.

It is not easy, brethren, to speak or to write, upon subjects of an abstract or intellectual character, without using expressions which do not often occur in the ordinary intercourse of man with man. We must not, however, in treating of divine things, always speak superficially under pretence of speaking plainly. What is commonly called plain language from the pulpit consists not in the simplicity of the words employed, so much as in the absence of thoughts. Men ordinarily call that perspicuous, which costs no trouble to understand; and the reason frequently is, that men are delivered from the trouble of thinking, because there is nothing communicated which requires thought. I am aware of this difficulty when I attempt to speak to you of a subject, which cannot possibly be understood without reflection. To the superficial hearer, every thing is abstruse which has any sense; and nothing is perfectly plain but that which has little or no meaning. I am also aware, and I confess, with gratitude to God for his goodness to the children of men, that many feel the power of regeneration who are not competent to define with accuracy the nature of the change which it effects. Many a strong man cannot name a muscle of the body, or tell the origin and insertion of a nerve or a sinew. The anatomy of the body is not therefore, however, an unbecoming subject of study; nor is the nature of regeneration unworthy of our attention. We have shown that it is the work of God; and we now show that it consists in a spiritual change.

Regeneration is often denominated, but not with precision, a *moral change*. It indeed improves the moral sense and the moral conduct; but as it is not effected by the power of moral suasion, to give it the exclusive designation of a moral change conveys an inadequate idea of its peculiar character. It affects the natural, or intellectual powers of man, as much as it does the moral or the active. It communicates no new faculty of either description, nor does its value consist in increasing the capacity of the one or the energy of the other. It does not convert the child into a man of science, nor the frigid into a man of sensibility: but it directs both reason and love to the things of God, and employs both intellect and inclination, as they ought to be employed, upon the things that belong to

our peace. It is not a *physical change*, produced by the force of impulse, nor is it a mere *moral change* produced by the influence of motive on the will; but a *spiritual change* infusing a new principle of life, which the mind did not previously, and could not, otherwise, possess: and this spiritual life, supernaturally communicated, lays the foundation for new exercises of perceiving, of feeling, and of acting, of a kind entirely distinct from any thing, of which the unregenerate mind was capable.

The sinner is spiritually dead until his conversion. By the fall of Adam, according to the penalty of the covenant of works, all the human race, proceeding from the Head of that covenant, are not only become subject to natural death, and exposed to death eternal, but are in fact, all *dead in trespasses and in sins*. *Death has passed upon all men*. The saints, on the other hand, are spiritually alive. They are quickened, and born again, according to the covenant of grace, in Jesus Christ their living Head, who fulfilled the condition, and restored what another, not he, had taken away.\* The last Adam was made a quickening spirit. If, then, unregenerate men are spiritually dead, and regenerate men spiritually alive, we cannot deny that regeneration communicates *spiritual life*.

Other arguments also, lead to the same conclusion. The gift of grace to man is something or other, which he did not possess by natural constitution. It is not, however, a new animal faculty, or a new intellectual faculty, or a new moral faculty. There is no augmentation of the number of the organs of the body or of the powers of the intellectual and moral constitution of man. It is not any new exercise of those organs or faculties; for these *exercises* are man's own acts, and not the gift of the grace of God. It is a fact, however, that *something* is graciously communicated from heaven to the fallen sinner, which affects every organ and every faculty, which directs and controls every exercise, until the whole man, soul and body, be sanctified to the service of the Lord.† And what is this new principle of perception, of will, and of action, which makes

\* Psalm lxi. 4.

† And if there be in the soul a new sort of exercises, and which no improvement, composition, or management of what it was before sensible of could produce; then it follows that the mind has an entirely *new kind* of perception: and here is, as it were, a new spiritual sense that the mind has. This *new spiritual sense*, and the new dispositions that attend it, are no new faculties; but are *new principles of nature*.—*Edwards on the Affections*.

the new nature, and the new man? What is this gift of the grace of God? It is powerful in its action; and we call it life: it is spiritual in its origin, its influence, and its end; and we call it *spiritual life*.

The oracles of inspiration completely warrant the use of the term "spiritual life" in designating that which is communicated in our regeneration, by the Spirit of God. Jesus Christ calls it, John iv. 10. "the gift of God, *living water*," and 14. "a well of water springing up into *everlasting life*. And this spake he of the *Spirit* which they should receive," chap. vii. 39. It is, therefore, a spiritual life which he gives.

Christians are said to *have been quickened* even when they were dead in sins, Eph. ii. 5. They had, of course, life given to them; and that life is of the Spirit: for it is the Spirit that quickeneth, John vi. 63. Nay, this truth is unquestionable; for the inspired writers make it one of the first principles upon which they reason and exhort. *If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit*, Gal. v. 25. If any should yet doubt the propriety or significancy of this mode of speech, let him be satisfied with the apostle Paul's declaration, Rom. viii. 6. "To be spiritually minded is life and peace." See also, 2 Cor. iii. 6. "The Spirit giveth life."

This form of expression is, moreover, more accurate than to call our regeneration merely a *moral change*. Every instance of reformation of manners in an individual or community, is a moral change. Indeed, every alteration of the moral character, whether for the worse or the better, may be so denominated. So general a phrase cannot therefore unequivocally convey the ideas which we ever ought to connect with the terms which designate the commencement of true religion in man. We cannot think correctly of the new birth if we exclude the ideas of life and spirit; and we do not speak with precision, if we define the blessing conveyed, without including in our definition, spiritual life.

Indeed, this expression is most conformable to the precision of metaphysical science. Life is a term very well understood; and as well understood by the vulgar as by the philosopher. Men of erudition may continue to dispute about that in which it consists; but it is obvious to all that life and death are distinct and opposite; and that in whatever the principle of vitality consists, there are different kinds of life in the universe. The gardener knows as well as his master, the difference between a living and a dead rose-bush: and without the aid of philosophy, the wandering

savage will prefer his "living dog to a dead lion." There is, moreover, a propriety in distinguishing one kind of vital nature from another. Vegetable life is distinct from animal life; and the animal life is distinct from the rational: but the spiritual life is as distinct from any of these, as any one of them is from the other. Even philosophical accuracy, therefore, justifies the plain Christian in retaining those distinctive terms, which Christianity recommends to his use, in speaking of the origin of piety in the heart.

The religious life of man, as a *new life*, requires a name descriptive of its nature. It is derived from the Spirit of God; it is concerned about spiritual things; it introduces a man into a spiritual empire; it makes him spiritually-minded; it makes him walk in the Spirit; it endows him with spiritual discernment; it qualifies him for worshipping God in spirit and in truth; and it ultimately settles the believer among "the spirits of just men made perfect."\* Why, then, not call it a *spiritual life*?

4. Regeneration is instantaneously communicated by the Holy Ghost.

Between life and death there is, in fact, no intermediate state. He who is not regenerated or born again, is unregenerated, and still in his sin. Where there is no spiritual life, there is no holy perception, no holy emotion, no holy act or exercise. This is the doctrine which we intend to inculcate by affirming the change effected in regeneration to be immediate.

There is no disposition to limit to a certain time, of more or less duration, the operations of the Almighty. The conversion of fallen man from sin to holiness, is *his* work. He is sovereign, and worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will. At once, if he wills such an effect, the sinner may be translated from spiritual death, independently of all created means, into the perfection of holiness and blessedness. For ages, if God wills such treatment, he that is born again may continue under the means of grace, before he attain to perfection in glory. There is great variety, too, in the apparent as well as in the real circumstances of the case in question. The effects of the new life are alone obvi-

\* "This *new spiritual sense* is not a new faculty of understanding; but a new foundation laid in the nature of the soul, for a new kind of exercises of the same faculty: it is not a new faculty of will; but a foundation laid in the nature of the soul for a new kind of exercises of the same faculty of will."—*Edwards on the Affections*.

ous to man. The principle itself is hidden. "Your life is hid with Christ in God." It eludes the scrutiny of created minds as much as the substance of the soul or the essence of matter. They all become known to us only by their properties. Matter, mind, life, in all its kinds and grades, are all brought to our knowledge by their attributes or operations; and beyond these, there is impenetrable mystery. In every pebble of the brook, in every flower of the field, in every one of the insects that flutter in the summer sun, there is something, examine them as you will, that must ultimately surpass the apprehension of the human intellect. The existence of spiritual life in man is known to his neighbour only by its effects; and perfect knowledge is exclusively from God. He alone searcheth the heart of man, and claims infallibility in judging. To us belong things which are revealed. The power of his work in the heart, and the testimony of his Spirit with the conscience, assure individuals of their own personal regeneration; and by divine revelation, God may, if he see cause, assure an individual of the conversion of another. Without this, there is no certainty, however promising appearances may have been. There is indeed a possibility of arriving at all the confidence respecting the integrity of a religious profession, which is necessary for the purposes of social life. So much is necessary for the good order of the house of God on earth, and so much is within the reach of church officers.

The apparent religion of good men, is subject to much variety; and that, of both the mistaken and the pretended professor, often assumes a very equivocal character. It may be long before an observer can form an estimate any way satisfactory, of the attainments of certain individuals who are asking the way to Zion; and although every man on earth is in fact either regenerated or unregenerated; there are some so affected by the means of grace, as to give us reason to hope their ultimate conversion, as well as to doubt, that they are already born again. Such appearances have been the occasion of introducing into practical discourses on personal religion, some expressions which convey the idea that regeneration is a work of time; and that it requires a preparatory process of mental exercises which are neither holy nor unholy, but of an intermediate nature.

The words *preparatory to regeneration* have been subject to much discussion among writers on Theology. Two remarks will suffice to prevent my meaning from being mis-

understood, in what I am about to say relative to this mode of expression.

1. Nothing done either by the sinner himself, or even by divine power upon the mind or body of man, previous to regeneration, has any real, natural, or moral tendency to produce that change, or to prepare the soul for becoming a subject of the new birth. The carnal mind is always enmity against God: and that which is born of the flesh is flesh. Regeneration is of God.

2. There are, nevertheless, in the case of adult sinners, converted under the dispensation of the gospel, several things which usually precede regeneration; and which prove serviceable to sanctification, when, through divine grace, a man is *born again*.

These things are of two kinds: and, although they are not necessarily connected with the new life, it is a fact, that they generally precede its existence in the case of adult converts—*Attention to his ordinances; and the common operations of his Spirit*.

1. There are certain things required of man in consequence of the revelation of the gospel. The divine law treats him as a reasonable creature; and whether in a regenerated state or not, he becomes morally bound to the performance of what is required in consequence of the very fact of his being a hearer of the gospel.\* *What the law saith, it saith to them that are*

\* The famous question so often disputed in some parts of our country, "Whether the unregenerate ought to perform prayer and attend the ordinances," appears to me of distinct and easy reply. Indeed, all men of common sagacity, on whatever side of this question they may as partisans have taken their stand, unite in a principle which necessarily leads to the solution: it is the principle of the apostolical commission—that the gospel and the law are to be addressed to all mankind. *Go ye, preach the gospel to every creature,—teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.*

Every intelligent creature of the race of man, to whom divine revelation comes, is required to make it the rule of his conduct. To attend the ordinances, not only with outward conformity to the letter, but also with inward affections corresponding to the true spirit and design of every institution, is the duty of every man; and of course, of unregenerate men; but, yet any performance of man without grace is unprofitable to the salvation of the soul, and unacceptable to a holy God. *Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear. Without faith it is impossible to please him.* Unbelief and corruption are, nevertheless, no excuse for negligence and transgression.

It is true that all acts of unrenowned men are unholy, and that unholiness is required of no man: It is holiness in heart, speech, and behaviour, that God requires of man; but it is equally true that while the precept demands an *outward act*, with a *corresponding affection*, it is less criminal



*under the law* ; it saith to every man, because he is a reasonable creature : and both the exhibition and the observance of these prescriptions are a part of the means divinely appointed for the conversion of sinners to God.

Every command of God is a part of the law. This assertion, although frequently disputed, is a self-evident proposition, to every one who is at leisure to attend to the meaning of words. To command is to give law ; and the law is given of God to the creature according to his whole condition, nature, and circumstances. The principles, of course, upon which the law, in some cases, is predicated, are evangelical. The gospel and the law are nevertheless distinct ; the revelation of grace is one thing, the requisition of duty is another. *The law is a schoolmaster to lead us unto Christ, and to enlighten our path, while we walk in him.* All men are under the divine government : they are bound to obey what he commands every where and throughout all time. Whosoever, therefore, the law finds any man enjoying the light of the gospel, it binds him to improve this new light under the law's proper penalty—the curse. It binds to the improvement of the means of grace. It is the sinner's duty to believe the gospel, and so escape the curse of the law.

to yield the one without the other, than to resist the precept by withholding both. I readily admit that *the overt act* is not, in a moral point of view, to be compared with *the disposition*. Bodily exercise profiteth little ; but all will grant that open irreligion is more impious than decent, although lifeless, attention to the forms of godliness.

The reasoning which excludes the unregenerate from using the means of grace, and prohibits them from praying for a new heart and a right spirit, is generally misunderstood and misrepresented. It is alleged to be either purely evangelical, or, but excessively opposed to the legal spirit. Nothing is more incorrect. This kind of reasoning is not only opposed to the general tenor of scriptural representation, but is also entirely opposite to evangelical principles. It is essentially *legal*, and subversive of the gospel. It supposes that God's favour cannot be conveyed in connexion with an unworthy prayer, and that there is some intrinsic worth in the prayers of the regenerate. It supposes that grace is not to be given to the unworthy ; *that grace is no more grace.* The same kind of reasoning, moreover, which would exclude the unregenerate from prayer and praise, would also exclude the regenerate ; and thus, banish all the ordinances of God from the earth. If the performances of unrenewed men are unholy, the performances of the best believers on earth are imperfect. If unholy acts are forbidden by the law, so are also all human imperfections : for the law requires not only holiness, but also perfection. It is grace that saves the soul. Duty is enjoined on men whether saints or sinners. In the case of both saints and sinners, no duty is performed with perfect rectitude ; and therefore in no case *doth righteousness come by the law.* To neglect the commandment, would, nevertheless, be the greater evil.

The unholy manner in which unconverted men attend to the means of grace, is their sin; but an habitual avowed neglect of divinely instituted ordinances is a much greater sin. It has more tendency to harden the sinner's own heart; it is more mischievous in its influence on society; it is more dishonouring to God's moral government; and it argues more malignity of spirit towards divine things. There are degrees of criminality on earth. *He that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.*

The most interesting light, however, because the most evangelical, in which we can consider what God requires of man in relation to outward ordinances, is their appointment of God for convincing and converting sinners, as well as for the edification of the saints. In the means, it is true, there is no power. The administrator and the administration, the recipient and the reception, are all alike inefficient to produce regeneration or to facilitate the production of new life by the Holy Spirit. *Paul may plant, and Apollus water; but it is God that giveth the increase.* God hath nevertheless appointed some things to be done by us. We are on that account bound in duty to perform the work. He is free to bless or withhold his blessing. We have no claim upon him beyond his promise: and no promise is in fact improved without faith; for all the promises are in Christ yea, and Amen. Encouragement, however, is held out to all gospel hearers, not excepting the unregenerate. Christ himself, in whom is all encouragement, in whom are all the promises of God, is freely offered in the gospel to "the chief of sinners;" and we are assured that this is "the high way" in which the King of grace and glory travels to display his mercy and dispense his blessings.

By diligent and habitual attention to the outward forms of prescribed worship, accompanied with intellectual and moral improvement, that is, by increase of religious knowledge and habits of morality, the unregenerate are profited in this life: and, although such cultivation of fallen nature has no tendency to convey spiritual life, it certainly prepares elect sinners for more rapid progress in Christianity, after their conversion; it makes them more capable to discern for themselves, to exhibit to others the effects of supernatural power in the conversion of the soul to God; and in the ordinary course of the work of God in gathering home his people, this is the method both ordained and sanctified. "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth."\*

\* Jam. i. 18.

2. The *common operations* of the Spirit of God on the mind, demand some attention, in our discussion of the doctrine of regeneration.

The Spirit of God is the author of life, of all kinds, throughout the universe. He moved upon the face of the waters, when the earth was without form and void;\* and he still continues to actuate nature, and to support vegetable and animal life. Thou sendest forth thy Spirit: they are created; and thou renewest the face of the earth.† The same Spirit is the author of corporeal vigour and of mental power, whether intellectual or moral. There is a spirit in man; and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.‡ These are called the common operations of the Spirit; because, they proceed upon principles common in the works both of creation and providence. The *special* or *gracious operations* of the Spirit arising from the plan of redemption, and proceeding upon the principle of electing love in Jesus Christ our Lord, are always connected with the salvation of the soul. They are to be distinguished from the common works of the same heavenly agent. Some of the common operations of the Spirit, are, moreover, so intimately allied, in their apparent effects, with his saving grace, and so frequently rendered subservient to the origin and progress of the spiritual life, as to be confounded by undiscerning men with the actual effects of divine grace in our conversion and sanctification. Of this description, are conviction, illumination, and reformation. All these are good in themselves; they are beneficial to society; they proceed from the Spirit of God; true religion is never without them: But sometimes they, one or all, exist, disconnected with that grace of God which certainly bringeth salvation to man. To all believers, indeed, illumination of mind, conviction of sin, and reformation of disposition and of manners, are new covenant blessings, secured through the death of Christ, by the promise of the Father.§ In this case, the effect is produced by the Holy Ghost in connection with that new life which immediately acts by faith on the Lord Jesus Christ, and is, in its nature, as well as by name, *everlasting life*: But, the knowledge, the convictions, and the morality of unrenewed men, have no certain connexion with vital religion, and no actual tendency to facilitate or effect the *new and second birth*.

High attainments in doctrine, deep and painful convictions, an amiable disposition, and a decent outward deportment,

\* Gen. i. 2. † Psa. civ. 30. ‡ Job xxxii. 8. § Jer. xxxi. 31.

are all consistent with spiritual death. Balaam the son of Beor had his eyes opened by the Spirit, to see the excellency of Jacob, and to prophesy of the Redeemer of Israel.\* Judas Iscariot was convinced of his transgression, and felt the anguish of despair; and that fine young man, a ruler of the Jews, who refused to follow the Redeemer, was amiable in his temper, and very exemplary in his deportment.†

Should the natural intellect of man be raised up to the extent of Lucifer's capacity; should his convictions become intense as those of *Dives in torments*; should his unrenewed heart become as a house ready swept and garnished; all this could not render, either more easy or more certain, the regeneration of the soul. The new life is instantaneous in its communication from on high. Nothing done previously to our regeneration, either by us or upon us, has any natural or certain tendency to produce the saving change, or to prepare us for it. The carnal mind is *enmity against God*. There are, however, some things which ordinarily precede the work of renovation in the case of elect adults; and which are highly subservient to the progress of sanctification, when regeneration has actually taken place. These are attention to the ordinances of God; and the common operations of the Holy Spirit.

Let me now, my brethren, apply this doctrine by showing,

II. The necessity of regeneration to him who would enjoy the benefits of religion.

In every part of the world, there is some attention paid, by the children of men, to personal character, general morality, and a future state; and such attention is usually accompanied with devotional feelings.

The age, too, of the world in which we live, is the witness of a powerful and extensive excitement, in favour of that divine revelation which we have, in the scriptures, for the direction of our devotion. The great and the small, the rich and the poor, the learned and the illiterate, the tyrant and the slave, the saint and the sinner, throughout Christendom, have, under an extraordinary popular influence employed in the good providence of God, determined to co-operate in sending the Bible in every language to men of all nations and ranks. At such a time, and under such circumstances, it is lamentable that so few attend to the doctrines, and conscientiously pursue the practice, inculcated in the sacred book so generally respected and recommended. We car-

\* Numb. xxiv.

Matth. xxvii. 5.

† Matt. xix. 22.

nestly desire, we confidently hope, and we humbly pray to God, that the number of those who understand the scriptures may be speedily and greatly increased. It is from that book, we learn the necessity of regeneration to a religious life. *Marvel not that I said unto you, Ye must be born again.*

This *necessity* is asserted by the Saviour himself: and he makes the assertion in connexion with the doctrines of religious worship. The connexion, of course, explains the necessity intended by him. The *second birth* is not necessary to the existence of man; nor is it a fact that all men shall certainly be renewed in the spirit of their minds. Regeneration is not essential to the *being*, but to the *well-being* of man. You may be born, and live, and die, and suffer eternal punishment in the world to come, without being born again; and unless you are born again, you must *necessarily* perish for ever. Regeneration is necessary to a religious life. This is the *necessity* intended, by the Redeemer, in my text. It is impossible in the nature of things, that an unregenerate sinner, should be a truly religious man. It implies a contradiction. *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he CANNOT SEE the kingdom of God.\** The unregenerate man *cannot* be a Christian.

Regeneration is necessary to faith in Christ; to repentance unto life; to the acceptable worship of God; to everlasting happiness in heaven.

If this is the case, it is no wonder we should insist upon your conversion. It is no wonder we should urge the importance of it. It is no wonder we should labour to prevent any mistakes respecting it. "Marvel not that I said unto you, Ye must be born again."

1. Regeneration is necessary to faith.

The necessity of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, is every where admitted by Christians. He that believeth shall be

\* John iii. 3. He *cannot see* the kingdom of God—*οὐ δυναται ιδειν την Βασιλειαν*. To see is to enjoy; and, in the fifth verse, the phrase is, *he cannot enter into the kingdom*—He cannot become a member of the kingdom of grace on earth, or of the kingdom of glory in heaven, except through regeneration. There is, however, a peculiar felicity in the words *cannot see the kingdom*, employed by our Redeemer in the present case.

Nicodemus had confessed his belief in Christ, as a teacher sent from God; but did not profess faith in him as the Messiah. *Jesus answered, Unless a man be born again, he cannot see my kingdom.* He has no spiritual discernment—He cannot discern my character, or that of my kingdom; he cannot enter into the spirit or the designs of my mission; he cannot perceive or enjoy my grace and my salvation.

saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned. Faith is the act of a renewed heart, and the necessity of regeneration is consequently manifest. "I give you to understand," said the apostle to the Corinthians, "that no man can say that Jesus is Lord but by the Holy Ghost."\* I do not affirm, because I do not believe, that any time elapses, in the case of those who have come to years of understanding, between their regeneration and the exercise of faith upon the Son of God. Faith is the first act of the renewed heart, the first exercise of spiritual life. The power and the act are in point of time inseparable: yet power precedes, in the order of nature and of grace, its own exercise.

Faith is the gift of God; but it is an act of man. *I believe, you believe,* are words which indicate that faith is acted both by you and by me. It is not a passive perception of the truth of any proposition; but a persuasion of the truth for actual exertion. With the heart man believeth unto righteousness: with the renewed heart, with the quickened spirit, man believeth. Faith is not of the flesh, but of the Spirit. It is an act of obedience to God. By it, I see, I hear, I obey my Redeemer. By faith I come to him on his own invitation; I embrace him as the gift of God for my salvation; and trust in him, for my protection in life and in death; and for my portion through eternity.

2. Regeneration is necessary to repentance.

I use *repentance*, in this case, according to the accurate definition of our standards.† Repentance unto life, is what

\* 1 Cor. xii. 3.

† Shorter Catechism. Quest. 87.

There is a conviction of sin, there is a sorrow even unto despair, which exists independently of either faith or regeneration. This fact induces many to suppose, that repentance unto life does not depend on either. The sacred scriptures make a distinction between mere regret and true repentance. It is very clearly marked in the original language of the New Testament, although the English translation does not follow the happy example.

*Μετανοια* designates that repentance which God requires, and which the Spirit works in us. It is a *change of mind for the better*, and in relation to religion, necessarily implies renovation of nature. *Μεταμελεομαι*, and not *Μετανοεω*, is the scriptural term to designate *mere sorrow or concern* for sin on account of its evil consequences. Such concern may exist without regeneration. *Repent* is the English translation of both these verbs. It has, of course, two distinct significations. Simple concern or sorrow for transgression; and a change of mind from sin to holiness in Jesus Christ our strength. Sensible men should distinguish the meaning. Our Catechism and Confession of Faith has done so. The duty and the grace of repentance is one thing,—*μετανοια*; mere regret and sorrow is another thing,—*μεταμελεια*.

God requires and accepts; it is that which the Redeemer himself dispenses to his people; which the Holy Spirit works in us as a principle of holiness; and which leads us to the practice of new obedience. The impenitent, as well as the unbelieving, are rejected from the number of the saints; and the necessity of the second birth to the Christian, is obvious from its being essential to evangelical repentance.

Repentance towards God is the exercise of a holy principle, and is a great part of our sanctification. As it is distinguished from mere distress on account of the dangerous consequences of moral evil, by its nature and its fruits, it is also distinct in its very origin. It is a godly sorrow for having offended God, accompanied with hatred of sin and love of holiness. It brings forth correspondent fruits, in good works and a humble disposition. It is the exercise of the new nature and the new life communicated by the Spirit of the Lord. *Godly sorrow* worketh repentance to salvation. "Therefore, brethren, we are debtors not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."\*

3. Regeneration is necessary to the acceptable worship of God.

Forms of religious worship are now so common, that all men seem to confess the propriety of expressing reverence for the Deity under some outward show. Were we to judge from the commonly received opinion among that class of people who are esteemed well informed, there is little importance attached to the kind of religion, or the modes of worship. There are, however, here and there, to be seen, a few pious men, who are not yet become bigots to the spurious charity, which substitutes looseness for liberality in principle and in practice. There are some who hold the forms of godliness, according to divine appointment; and who retain, with the form, "the life and power."

The worship of God, being an expression of such affections as he invites, under forms which he prescribes, requires, for the due performance of it, holy affections and a knowledge of his revealed will. The exercises of Christian worship must be observed by all the saints. The word, the sabbath, the sacraments, prayer, and praise, must receive attention from him, who would walk in all the commandments

\* 2 Cor. vii. 10. Rom. viii. 12, 14.

and ordinances of the Lord. "Bodily service profiteth not: for the body without the spirit is dead." Mere sounds and gestures may serve for the production of theatrical effect, or for the amusement of the ignorant and the gay: but no rational being, in the exercise of common sense, will attach the idea of holiness or virtue, to services performed without any intention to improve the creature, or to honour the Creator. Divine revelation, your only rule, Christians, in faith and in worship, requires the exercise of grace, in all that we undertake to perform. *Without faith it is impossible to please God.* "Let us, therefore, have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear." If works without faith cannot please Jehovah; if grace be necessary to serve him acceptably; then, certainly, the unregenerate sinner cannot calculate upon offering any sacrifice which shall be accepted by the Omniscient Being who detects hypocrisy; who cannot be deceived by the pretensions of those whose hearts are at enmity with the character which they professedly adore.

4. Regeneration is necessary to our future happiness. "Except a man be born of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. For without holiness, no man shall see God."

Were it possible to admit into the celestial paradise an unregenerate man, however glorious the place, it would yield no enjoyment to him. Opposite to good, in the temper of his mind; enmity against God, in his disposition; opposed to the Redeemer, in his whole soul; what enjoyment could the place or the company yield to him?

The unsanctified sinner, would, in heaven, be out of his element. A tenant of the deep, on the summit of a rock, or a bird of the air, in the depth of the sea, would not be so far removed, from the condition in which nature would find enjoyment, as an unregenerate man within the gates of the new Jerusalem. A sinner may find pleasure in the visible church, although he has none in real religion. Society not far removed from himself, and the distinguishing traits to him imperceptible, may give play to his social affections, and induce him to bear patiently with the doctrine and discipline which otherwise would prove an annoyance. The habits of early life, the customs of moral order, in the circle which includes his person and his family; interest, pride, ambition, and perhaps even the basest of passions, may help him to deceive himself; or tempt him to deceive others,



by a profession of love and submission to the Lord. Such considerations render the ordinances of Christianity tolerable, in the church on earth, to many who would endure torture, were they, with all their malignity of soul, set down in heaven before the throne of the Lamb. Such a state of things is, however, impossible. Justice will not permit the admission of the guilty to the fellowship of the righteous. The divine holiness prevents the introduction of a polluted sinner into that place where no unclean thing can enter. *Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.* Sooner shall Satan succeed in scaling the high battlements of the celestial city, and in casting down from his throne of glory the almighty God, than Jehovah receive into the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world for the saints, any one who remains unrenewed and under the dominion of the law of sin and death. *There is no communion between light and darkness; between Christ and Belial.*

## CONCLUSION.

Hear, then, *ye unrenewed sinners*, the message which I am bound to deliver from my God and my Redeemer. "Ye must be born again," or perish for ever. The Saviour himself hath spoken it; and even he cannot save without regeneration. It would be a contradiction. Such salvation is death; death in sin; death eternal; no salvation: *But unto them that do not obey the truth, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil.\**

Listen to the message which I bring. It is a message of mercy. Come, now let us reason together. Of what avail is your *negligence*? Can that save you? Making light of important truth cannot alter its nature. You cannot possibly consider disrespect for divine revelation as conducive to your future happiness. Unbelief may deceive, but it cannot sanctify. Of what avail is your honesty in social life; your morality? Will it atone for your impiety? Is it more valuable than that which you reject, the merits of Jesus Christ? Be not deceived. God is not mocked with impunity. If you allow yourselves one moment's consideration, you cannot imagine that you shall be happy in heaven without holiness; or that you can be Christians without believing in the Lord with a new heart. You are sinners. You come short of your duty in every thing. You are guilty at the bar of

\* Rom. ii. 8, 9.

your own conscience. God is greater than conscience. He also condemns you. You are condemned already. *You are dead in trespasses and in sins.* Within you, there is no spiritual life. You are graceless. God above will in no wise clear the guilty. Already are you in chains, under the bondage of the evil spirit. Death approaches. The grave opens her mouth. Hell is moving towards her prey. *Hear, ye that are afar off; the sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath seized the hypocrites: who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?*

Mistake me not, my brethren, we are not to pronounce your doom. Ours is the ministry of reconciliation. It is God that justifieth. You are by nature condemned in your sins. All Christians have been in your condition. *We are all by nature children of wrath.* Thus the gospel finds you. While we say to the sinner, Ye must be born again, we point out the Saviour. Behold the Lamb of God. He came to save his people from their sins. He is able to save to the uttermost. Come unto him and be saved: He that cometh shall in no wise be cast out. To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. May you, who know the nature and the origin of the Christian life in your own souls, go on unto perfection. AMEN.

## THE SEVERAL DEGREES OF PERSONAL RELIGION.

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### SERMON III.

ROM. vi. 4.—*As Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

PROGRESS in the new life, commenced at the time of the *second birth*, is more important, and more desirable, than success in business, or growth from infancy to manhood. It is, in this text, urged as a duty, and proposed as a favour, in consideration of the resurrection of our Redeemer from the dead. The due consideration of that fact, which we always commemorate in meeting together on the weekly Sabbath, cannot fail to exercise a happy influence on the Christian's life. We are both enlightened and invigorated for our journey, by a knowledge of "the power of his resurrection." This, brethren, is the doctrine of my text: And I shall,

I. Make that appear by an exposition, and

II. Lay before you the several degrees of progress in the religious life.

I. I explain the words of my text.

The apostle Paul, who experienced, in his own progressive attainments, the influence of Christ's resurrection, holds it up, to the view of the believing Romans, as the reason and the means of their walking forward "in newness of life." *Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father.* The power of God, glorious in its exercises and results, was remarkably displayed when the Son of man arose from the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, to live for evermore. Three nights, our Redeemer lay in the house of silence: the door was sealed by Jewish and Roman authorities combined: and sentinels, practised in the duties of a military life, were posted, under arms, to guard the tomb. His enemies were

in fancied security, and his friends were in tears, on the evening which preceded the first day of the week. Before the dawn of that ever-memorable day, the Lord of life awoke from the death, to which he had submitted for our redemption. Then, the *glory of the Father* was clearly displayed. The Son exerted his own power over the king of terrors; and the solid earth trembled, when his body was revived. Angels, from on high, ministered to their acknowledged Sovereign. The door of stone, which closed up the only avenue to the chamber of death, was removed, by an invisible and immortal hand, in an instant from its place; and, with a countenance like lightning, the ethereal messenger sat upon the displaced rock. The keepers felt the shaking of the ground, upon which they stood in arms; they beheld the unexpected and astonishing sight; and overawed, by the presence of an unembodied visitant, every fibre of their mortal frame shook violently, until their strength was exhausted, and they became as dead men. Roman courage, proved sufficiently before many an equal foe, in previous combat, now yielded implicitly: resistance was vain against him whom even death can no longer bind. *He rose again for our justification.*

The same divine and glorious power, which produced the resurrection of our Lord, is pledged by that very fact to raise up us also, both from spiritual and from temporal death: "For as the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will: And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and in sins.—Created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

"Walking" indicates not only vital action; but also progress from one place to another. That *walking in newness of life*, which is urged in the text, in consideration of the resurrection of our Lord, must of course signify both, the exercise of the Christian life, in all its parts and relations, and our progressive improvement in piety.\*

\* Some divines, I am aware, are of opinion, that the allusion to Christ's resurrection requires us to understand this "walking in newness of life" of the state of blessedness, after the resurrection of the body to life everlasting in heaven: but the scope of the passage, in which the text is found, excludes this application; and there is nothing in the words themselves to render it necessary. The inquiry, in the first verse, *shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?* is not applicable to the state of glory. Neither is the reply, God forbid, *How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?*

The progressive improvement of believers, in gracious attainments, is not only inculcated, as a *doctrine*, in the sacred oracles, but is also secured, as a *blessing*, to Christians, by the death of Christ, and actually administered to them by their arisen Lord. It is signified as well as the pardon of sin, to the church of God, in the sacrament of baptism; and it is implied in our religious profession, that we esteem it our duty to go forward, *growing in grace and in knowledge*. In all our exertions to advance in godliness, we are animated by the assurance, that "the glory of the Father" is intimately connected with all our gracious attainments; and, that the power by which our Redeemer triumphed over death, shall secure our progress, until sanctification be complete—"Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

Admitting then, my dear hearers, the truth, that there are different degrees in holiness of life; and confessing it to be the duty of every Christian to go on "from strength to strength," unto the perfection of "the man of God," you will patiently allow me your attention, while,

II. I describe, from the scriptures, THE SEVERAL DISTINCT DEGREES OF PERSONAL ATTAINMENT IN TRUE RELIGION, from its commencement in regeneration or conversion, until its perfection, in passing through the valley of the shadow of death, from earth to heaven.

The several attainments I distinguish by names, indicative of their characteristic features.

The first is distinguished by *anxiety to escape from evil*—the second, by *admiration of Christ and his salvation*—the third, by *thirst for improvement in the knowledge of his ways*—the fourth, by *public spirit in promoting good*—the fifth, by *heavenly-mindedness*—and the sixth, by *willingness to suffer for the cause of God*.

"Baptism into the death of Christ," signifying the death and destruction of the power of corruption in regeneration, asserted in the 3d and 4th verses, refers not to the future state of believers; and the corresponding resurrection must of course apply not to that state, but to the life of holiness communicated in regeneration. The "planting of baptism" belongs also to the same event, by which we are at once both dead to sin and alive unto God. All the subsequent injunctions, down to the 14th verse, respect the present life; and it would be very absurd, under these circumstances, to apply the expression "walking in newness of life" to any other period than that of the Christian life upon earth. The soul, quickened by the Holy Ghost into new life, has its resurrection from sin and death.

The scale, by which we measure spiritual progress, is not graduated by considerations of age, of literature, or of rank. There are many aged sinners under the dispensation of the gospel: many have experienced the decline of life before their conversion to vital religion; and there may be some believers with hoary hairs, who are of small attainments in holiness—mere babes in grace, far inferior, in point of Christian improvement, to their own children, perhaps to their children's children. There are, also, men of learning and of rank, in the outward profession of Christianity, who have little or no real religion, while the labourer and the illiterate are ripening rapidly for glory. "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom?" We cannot measure the progress of Christians even by the time which they have actually been in Christ. Some see more clearly than others; they walk more consistently and firmly; enjoy a more decided, and diversified, and extensive experience; and, they war, more successfully, against their spiritual adversaries. Many a comparatively young man is an old Christian, while there are many, trembling over the grave with age and infirmities, who are yet either children in understanding, or have their holiness and their comfort so much impaired and obscured as to be scarcely felt or visible.

Professing Christians, themselves, are prone to estimate a man's religious worth, by his rank or influence in society, particularly in the church—a very inadequate criterion: but it is still more pernicious to decide upon the degree of personal piety from the character of a congregation, or that of a distinct denomination among the several sections of the church of God. We are indeed bound, by the divine law, to urge it as the duty of all men, *to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints*; and here, happily, free from compulsion, you may select for yourselves, the church fellowship which you deem the most pure and profitable to your souls: but you must not, on that account, imagine personal attainments in piety are to be measured by the general character of any visible society whatsoever. We are not to forget that Nicodemus and Joseph remained among the Jews, while Judas Iscariot was associated with the apostles. When any community, makes either a dereliction of truth, or an avowal of error, a condition of their fellowship, the path of duty is open before you: nevertheless, different degrees of Christian progress will be found among them, who worship

in the same congregation, throughout all the churches of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is upon this principle, and without regard to ranks or names of men, that I have formed that arrangement, already announced, and which I now proceed to illustrate.

1. The state of mind, which exists in the earliest stage of true religion, is characterized by *anxiety to escape from evil and enjoy salvation*.

The Christian, is always, in every part of his progress, sincerely desirous to escape from sin and from punishment. So long as he continues imperfect, he is solicitous to enjoy such supplies of grace, as shall enable him to subdue his own corruptions; and even, in the exercise of the full assurance of eternal life, he still labours to mortify the body of sin and death: but anxiety to have such an interest in the merits of Christ, as shall secure to him the pardon of sin and a title to everlasting life, is the principal feature of the Christian character in its commencement.

This is also, *the very lowest grade* of Christianity: for a man who has no anxiety to escape from sin and to enjoy salvation, is not at all a Christian. He is still dead in trespasses and in sins. He who lives at ease in sin, and is careless of God and of eternity, whatever may be his doctrine, or his profession, or his general deportment in society, is certainly a graceless unregenerate man. He is unbelieving and impenitent; and the wrath of God abideth on him. The first period of the new life is peculiarly the time of faith and penitence; and repentance towards God, with faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, are the prominent exercises of that anxiety of mind which constitutes its characteristic. It is evident that they who have neither faith nor repentance, are not true Christians. "O man! despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God?"

It is not, moreover, *every kind* of anxiety which sinners feel, for deliverance from evil and for the enjoyment of eternal life, that is to be sustained as descriptive even of the first stages of personal religion. Upon this subject, there is great liability to mistakes. The saints themselves, although they certainly exercise both faith and repentance, are not always capable of accurately describing them. Of their own anxiety for an interest in the grace of God, they are indeed conscious; but, in bringing the subject of their consciousness to

the test of divine truth, they are apt to err. Aware of the deceitfulness of sin, and fearful of presumption; somewhat disordered, moreover, by the pungency of their soul-harrowing convictions, they frequently despond, because they will not pronounce decidedly upon the spirituality of their own emotions. If misled by false opinions inculcated by others, or rendered incapable, by want of sound knowledge, to perceive distinctly the connexion of the several parts of the system of grace, they should suppose that their own experience of divine power on the soul, and not the free and full offer of the gospel, is the foundation for trusting in Christ for salvation; then indeed they must be disconsolate, and be liable to wavering all the days of their life. It is only through the medium of knowledge that Christians enjoy spiritual liberty. *The truth shall make you free.*

While regenerated men err, in judging unfavourably of their first attainments, unrenewed sinners more fatally err, in judging favourably of their convictions. There is a sorrow sometimes of long continuance which issues in actual conversion. The Holy Ghost convinces man *of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment*; and such conviction is always an essential part of our effectual calling. Sinners have often heard this asserted; and they are in danger of mistaking every kind of sorrow for sin, as a gracious exercise. They of course give themselves credit for the grace which they do not possess; and so cherish a false confidence which is ruinous to the soul. Judas Iscariot repented of his treachery. He was deeply sensible of his guilt in betraying innocent blood. He manifested the reality of his remorse by returning the money which bribed him to the transgression: and such was the pain of his soul that he loathed life and cast it away as a burden which he could no longer bear. This man, nevertheless, went to his own place: of his condemnation we are more certain than that of any other man whom we can point out by name. "Better for him," said the Redeemer, "that he had never been born."

The anxiety of the young believer, must therefore be distinguished from that of unconverted minds. This is easy in theory; but difficult in practice. When we act, it is with imperfect instruments; with faculties corrupted by sin, and disordered by our pains and our passions. It is the Spirit, however, that helps our infirmities. Let us go on in the light of his word. "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us."



Let us again examine the anxiety of the traitor. It was on account of sin. It was no pretension. It was real, deep, and effective. How sudden and how great the change of feeling and of conduct which it produced. He who, a little before, coolly calculated the price of blood with his employers, and with a smile and a kiss betrayed the Son of man; now with horror in his soul and desperation in his countenance, confesses the enormity of his crime, to these very employers. The man of avarice can no longer bear the sight of his silver, but casts his wages of unrighteousness at the feet of them from whom it had been received. The cold-blooded hypocrite, now burns with a consuming flame, esteems the earth no longer desirable, and anxious to escape the tortures of his own conscience, rapidly plunges himself into the fire of eternal burnings. No penitence can exceed this in its intensity; but that of the renewed man is of a very different kind.

The Christian is anxious to be delivered from sin: the unrenewed man cares only for its consequences. Both may experience uneasiness and alarm; but the renovated soul seeks for an interest in the salvation of God, while the sinner cries merely for comfort. The renewed mind looks directly to the Saviour, and sees the Father only in him: the unconverted mind, blinded by the evil one, looks to God immediately as the disturber of his repose, and solicits compassion without respect to perfect satisfaction for transgression. The anxiety of the believer is from the Holy Spirit; is exercised with a spiritual discernment of the covenant of grace; and is influenced by an ardent desire to enjoy the beloved Redeemer, together with righteousness, and holiness, and happiness in him: the anxiety of the unconverted, is a blind unholy passion, pungent indeed, but indefinite, indistinct, and equivocal in respect to all these objects.

I have already observed, that the first stage of the Christian's *walking in newness of life*, is during the time in which faith and repentance are in early exercise. These graces are, then, peculiarly marked with an earnest desire to enjoy God. It is therefore an *anxious* exercise. By increasing experience the new man learns more of the subtlety and the power of sin, more of the excellencies and the grace of the Saviour, and more of his own duty and privilege; but never is love more intense, than at the period of his espousals, or his desires more ardent for deliverance from evil, and for the enjoyment of his Redeemer.

Let my hearers try themselves in the light of this doctrine. Do so, my beloved brethren, with sincerity. Whether actual professors of religion in church fellowship or otherwise, you all have an interest in this inquiry. Where do you stand in relation to the path of life? Have you no anxiety to escape the guilt, the pollution, and the punishment of sin, through the blood of Jesus? Have you no desire to enjoy his grace, his covenant, and his salvation? then you are not Christians. Are you indeed in the anxious exercise of faith, and penitence, and love, and prayer? And is this all your experience? Boast not of your attainments: you are in the very lowest ranks of piety. Be not slothful in this business. Let me not find you slumbering at your post. Awake, arise, go forward: and *as ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.*

2. The state of mind, enjoyed by the Christian, in the second grade of spiritual attainments, is characterized, by *Admiration of Jesus Christ, and the salvation which he administers.*

God, who is both rich in mercy and abundant in power, might have created all the children of men at once, as he did the angels of heaven. He might have made all men alike, in the dimensions of the body and the features of their countenance. He might have made his elect perfect, in the moment of their regeneration; and have given to all the same measure of holiness and happiness, if such a plan had corresponded with infinite wisdom and goodness. He hath ordered it otherwise; and, in the varieties of creation, we perceive his wisdom, and enjoy his munificence. The varieties, displayed in his spiritual empire, are no less interesting and instructive. Though we cannot describe them all, or even any one of them, with perfect accuracy, it is not unprofitable to take a rapid view of the company of pilgrims, and fix their distinguishing features permanently before us. The progress, which is made in the path of righteousness, is not always discoverable at short intervals of time; and to the sovereignty of God, both in his general providence, and in the communications of his special grace, we must refer the question, why some improve so rapidly, while others are either stationary or declining, under the same means, and with similar natural dispositions. Without at all determining whether it requires a certain number of days or of years to gain a certain distance, in our Christian journey, let us survey the spot which we have marked out as the second stage of travellers towards the heavenly Jerusalem.

The anxiety with which the Christian commences the walk of faith, gives origin to examinations and reflections of an important nature. These exercises improve our spiritual strength, and open up new views of divine things to the soul. In proportion as we are favoured with such discoveries, our faith becomes stronger; our penitence more habitual and serene; and the fulness of the covenant of promise is better understood and appreciated. In proportion, too, as the believer has been enabled to make his calling and his election sure, his anxiety is diminished without a diminution of his industry. He still labours to subdue his corruptions, and obtain salvation; but he works with less uneasiness and alarm, and with more confidence and comfort. He surveys his company and his inheritance with admiration and delight. This is the period, in the Christian life, of successful self-examination; and of judicious reflection upon his faith in Christ Jesus. These exercises, instead of ministering to his indolence or pride, contribute, under divine grace, to an increasing conviction of his dependence upon the Saviour, and to an increasing sense of that Saviour's worth. Hence I conclude, that the most prominent feature of his character in all his religious exercises and employments, is *the delightful admiration* of the grace and glory of the Lord Jesus, and the whole salvation which he hopes, through his mediation, to obtain.

Great power, magnanimity, and condescension, are in their own nature admirable; infinite perfection is an object of the admiration of all intelligent creatures; and, in a certain sense, the divine excellency is admired by the unregenerate, even by those to whom it is an object of terror. Christians, too, from the very commencement of their new life, and throughout every stage of their progress, feel an admiration for God in Christ: nor does it cease in heaven; but, in this stage, after having ascertained their own interest in the grace of God, it becomes the most prominent part of their character. They admire the dignity of the mediatory Person, God manifested in the flesh; the attributes, and, especially, the love of God in him; the wisdom of the plan devised for our redemption through a covenant, ordered in all things, and sure; and his fitness in every thing to our condition, in whom it pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell. They admire the tenderness of his compassion; the fortitude displayed in his sufferings; the graces of the Spirit, which rest upon him, and which he liberally communicates.

grace for grace, from his own fulness to our wants. They admire the place on high, where he is enthroned in light, and into which they have now, themselves, a sure hope of admission. Oh, brethren, with what transports of admiration do young believers, after their anxiety is allayed, by the demonstrations of the Holy Ghost, take their first view from the top of Pisgah of the King in his beauty, and of the land that is afar off. That inheritance, however, is beyond the Jordan; and here the saints are not to rest: cheered with the prospect before them, they must descend and march forward to the possession—*Walk in newness of life.*

3. The third period of Christian progress is characterized by a *thirst for religious knowledge.*

The mind of man is formed for exertion, and the knowledge of truth is, at all times, desirable for the direction of its activity, and the increase of its enjoyments. Ignorance is, in every situation of life, both a loss and a reproach. The curiosity, which prompts the old and the young, to acquire information about its several objects, indicates the benevolent provision made in the constitution of our rational nature for its progressive improvement and felicity, through the medium of knowledge. He, who is ignorant of his own business, whatever may be his industry, cannot be considered as likely to be successful; and without intelligence, even a partial success affords no moral satisfaction. What is to me unknown, is as if it had not been.

In the concerns of religion, knowledge is not only useful, but indispensable. It is an essential part of the image of God in which man was formed by the Creator, and into which he is renewed by the Holy Ghost. "Ye are renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created you." Without the exercise of intellect upon divine things, there can be no comfort or profit in Christianity, any more than in the habits of idolatry. "Know thou," if thou wouldst enjoy him, "the God of thy fathers."

In every art or science, the period most favourable to the ardent pursuit of knowledge, is immediately after the habits and the language peculiar to it, and at first strange, have become familiar and easy; after a high admiration of the objects of study is felt by the learner; and before the actual business of life demands his chief attention. There is a similar period in the religious life of man. The knowledge of divine things, always desirable and always useful, is pursued with peculiar ardour, so soon as we have attained to

that patient admiration of its glorious objects which accompanies the full assurance of hope. Then the speculative powers of the mind, enlightened and enlivened by the Holy Ghost, search for knowledge, and procure it on account of its own intrinsic worth. We learn, my brethren, not merely because we are commanded, and because it is profitable; but also because we *desire* to know. "Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes: Therefore I love thy commandments above gold, yea, above fine gold."

This is the period in the Christian life, when the desire of knowledge for its own sake, is in its most vigorous exercise. Have my hearers attained to it, in walking forward to perfection? Be not deceived. True religion gives no encouragement to ignorance. It gives no toleration to negligence in ignorance of any thing which God has made known to us in the sacred oracles. There are, I confess, in the Scriptures, some things hard to be understood. There are also plain first principles. As there are precepts in the law of more and of less weight, so there are declarations and promises of greater and of less importance. All these, nevertheless, are worthy of attention, otherwise God would not have revealed them. Every truth is of use in its place: and every ray from the Sun of Righteousness is cheering to the eyes of believers. It is impious to treat with contempt any thing spoken by the Lord God our Saviour. Truth is the proper food of the enlightened mind; *and every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God.*

Affections indeed are a necessary part of religion. Let them be excited to the most lively and the most powerful exercise. Let your impressions of divine things be deep and permanent, and productive of practical results; but let them be intelligent. Walk as children of light: for ye are not of the night; but of the day. Be not children in understanding; but in understanding be men. A glorious light bursts forth from on high. The windows of our earthly habitations are set open by the hand of God for its admission. The curtains are drawn, the eyes are opened, sloth is overcome; and "beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image," while his voice vibrates on the ear, and thrills through every fibre of the heart, Awake, thou that sleepest, and Christ shall give thee light. Now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation

nearer than when we believed. Sweet is the fellowship which the natural eye holds with the light of day. Still more delightful is the communion of the enlightened spirit with the glory of the Father shining forth between the cherubim above the mercy-seat. In the person of our redeeming Head, God manifested in the flesh, there are perfections which invite and reward contemplation. Invited by his promise, and commanded by his precept; drawn inwardly towards him by the cords of his love; and enraptured by the brightness of his glory before us, we desire the knowledge of his ways. Forgetting the things that are behind, we press forward; and instead of becoming babes who have need of milk, we thus become men who have need of strong meat: *therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection.*

4. The fourth period of Christian progress is characterized by *Public spirit in promoting the interests of the church.*

The religion which we profess; the relations, in which it finds, and into which it introduces Christians; and the disposition of mind which it communicates and cultivates, all proclaim the duty of public spirit in the service of God. Christianity is social as well as personal; and the religion of the renewed individual must of course influence his relation to society. It is not good for man to be alone. Entire solitude is opposed to his improvement, his usefulness, and his happiness: and the sanctification, "whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God," produces a disposition to promote in every sphere of life the greatest good. The glory of God, the prosperity of the church, the comfort of society, and the happiness of every individual with whom we stand connected, as well as our own salvation, are objects of solicitude to all believers. Religion would be an imperfect system, unworthy of the Creator, and unfit for the creature, did it not pay respect to our relative condition, in this world, and in the world to come. With such deficiency, it could not qualify the new man, either for present usefulness, or future happiness. Listen to its admonitions, and then judge whether it be chargeable with any such defect. *Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. Let no man seek his own, but every man another's. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*

The moral and spiritual empire, of which the Redeemer is the Head and Lawgiver, is the most important and interesting association in the universe. Here the sinner is converted, the saints are edified, and God is glorified. For the church's sake the world is preserved and governed by the Prince of the kings of the earth: Sin and Satan are restrained and overruled: and the angels of heaven are employed as ministering spirits. Out of Zion the perfection of beauty God hath shined; and to this object the public spirit of the Christian is principally directed. For Zion's sake I will not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth. A benevolent disposition towards mankind, and a special regard for the godly, are coeval with the Christian life; and wheresoever these exist, there will also be some exertions for promoting the good of the house of the Lord: but it requires great progress in the new life before any one is characterized, by self-denial, in the church's service, similar to that of Moses, who chose affliction with the people of God; by an enlightened ardour in the work of righteousness, like Elijah the prophet; and by such disinterestedness, as was practised by Paul the apostle. These attainments are not to be expected, until after man has obtained grace to quiet his personal anxieties, and has moreover made so much progress in the knowledge of divine things, as is necessary to an understanding of the times, that he may know how to promote the welfare of Israel. This is not a blind devotion to the interests of a party; but a spirit of magnanimity and liberality, fostered and directed by the word of God.

It indeed requires no grace or goodness, in any man, to be zealous in promoting the interests of the sect or family, in political or ecclesiastical society, to which he has attached himself. Ignorance and prejudice, nay, ambition or avarice may have led to such connexion: Shame and cowardice, as well as mistaken interest, may be the means of continuing the alliance: native contractedness of spirit may occasion bigoted exertions in the cause: and the most hateful passions prove productive of obstinate perseverance. These principles are, however, not only destitute of religion, but utterly opposed to its power. The remains of corruption in the heart of the regenerate, natural zeal and inflexibility, may also go far in producing something like religious exertions for the prosperity of the church, in men who are of very small attainments

in holiness of life; but the affections and exertions of growing Christians, are easily distinguished from such appearances. The unreflecting may be deceived, but the wise shall understand.

Unsanctified exertions, for promoting the good of the church, have for their ultimate end, some temporary object: Spiritual enterprise always contemplates the prosperity of the cause of God in Christ, and the highest happiness of man, throughout eternity. Natural or unsanctified zeal is obtrusive like that of Jehu, seeking praise to its possessor: Holy zeal, like that of Paul, glories only in the cross of Christ. The rule, to which unholy enterprise conforms, is the prospect of success: The law of God directs the virtuous in the use of means, as well as in the choice of ends to be prosecuted. Success affords more pleasure to the ungodly than a consciousness of divine approbation: The virtuous are sensible that ineffectual enterprise evangelically conducted shall not lose its reward. The wicked are proud of their own ardour, their skilful management, their sincerity and their success: the righteous disapprove of zeal, which is not according to knowledge; they detest the idea of doing evil that good may come of it; they never offer the sincerity of their own deceitful hearts as atonement to God for their disobedience; and it is not the success of their own schemes, but the triumphs of truth and holiness that constitute their joy and their crown. Mindful of the relation in which they stand to the great spiritual empire of Messiah, and embracing with their affections the whole church of God, they labour with industry to promote the good of Jerusalem, in the particular sphere, and with special regard to the society of believers, in which it hath pleased God to place them for his own glory. Their public spirit overcomes all disorderly or partial considerations. *Our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged. Be ye also enlarged.*

5. The fifth degree of progress in personal piety is characterized by *heavenly-mindedness*.

“To be spiritually minded” is, in some degree, the property of all the saints. Renewed by the Holy Ghost, they are directed to the heavenly Jerusalem, as the ultimate end of their pilgrimage. Persuaded of the truth, they declare plainly that they seek that country. From the very beginning of their journey, their desire for its enjoyment is both sincere and ardent: but, as they approach the perfection of the man of God, and the place of their final rest, the whole



soul is more and more assimilated to the sons of felicity who dwell on high ; to the place itself which they so happily enjoy ; and to him who is its light and its glory.

The Redeemer, in his conversation with Nicodemus, on the nature and origin of spiritual life, distinguishes the concerns of true religion into things that are *earthly* and things that are *heavenly*. The plain principles which are more immediately adapted to our faith and obedience, as living piously in this world, are distinguished from the more sublime doctrines, which directly refer to the life on which we are about to enter, and the company into which we are about to be introduced, when the celestial gates are set open for our admission. There is a corresponding change effected, from good to better, upon the mind of the Christian, as he draws near the holy habitation. The thoughts are more habitually directed to those things which are above : the understanding is more enlarged in beholding the counsels, and the attributes, and the love of God to fallen man : the vanity of earthly things, is more feelingly acknowledged : and the joy of heaven sits more uniformly upon the countenance, while faith invigorated, sees *him that is invisible*, and gives substance to the objects of hope.

Some believers are seized rapidly, like Philip on the road to Gaza, and are found, a little before they breathe their last, in this heavenly-minded state. Others are left for a long time on earth in the habitual exercise of it, as an example to others and as monuments of the power and sovereignty of the grace of God. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth. When Christ, who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."

6. The highest rank in personal godliness on earth is attained by those *who willingly suffer for Christ's sake*.

Those who, under pretence of superior sagacity, reject the revelation of Jesus Christ, have always undervalued the testimony which Christianity derives from the self-denial, the sufferings, and the martyrdom of her sons and daughters. *The patience of the saints* has been represented as a spirit of bigotry, joyless, sullen, and obstinate. The calm fortitude of the humble and zealous Christian, has been degraded by a comparison with the gloomy endurance of the barbarian who bears torture without complaint. But the intelligent and candid infidel himself will not deny, that voluntary martyrdom

for any cause, is an evidence of personal resolution and sincerity—the highest which man can give of his attachment to the cause he has espoused. And it is easy to show that the disciple who willingly carries the cross, for which he is misrepresented and maligned by his cotemporaries, rises far superior in heroism to the patriot soldier, who, encouraged by the honours of a military life, and cheered by the voice of applause loudly raised by his country, exposes himself to danger and to death.

In this age of worldly wisdom ; in a state of society where professors have the most of their religion on their lips ; and where they are not in immediate danger of being put to the trial of their faith by persecution, suffering for Christ is esteemed an easy service, and willingness to die for the truth, an attainment of no great account in the religious life. Indeed, the maxim is become in some degree proverbial, that “ it is easier to die the death of the martyr than to live the life of the Christian.”

Did this maxim only convey the idea, that it is easier for a Christian to die for his religion, than uniformly to live in a perfect conformity to its letter and its spirit, I should not call its truth in question. The former, though a rare, is a possible attainment, but the latter is impossible. No man liveth and sinneth not. Perfection in this life is neither promised nor given to man. This, however, is not the meaning of the assertion. It is intended to undervalue the fortitude which endureth all things, and overcometh the world by patience even unto death. It is far from being true, that it is easier to die a natural death, like a Christian, than to live like one : and it is still farther from truth, that it is easier to endure persecution ; to suffer daily reproach and loss ; and to meet death in the midst of one's health, and comfort, and usefulness, than it is to live in the practice of the ordinary duties of a religious life. Man is surely more willing to live than to die. This is human nature. Ease and enjoyment are preferable to trouble and sorrow. It necessarily follows, that it requires less of divine grace to live, in the ordinary practice and quiet enjoyment of the Christian religion, than is necessary to incline one willingly to suffer loss of property, of liberty, and of life for the sake of the gospel.

Divine revelation describes the sufferings of Christ for our redemption, as the greatest evidence of his love for us, and as the most difficult part of his mediatory obedience 'o the law

of God. Hence we find, that his blood, his death, and such other terms as indicate his last sufferings, are frequently used, in the word of God, to designate his entire righteousness as the Saviour from sin. It is also intimated, in the sacred volume, that as faith is the spring of our evangelical obedience, so suffering for the cause of truth is the highest exercise of holiness, while each is the gift of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. *For unto you it is given, in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.\**

Pain of every kind, is an object of aversion by the creature; and chastisement itself is, on that account, grievous. The preservation of life, and participation in health and comfort, are always in themselves desirable. Regard to our own happiness is a part of the constitution of our nature; and thus, by his works as well as by his word, the Creator and Redeemer of men declares it to be his will, that man should avoid suffering, and seek his own safety, and particular good. *For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church.* This is as much a part of human nature as the power of sensation or reflection; a part too which divine grace neither communicates nor destroys. Exposed, nevertheless, as we are, in the present state of imperfection, to suffer loss and pain, it is our wisdom to bear with patience unavoidable evil; and often to choose an inferior degree of suffering as the means of escaping the greater and more permanent. Reason, as well as divine revelation, of course, justifies the Christian, in sacrifici-

\* It is not denied, that under certain evils, whether real or imaginary, life becomes a burden, and death desirable. Judas himself sought for death, and he found the destroyer. But this is not magnanimity. It is not martyrdom. I also admit, that some pious men, who are far from eminence in piety, may fancy, and even assert with sincerity that they are ready to die for the cause of religion. Peter, the apostle, was probably sincere, when he rashly said, *If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise:* but it was easier said than done. Soon did this confident man lose his courage, and realize the words of his Master, "Before the cock crow twice thou shalt deny me thrice." It is easy to be brave where there is no apprehension of danger; but the spirit of martyrdom is no common Christian attainment.

The man, on the contrary, who, from a pure conscience, foregoes the honour which awaited him in the midst of his cotemporaries; forsakes the ease which he might have enjoyed; rejects the influence, the rank, and the wealth which were obviously proposed to his acceptance; and in despite of the solicitation of friends, perhaps the cries of a beloved family, and the hope of enlarged usefulness in the church itself, sacrifices even his life to the truth, is certainly superior, in true holiness, to the ordinary classes of religious professors.

cing cheerfully the honours and comforts of this life, and even life itself, when they come in competition with the honour which cometh from God, and with the never-ending enjoyments of the heavenly life.

The duty and the reward of such a sacrifice are sufficiently obvious: *Whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it*: but the disposition of mind to perform the duty, in view of the high reward, is a rare attainment in grace. The Lord himself will, however, bestow it according to his good pleasure, in those extraordinary times of trial which call for it, upon them whom the King delighteth to honour. See, with what alacrity did the son of Amram, refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choose to suffer affliction with the people of God, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. Behold Stephen, before the high court of Palestine, suffering magnanimously for his Master. He is an object less of compassion than of admiration. While the scribes are recording the testimony of perjured witnesses, all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel. Cut to the heart by his reproofs, they gnashed on him with their teeth: but he being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God. *They stoned him, calling upon, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.*<sup>1</sup>

Of such men, brethren, the world is not worthy. They rarely appear, and when they do, this is not their rest. We, who profess the Christian religion, and who believe that we have ourselves experienced the power of grace in our effectual calling, are all, however, required to know the Redeemer in the fellowship of his sufferings. Although we are not often called to seal with our blood the testimony which we hold, it is still an invariable part of the economy of grace, that he who lives godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer some persecution.

Natural life, too, we must, every one of us, one day yield up to God. It is appointed unto all men once to die. Here we have no continuing city. Let us be prepared to meet the king of terrors without dismay, and with Christian confidence, *be willing rather to be absent from the body, and be present with the Lord.*\* Many a timid believer, fearful of entering into

\* Severe or long protracted sickness, or other distress, is a trial of patience; and the power of religion is displayed in supporting the saints under it with resignation and with piety.

the valley of the shadow of death, is, in a moment, before he enters into it, filled with faith and with confidence, and at the last hour, delivered from the fear of death by which, all his life, he has been held in bondage. To know death, and yet be fearless of its approach, is a desirable attainment; and let it ever be remembered, that the religion of years, which never has taught us to dismiss our alarms, is at best but feeble. Let us go on therefore from strength to strength to appear before God in Zion.

It is not insensibility to dishonour, to pain, or to death, that Christianity inculcates. It is not a false confidence, in rashly rushing into danger, or passionately provoking trouble, that it cherishes and recommends. Good men are, by the power of corruption, made weary of life, like Job and Jeremiah: profane men, like Judas Iscariot, may deem it an intolerable burden. Presumption, petulance, and passion, may expose to unnecessary and unprofitable opposition and sufferings. Pride, malevolence, and obstinacy, as well as mere rigidity of muscle and of nerve, may give the appearance of manly fortitude under adversity. But it is not the insensibility of the Stoic; it is not the obstinacy of animal intrepidity; it is not the enthusiasm of despair, nor the delusion of a false hope, that enters into the character of the Christian's voluntary sufferings. It is the work of God's Spirit, convincing him of the goodness of his cause; showing him that God's glory demands the sacrifice; and assuring him of a great reward in heaven. It is grace that makes the Christian hero. High stands the throne, and brilliant is the crown of martyrdom.

Valour betokens magnanimity, and excites our admiration. Candour indicates integrity, and commands our approbation. Piety, modesty, and fidelity, interest our hearts and unite them in love to him who possesses them. The good man, struggling with adversity, and a conqueror over death itself, leaves a monument of his worth more durable than marble. Such is the martyr who sealed with his blood the testimony which he held. Let me draw up the curtain, and reveal to the faith of my hearers the multitude before the throne. Hear that shout of victory. *What are these that are arrayed with white robes, and palms in their hands? and whence came they? These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

## CONCLUSION.

It is not without embarrassment that I attempted this delineation. I felt the difficulty and the delicacy of the undertaking. Years of scrupulous attention to the subject, have persuaded me, that however distinctly different characters are marked in the sacred oracles, it is no easy task so to apply the description to living Christians, as to determine with accuracy, the grade, to which the individual professor in the school of Christ is to be justly referred. Although it is obvious to every one that there is a variety of countenance and complexion in the human family dwelling upon earth, scientific men find it difficult to mark the line, by country or by climate, which in every case serves to distinguish one variety from another. He who would attempt to classify the inhabitants of a city or a township, into several distinct orders, would find, on making the experiment, individual cases upon which he could not satisfactorily determine. Differences, however, there are; and for all the purposes of general utility they are sufficiently distinctly marked. In delineating the different degrees of attainment in Christianity, I have made no invidious application to individuals. I leave you to ascertain, from the description and from the exercise of an enlightened conscience, and also to decide for yourselves, to which class you in fact belong. The features of the Christian character, like the colours of the rainbow, although obviously distinct, run into one another; and it is difficult to put your finger upon the spot, where the one begins or where another absolutely terminates. This will readily account for the diversity of opinions which exist upon this subject among sensible men, although they acknowledge that all the parts belong in general to the Christian character. Far be it from me, to urge my own scheme upon your attention, as the best possible description of the several degrees of piety. I give it to you, however, as that which is most satisfactory to myself; and let the claim to your approbation rest upon its own evidence.

Should you, however, deem the arrangement, which I have adopted, an arbitrary one; still you will allow me to urge, with my last words, the exhortation of the text. It is entitled to perfect confidence and sincere obedience. "As Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." AMEN.

## THE SPIRIT OF ADOPTION.

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### SERMON IV.

ROM. viii. 15.—*Ye have received the Spirit of Adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.*

ALL true Christians, whatever may be their several degrees of attainment in sanctification, are led by the Spirit of God; and are become the sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus. They have obeyed from the heart the call, to “leave their own people and their father’s house;” and have accepted the gracious offer of adoption to the family of the living God. Descended from him, by whose *disobedience many were made sinners*, our connexion, by corrupt nature, is with a family devoted to destruction, in consequence of the breach of the first covenant. *As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.* This connexion is set aside by the grace of God, calling us from the service of sin, and enabling us to embrace the offer of salvation through a Redeemer. Those who are born again, and have so entered upon a new and better life, *are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.* The apparent change in their condition is not very captivating to the senses of men of worldly prudence. The spiritual life does not make them more wealthy, or more honourable in the esteem of sinners. *It does not yet appear what they shall be.* But when the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, their dignity and happiness shall be made manifest. Mortality shall then be swallowed up of life, and the state of the believer shall appear more glorious than we can now conceive or describe. Made perfect in holiness, he shall enter the heavenly sanctuary, and with a beating heart, meet his long looked for Father, and receive from his dear Redeemer an abundant welcome.

In the meantime, brethren, although you are “poor in spirit,” you have a certain pledge of an inheritance among

them which are sanctified. You may therefore patiently wait until the redemption of the purchased possession: For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father. Ye were once strangers and foreigners, fearful and unbelieving, held in durance by the *spirit of bondage*; not the Spirit of God and of Christ; for this is a Spirit of liberty. It is the spirit of the world and of false religion that reduces to servitude and servility. You have been delivered from that state of slavery and corruption, and are now Christ's freemen, in the family of God. A very different spirit is now communicated: and a different effect is produced by him. He is the Comforter of your souls; and by him you are led through Jesus Christ unto the Father.

Let us consider, with attention, *the Gift which the children of God have received*—the spirit of adoption; *their Christian liberty*—the spirit of bondage was not again sent upon them; and *the import of their address to God*—they cry, Abba, Father.

I. We shall consider the gift which God confers on his children, "Ye have received the spirit of adoption."

Adoption is an act, whereby one admits a stranger into his family, in order to deal with him, in all respects, as if he was really a child of his own. Pharaoh's daughter took Moses in this manner into her family, and educated him as her son. Israel, as a body politic, was adopted under the special care of God. To them "pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants."\* True Christians shall, at the resurrection, in one glorious congregation, be publicly adopted and put in possession of the heavenly inheritance. "But ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our bodies."† There is a *spiritual* adoption into the family of God, which he bestows upon all those who have embraced the Saviour. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe in his name."‡ They are, by an act of God's free grace, received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God. The Holy Spirit, is the *earnest* of these privileges: He is the gift received. The third Person of the Godhead is present with every creature; but he is in a peculiar manner present with every Christian. The Redeemer, when about to suffer death for the redemp-

\* Rom. ix. 4.

† Rom. viii. 23.

‡ John i. 12.



tion of our transgressions, promised to his disciples, as the sum of their blessings, and as a sufficient recompense for his own removal from them, the Holy Ghost to bring all things to their remembrance, and to guide them into all truth.\* This divine Person influences the minds of God's children, by infusing into the soul gracious principles, bestowing upon them a pious temper, and directing them to holy exercises. The Spirit of God dwelleth in them, and this Spirit is life because of righteousness. This is the Spirit of adoption, which believers have received. It is a proposition of inspiration, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."†

The third Person in the Trinity, is called "the Spirit of adoption," because he *seals believers in their adopted state; assures them of their adoption; and bestows upon them its various comforts.*

1. The Spirit of God *seals* the children of adoption. We are indebted to the riches of divine grace for all the good things we enjoy. To nothing can we claim a right, founded upon our own merit. The Spirit places us among the children, and then seals us in that state. "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."‡ "In whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise."§ This serves to *mark the particular property* God has in believers; to *distinguish* them from others of the human family: and to *preserve* them for the end of their election and faith, even the salvation of their souls. To my legal transactions I annex my seal, to confirm it as my own deed; property which I wish to have distinguished from any thing similar to it, I mark also with my seal; and I seal up my letter in order to preserve it for the use of the person to whom it is directed.

God has a *special property* in believers. "For the Lord hath chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel as his peculiar treasure."|| The saints are scattered over the earth; mingled in families and in civil society with the wicked of this world; some in the most honourable, and some in the meanest stations. Nevertheless, the eye of the Lord is upon them for good: the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his.¶ They are no more their own, they are bought with a price: and although they may be despised by the world; reproached and persecuted;

\* John xvi. 7, 15, 26.

† Rom. viii. 9.

‡ Gal. iii. 26.

§ Eph. i. 13.

|| Psa. cxxxv. 4

¶ 2 Tim. ii. 19.

though they be distracted with doubts, and sunk in despondency, the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls recognizes them as the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. He sends his servants to collect, out of the various tribes of the human race, the members of his body, "that we may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body to the edifying of itself in love."\*

By the impression of God's seal they are also *visibly distinguished* from others. They are renewed in the image of God; they profess themselves his servants, and they act in conformity to the vocation wherewith they are called. The servants of the living God are sealed in their foreheads. They bear the mark, which their Master puts upon them, in a conspicuous place.

The prevalence of revealed religion distinguishes Christendom from the heathen world: an assent to the truth of revelation distinguishes the professor of Christianity from the infidel: acquiescence in the doctrines of grace discriminates the orthodox from the heretic; but there are marks more legible than confessions. A conscientious Christian is another name for the sober, the useful, the pious, and the upright character. An openly profane and immoral man is never mistaken for a true Christian. "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works?"† "And what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"‡

It must be confessed, however, that a particular examination of the state of the Christian world, in order to ascertain who are God's sealed ones, as distinct from those who bear only the name Christian, is accompanied with great difficulty. Between the two opposite points, undoubted piety and absolute irreligion, you can find all the intermediate steps occupied: so various and complicated are the plans and pretensions of professed Christians. To draw with certainty the line of distinction, is impossible for man. We must be content to let the tares grow with the wheat until the harvest.

But if we meet with some instances in which it is difficult to discern the seal of the living God in the foreheads of his servants; there are many in whom the impression is distinct and lasting. Their shining countenance show that they have

\* Eph. iv. 12, 15, 16.

† James ii. 14.

‡ Micah vi. 8.

been in the mount with God. They abide in Christ, and endeavour to walk even as he walked. They hate evil. They shun the company of the scorner. They delight in the excellent of the earth, and if they have conscientiously taken their stand in that part of the visible church, in which they can most faithfully serve their divine Master, they embrace in their affections, all that love the Lord Jesus Christ; speaking the language of Canaan, and superior both to party zeal and a time-serving spirit, they do good to all men, especially to those who are of the household of faith: Contending earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints; and speaking the truth in love, they grow up in all things into him who is the head, even Christ.

Such persons are preserved in the possession of their inheritance for ever; "For doing these things they shall never fall."\* The precepts of the law encourage them to the duty of perseverance; and the promise of the gospel, connected with the precept, assures them of their perseverance as a blessing from heaven. "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."† This divine seal secures them from all danger. There is no power in the universe which can break up, what God has determined to keep sacred. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."‡

Christians are not indeed made perfect at their conversion, nor is the time of their tribulation then over. Some are permitted to wander far from the path of duty—To walk in darkness—To stumble and fall, until overcome by their own corruptions, and tormented by the adversary, horror inexpressible tortures their consciences; but not all their infirmities, nor all their sins; not all the power of temptation, nor all the efforts of devils can separate one of them from the body of Christ in which they are preserved by the Spirit of adoption. My heart may faint, and my strength may fail; my faith may waver, and my love become languid: was there nothing to preserve my union with the Saviour, but my own exertions, the enemy might prevail: But the everlasting arms are underneath me, how then shall I fall? My Father is greater than all, none is able to pluck me out of his hands. "God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever. I am continually with thee: Thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory."§

\* 2 Pet. i. 10. † Eph. iv. 30. ‡ Rom. viii. 1. § Ps. lxxiii. 26, 23, 24.

2. The Holy Spirit is to believers the witness of their adoption. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God."\*

It is of great importance for a Christian to be conscious of his own gracious exercises. He is jealous of his deceitful heart; and he cannot well be happy while he is uncertain of an interest in the common salvation: uncertainty of success prevents cheerful exertion.

There are many who presume to appropriate the promise of eternal life, while they reject the Saviour, in whom the promise is made. "Lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." It is reasonable, therefore, that professors of religion should be anxious to ascertain their own state in God's sight. Assurance of salvation will not operate to their disadvantage. It neither encourages indolence nor disposes the soul to sin. It, on the contrary, enables them to hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering. You do not paralyze the arm of industry by giving to the husbandman a good title to the land which he cultivates. He has an additional incitement to improve the estate from the assurance that he shall not be dispossessed. It is not an optional matter whether Christians shall give themselves the trouble of self-examination. An authority to which they must submit commands them to commence the work with vigour. "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure."† He hath also provided them with a witness, whose testimony can determine the truth in question. "Ye have received the Spirit of adoption." Every Christian, without exception, has access to this divine witness. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."‡ Nor have we to go far in order to look for him. He is near to our hearts. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself."§ When I am in earnest, in my inquiry about my state, I must close my eyes upon the world, and open them upon my own soul. The testimony of my neighbour, the testimony of the church and her most able ministers in my favour, cannot decide the awful question, Am I an heir of glory? To the witness within me let me listen with attention. His testimony is truth.

The Holy Ghost assures the believer of his adoption, by making him *understand the marks of a gracious state* laid down in the Scriptures—by *quickenning the various graces* in

\* Rom. viii. 16. † 2 Pet. i. 10. ‡ Rom. viii. 9. § 1 John v. 10.

his soul—and by *powerfully applying the appropriate promises of God*, to these very graces now excited to a lively exercise.

The assistance of the divine Spirit, in all these instances, is necessary to the full assurance of salvation. I may be well acquainted with the portrait of the Christian drawn in the bible. But unless I recognize the very same likeness in my own heart, what right have I to conclude it is mine? And if I should discover the propriety of the application of it to myself, where would be my hope unless I was convinced of the inseparable connexion between grace and glory? The infallibility of the promise is the only ground of the full assurance of hope. And this hope is the anchor of the soul.\*

Blessed Spirit! send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me to thy tabernacles.

Brethren, we cannot make any progress in grace or in the saving knowledge of Christ without the assistance of the Spirit. The natural man knoweth not the things of God. He is destitute of spiritual discernment. But the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him. And in order to attain a satisfactory knowledge of the Christian's portrait, we must apply to the Holy Ghost. He knows how grace affects the human soul; he hath described the manner in the scriptures; and he enlightens the eyes of the understanding in order that we may comprehend the description.

The Spirit of God cannot be ignorant of the nature or the effects of divine grace. He is the messenger of peace from Christ to the soul. He is the maker of the human mind, and knows all its powers. The application of grace to these powers, and the direction of all our faculties under the dispensation of grace, are his own work. He alone can describe the effects of irresistible grace directing the voluntary actions of a moral agent, amidst all the complex influences of inherent corruption, external temptation, and Satanical exertions. He has, however, given us this description in the holy scriptures. The penmen of the sacred volume wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. They have given us a system of doctrines and of Christian experience drawn with infallible accuracy. To attend to the practical influence of religion, upon the saints eminent in scripture history, is of great utility. But our own intellects, unassisted by the Spirit of God, are incompetent to the task.

The human mind is capable of perceiving the force of a

\* Heb. vi. 17, 19.

syllogism, or the truth of a mathematical proposition ; but it is devoid of spiritual discrimination. " For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him ? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God."\* The hound which howls after its game, is superior to its master in the delicacy of its scent ; and the eagle that soars aloft, excels the philosopher in the organs of vision. But these creatures are utterly incapable of scientific exertions, or of profiting by the experience of former ages. Even so, the natural man may excel the Christian in physical science, and in the knowledge of the useful and ornamental arts ; but the children of adoption are capable of knowledge, compared with which this is dross and dung. Their Omniscient Instructor presents them with a view of the grace of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And in order to assist them in understanding its doctrines, examples are given them of the lives of the faithful. This strikes out a meridian, through the vast map of revelation, and serves for a line of reference while we investigate the sublime mysteries of the Christian religion. The soul, divinely qualified to improve the means of knowledge thus provided, attains to certainty about the characteristics of a gracious state.

He is also enabled to perceive in his own experience those very graces, the nature of which he now understands. The gracious affections perceived, and the consciousness of their existence, are equally the gift of the Spirit of adoption.—*Without me ye can do nothing.*

The carnal mind is unfruitful. It is a hard-beaten path, which will not receive the seed cast into it, but leaves it exposed to the fowls of the air. This barren waste is changed by the power of divine grace into a fruitful field, like the garden of the Lord. A true Christian, however, may suffer spiritual decay. The verdure is faded, the fruit is blasted : but the renovating influence of the Spirit of the Almighty is the return of spring. The icy hardness of the heart melts in the beams of the Sun of righteousness. The winter is past, the storm is over ; the fruits of the vine flourish and the pomegranates bud. Grace is quickened. A divine light shines upon it, which renders it both vigorous and visible. I see the image of God restored to my soul. I know it to be from above. Whatever diffidence may suggest, whatever fear may dictate, evidence so forcible bears down all opposi-

\* 1 Cor. ii. 11.

tion of unbelief. "God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."\*

The promises of God, confirmed by his oath, are now understood and applied. In no part of practical religion do Christians stand in more need of supernatural assistance, than in applying those great and precious promises, whereby we are made *partakers of the divine nature*. This work is accompanied with peculiar difficulty. We have a general acquaintance with the promissory part of revelation, and have no doubt of its truth. "For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen, unto the glory of God by us."† But we find it hard to make the appropriation. The saints are diffident of their own gracious qualities: they perceive the blessings of the covenant directed in the promise to specified characters; and they have witnessed the raptures of the enthusiast, following the sparks of his own kindling, until bewildered and disappointed, he lay down in sorrow. I hear my Lord say, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."‡ I have no doubt of the truth of this. But what comfort is it to my soul? I dare not separate the blessing from the character specified. Shall I assure myself that the promise is to me, and still indulge in the impurities of impiety? This would be presumption. Shall I break open a letter addressed to another, and appropriate its contents, and be guiltless? No. The believer trembles at the very idea of perverting scripture. He is perplexed with doubts: but even in this situation he still cleaves to the promise of salvation. He may be perplexed, but he does not absolutely despair. "He *may* walk in darkness, but he *will* trust in the name of the Lord." Nor shall he trust in vain: for the Spirit is with him; and that Spirit beareth witness with our spirits that we are the sons of God. Quickening and enlightening the soul by his heat and by his light, we perceive the grace of God within us; the promise is directed to the heart. The blessing which it brings is welcome. We wonder why we have been so slow of heart to believe. We recover our strength. We are transported from the regions of doubt to those of full assurance. "The Lord my God will enlighten my darkness. For by thee have I run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall. He teacheth my hands to war so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arm."§

3. The Holy Spirit communicates to believers the comfort arising from their adoption into God's family.

\* 2 Tim. i. 7. † 2 Cor. i. 20. ‡ Matt. 5. 8. § Psa. xviii. 23, 29, 34.

When the Redeemer was about to leave the world, he informed his disciples that they had many dangers to encounter. He was affected by their foreseen tribulations, and already sympathized in their sorrow. He bade them, however, to be of good cheer. He did not leave them comfortless. A divine messenger, he engaged to send to them; and it was expedient that he should himself depart in order that the Comforter might come, even the Spirit of truth. "He will guide you into all truth; for he shall take of mine, and show it unto you."

The Holy Spirit, as the COMFORTER, *discovers to believers the path of light; qualifies them for their present rank; and supports them during their pilgrimage.*

One of the first lessons the disciple received from his Master was, "deny thyself and follow me;" and one of the first considerations of the Christian is, "Here I have no continuing city." To be directed in the new and the living way;—made wise in the knowledge of the scriptures, will therefore be a desirable object; and the gratification of that desire by the Spirit of adoption, will comfort the hearts of God's children.

The bible is the rule, which God has given for our direction. It is intended for persons almost infinitely diversified in the circumstances of age, country, education, understanding, temper, rank, pursuits, and connexions: it is therefore not to be expected that the capacity of an individual man should be the measure of its doctrines. In the scriptures are some things hard to be understood, although in matters of universal concern we have line upon line, and precept upon precept. We have food in abundance to satisfy us, in this blessed store, and we have also sufficient incitements to industry in searching for the hidden treasures which it contains.

The ministers of the gospel, my Christian brethren, are your servants for Jesus's sake; and they dig in the mine in order to discover the gold to your anxious view. The acquisition of information is delightful to us and to you: But we must both be sensible of our need of the Holy Spirit. The learned and the industrious frequently stumble over spiritual truth. When we search the sacred volume, without a sense of our own vileness, and of the majesty and holiness of God, whatever be our diligence and our penetration, it is not surprising that we should make false reports.

If any man open the Bible, not to seek for the words of



eternal life, but to select materials wherewith he may display his own powers to advantage, or serve the interests of party spirit, shall not God be just in answering such a fool according to his folly? And if the design be, to keep back any part of the counsel of God, he may expect to have a veil over his eyes, which will to him obscure the lustre of divine truth. But where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. Oh, how comfortable to have the company of the Holy Ghost in searching his own Scriptures; and to have "an unction from this holy one whereby we shall know all things." It is his office, to show to Christians the glories of their religion—to fill their understandings with truth; and their hearts with gladness. Irresistible conviction accompanies them even into the regions of divine mystery. Here they are delighted and astonished. A thousand unanswered questions occur with amazement, and teach them the imperfection of the present state; but cannot shake their faith in the answers which they have received to others from God's word. "And we all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord."

Christians are born again. To this fact the Spirit bears witness. They are mindful of the dignity of their rank. Beloved, now are we the sons of God. But the thought humbles them: for their character and conduct are not suitable to their expectations. As the hart panteth after the water brooks, they pant for the image of God. They feel the sinfulness of their soul with pain. Much, therefore, of their joy consists in the sanctification of the Spirit. To be delivered from sin, to be approaching nearer to the standard of perfection; to have the understanding improved, the temper amended, the manners accommodated to the house of God, will afford the experienced Christian no small share of delight.

The comforts of his adoption do not rest here. Heaven, that word which means an assemblage of all perfection and happiness, is before them. They anticipate its joy. The Spirit himself gives unto them a foretaste of it. He brings them to Christ's banqueting house. Their souls are satisfied with marrow and with fatness. Brethren, who can describe joy, so as to convey an idea of it to one who has never been glad? and they who are glad in the Lord, know that it cannot be described. I relinquish the theme. But I indulge a hope that we shall resume it with more advantage in the temple above.

## II. The Christian enjoys true liberty.

The apostle is addressing those who have been led by the Holy Spirit into the family of the living God. To such he says, "Ye have not received the Spirit of bondage again to fear."

Bondage and fear are words which call up very disagreeable ideas. They are presented to us here that we might rejoice in our deliverance. Let us endeavour to ascertain the meaning of them; and let us be thankful that we have received another Spirit.

Subjection to the burdensome yoke of the ceremonial law is represented in the New Testament as a state of bondage. "How turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?"\* "Be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."† The Old Testament dispensation of grace was certainly more obscure and burdensome than that which it is our happiness to enjoy: and yet the design of that dispensation was not to fill the mind with terror, nor was it in any sense inconsistent with possessing the Spirit of adoption. Saints, under that Testament, were adopted into God's family. They were emancipated from the slavery of sin and the fear of death, and gave many decisive evidences of their having attained to the full assurance of faith. Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, must therefore point out another deliverance, than the change of dispensation. The apostle, in the verses both before and after my text, describes the effects of the Holy Ghost's dealing with those who are Christ's ransomed ones. Ye were once the servants of sin. Ye were then in a state of bondage. "For of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage."‡ But ye were elected of God, and redeemed by Christ: God therefore sent forth the Spirit of his Son in your hearts. You were convinced of your sins, and you saw your danger: You felt your bondage, and with consequent fear, like the keeper of the prison at Philippi, fell down trembling, "Saying, what must I do to be saved?"§

Believers in Jesus Christ, justified freely by his grace, and admitted into God's family, never, however, receive the spirit of bondage to fear. There may be some of them left to experience much distress of body and mind, and "by reason of fear be for some time subject to bondage;"|| but the Holy Ghost will never be a spirit of bondage to them. They are

\* Gal. iv. 9.

† Chap. v. 1.

‡ 2 Pet. ii. 19.

§ Acts xvi. 30.

|| Heb. ii. 15.

in a state of liberty, though they know it not: and Omniscience will not testify to a falsehood.

The words thus explained teach us that the Christian is in a state of liberty. Other passages of Scripture confirm this. "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. If the Son, therefore, shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."\*

Christian liberty is equally opposed to slavery and licentiousness. It is opposed to restraint and violence, but not to subordination and cheerful obedience. When I can freely direct my own conduct under equitable laws, I enjoy a state of liberty. When I must make the will of another, in opposition to my own, the rule of my conduct, I am in a state of servitude; and when I wilfully violate law and right, I enter the regions of licentiousness. This is but another name for slavery. It is bondage to my own passions and lusts. I am then become a slave to those who ought to be my servants. This is both more shameful and more dangerous than servitude to foreign force. But this is the state of those who consider it liberty to be irreligious. "Presumptuous, self-willed,—they speak great swelling words of vanity—They allure others—And while they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption."†

Your liberty, Christians, consists in deliverance from the dominion of sin—from the power of Satan—and from undue human influence over your sentiments, your conscience, or your conduct.

1. They who are adopted into God's family, are delivered from the dominion of sin.

Sin may be considered as imputed and inherent. All mankind descending from Adam by ordinary generation sinned in him, and fell with him in his first transgression. We are all by nature children of wrath. The curse of the law rests upon the human family; and they are bound as victims to divine vengeance. Every mouth must be stopped; for the whole world is guilty in the sight of God, the righteous Judge. We must also remember, that by the deeds of the law no flesh can be justified; for the wages of sin is death. But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. This is our *deliverance*. "The Lord 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."‡ At the foot of the cross the burden

\* John viii. 32, 36.

† 2 Pet. ii. 19.

‡ Gal. iv. 5, 6.

of guilt tumbles from our shoulders. "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." The curse being removed, there is now no barrier to the Spirit's restoring the image of God to our souls. Sin shall have no more dominion over you. Ye are not under the law, but under grace.

Christians indeed are not always conscious that they possess such liberty. Many of them have their doubts and their fears. They all have certainly believed; but they are not certain that they have: They have a sure faith; but they have not full assurance.

Delivered, in their justification, from the guilt of sin and the curse of the law, corruption shall no longer hold its throne in their hearts. But they are not yet made perfect. "They have forgotten that they have been washed from their old sins."\* They grieve the Holy Spirit who sealed them; and spiritual consolation is therefore withheld from them. They fall into deep pits, and horror seizes upon them. They cry unto the Lord in their distress; their cry is heard; and they are delivered. "He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God."† They now walk at liberty. They feel that they are free to serve God without the fear of wrath. Their love for their heavenly Father implies reverence and esteem. They delight in the law of the Lord after the inward man. Their yoke is easy and their burden light.

Any restriction upon Christian liberty, arising from the power of sin, is painful to the Christian. He feels it more forcibly, than he formerly did his absolute bondage. He has tasted of the sweets of that liberty wherewith Christ has made his people free, and he bears with uneasiness any future servitude to the anger of heaven, or to his own vile affections. He now listens to the voice which proposes deliverance with double delight. It is the voice of my Beloved, is his exclamation, while his heart leaps for joy. That voice addresses him, "I am the Lord thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob. The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek: he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives; and the opening of the prisons to them that are bound."‡ These words are effectual. God hath spoken, and it is performed. No intervening

\* 2 Pet. i.

† Psa. xl. 2, 3.

‡ Isa. lxi. 1.

cloud now hides his Father's face from the believer's anxious eye. "The Lord was my stay. He brought me forth also into a large place. He delivered me, because he delighted in me."\*

2. Christians are delivered from the power of Satan.

Man, in his first act of rebellion against heaven, sold himself to the prince of the fallen angels. He bartered the blessing for the curse—the image and the favour of God for the similitude and the servitude of the devil.

The carnal mind approves of the exchange; and readily conforms to the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience. The prince of the power of the air consequently has dominion over unregenerate man. This is a lamentable fact asserted expressly in the volume of inspiration. The history of our race corresponds to the testimony of scripture; and philosophy offers no objection to this part of our belief. Philosophists, who pretend to think freely, speak ignorantly, when they deny the possibility of the fact. We are not chargeable, brethren, with celebrating an imaginary deliverance, when we rejoice in freedom from the power of Satan as a part of our Christian liberty.

Mind converses with mind through bodily organs; and most assuredly the want of body cannot prove a hindrance to the intercourse of spirits. An unembodied spirit may have access to a mind connected with body, in a manner which we cannot explain: for we cannot explain the manner even of our own perceptions. We may trace the impression made by external objects to the nerves, and from thence to the brain; but how matter can affect spirit, even then, is as great a mystery as ever. How matter can affect mind is, certainly, a secret as inexplicable as how spirit can converse with spirit without the intervention of matter. It is not necessary, as unbelievers affirm, to clothe Satan with the attributes of omnipresence or omniscience, in order to make him the enemy of virtue and the leader of rebellion against the divine authority. A man of ambition and intrigue may rule an empire, and carry his own spirit into the councils of the remotest provinces. The number moreover of fallen angels is great. Their powers are superior to those of the human mind; their experience is long, and their observation extensive. Intent upon wickedness, and unwearied in industry, they have for nearly six thousand years studied the course of Providence; and the laws of the physical and moral world.

\* Psa. xviii. 18, 19.

Engaged in a conspiracy against virtue, what injury must they not be capable of doing to the spiritual interests of mortals? They are able also to make repeated visits, of but short intermissions, to the quarter in which their malicious views may be promoted. Matter, though naturally inert, travels, when impelled by sufficient force, with astonishing velocity. A ray of light, or an electric spark, moves with a rapidity which would soon make the circuit of the globe. The activity of spirit is confessed. When, from an eminence, we take a view of an extended plain several miles before us, we give millions of different inclinations to the optic axis in the course of a moment of time; and a distinct act of the will is necessary to each inclination.\* Neither consciousness nor recollection, serve in contemplating these actions; because such a minute exercise of those powers would only embarrass and in no case answer the purposes of present usefulness or comfort. These things are taught by philosophy: and serve to defend against sophistry the Christian doctrine, in admitting the possibility of the agency of evil spirits on the human mind.

Devils numerous, malicious, and active, hold an empire over ungodly men, who have willingly given themselves over to slavery—who have been committed by the justice of God, on account of their crimes, to the power of the roaring lion, that constantly goeth about seeking whom he may devour.

The grand adversary is the “god of this world, who hath blinded the minds of them which believe not.”† He is the prince of this world, who, infuriated by the apprehended destruction of his kingdom, attacked with all his might the Redeemer of men. It was not in vain that Jesus suffered from the power of darkness. The serpent bruised the heel of the Seed of the woman; but he bruised the serpent’s head. That same Jesus, who gave deliverance from the guilt of sin and the curse of the law, “Blotting out the hand-writing of ordinances that was against us, nailing it to his cross;” did also set his people at liberty from the dominion of Satan. “Having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them, openly triumphing over them.”‡

The strong man armed can no longer keep the house. A stronger than he dispossesses him; and the Spirit of adoption witnesses to the ransomed their liberty from this tyrant. To him they shall never hereafter be subjected, although he may

\* Stewart’s Phil.

† 2 Cor. iv. 4.

‡ Col. ii. 14, 15.

often much annoy them. They have obtained their liberty, although they have not as yet attained to a state of perfect peace and glory.

Christians, in the present world, have many conflicts with Satan. If he finds a believer in a decayed state, he marks him for his prey. He diverts his attention from practical religion: he provides other objects to occupy his mind; he enervates the whole soul; and renders it as unfruitful as possible. A barren wind destroys all remaining verdure; and blasts from hell threaten to pull the tree from its roots. If he finds a professor of religion pursuing with too much eagerness any of the tempting objects of worldly gratification, he inflames the passions; he throws a mist around the eyes, which unduly magnifies the object; he allures him from the path of righteousness; and embraces every opportunity of throwing him agitated and disappointed, headlong into the pit which he had digged for him. To the mourning and trembling Christian he also joins himself. He studies his constitution, and the cause of his alarm. The wounded conscience he makes to bleed afresh; and brandishing the threatening of the divine law over the terrified soul, he fills the mind with horror. Happy for us the adversary can proceed no farther. Jesus commands the devils, and they must, though unwillingly, obey. He has the keys of hell and death. He suffers the enemy partially to prevail, that we might apply to him who rebukes the devourer; but he shall prevail no farther than shall turn out to our advantage. So much grace is provided for the soul, as shall be sufficient to sustain it, while the messenger of Satan continues to buffet us. And the Redeemer shall constrain our worst enemy to be the occasion of increasing our sanctification. Paul the apostle was instructed in humility by the instrumentality of the Father of pride. "There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure."\* "Mine enemies would daily swallow me up. All their thoughts are against me for evil—They hide themselves, they mark my steps, when they wait for my soul. In the Lord will I praise his word. For thou hast delivered my soul from death; wilt thou not deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?"†

3. Christian liberty implies deliverance from undue human influence. "The fear of man bringeth a snare: But whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe."‡ "I will walk

\* 2 Cor. xii. 7.

† Psa. lvi. 5, 6, 10, 13.

‡ Prov. xxix. 25.

at liberty, for I seek thy precepts."\* Independence of mind, and courage in Christian behaviour, are desirable objects. He who attains to them, puts his trust in God, and does not fear what man can do unto him. Our religion does not teach us to act disorderly. It requires us "to preserve the honour, and perform the duties belonging to every one in their several places and relations, as superiors, inferiors, and equals:" but it does not admit, that we should weigh names and numbers against truth, or follow a multitude to do evil. It marks out the happy medium between anarchy and slavery, between servility and impudence; and it teaches us to walk in the path of virtue with modesty and magnanimity. God is ever present with us. This inspires us with reverence for his authority, and for all his institutions, whether civil or ecclesiastic. It makes us bold to profess ourselves his servants, although the whole world should wonder after the beast. In matters of right and wrong, the Christian claims to himself, and allows to others, the right of private judgment; but he neither claims to himself, nor guarantees to another, the liberty of contravening in a single instance, the commandment of his God. The rights of conscience cannot be understood, where there is no conscientious disposition; and where there is such a disposition, it submits implicitly to the divine authority.

Christianity, brethren, is the only perfect law of liberty. Its influence upon the heart is the only protection from bondage to human inventions. Those who are industrious to invalidate the authority of scripture, are themselves in bondage, and are endeavouring to reduce others to a similar condition; and the slavery of mind to error or to passion is more dangerous than any other. Those who think it more honourable to invent fiction than discover truth; under the pretence of evidencing genius are slaves to a most dangerous passion, a passion which, having once obtained the ascendancy, will employ the understanding as a patient drudge to serve its cause. It is by the authority of the names of such persons, that infidelity is attempted to be promoted; and while its advocates offer you liberty, they are themselves subject to bondage.

Of the same species, is that which is commonly called *liberality*, and which, under pretence of opposing bigotry, is offered as a substitute for zeal in contending earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. This is no more than total indifference to the appointed order of the house of God,

\* Psa. cxix. 45.



and this indifference seems itself to have become a strong passion which hurries its possessors into bondage. Strange as the assertion may appear, this passion participates of malevolence, for the bigot to liberality despises and hates me if I am not as liberal as he. But wherever Christianity prevails, in reality, as well as in name, there, in spite of opposition, shall true liberality prevail. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

In the present life, we are made to taste the cup of our deliverance; but our enjoyment of it is incomplete until at death we enter into glory. Christ delivers his people, at last, both from the world and all its imperfections. They shall triumph over death, and him who has the power of it. They shall be presented faultless unto their God. They shall enter into heaven, where they shall more fully understand their liberty, from the wrath of God, the curse of the law, the power of sin, the influence of Satan, the fear of man, the imperfections of the present state, from death itself, and from the pains of hell for ever. They shall be completely blessed in the full enjoyment of God to all eternity. Let us, therefore, serve our God, without fear, all the days of our life. Standing fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, let us use it not for a cloak to licentiousness, but as a strong incitement to fear God, and to keep his commandments.

III. Consider the expressions which we are enabled by the Spirit of adoption to utter—"Whereby we cry, Abba, Father."

Both these words signify the same thing. Father is familiar to you. *Abba* is a Syriac word, derived from the Hebrew אב, a Father. It was commonly used by the Jews in their addresses to God. Christ, during his sufferings in Gethsemane, uses this form of expression in his prayer. "And—he fell on the ground, and prayed,—and he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee."\* Besides the declaration of my text, the apostle Paul in another place represents the Holy Spirit teaching believers the use of this address. "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father."†

A solemn expression, thus used by our Head and Lord, and dictated repeatedly to the children of adoption by the Holy Ghost, we must not consider as needless tautology. The same thing, expressed in the language of the Jews, and in that of the Greeks, teaches us the union of Jew and Gen-

\* Mark xiv. 35, 36.

† Gal. iv. 6.

tile in the Christian church; and that it is the duty of Christians of different nations and languages, to unite cheerfully, as brethren, in their prayers to God, and in submission to the discipline of his family.

The repetition, FATHER, FATHER, also evidences the earnestness, with which a Christian, feeling his deliverance from bondage, recognizes his present delightful relation to God as an adopted son. I therefore conclude, that this address of inspiration implies the believer's Approbation of his new relation to God—His delight in his Father's compassion—His acceptance of God as his sole instructor—Submission to his corrections—Dependence upon him for protection—and Confidence in him as the future answerer of all his prayers.

1. The believer approves of his relation to God in Jesus Christ. "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."\*

This relation was planned in the counsel of peace before the ages of time began to run. We had then no existence, and therefore it was done without our consent. When we come into the world, we are viciously disposed; and care nothing for heavenly privileges. And yet we are not forced into God's family against our inclination, and without our consent. An irresistible efficacy changes the heart, and unites us to the second Adam: but we are united to him in affection, as well as in law. The consequent admission into God's family as joint-heirs with Jesus Christ, cannot remain a matter of indifference. "Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth. Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men. I have hated the congregation of evil doers; and will not sit with the wicked."† My soul is defiled with sin. I am exposed to God's curse. I have done evil continually. I merit a place with the devil and his angels. O wretched man that I am! and yet on me God hath set his love. I am called, I am justified, I am adopted. He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure. Astonishing love: wise arrangement. I approve of the whole plan. I press forward to the kingdom of heaven. I burst the bands of sin. I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me. *Abba, Father.*

2. The religious man is soothed in all his afflictions when

\* Gal. iii. 26

† Psa. xxvi. 5, 9, 8.

he contemplates the compassion of his Father who is in heaven. "A Father of the fatherless—is God in his holy habitation."\*

Piety renders the affections truly benevolent. The sensibility of the heart is increased by religious education. There is little in this world suited to that sensibility. The Christian is not at home while he is on earth. The education which he has received disqualifies him from entering into the views, delighting in the conversation, and furthering the plans of the men of this world. He is despised, and shunned, and feared, and hated; he is frequently, of course, melancholy and alone amidst the many. The righteous soul of Lot was grieved at the wickedness of the men of Sodom. Christ mentions mourning as a Christian characteristic. "Wo is me that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar. My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace."

The children of adoption are not left comfortless in this condition. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. God commands their services in the world. Let them be content to live in it while he leaves them here. He remembers that we are dust. He knoweth our frame. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. Grieved at the folly of men, distressed by the injuries I receive from them, and shocked by their wickedness, I retire into my closet, I turn my mourning eye to heaven. I know who is touched with the feelings of my infirmities. He bade me be of good cheer, for he hath overcome the world.

3. God's children consider him as their instructor. "O God, thou hast taught me from my youth."† "And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children."‡

They feel the necessity of a divine instructor. The fall hath weakened their intellectual powers and vitiated their affections. The whole soul is depraved. In vain I am told that the sinfulness of my state is no more than the perversion of my active powers. The Scriptures tell me that my *understanding is darkened*, as certainly as that *my heart is enmity against God*. Man may say that regeneration is no more than a change of inclination by supernatural energy: but the Scriptures inform us that the eyes of our understanding must be opened, and the whole soul renewed. We may be told

\* Psa. lxxviii. 5.

† Psa. lxxi. 17.

‡ Isa. liv. 13.

that unregenerate men have as strong intellectual powers as the regenerate; and that they can explore the deepest recesses of science: but we also observe the unregenerate capable of as much sensibility to friendship, as sincere in their affections, and as liberal of their goods as our Christian acquaintances. Thanks be to God that it is so. Dark and dismal, otherwise, would have been the abodes of men. Without God's Spirit, however, we cannot be truly religious; we can neither love God, nor possess the power of spiritual discrimination. He guides us to all truth, as well as to the exercise of pious affections. He revealed to the prophets what they never could otherwise have known; and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth such understanding of what the prophets have written, as, independently of his assistance, we never could have otherwise possessed. There are some who are ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth—There are some tossed about with every wind of doctrine: the best see but as through a glass darkly. Father! I submit to thy direction. "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory."\*

4. God's children submit to such chastisement as he thinks proper to administer. "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction. For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth."†

There is a rod laid up by the ark of the covenant, and with it God visits the faults of his sons and daughters. They stand in need of correction, and their God supplies all their needs. Pain is never in itself desirable; but it becomes desirable as the mean of obtaining ease and pleasure. To render believers sensible of their corruption, and to increase their holiness, their God corrects them. The furnace of affliction purifies them as the silver. To wean their affections from terrestrial objects, these objects are made the messengers of sorrow. The troubles, which the possession of them occasions, and the pain we suffer from the loss of them, admonish us, that both the treasure and the heart should be elsewhere. To exercise my grace, and show forth the glory of its divine Author, supporting me in the hour of trial, I am often made to experience much tribulation. The enemy is suffered to attack me, that I may prove the impenetrability of my armour, and the magnanimity of my Captain. I therefore glory in tribulation. "Furthermore, we have had

\* Psa. lxxiii. 24.

† Prov. iii. 11.

fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.”\*

5. The children of adoption place themselves under the protection of their heavenly Father. “Unto thine hand I commit my spirit; thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth. Deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me.”†

No person is more conscious of his own weakness than a real Christian. He has much experience of it in the course of his pilgrimage. He cannot move a step to advantage without leaning upon his Beloved. His devotion cools; his heart faints; he cannot think, or act, or pray, without the Spirit of his Master. The good that he would, he cannot do; for evil is present with him. On the Lord he depends, confident of this thing, that he who began the good work will perform it. And if his enemies be numerous and violent, he knows that they cannot prevail against God. Against man they easily might, had he no resources to fly to but his own strength; but amidst the common calamities of life, in the midst of disappointments, poverty, persecution, and death, he may possess his soul in patience. “Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day. Only with thine eye shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation.”‡

6. By the Spirit of adoption, we are enabled to approach with boldness the throne of grace, in prayer to God. “Through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.”§

Prayer is an employment delightful to the Christian, when he can lift up to God holy hands without wrath and doubting. Assured that he shall have access to God with all his petitions, he is encouraged to undertake any duty, however difficult to perform. He can apply unto his God for direction when he is in doubt, and when he is faint and weary, he can ask him for renewed strength. When he is in distress, he calls upon the Lord: and the Lord hears and saves.

Your petitions cannot alter the purpose of God; but prayer is an appointed mean, in the divine decree, for the comfort of your souls. Pray always with all prayer and supplication

\* Heb. xii. 9, 10.

† Psa. xci. 5, 8, 9.

‡ Psa. xxxi. 5, 15.

§ Eph. ii. 18.

of the Spirit. And, O Christians, be sincere in your prayers. In your address to God in private, put on no reserve. Lay your souls open to him. Ask for nothing as a matter of form. Petition him only for what you really desire to obtain. Desire nothing but what is lawful and useful; and hide none of those desires, from your heavenly Father.

The Lord speaks peace unto his people. He will give them what is good. You have a friend now upon whom you may depend in the hour of danger. Even in the swellings of Jordan, your cry shall come before him. Enter then, into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise. *For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, Father.* AMEN.

## THE MEANS OF GROWTH IN GRACE.

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### SERMON V.

2 PET. iii. 18.—*Grow in grace.*

LIFE and growth are exclusively from the Lord. An angel cannot create an insect, or make, without divine co-operation, a blade of grass to spring up from the earth. The Spirit who, at the beginning, moved upon the face of the deep, and converted the chaos into a world, still continues to actuate the system which he hath arranged; to multiply the forms of matter; and to give animation and activity to the different classes of being which rise up before us. Nothing in nature is permitted to remain perfectly idle and useless. The decomposition of one body becomes subservient to the organization of another.

Man, too, is formed for action; and cannot find either improvement or happiness in idleness. All the faculties of his immortal mind, and all the organs of his earthly body indicate that he is appointed for employment. The higher powers of his soul, as well as the more tender sensibilities of the heart, bear "a manifest reference to the career of activity which he has to run;"\* and even his religion itself, is a mere delusion when it teaches him to sink into apathy and indolence. "Wo to them that lie at ease in Zion: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."

Whatever may come, at last, of the mere professor, it is certain that every truly religious man shall grow up unto perfection. *They go from strength to strength; every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.* It is the glory of Christianity, to be worthy of its divine Author, and perfectly adapted to the condition of man. The purpose of God is the

\* Logan's Sermons.

display of his own glory in the salvation of his people from sin and from misery. That purpose shall certainly be accomplished. *I am God, and there is none like me ; declaring the end from the beginning—My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.* This purposed salvation, secures the sanctification, the improvement, and perfection of man, as well as his redemption by Jesus Christ. It secures obedience to the commandment, as well as trust in the promise of our Lord. The perfection of the saints is predicted and predestinated ; and this is neither more nor less, than to secure by the favour of God the certain improvement of their whole rational and moral character in the willing exercise of all their own faculties, cleansing themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. In the progress of the Christian life, the grace of God and the duty of man appear together without discord and without strife. The misapprehension of unenlightened men represents them at variance, but true religion exhibits them in perfect harmony. Progress in holiness comes to us from the Holy Spirit ; and human boasting is excluded : it is the duty of man ; and ignorance, indolence, and negligence, are excluded in its performance. In the love and obedience of believers, there is no collision between the divine influence and the voluntary agency of man. Ye, therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things—“ Grow in grace.”

It is common in Scripture to express all the parts of piety by some one part or principle of true religion ; because all the parts are inseparably connected. The whole of personal godliness, is sometimes included in the words wisdom and understanding ; at other times, faith, love, the fear of the Lord, &c. denote, in a single expression, the whole economy of the Christian life.

The word *grace*, in this text, is also employed to denote the whole of personal religion. The *cause*, in every language, is, by figure, frequently used to signify the *effect* ; and as religion, in any man, is produced and continued by the favour of God, *grace* is often employed to signify vital godliness. Growth, is progress in religion. The latter part of the verse decides the meaning of the word. To grow in knowledge, is to increase the measure of our information ; and, of course, to grow in grace, is to make progress in personal piety. How to make such progress is the chief inquiry of him who would conscientiously submit to the injunction of the inspired writer. The different degrees of gracious attainment, we have endeav-



oured in the preceding discourse, to lay before you. The duty of going forward, making increase in godliness, is peremptory ; and needs no confirmation. The means of improvement, you behove to know ; and it is the object of this discourse to show you wherein they consist.

THE MEANS OF GROWTH IN GRACE

are threefold, *Divine ordinances—Rational reflections—and the Spirit's influence.*

I shall treat of these in the order in which I have mentioned them, and afterwards offer some concluding remarks.

I. The ordinances of the New Testament are means of improvement in religion.

Every creature of God is at the disposal of the Creator, as the clay is in the hands of the potter. *He hath established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom ruleth over all.* Matter and mind are both governed by him ; and have been placed under laws fitted by infinite wisdom for that purpose. To all his rational creatures God has given a law for the direction of their active power in their respective spheres ; and fallen man, providentially placed under the light of the gospel, is bound by the divine law to embrace the offer of salvation in a Redeemer, and to observe the statutes predicated upon the revelation of the covenant of grace. Every wise and just legislator predicates his statutes upon the nature and actual condition of the subject. The promulgation of the gospel, places the sinner, to whom its benefits are offered, in a new situation. There, the authority of the divine Lawgiver finds him, and binds him to compliance under pain of aggravated guilt, and corresponding punishment. The ordinances of religion, moreover, like the evangelical message with which they are connected, are appointed of God for the salvation of sinners in Jesus Christ our Lord. They are instituted by our Redeemer as means of applying the purchased blessings to his covenant seed : and they are to be observed by us in order to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

“The outward and ordinary *means*, whereby Christ communiceth to us the benefits of redemption, are his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer ; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.”\*

\* These are the words of the Westminster Assembly, in reply to the 88th Question of our Shorter Catechism. They compose a part of *the*

1. Divine revelation, by its influence on the understanding, the heart, the will, and the conscience of man, in every condition of life, promotes the Christian's growth in holiness, in comfort, and in usefulness.

The communication of light from on high, is, in the hand of the Holy Spirit, the principal source of our religious improvement. The rational soul cannot, from its very nature, begin or go on, in a course of moral or spiritual reform, either personal or social, without information. Light is necessary in entering upon the path, and in travelling homeward to the place of endless rest. *The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.* In darkness and in ignorance, there is no faith, no piety, no comfort, no usefulness. Jehovah treats the creature in a way which corresponds with its nature and its destiny. To us, created reasonable creatures, in order to glorify him and enjoy him, he has graciously made a revelation of himself and of his will, adapted to our capacity and our condition. By visions, by dreams, by immediate suggestion from his Spirit; by the words, and the acts, and the writings of inspired men; by angels, and by a voice from heaven; and by his Son Jesus Christ, the image of the invisible God our heavenly Father

*form of sound words*, which it is our duty to hold fast. They teach us, that there are means of grace divinely appointed; and they show what are these means. I know that many, who profess a belief in the doctrines of our ecclesiastical standards, deny the existence of any means of grace. As this is done under pretence of greater accuracy of expression, I feel it to be my duty to assign my reasons for continuing the use of such phraseology.

*Means of grace*, are ordinances of God, whereby Christ communicates, to his ransomed people, spiritual life, and growth unto perfection. We say *means of grace*, not, because God cannot convey his blessing without them; not because God must confer his blessing on man in the use of them: for neither of these is true; but we call them *means*, because God has appointed them for the specified purpose; he commands us to use them for that purpose; and in his sovereign grace, he makes them answer the purposes intended.

The outward ordinances of religious worship, are appointed for some end; they are therefore means; they are observed for some end; they are therefore, means: they are made effectual to the elect for salvation; they are therefore means of salvation. The salvation itself is of grace; the institution and the benediction of the means are also of divine grace. We, therefore, say, and we say with great propriety, that the ordinances of the New Testament, are *means of grace*. It corresponds with the common usage to apply the terms in this manner. *Mean*, from the French *moyen*, signifies any thing that either leads or is intended to lead to something else. *So shall my word be; it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.* Isa. lv. 11.

hath given us such discoveries of his attributes and his purposes ; of our condition, our duties, and our privileges ; and of the heavenly inheritance upon which we are about to enter, as may serve to promote our growth in holiness on earth. *God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the Fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son. Search the Scriptures: For all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect.*

You see, then, my brethren, that while you are commanded to grow in grace, you are supplied with means well adapted for that purpose. The Scriptures are profitable for that end ; and they are given by inspiration of God in order to be profitable. He tells you what you ought to know, that knowing, you may go forward. The reading and hearing of the word of God ; the acquisition of the knowledge of divine truth, in whatever manner, is calculated to strengthen our faith and our hope ; to increase our love and our zeal ; and, indeed, to make all the children of God more humble and patient ; more active and useful ; more holy and happy. To this end, too, we have assurance from the testimony of God that the appointed *means* shall be made effectual. "For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goeth out of my mouth : it shall not return to me void."

The importance of religious knowledge, to the growing Christian, is easily demonstrated. A God of infinite wisdom and love has been pleased to reveal its objects to our understanding ; and he has revealed them at great expense. He has not only given information to the creature, in a supernatural manner ; but he also suspended and counteracted the operation of the laws of nature, in order to make the necessary communication, and to attest the divinity of the source from whence the stream of truth hath issued. Inspiration is supernatural ; and miracles attest the doctrines delivered. Angels have left their place before the Father's throne, and have ministered in glad tidings to fallen men. The Redeemer was humbled unto death to illustrate and exemplify the truths which he testified : and, now that he is exalted above the powers of death, he sends the Comforter into the world for the instruction of his disciples. There is another witness to

the value of truth, in your own consciences. I speak to you who have experienced its renewing power. The sons and daughters of Zion, in the possession of precious faith, cannot but appreciate the divine commandment, "Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding."\* You have found the word of God the means of your regeneration, and you will certainly find it the means of progressive sanctification. Come, hear, all ye that fear God! To you I have made the appeal: to you I have given the promise. To the appeal, you will answer, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth;"† The promise, I will confirm by infallible testimony, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ," who says in his intercession for you, within the veil, *Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.*‡

The various ways of improvement in the knowledge of scriptural truth, merit and receive the attention of Christians walking in the fear of God. The light of heaven, shining upon his ordinances, inspires with confidence and delight. Sweet are the meditations, and refreshing the thoughts of those who retire from the bustle of society, to converse with the bible in the fellowship of the Holy Ghost. But it is in the public social worship of God, under the faithful preaching of the word of life, that believers most enjoy the benefits of sacred instruction: the public assembly, the Sabbath, and the ministry, are God's appointment. There, as on Mount Zion, he meets his people. Thither, the tribes go up to receive the blessing. The solemnities of the sacred day, the recollections of him whose resurrection from the tomb it weekly commemorates, the social aptitudes of human nature called into exercise by meeting together before God our Maker, to worship the author of our common salvation, the rest and the activity, the order and the earnestness, so indicative of the upper sanctuary, while the word of truth comes with power, cause us with the blessing of God to greet the messenger of peace, by gladly receiving sanctified instruction. Under such preaching, our faith is confirmed in the doctrines previously understood. Such as were before obscure, appear in a new light; principles hitherto unknown are perceived and embraced; our failings, our errors, our corruption, our duties, and comforts become better understood; conscience

\* Prov. xxiii. 23.

† James i. 18.

‡ John xvii. 17, 19.

and inclination unite in joining the company in order to ascend the holy hill; and with revived affections we press forward to the prize held out before us. Verily, "wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."

2. The sacraments are means of improvement in religion.

The positive institutions, which bear the name of sacraments, have always obtained in the Christian church. The fact, of their general observance in every age, since the time to which they refer, a fact so well supported by historical testimony, is itself ample evidence of the antiquity of our religion—of the appearance on earth, at a certain time, of the remarkable Personage in whose name they are dispensed; and whose meditation and death, with its consequent blessings, they are designed to set forth, commemorate, and apply. They, it is true, properly belong to social religion. They are the sacraments of individuals, not merely as Christians, but as members of the Christian church—the sacraments of the church of God, as a visible society of saints. It is the actual connexion of the individual by covenant with this society professing godliness, that entitles him to the solemn seals of the covenant of promise;\* but social relations influence the in-

\* There is scarcely any subject about which Christians are more divided in opinion than the qualifications upon which men are admissible to the sacraments of the church. The principle, however, is easily understood: It is the application of the principle to practice that causes us to differ. Principle and practice, are nevertheless, intimately connected; and intelligent practice always proceeds from correct principles.

Some Christian churches propose to admit, as members, all who profess that the Christian religion is the true religion, and that they embrace it as such. Others propose to admit, to sealing ordinances in the church, all who profess that they are themselves in fact Christians; and give evidence of their conversion. The former, is at present, in this country, called *the loose plan*; the latter, is by some called *the strict plan*. Each plan has some truth, and some error connected with it; and both are of injurious tendency in practice. Each of them is *too loose*. There is a *stricter and more correct* plan than either.

They, and they only, ought to be admitted to sealing ordinances in the church of God, who give satisfactory evidence that they know the doctrines of religion, that they experience the power of religion in the soul, and that they habitually live according to the laws of the Christian religion in their outward deportment. Those who take the seal of the covenant should know what it is; should embrace it with all their hearts; should conform to it in their conversation. *By their fruits ye shall know them*. These THREE things, INTELLIGENCE, EXPERIENCE, and PRACTICE, are necessary to admission in a well-ordered church.

This is THE STRICT PLAN, in reality. That it is the *correct* plan can be

tellect, the feelings, and the conduct of believers; and these social ordinances, of course, affect the personal attainments of individual Christians in true godliness. It would be, therefore, unjust as well as ungenerous, to omit the enumeration of the sacraments of the New Testament, among the outward means of personal growth in grace. The nature of these ordinances, and the special design of each, as well as the experience of the children of Zion, sufficiently testify that baptism and the Lord's supper are means of improvement in piety.

A sacrament is an oath of allegiance to the Lord God our Saviour, as the sovereign of the church; and the whole church, with every member actually belonging to it, is in covenant with God. The recollection and the renovation of the oath have a tendency to fortify individual resolution to walk worthy of the high calling of God, and so to promote personal religion. The sacraments are, moreover, distinguished from all other ordinances. It is their special property to seal by sensible signs our covenant connexion with Jehovah. What God said unto Abraham, Gen. xvii. 11. concerning circumcision, is equally applicable to every sacrament, *it shall be a TOKEN OF THE COVENANT betwixt me and you.* All other ordinances are of divine appointment and profitable to believers; but the sacraments alone set apart and employ common elements as *sensible* symbols of spiritual

shown very easily, by an example. Let one apply for baptism or the sacrament of the supper. Amiable and orderly in his conversation and life, he says, he hates sin, and hopes for salvation, and is a converted man: but on examination you find him totally ignorant of the use of the sacrament, and of the person and mediation of Jesus Christ, and of the covenant of Grace; or you find him decidedly opposed to the truth on each of these topics. You cannot admit him. *Knowledge* is then necessary. Suppose, again, that this man is intelligent and moral; but he tells you that he is impenitent, that he is careless of salvation, that he will not embrace Christ and the covenant of grace; but deliberately, and from his heart, rejects divine grace. You will not, you dare not give him the seal of the covenant. *Experience* of the power of religion, is of course required. Again, let him manifest knowledge of the truth, declare his conversion, and satisfy you as to his pious affections; but you find that he is habitually or frequently intemperate; or that he lives in adultery; or that he is married to his niece, his sister-in-law, or his own sister; still you will not admit him. *Practice*, according to New Testament order, then, is also necessary. The three qualifications mentioned, are of course, indispensable.

The principle of church membership is not *mere profession*; is not *actual regeneration*; but APPARENT CHRISTIANITY described in the law of Christ. Any SCANDAL publicly persisted in, or avowed, disqualified even a Christian for the communion of the visible church of C

things, to be *dispensed* exclusively to the church as a visible and sanctified society, *separated from the world, and in covenant with God.*

These four ideas are of course essential to a sacrament, besides its divine appointment as a permanent ordinance in the house of God to be observed by all the saints; and these together with their happy tendency to union, co-operation, and comfort in social religion, all have a beneficial influence upon the progressive improvement of individuals in holiness and usefulness.

First. By a *sensible symbol*, the consecrated element, the sacrament sets forth the spiritual blessings of the covenant of grace to the senses, the reason, and the faith of the people of God.

Second. By the *dispensation* of the sign of the covenant to the members of the church, and to them exclusively, the sacrament becomes a badge of visible distinction to these members; and a line is consequently drawn between the church and others in the world.

Third. By this ministerial administration, *in the name and by the appointment of the LORD*, he publicly recognizes the members of his church as his own people; and assures all believers of his unalterable purpose to perform his promise, and confer all covenant blessings upon them in time and through eternity.

Fourth. By the *reception* of the sacred symbol upon our part, there is given a public and explicit pledge, both of our embracing the provisions of the covenant of grace for our own salvation, and of our engagement, along with our brethren in the sanctuary, to walk in all the statutes and all the ordinances of the Lord.

Such is the distinctive character of the two great ordinances to which the church has given the name of sacraments.\*

\* It is by this rule the Protestant churches rejected the *five spurious sacraments* of the church of Rome. These are *penance, marriage, confirmation, ordination, and extreme unction.* The Roman Catholics maintain that there are in all *seven* sacraments. Each of the five false ones has some plea from the scriptures, in its behalf, as either temporarily or permanently required or bestowed upon men. PENANCE, or rather, *humiliation for sin*, is a duty in its own place. MARRIAGE is honourable in all. The CONFIRMATION of our faith, though not an outward ordinance to be dispensed by man, is a grace of the Holy Spirit. ORDINATION to the ministry is a standing ordinance in the church. ANOINTING the sick with oil was an ancient medical practice recommended in certain cases, James v. 14. But not one of these combine the characters essential to a sacrament. In none of them do we find, a sensible sign to be dispensed

Every part of that character bears powerfully upon the piety of believers. Sense is the path through which the Redeemer travels to the mind, to invigorate our reason, to confirm our faith, to awaken our affections, to engage us in the practice of devotion, to comfort our hearts, and inspire us with the full assurance of hope.

When I witness the administration of Baptism, to a single member of the body of Christ, I behold the token of my own covenant with God: I see the near relation which the whole church bears to my Redeemer, I accordingly approve, I rejoice, and I take my resolution in the strength of promised grace.

When I see the sacred symbols of the body and blood of my once crucified and now glorified Saviour, dispensed to the holy society who meet on Mount Zion; and when I handle with my own hands the bread of life, recollections, enjoyments, and anticipations of no ordinary kind take possession of my whole soul. In the great solemnity, the Christian perceives a commemoration of the death of Christ in all its horrors to make atonement for transgression, and to procure for them that believe the heavenly inheritance given by the Father in his own Son. By the display of religious truth, made in the sacramental actions themselves, and in the words with which a regular administration is accompanied, Christians are made to grow up in knowledge and in holiness. They have, moreover, assurance of God's covenant faithfulness in the seal applied agreeably to his direction: receiving the benefits of divine grace, they renew their own vows at the altar of God; and with a heart overflowing with love to the saints, whose communion we at the time enjoy, and with high expectation of future beatitude, we give, with delight in the presence of God, angels, and men, this distinct, public, and social testimony of our faith in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of our obedience to all that he commands.

3. Conversation among private Christians is one of the means of growth in knowledge, in holiness, and in usefulness. It is itself a part of our religious enjoyments; and the means of increasing both the desire and the capacity for more enjoyment.

Whatever other advantages of improvement a man may to the whole church and to none else, as a seal of the covenant, and a mark of distinction from the world. Therefore have they been rejected by Protestants.



possess, if he is totally cut off from intimate intercourse with pious friends, he will soon discover it in the coldness and the formality of his profession. Whether he be prevented by his situation in life, by his business, by his bashfulness, or by his negligence, from intermingling frequently and familiarly with those who make religion the subject of their discourse, his own personal religion, will be deprived of the ease, the ardour, the accuracy, and the openness, which are so ornamental to the social character of Christ's disciples. Should he read with attention the word of God, should he study the works of the best commentators; should he hear from the pulpit the most able sermons: he may become a proficient in the science of didactic theology; but both his acquaintance with the power of religion in others, and his own experience in piety, must, in such a case, be deficient in many very interesting respects, compared with the attainments of one who adds, to these advantages, *frequent conversation* about the things of God. The Christian minister who is far advanced in age and in godliness, finds in free religious conversation, increasing instruction and comfort: the student of divinity, who is preparing for usefulness in the church of God; and the younger ministers of the sanctuary, will profit exceedingly by familiar society with the saints; and unto the pastor of a congregation it is a source of more improvement than the study of elegant literature. A man accustomed to judicious reflections will find, in such intercourse with Christians, so many suggestions of a doctrinal and practical tendency, as cannot fail to enlarge the sum of his ideas, and to render his own maxims more correct and practical.

The Christian conversation which I recommend, is either *occasional*, in our interviews with our fellow-pilgrims, or *stated*, in fellowship meetings, established expressly for this purpose.

*Private societies, for prayer and conference*, have always obtained more or less in the church; and have always been productive of remarkable advantage. In times of revival and reform, they multiply: they intermingle the counsels and the experience of age, with the ardour and the rashness of young believers; and both characters derive profit from an augmentation of heat and of light. In times of danger and declension, such assemblies, if they do not arrest corruption in its progress, may preserve a few from following the multitude to do evil; may strengthen the weak; and direct to useful exertions the more intelligent. They certainly

procure the approbation and the blessing of God ; and they serve to distinguish from others the more faithful servants of the MOST HIGH. "Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another ; and the LORD hearkened, and heard it : and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels ; and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."\*

In these meetings for mutual improvement, Christians, agreeing in the great concerns of religion, freely speak to one another. They are different from those occasional or stated assemblies, in which either ministers of the word or other persons act as *leaders* to the company ; offer up the prayers ; read a discourse or deliver an address. All such are of the nature of assemblies, for public worship ; and, of course, exclude conversation altogether. I now speak of societies, in which, whatever may be the diversity of attainments, all the members have equal rights and privileges ; in which every member is permitted to introduce for conversation any religious subject, doctrinal or practical ; and each, in order, speaks his mind on the subject under consideration—SMALL SELECT SOCIETIES, for mutual instruction, exhortation, and encouragement. By such means, pious youth, and those who have little religious information and experience, judiciously associated with men of superior information, have an admirable opportunity of being built up in their most holy faith ; of knowing, and consequently guarding against current error and delusion ; of becoming acquainted with the sufferings, the trials, and encouragements of religious men ; of understanding the former contendings, the present progress, and the future prospects of the church ; and mutual co-operation and support, *in contending for the faith once delivered unto the saints.*

Societies for Christian conversation are adapted to our social nature and our Christian privileges and duties. The scriptures authorize them. Experience has proved their utility : and you, too, if you conscientiously attend to this ordinance, and prudently employ your time, will realize the profit arising from *not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together.* By conversation, true religion was taught and known, for ages, without a public official ministry. From Adam to Moses, this was the principal means of religious

\* Mal. iii. 16—18.

instruction. From the time of Moses, until the return of the Jews from the Chaldean captivity, this was one of the chief instruments of promoting knowledge and piety: and even after the erection of synagogues, the place of private fellowship for prayer and conference was frequented by the pious Israelites, from the time of Malachi the prophet, until Lydia, at the river which ran without the walls of the city of Philippi, met at society the apostle Paul; and learned, from his ministry, what had been done at Jerusalem for our redemption.\* In such societies, the captive Hebrews conversed together by the waters of Babylon, while their untuned harps were suspended from the drooping willows.†

Daniel, carried away in early years from his native land, followed in Babylon the good practice to which he had been accustomed in Judea, of religious society with his companions in bondage. He, and his three pious friends, by such means increased in wisdom, and became as remarkable for their spiritual health, as they were for their outward appearance, although fed on pulse, while they refused the delicacies of the king's table. Our Saviour had much private fellowship with his peculiar disciples; and they after his death met together for prayer, for praise, and for religious conference. Happy, my brethren, is the man, who finds Christian friends and associates: *Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend; but wo to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.*‡

4. I take for granted, that, with all these ordinances, you will attend to the duty of PRAYER to the God of heaven. Its own importance, in the commencement and progress of the Christian life, would entitle the ordinance of prayer to a distinct consideration among the means of religious improvement. I could not however, speak, with any satisfaction, upon the subject of instituted ordinances, without including supplication for divine mercy along with every other. The due observance of any other institution implies that prayer is not neglected: for, this duty, continually inculcated in the word of God; accommodated to all times and to all circumstances, urged by our wants and our woes, by our fears and our hopes, is the constant companion of every devotional service in the church. In public and in private, in society and in solitude; at home and abroad, in grief and in joy, in business, in trial, and on the bed of death, prayer is practi-

\* Mal. iii. 16. and Acts xvi. 13.

† Psal. cxxxvii.

‡ Prov. xxvii. 17. Eccles. iv. 10.

cable and is practised by the growing Christian. It is the breathing of the spiritual man; and as necessary to our Christianity, as respiration of the air to natural life. Hereby, we bless our habitations, convert the closet into a sanctuary, and make our resting place in the wilderness, the very gate of heaven; because in this duty we are present with our God, the hearer of prayer, and he is present with his people to bless them. To you, Christians, who are in the habits of religious conversation, with your pious brethren, there is special encouragement to this important duty. While waiting in the garden of God for an interview with the beloved Redeemer, you hear in the midst of your companions his invitation to the delightful exercise of communion with himself in prayer. *O thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice; cause me to hear it: Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.*

II. Judicious reflections, upon our personal concerns in the light of divine revelation, have a great influence upon our religious improvement.

The ordinances of religion do not operate with mechanical force in promoting our spiritual growth. Human nature is rational; and its reformation includes the exercise of its several faculties. The entire intellect of man is influenced by his piety. All the active powers of the mind are concerned. The whole soul is the subject of sanctification. The whole moral constitution must of course be put in action; and the vital principle, communicated in regeneration by the Spirit of adoption, requires to be cherished by outward ordinances and rational reflections, under the direction of the Holy Ghost, until we come to the measure of perfect men in Jesus Christ. The inconsiderate observance of outward rites profiteth little. We are required to attend to our ways as reasonable creatures; and we have the promise of divine aid in the work. *Consider what I say, and the Lord give you understanding in all things.\**

Rational reflections upon our sinful nature and actions—upon the providence of God in determining our lot—upon the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord, and upon death and a future state—are very becoming the Christian character; are required of us by the Governor of the world; and are conducive to our progress in personal religion.

\* 2 Tim. ii. 7.

1. Let us consider the sinfulness of our disposition and deportment.

The improvement of man depends, in a great degree, upon the estimate he forms of his own character. No reasonable creature will seek to alter that which is already perfect, or strive to amend a course of conduct which is irreprehensible. Should he consider his nature as depraved only in part, he will seek at most only for a partial remedy: and should he be induced to believe that he has himself already reached the full perfection of Christianity, it would be useless to propose or to use means of improvement. To men of either description, to those who are by nature free from total depravity, or have, any how, attained to perfection of nature and of life, our bibles have no reference; our doctrine and our worship are entirely inapplicable. The Christian revelation is sent to those who are by nature children of wrath; and the duties, the promises, and the hopes of religion are addressed to those who are not yet made perfect. Christ came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance: for the whole have no need of the physician. *There is no man liveth and sinneth not.* This fact is not to be disputed; and it is dangerous to pervert the doctrine.

He who lives on earth, and does not acknowledge his own imperfection, is ignorant of both the law and its holy Author, and cannot have attained to much knowledge of himself, or the course of conduct becoming a religious man. Let us consider our ways, and beware of the deceitfulness of sin. It is the man whose sins are known to himself, that alone can be supposed to repent and to reform. It is he who acknowledges his transgressions that asks pardon of the Lord, that applies to the blood of the covenant, and rejoices in its purifying power. Be not deceived, my brethren, God is not mocked. Would you sincerely desire to be more holy than you are? Remember that progress in Christian attainments is the opposite of a life of transgression. Mark your sins in the light of divine law, consider their opposition to God, their unhappy effects upon yourselves and others, and apply for gospel energy to crucify the flesh with all its affections and lusts. Mark your passions and restrain them; consider your frailties and avoid them; study your temper and improve it; and do all this, deliberately, resolutely, and constantly. There is a propriety in such conduct. The Christian, in acting piously, acts under the influence of reason—the most enlightened rationality.

Why should I hide from myself, the imperfections of my character? Ignorance will not effect amendment. Why should I strive to forget my corruptions, my errors, my criminal thoughts, or words, or actions? Can mere forgetfulness produce amendment or procure salvation? No! Let me rather search out my wickedness, and collect all my sins, that I may approach with them the altar of God, and with my hands upon the great victim,\* offered up once for all, rejoice in the satisfaction which is made to divine justice, and in the consequent pardon granted to believers. Let me still keep my transgressions before me; pursue my sins as my worst enemies; and give them no quarter, grant them not even a temporary indulgence. *If you live after the flesh, ye shall die, but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live.*

2. A due consideration of God's providence respecting us, tends to our personal progress in true religion.

The doctrine of divine providence is not revealed to employ unprofitable speculation. Much, both of the stability and progress of experimental religion, rests upon the conviction, that there is no unrighteousness with God. The common sense of mankind seems to say, that mere power, taken apart from morality, never can lay claim to our conscientious obedience, certainly not to our affection. It is the happiness of both angels and men to have been brought into being, not by an omnipotent tyrant, who has no other pleasure than to sport with the afflictions of his creatures, but by him who is the original source and the supreme standard of all righteousness. Could we even conceive the idea of an eternal principle of force disconnected from goodness, the thought would abound with unsupportable horror. "But in such a case no good creature could exist in the ranks of creation, to cast its joyless eye over the dreary desert."† All good men, on the contrary, live in the full and constant persuasion, that the providence of God extends to the numeration of the hairs of our heads: and that, amidst all his works, *the Judge of all the earth shall do right.* With what confidence and comfort, does the evangelical prophet approach the Governor of the world, and say, by the inspiration of the Spirit which influ-

\* The Jews under the law, brought their sin-offering to the priest, and confessed, with their hands on the victim, the transgression for which they made atonement. They thus transferred the guilt, or *legal liability to punishment*, from the sinner to the substitute. This was done for a type.

† M'Kinry's Sermons.

ences all believers, *O Lord, thou art my God ; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name : for thou hast done wonderful things ; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth : for thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall.\**

To unbelievers, indeed, whatever may be their religious profession, the doctrine of a particular providence affords no great consolation ; and it ought not to be a wonder that such are unwilling to give this truth full credit. Man is naturally influenced by his affections. That which he dislikes he is slow to believe : and even conviction of truth will not always produce an acknowledgment. Evidence may force conviction upon the reluctant mind ; but all are not sufficiently honest to avow the truths of which they are persuaded. I know it is a joyless consideration, to those whose hearts are far from righteousness, that there is a holy and an equitable Sovereign, omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent, *who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will*, although the scriptures contain the assertion.† Why should you be surprised at hearing a man, who is uneasy under the restraints of a most holy law, and cherishes in his unrenewed heart enmity against God, deny the doctrine of sovereignty both in purpose and in action ? Surely, it is no satisfaction to the rebel to be told that Jehovah makes the wrath of man to praise him ; and effectually restrains that wrath which does not tend to produce such effect. I know it is unreasonable and inconsistent upon the part of man, who extends his influence as far as possible in order to secure his own designs, and who forms the plan upon which he acts before he commences his operations, to deny to the most high God the right of extending his government over all his creatures and all their actions, and the right of decreeing from eternity whatsoever he causes in the revolutions of time to come to pass : But yet I cannot see, why we should expect, that un-sanctified men should derive delight from the doctrine of unchangeable counsels and effectual workings which are all upon the side of holiness and truth. The wishes and the views of fallen sinners are opposed to the religion of the bible ; and it requires divine grace to open the understanding for the reception of evangelical doctrine.

To you, however, who have entered on the Christian

\* Isa. xxv. 1, 4.

† Eph. i. 11.

journey, and are going forward unto perfection, rational views of the Providence of God are exceedingly profitable. The magnitude of the object contemplated occasions a corresponding elevation of thought ; its benignity excites the most agreeable emotions ; and the certainty we have that the ultimate result is for God's glory and our own good, encourages to patience and to action. We know, brethren, that the divine mind is capable without toil or distraction to manage with perfect precision the concerns of empires and of worlds ; to arrange with minuteness all the incidents which enter into the history of our own lives ; and so to weave the mysterious web of human affairs, as that without producing a dissolution of the contingency of second causes, his purposes shall be accomplished. *His counsel shall stand.*

God is almighty in his providence ; and you must submit. He is omniscient ; and it is your wisdom to submit. His arrangements are equitable ; and, should they even affect us painfully, we have no right to employ the language of complaint. He is our Father and our Friend ; and we have no reason to be alarmed. He has given assurance that all things shall work together for our good. We believe his word, we observe the doings of his hand, we rejoice in the prospect before us. Of our property, our health, our reputation, and our lives, let him dispose at his pleasure. Of our parents, our children, our friends ; of the church, and of the world, let him dispose at his pleasure. He has both the right and the power ; for who can say unto him, what dost thou ? He exercises the right, with perfect purity of design ; he employs the power with abundant benevolence. *The Lord is good to all ; and his tender mercies are over all his works.*

The hand of God, in the arrangement of our own personal affairs, is peculiarly worthy of our attention. The lot is cast into the lap, and the whole disposal thereof is from the Lord. Our heavenly Father determines the lot of our inheritance, the bounds of our habitation, and all the incidents of life. The due consideration of this truth assists the believer in repressing the struggles of indwelling sin ; it serves to relieve the mind from extravagant sorrow, and to inspire with confidence in the face of danger ; and it facilitates the performance of every duty with alacrity. He goes up, accordingly, through the wilderness leaning upon his beloved, and rejoicing in the strength of the everlasting arms. By such considerations, Asaph was enabled to recover his standing, dismiss at once both his envy and his



grief, and assert and exemplify the dignity of the Christian protected by an overruling providence. *I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.\**

3. Meditations on the love of God, are conducive to the improvement of the Christian character.

It is an admirable and benevolent provision which the Most High has made in the creation of the soul, that we have the faculty of recalling transient ideas, and of holding them up to our own view as subjects of patient examination. Without the capacity of meditation, man must have been secluded from a large portion of both his improvement and enjoyment. However ready his powers of perception, however great his discernment, however tender his sensibility, had he not the power of recalling the past, of abstracting and selecting from the mass of his thoughts, that idea to which a peculiar attention is to be directed, he never could become either wise or virtuous: his days would pass away as a shadow, and all his experience be as a dream forgotten before it is told. One of the most happy, and, at the same time, most improving exercises of the human mind is meditation upon divine things. The writer of the 104th Psalm exemplifies this truth in a very striking manner. In this fine eucharistic hymn, the Psalmist of Israel addressed Jehovah as the Creator and Governor of the world—as the God of nature, of grace, and of glory. Setting forth, in strains of becoming majesty and sweetness, the wisdom, the goodness, and the power displayed in the formation of the heavens and the earth, and in the various and abundant provision made for the beasts and the birds, and for man, the Lord of all things upon earth, he declares the satisfaction which he himself enjoyed in the contemplation of that BEING, who directs with his finger the stars in their courses, and causes the seasons to move in regular order around each returning year. *My meditation of him shall be sweet; I will rejoice in the Lord.†*

The theme of meditation, most interesting and most improving, both in an intellectual and moral point of view, to man, is *the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*. This is the source of our spiritual life and our spiritual health; and without respect to it, no progress in Christianity is ever made by man whatever. It is usual for all who profess the Christian religion to acknowledge their obligations to Jesus Christ the Son of God; and this is frequently done without respect to the

\* Psa. lxxiii. 23, 24.

† Psa. civ. 34.

Father that sent him. Some, indeed, are of opinion, that we owe God's love to our belief of the Gospel. Upon the other hand, many are of opinion that whatever is discriminating in the system of grace belongs exclusively to the sovereign will of the Father; while they suppose that the atonement of Messiah is either general or universal, and has no other object than to render the Deity capable of saving whom he will. In neither case is due respect paid to the love of God itself, or to the fact, that his love to fallen man *is in* his Son Jesus Christ. Rational reflections upon the scriptural doctrine of divine love, will correct these dangerous and absurd opinions. *This is the love of God, not that we loved him; but that he first loved us: we love him because he first loved us.* It is evident, therefore, to every reflecting mind, that if this scriptural representation be correct, we owe the love of God, not to our own improvement of opportunities, our innocency, or our afflictions; but that God's love is the cause of all our goodness and of our love to him. His love precedes our love, and in fact, provides the means of producing our love towards him. *God commendeth his love to us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. While we were without strength, he died for the ungodly.* It is of course plainly perceived in the light of this doctrine, that while the saints owe their goodness to the death of Christ, they owe the gift of Christ to the love of God. The Father *gave* his Son to die for the ungodly; we owe our godliness to this gift and its consequences: we owe the gift, consequences, and all, to God's love; and instead of being left to conjecture that a general redemption effected by the Saviour brings about the love of God to man; we are expressly assured that God's love provided for us both the redemption and the Redeemer. *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

It is impossible, brethren, to have correct ideas of our obligations to the Son of God, or to be duly grateful for the salvation with which he blesses his people, unless we admit the whole economy of his mission as Mediator to be the consequence of the great love wherewith the Father himself loved us; and unless we consider that love to be eternal and unalterable, as well as expressed exclusively in Jesus Christ: *Having chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blame before him in love.* This, then, is the source of all our hopes and enjoyments. Hence, as from an overflowing fountain, proceed the rivers of living water,

which make glad the city of God. True Christians thirst for this water more vehemently than did David for the waters of the well of Bethlehem. Refreshed and invigorated by the water of life, let us follow the stream clear as chrystal, until arriving at the perfection of happiness before the throne of God in the celestial Paradise, we are welcomed to our final abode.

4. Judicious reflections, upon our own mortality, and the future state which we are daily approaching, have a tendency to prepare us for both.

He who forgets must neglect the business of life; and he who neglects cannot succeed in his employment. The great business of this life is to prepare for another; and as we have to pass from this to the invisible and eternal world, through death, it is impossible to think seriously of our personal concerns without including in our reflections, the idea of our separation from the body in order to return to God. *It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.\** The law is universal; and there is no living man that dare flatter himself with an exception in his favour: for, *Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.†*

It was never intended that this world should be the permanent abode of all that once breathed its atmosphere. It is only a place of preparation for another. As such it ought to be used by mortal man, while his immortal mind looks forward to the disembodied state, and to its unparalleled advantages. Persuaded that here we have no continuing city, let us live as strangers on the earth; let us treat the world as the nursery in which we are like children under tutelage: let us travel as pilgrims to the city of God. The ordinary occupations and enjoyments of life are not inconsistent with such views of death and eternity. The Christian gratefully receives the comforts of his journey, and dutifully strives to be useful to his fellow-travellers; but his affections are set upon things that are above—superior in relation both to place and to worth, to the objects of the sinner's pursuit in this present world. The petty details of the preservation of the body, or the gradual acquisition of property, can never enter into competition, in point of importance, with the glories of an everlasting and undeviating enjoyment. *Since life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel,* who would be content to resign for the puerilities of earthly felicity, or the anxieties and calculations of ambition and trade, the profounder

\* Heb. ix. 27.

† Gen. iii. 19.

mysteries, the unbounded riches of the life beyond the grave? Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, is *the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen*: and the believer, proceeding in his Christian attainments, enjoys by anticipation his victory over the world and the king of terrors, and over all those diseases, and that anguish, which usually accompany the warfare of the last enemy.

The present life is uncertain; and its duties must be discharged without delay: it is, at all events, of short duration; and we must prepare for abandoning its pleasures, and for bidding adieu to its passions, its trials, and its sorrows. Death is unnatural—an inversion of the original constitution of man: it is a stroke of violence which separates the soul from the body; in a moral point of view, it is the consequence and the wages of sin: but in the light of revelation, it is converted by divine grace into a messenger of escape from the prison, that the saints may be introduced to the presence of their Father in heaven. You can now, brethren, deliberately contemplate this destroyer of natural life, and examine, without dismay, every feature of his character. This is indeed the work of the *grace* of God. *Nature* shudders at the touch of his cold hand. Conscious guilt inflicts horror on the soul at the prospect of intimate familiarity with him; but he appears to you with the badges of servitude to your almighty Saviour: his strength is subdued; his sting is extracted; to the Christian, there remains of the king of terrors no more than the shadow. *Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.*\* “To die is gain.”† Yes! O believers, however great a loss to others, for you, *to die is gain*. Exhaustless wealth, invulnerability to disease, and eternal youth, are the least valuable attributes of the future state which awaits you. Intellect, clear and comprehensive; affections, ardent and in perfect harmony; society, various and exalted; sinless morality, and the presence of Jehovah, furnish a never-ending enjoyment, exempt indeed from perplexing vicissitudes; but not too calm or motionless, to excite attention, or support the ceaseless career of activity for which you shall be glorified.

III. Divine influences are required and employed in the progressive improvement of the saints.

The outward ordinances are all adapted by infinite wisdom to their end: the exercises of our own rational powers are of use in their proper place: and both are means of attaining to

\* 1 Cor. xv. 57.

† Phil. i. 21

higher degrees of sanctification and usefulness in life ; but the power of the Spirit is that which gives efficacy to other means of improvement, and is itself the chief support and solace of the Christian. It is to be understood, in all evangelical discussions, whether from the pulpit or the press, that the Spirit of God blesses the institutions of religion ; and that without this aid, the ordinances are dry breasts affording no milk to new-born babes ; that the professor of religion is as a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal, destitute of life and of virtue. It is nevertheless meet, that in setting forth in order, before my hearers, the means of growth in grace, I should distinctly mention the *influences of* THE HOLY GHOST, as well as take for granted their existence while describing the advantages of subordinate instrumentality. The Comforter is distinctly promised to the saints both by the Father and the Son ; all Christians enjoy distinct communion with him, in the exercises of godliness ; and the principal design of the gracious economy which provides felicity for sinners in a Saviour, is to develope to the intelligent part of the creation of God, the glory of the Trinity.

The natural attributes of the Deity are sufficiently manifest in the works of creation and providence. His goodness and his long-suffering are discoverable in his treatment of offenders in this world : but it is only in the gospel we see clearly his compassion in harmony with his righteousness, and his love to sinners directed by wisdom, and applied by omnipotence, in consistency with truth and holiness.

The UNITY of the Deity is set forth to the intellectual world in all his works ; but it is only in the economy of the system of grace, we are furnished with an exemplification of the *distinction of persons* in the Godhead. It is true, a revelation of this fact might have been made by a simple declaration from heaven. Many such declarations are found in the bible, and are believed, or rejected by men according to the degree of respect they have for Jehovah, and the measure of their knowledge of the terms in which he has seen proper to express himself unto them. Still, however, a pure declaration, that there are three equal distinct persons in the unity of the Godhead, unaccompanied with some practical exemplification, would make upon the minds of believers but a comparatively indistinct impression ; while the unbelieving portion of the sons of men, would, in rejecting the truth, have to contend only with a bare speculative doctrine. God himself, in mercy to man, and in goodness to the countless millions of

intelligent creatures in the universe, hath seen proper to order that a practical exemplification of this truth should be made in the presence of all, and so applied to the souls of his peculiar people as to become familiar to their sanctified understandings, and be interwoven with the very texture of their piety.

In the counsel of peace, the language of which is, "Let us deliver fallen man from his sin and misery, and bring him into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer," the plan was eternally settled, and the economy of grace established as an everlasting covenant for the glory of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, in the salvation of sinners. That there are three persons in the Godhead, is not only affirmed as a matter of fact; but the personal properties of each are declared; each assumes a distinct agency in the work of salvation: and such is the nature of the sanctification predestinated and applied, that the renewed man has access through the Redeemer by the Spirit to the Father in his public and private devotion. Without, therefore, a distinct apprehension and experience of the doctrine of three persons in one Godhead, there is no scriptural devotion either social or personal. He who rejects the Son and the Holy Ghost, from his affections and his worship, by denying to them divine attributes, whatever may be his name, is any thing but a Christian. It is correspondent with the whole design of Christianity as a revelation from God, and as a matter of experience to the saints, to behold the eternal Father sending his own Son for our redemption; to behold the eternal Son coming from the Father, finishing the work, and returning to the Father who sent him; to behold the eternal Spirit coming from the Father and the Son, by the authority of the arisen Redeemer, to quicken and to guide men in the path of life everlasting. This Holy Spirit, of whom we have already spoken as "the Spirit of adoption," is our support while *walking in newness of life*.

His divine influence, in the several attainments of the saints, is experienced in a threefold mode of operation. He *presents proper objects* to the mind—He *directs the affections* of the heart to these objects—and he *imparts strength* for action in a believing view of them.

1. The Spirit presents to the saints the proper objects of pursuit.

In order to succeed, believers behave to walk according to their Christian profession. *Only let your conversation be as*

*becometh the gospel*, is the constant admonition under which they act. In the exercise of faith they must take every step; *for without faith it is impossible to please God*. Evangelical obedience and deportment consist in a correspondence with the rules given by the Mediator. *As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him*. The promised assistance which we have on our journey includes the exhibition to the enlightened mind of objects which ought to occupy our attention. "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself: but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you."\*

The Holy Spirit, in the formation of the plan of redemption, took his part of the sacred economy, and agreed to apply all the blessings which God the Father promised, and the Redeemer purchased for our souls: therefore did the Saviour say, *he shall receive of mine, and show it unto you*. The exhibition made by the Spirit respects principally future good—*He shall show you things to come*. These things are, of course, the proper objects of Christian pursuit; and the gracious discovery leads believers on to their enjoyment. Spiritual blessings are all arranged in their proper order, are all placed in a strong light: and the eyes of our understanding being opened, are directed towards them, and are fixed upon them with admiration and delight. Divine things, seen and realized by that faith which is *the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen*, make a lasting impression upon the mind. They communicate to the beholder their own holy and sublime character. The veil of prejudice and error is taken away; and "we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

2. The Spirit directs the affections of the heart to spiritual objects.

The Christian is a child of light, having an *unction from the Holy One*. He is also a child of love: for his *faith worketh by love, and purifies the heart*. God requires, in his law, that we should set our affections on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. He promises in his gospel, that his people shall have a new heart; and in the dispensations of grace, the love of God is shed abroad in our

\* John xvi. 13, 14.

hearts by his Spirit which is given to us. Without such affections, there is no religion, no true godliness. *Affections* are a part of our constitution; and if the whole man is sanctified, they must be rendered holy. Affections are necessary to moral action as well as intellect itself; they are the great springs of human activity; and behove to be set in order and in motion by the Spirit of holiness. The religion of the glorified saints partakes of pure affections; and the experience of holy men in this life abundantly shows that the desires and the enjoyments of the sons of Zion are guided by the Spirit of Christ.

Although we speak of religious affections as distinct from the exercises of the understanding, it is not with design to convey the idea that they are separable, the one from the other. In religion, as in the constitution of human nature, the *power of perceiving*, and the *capacity of being affected* by what is perceived, are faculties of the same soul. The soul is the living being, that both understands and loves—the *being* that, when renewed and sanctified, understands and loves divine things, in their proper nature and character. Religious affections are distinguished from all other affections, by their spirituality.\* The Holy Ghost is the cause which produces

\* “The *spiritual* man and the *natural* man are set in opposition, one to another, 1 Cor. ii. 14, 15. And as the saints are called spiritual in scripture, so we also find that there are certain properties, that have the same epithet given them. We read of a “spiritual mind,” Rom. viii. 7. of “spiritual wisdom,” Col. i. 9. and of “spiritual blessings,” Eph. i. 3. Now, it may be observed, that the epithet *spiritual* is not used to signify any relation of persons or things to the spirit or soul of man: for there are some properties that the scripture calls *carnal*, which have their existence in the soul, Col. ii. 18. Nor, are things called spiritual, because they are conversant about those things which are immaterial: for so was the wisdom of this world, 1 Cor. chap. ii. But it is with relation to the HOLY GHOST that persons or things are termed *spiritual* in the New Testament. And it must be observed that they who have only the *common* influences of the Spirit are not so called: but only those who have the *saving* influences.

The Spirit of God is given to the true saints to dwell in them as their proper and lasting abode; and to influence their hearts as a *principle of new nature*, or as a divine supernatural spring of life and action. They are therefore properly denominated from it, and are called *spiritual*. Another reason why the saints and their virtues are called *spiritual*, is that the Spirit of God dwelling as a vital principle in their souls, there produces those effects wherein he communicates himself in his own proper nature, true holiness—*That which is born of the Spirit is spirit*. So that not only the persons are called *spiritual*, as having the Spirit of God dwelling in them; but those qualifications, affectione, and experiences that are wrought in them by the Spirit, are also spiritual; and therein differ vastly in their nature and kind from all that a natural man is or



them ; and he makes us to be affected in a holy manner. He gives us light to see the object as it is ; and he gives us the disposition which becometh the object. He commits no mistake. He counteracts alike ignorance and heresy, apathy and fanaticism. For this work he is sent from God to the mind of man : he understands perfectly what he has to do ; for he is omniscient : he is able to do what he has undertaken ; for he is omnipotent.

The *adversary*, who goeth about to mislead, to tempt, and to destroy, is capable, when permitted of the Lord, to excite emotions in the human heart ; and his devices are not detected without spiritual discernment. Anxious to hold his dominion over fallen men, he is satisfied while he can keep them in ignorance, in negligence, or infidelity. If they should be any how alarmed about their state, he will suit his temptations to circumstances, in order that he may, by all means, secure his prey. Delusions, artfully adapted to the temper and pursuits of the individual, to the opinions, the practices, and the fashions of the society in which the individual resides, are ready at hand. Whether it be idolatry, or superstition, or formality, or enthusiasm ; whether it be charity, or bigotry, or self-righteousness in any of its endlessly diversified forms, whatever, in fact, may answer his purposes of deceit, that he inculcates on the mind ; and with it he diverts, and feeds, and fattens his victims. Great and sudden are the changes produced upon nations and individuals, by *the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience*. Nations, under his enchantments, break in pieces the shackles of a base superstition ; and all at once amuse themselves with visionary speculations of infidel philosophy and reform : and again, wearied with their own vanities, they sink back into a stupid and sullen repose under the shadow of *ANTICHRIST, the son of perdition*. Individuals are suddenly alarmed, and from the cold and carnal habitude of years, become, at once, in their own estimation, with all their ignorance, saints of the first magnitude, who think of nothing and speak of nothing but religion ; and then again, the fire burns out, and they return cold and comfortless to the state which they vainly imagined they had for ever forsaken. *Their goodness is like the morning cloud. It passeth rapidly away.*

The enemy gains much by this management. True can be the subject of remaining in a natural state."—*President Edwards's first Sign of Gracious Affections.*

Christianity is serious, solemn, ardent, active, unyielding, and constant. To the secure, Satan will represent it as troublesome, sullen, ignoble, useless, and unhappy. For the alarmed sinner, he finds it necessary to provide a substitute for real religion in something resembling it, but essentially distinguished from it: therefore, he employs error to produce confusion of ideas, distraction of mind, or false peace, without removing guilt. Any excitement of affection, which is not of a spiritual nature, is peculiarly suited to his purposes. If it pass, in the world and in the church, for what is called a *revival* of religion, so much the better for him who readily transforms himself into an angel of light. Satan takes pleasure in the fanatic as well as in the formalist. Hereby he not only makes sure of his deluded victim, but also brings religion itself into disgrace. A wild delusion is contemptible to reflecting minds, and whensoever it is identified in general estimation with vital religion, as, alas, it too frequently is, then, of course, religion itself necessarily suffers. Ignorant excitement is awfully dangerous. Strong passion, whether from fear or from love of imaginary good, without the light of truth to direct its exercise, puts the sinner under full sail, and drives him to irremediable wo.

Actual godliness is equally averse from unenlightened excitement and cold speculation. It is alike opposed to the senseless professions of the deluded fanatic, and the callous calculations of the hard-hearted worldling. It is a pure and a holy flame, from the celestial fire, which enlightens with its rays, and revives with its warmth. It affects powerfully the finer feelings of the heart; it imparts energy for action in all the pious pursuits of believers; it is intelligent and discreet, pure and peaceable, *and yields the fruits of righteousness to them who are exercised thereby*. Such is the work of the Holy Ghost upon the affections of the saints. By communicating himself as a living and abiding principle of holy action in the soul of man, we are by a supernatural influence inclined to virtuous pursuits; and being *inclined*, we, of course, *willingly*, as well as *certainly*, improve in the spiritual life, and proceed in our preparation for glory.

3. Divine influence *strengthens* the saints for every duty.

In the intellectual world, as well as in the inferior ranks of animated beings, there are different degrees of power. However intimately our ideas of strength are associated with physical force, all languages imply that there is intellectual vigour as well as muscular or bodily energy. It is as easy

to conceive of the one as of the other, and to account for the one as for the other. The effects are equally obvious in both cases. A strong or a weak mind, are phrases as definite and intelligible, as a strong or a weak arm. The scriptures too assure us, that there are different degrees of spiritual strength; and experience shows that all the acts and exercises of the new man admit of various degrees. Were it not for this, improvement would be impossible. Spiritual strength is as distinct from the vigour of the understanding, from the natural force of any of our mental faculties, as these are from mere muscular power; and that strength is called spiritual, which is from the Spirit of God, acting according to the economy of grace, as the author of holiness in man.

All power is indeed from the Lord: *For there is no power but of God.\** The Spirit moved upon the face of the waters, and established what are called the laws of nature over the several elements. The Spirit gave animation and energy to the nerves and the sinews of organized bodies: the flight of the eagle, the swiftness of the roe, and the impulse of Samson's arm, are all from this source of power. It is the same Spirit of the Almighty that giveth us understanding: but there is an essential difference between these communications and what he does for his saints in making them to grow in grace; and it is by his strengthening them with might in the inner man, they are made to go on unto perfection.

It is a mercy that the Spirit bringeth all things to our remembrance, and places the object of pursuit before us in his own divine light: let us be grateful for the gracious affections he begets in the heart, directing the desire of our souls to his holy name,—to those things which are above in the paradise of God; but let us remember that a *sight* of the good, and a *desire* of enjoying it, would be unavailing, were we not *enabled* to pursue it with success. Thanks be unto God, who giveth us of his Holy Spirit. This is our ability: this is our strength. It consists not in mere acuteness of perception, in mere ardour of desire, or in the intensity of my grief, my joy, or my love. I speak not of mere *natural ability*, or mere *moral ability*; but of a power distinct from both, and superior to both—The power of the Holy Ghost, sanctifying both my nature and my morals. It is in the strength of grace promised and communicated that believers travel to the celestial mansions. *I will go in the strength of*

\* Rom. xiii. 1.

*the Lord God. It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect.*

#### CONCLUSION.

It is for you, brethren, as well as for me, to make the application of this discourse. Knowing that it is the Spirit of God who applies divine grace effectually to the soul, we be-  
hove to depend upon him at all times, and to solicit him when we meet together at the public ordinances for his blessing on the teacher and the taught. We all have an interest in this direction—"Grow in grace."

While it implies, that they who are still in their sins, are incapable of growth, and that all who have grace have ample room for improvement in religion, it evidently requires of us all, to use with care and constancy those means which are provided for our advancement to the perfection of the saints. The means, which we have pointed out to you in this discourse, are worthy of regard: the ordinances are of God: the reasonings and reflections correspond with his declarations, and your own character and condition: The influences of the Spirit are promised, and procured, and communicated in the whole economy, *grace reigns through righteousness unto everlasting life by Jesus Christ our Lord.* My concluding remarks are predicated upon the Christian experience of those whom I now address. I hope I am not deceived in you, while I take for granted your gracious state, and speak unto you as believers, the beloved of the Lord.

1. I observe from my text, that there are different degrees of gracious attainments, and I urge upon all ranks the duty of further progress—"Grow in grace." Moses was instructed, when he cried unto the Lord for the descendants of Abraham, to urge them to go on in their journey. Pressed by the pursuing Egyptians, and opposed in their progress by the waters of the Red Sea, the people were sore afraid: *and the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward."* So say I unto you; Awake, arise, this is not your rest. Before you is the prize. It is God that calls upon you—your own, your fathers' God. Lo! He stands on high in light and in righteousness, looking down in compassion on the company of pilgrims; and graciously inviting them to lay aside every weight, that they may the better *run the race that is set before*

*them.* His presence is encouraging, and therefore are you assembled that you may go on together to the place of your final abode.

Take a view of the varieties of character and gracious attainments that are found among you: not for the purposes of discord, of pretension, or of pride of superiority; but with gratitude to the Sovereign disposer of every event, and with design to be helpers of one another in your progress. The least of you that believe, has more than he merited; the best, has nothing whereof to be vain; all have reason to mourn over imperfections, and to rejoice that your sufficiency is of God. Hand in hand, the young and the old, the feeble and the strong, the unlearned and the scholar, the new recruit and the veteran, march to the place of conquest and triumph. The trumpet blows, the people hear, "The Breaker is come up before them: they have broken up, and have passed through the gate, and the Lord on the head of them. Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance."\*

2. Be not discouraged, although your progress in religion is neither as uniform nor as rapid as you first expected it should actually prove.

Every Christian has many changes in his own spiritual lot; and those changes are not always agreeable to his feelings or his expectations. We know most assuredly, that all things shall work together for our good; but we do not previously know, what method our heavenly Father will take in relation to our numerous concerns in order to produce this effect. That religion itself is a source of happiness, we will not cease to believe; for wisdom's ways are pleasantness, and all her paths are peace: but in consequence of our personal imperfections and transgressions, and our relation to a sinful world, our very piety may become the *occasion* of trouble and sorrow. There are seasons in your life, in which there is need that ye be *in heaviness through manifold temptations*.

Among the numerous trials which afflict the saints, none appear more alarming than those which indicate a decline of their spirituality: and there is on this quarter great reason of deep concern. In all cases of declension, there is something to blame on our part; and there is evident diminution of our usefulness to others: there is offence against God,

\* Micah ii. 13. Psa. lxxxix. 15.

and consequent ground for our apprehension of his indignation. It is, moreover, the case, that many professors who were once confident of their own religion, and who were in the estimation of others truly religious, have, by gradual or sudden declension, lost that which they appeared to have had, and so made it manifest to all that they were not true Christians. Such considerations ought to humble us when it is evident that we are not growing in grace; they must humble the saints when they are made sensible of personal decay: but they often alarm the pious, perhaps to renewal of strength, perhaps to despondence approaching despair.

This last, is the most painful condition in which pious men can be placed. Against it I would have you guard with caution. It is a bitter draught of itself; and it renders all other troubles with which it may be your lot to be visited, doubly painful. It induces melancholy, augments bodily infirmity, and renders its sleepless victim unfit for exertion. Wipe away your tears, ye sons of sorrow, for the gospel has provided a remedy. The cure is not in yourselves: ye have sinned, and merit the indignation of the Lord. But there is a remedy. Lo, the Mediator is your advocate. He is your Lord and your Brother. He delights in employment: and he calls to him the wearied and the heavy laden. Are you guilty of sloth, of ingratitude, of negligence? Are you idle in his sanctuary, cold in your affection, slow in your progress, or rather retrograde in your motions? Then you have the greater need of his aid who is able to save to the uttermost. Come to him at his invitation. The urgency of your case should be with you an argument to come without delay: the greatness of your criminality is no reason for his denying his salvation; but on the contrary his glory is the more conspicuous, because his mercy is the better displayed in pardoning the iniquity which is very great. He is rich in mercy; his blood cleanseth from all sin. I repeat it, Christians, although you have lingered too long, although you have been overcome by temptations, although you have not hitherto made the expected progress in zeal, in usefulness, in patience, and in heavenly-mindedness; although you are faint and without the wished-for strength, he is at hand to help you. He is a Father and a Friend, "God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble; therefore will we not fear though the earth be removed. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he

increaseth strength. Even the youth shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but they that wait on the *Lord* shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint."\* AMEN.

\* Psa. xlv. 1, 2. Isa. xl. 29—31.

## ASSURANCE OF A SAVING INTEREST IN CHRIST.

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### SERMON VI.

1 JOHN iii. 19.—*And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.*

IT may with truth be said of unfounded confidence in matters of religion, as the daughters of Israel said of the son of Jesse in their songs, "David has killed his tens of thousands." Numerous beyond calculation are the victims of a deceitful hope of future salvation. Very few of those who think at all of the world to come, have gone down to the grave in despair of happiness; and but comparatively a small number of those who hear the gospel, have really believed to the saving of the soul: the remainder perish with delusive expectations. *Many are called, but few are chosen. Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat.*

It is lamentable, that there should prevail among men, both within and without the pale of the Christian church, so much unreasonable confidence, as it regards the future state of their immortal souls. Strange as it may appear, when the fact is at first presented to view, there are many people, in other things intelligent and prudent, who are conscious that they are not sufficiently religious to make a public profession of Christianity; who acknowledge that they are not fit to join in a visible communion with men who are very far from perfection: and yet, with such consciousness and acknowledgments, they flatter themselves that they are in quite a fair way to enter at death into heaven; to be admitted by a holy God to the communion of angels; and settled in the incorruptible inheritance, in fellowship with the spirits of just men made



perfect. It is remarkable that so many acute and inquiring minds, should bestow so little consideration upon the most important and interesting subjects, while they are alive, feelingly and jealously alive to the concerns of country, of personal interest and reputation, yea, of party and of prejudice.

It is a pity, too, that among the few who live godly in Christ Jesus, there should be found any who, from ignorance of their own gracious state, or negligence of their high calling, deprive themselves of the consolations of the Christian's hope. To awaken, from their deceitful dreams, those who are slumbering in false security; to conduct to a sight of their personal safety, those believers in Jesus Christ who are afflicted with doubts and fears, is a duty, at which the pastor must aim, however difficult it may be to accomplish. After having described the NATURE AND PROGRESS OF TRUE RELIGION in the soul, I have thought it might be well to exhibit those principles upon which my hearers should try their own Christian character. With this view, the text is selected.

The venerable apostle furnishes in this epistle the professed Christian with the proper criterion of his devotional exercises. In his Gospel, he has exhibited the most sublime doctrines of the evangelical system; in the Apocalypse he has given us an outline of the prospective history of Christianity as it affects the great concerns of society: and in his Epistles he furnishes us with a fine and discriminating view of personal godliness. Pure friendship, upon Christian principles, tender, enlightened, and constant, appears in the last two addressed to individuals. In this, a general epistle to the churches of Christ, he happily interweaves, with the doctrines of grace, and the purest morality, a description of the principal effects of experimental religion among all ranks. John the Divine outlived the rest of the apostles of our Lord; and peculiarly felt a parental affection for all the scattered churches and their several members. He had lived long enough to see many instances of apostacy and hypocrisy; and much decay of spirituality in some men of undoubted piety. His furrowed brow and his silvered locks betokened the many years which had passed over him in his ministry: and before he departs from the world, he strives to leave as a legacy with his children, a practical work by which they may ascertain their own religious state. Referring to some distinguishing traits of Christian character which he had previously drawn, he adds, in my text, *hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.*

True Christians have the means of assuring themselves that they are in a state of grace, and shall obtain eternal life—There are certain principles to be understood and admitted in all accurate examinations of our own religious state—Some practical directions are suggested by this subject.

In making these assertions, brethren, I lay the plan of this discourse before you. I entreat your attention to every part of the discussion; and I hope, through divine aid, that I shall be enabled to make this interesting subject plain to every capacity.

I. True Christians have the means of assurance. The truth of this assertion is sufficiently obvious from the text; for if the attainment were impossible, there could be no propriety in pointing it out as within our reach: on the contrary, the inspired writer refers to the means, and affirms that both he and others have succeeded in the use of them—"Hereby we *know* that we are of the truth." Other parts of scripture also attest this doctrine; reasoning from the nature of the case makes the opposite opinion appear to be absurd; and facts are on record to show that many have been in possession of the assurance of their personal salvation.

1. Let us examine the text, and explain its meaning. *We are of the truth.* The "truth" spoken of is religious truth—the true religion. There are, it is granted, many other sorts of truth; but this alone is the subject of consideration in the case before us. Truth, in the abstract, signifies an agreement between any object and our idea of it. "There is a truth in every art and science. There is a truth in the art of rising in the world; a certain choice of means, a certain dexterous application of circumstances, a certain promptitude at seizing an opportunity. In like manner, there is a truth in the sciences. A mathematician racks his invention, spends whole nights and days, suspends the most lawful pleasures, and the most natural inclinations, to find the solution of a problem in a relation of figures, in a combination of numbers."\* This is not the truth of which the apostle John writes to Christians. He treats of Christian truth. He refers to that truth which is originally in the eternal God, which is revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ, which is applied to the mind of man by the Holy Ghost, and which is experienced in the renewed hearts of the children of adoption. He treats of that religion which is agreeable in doctrine, in ordinances, in sentiment, and in conversation to the word of God. Of

\* *Saurin's* PRICE OF TRUTH.

this he spake, when he said, *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.* ‘*To be*’ of this truth, is to be in fact believers in it, professors of it, and subjects of its experimental power—to be truly religious. *To know that we are of the truth*—is to know that we are Christians. It is to be assured that we are ourselves personally pious—that we are regenerated, that we have faith, that we are saints. Thus, *we shall assure our hearts before him.* This additional assertion corroborates our interpretation of the former. Christians, who *know* that they are true Christians, are *persuaded* of the fact. Their hearts are confident upon the subject. Even before God, that cannot be imposed upon by human pretensions, they are free from doubt, and assert without hesitation what they absolutely know to be true. It is not a faint hope; it is not a mere conjecture: it is not even a strong probability. It is consciousness, it is knowledge, it is assurance of heart before the Lord.

This assurance of “being of the truth” is the same with “the assurance of grace and salvation.”\* It is the certain knowledge we have of the reality of our piety, of our having an actual interest at the time in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a conviction by evidence—*hereby* we know that we are of the truth. Whereby, will you ask, do we attain to this knowledge, to such assurance? The question is reasonable. It has been anticipated; and the reply is given, by inspiration of the Almighty, in the context. “*Hereby* we know,” by the exercise of gracious affections. Of our own mental operations we are conscious. There are mental exercises, truly and peculiarly spiritual, gracious, holy. We are conscious of these exercises; and hence our knowledge and assurance. We have the witness within us. Evangelical affection is our evidence. Love of holiness, verses 7 and 10: Love of the brethren, verse 14: the love of God, verse 17: *Hereby* we know that we are of the truth. This love is sincere, ardent, and active in beneficence. *Let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.* When we know that we have true holiness, we know that we have a saving interest in Christ. Sanctification is the only satisfactory evidence of personal religion; it is the only true evidence of our assurance of heart before God, that we are in a state of grace. *Hereby*, the Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God. It is the work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness; it is the work within us

\* Westminster Confession of Faith, chap. xviii.

of which our own spirits are conscious : and both the spirit of man and the Spirit of God bear testimony together to assure our hearts before him. It is evident, therefore, from the text, that assurance of salvation is attainable in this life.

The doctrine of assurance of personal salvation does not depend entirely for its support upon this part of divine revelation. Other portions of the sacred volume may readily be cited in its support. Cold and comfortless is the creed which excludes this principle, by casting the mantle of uncertainty over all the religious exercises of the children of men. It is a happy consideration for the benevolent mind, that however prevalent this gloomy faith, which never warrants the full assurance of the hope of salvation, it is not scriptural. *We therefore so run, not as uncertainly ; so fight we, not as one that beateth the air.*

Let us accordingly proceed,

2. To prove from other parts of scripture, that assurance of salvation is attainable in the present world.

Did the title to heavenly felicity depend upon our own merit, it could never be infallibly secured ; because that merit is confessedly incomplete, and demonstrably inadequate—*By the deeds of the law no flesh shall be justified.* Did even our belief in the perpetuity of grace in the soul, depend upon our good opinion of human resolution and strength, we never could “make our calling and election sure :” for human resolution and created strength are certainly liable to change and decay ; and besides, an experiment has already been made upon the stability of the creature in the case of man and angels, in the case of Adam and of Lucifer, and, in both, it has failed. We are not, therefore, surprised that those who build their hope on their own personal virtue, however acquired, should also hold the opinion that assurance is not attainable, and that regenerate men may “fall away” into eternal perdition. These ideas are not only consistent with their other ideas ; but are absolutely inseparable from the *legal* scheme of justification, although utterly inconsistent with evangelical doctrine. They, therefore, who depend upon unchangeable goodness and almighty mercy for their salvation, require only a declaration from God, that certain qualities being once possessed shall always be possessed, and that heavenly enjoyment shall at last be the portion of all who in fact possess these qualities.

Declarations plain and positive to this amount are given freely in the word of God : and those sanctified men, who

are conscious that they possess themselves those spiritual qualities which are specified in such declarations, must thereby *assure their hearts* before the Lord. To this very end, the Redeemer *opened his mouth, and taught them, saying*, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."\*

These *benedictions* were pronounced, by the Lord of righteousness, upon his disciples; the *beatitudes* belong exclusively to actual saints. To them only could he say with truth, "Rejoice and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven. Ye are the salt of the earth. Ye are the light of the world."† To them, of course, he gives *assurance* of happiness everlasting. And is not that attainable which Christ himself bestows?

The first ministers of the New Testament, directed by the Holy Spirit, urge affectionately upon Christians the duty of exercising the assurance of salvation, and so recommend it as a gracious attainment in the church of God. The apostle Peter may be introduced as speaking for all his associates. "Brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."‡

\* It will not be denied, by any one, that the BLESSINGS pronounced in the memorable sermon on the mount, all imply everlasting life. The *character* described in each declaration certainly includes spiritual life, or true religion; and the *promise* as certainly includes happiness in heaven. On this account the persons described are already called happy or *blessed*. They have that life and that holiness, which shall be certainly made perfect. The word employed so often and appropriately by our Saviour, conveys this idea: It is μακαριοι, "from μα or μη, not, and κηρ, fate or death; intimating that such persons were endued with immortality."—CLARKE'S NOTES.

The different shades of Christian character are brought to view; an appropriate promise is made to each; and since every one of them belongs to vital godliness, they are all pronounced *blessed*, μακαριοι—exempted from the second death.

† Matt. v. 12—14.

‡ 2 Pet. i. 10, 11. Give diligence to *make sure*, your calling and election—Strive to obtain certain knowledge of the fact. You have the means of verifying it, in your sanctification. The tree is known by its fruit. This is undoubtedly the import of the words ποιεσθαι βεβαιαν.

The exhortation is addressed *to them that have obtained precious faith through the righteousness of God our Saviour*. They are directed to go on making higher attainments in all things that pertain to life and godliness; and they are informed that by so doing they shall not fall, but have a certain admission into the everlasting kingdom of God in heaven. Progress in sanctification makes it not only apparent, but sure, that they who give such diligence are called effectually by divine grace, and of course confirms the fact of their predestination or election to eternal happiness: *for whom he did predestinate, them he also called; whom he called, them he also justified; whom he justified, them he also glorified*. This direction is of the same nature with the exhortation of the apostle Paul to the Hebrews, chap. vi. 11. And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: And either of them renders it sufficiently manifest that the Christian religion supplies believers with the means of assuring their own hearts of their present piety and future safety.

3. The contrary opinion leads to absurdity.

There is no truth more frequently or more clearly revealed in the book of God, than that believers shall certainly be made perfect and happy in heaven. On this subject, the most positive assertions are used by him who cannot lie—*He that believeth shall be saved: believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved: I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die*. It is manifestly the design of such express assertions, to convey to the intelligent mind, a certain assurance that the believer shall enjoy salvation; and, therefore, the doctrine which denies the possibility of reaching to such assurance must appear absurd. If it be not a fact that every true believer shall be saved, why should it be so often, why should it be *once* affirmed? and if it be impossible, with and without divine aid, to ascertain true faith, it is entirely useless to engage in self-examination, or to invite us to draw near to God with a true heart and in full assurance. The Christian religion contains in itself no absurdities; and we are compelled *Make firm or certain*—confirm it to your satisfaction. The fact of their effectual calling was already certain; for they had precious faith: their election was certain independently of any act of their own. Indeed, both their calling and election were of the grace of God, and not dependent on their sanctification; but their sanctification confirmed and verified the fact to themselves. It gave them assurance of eternal life.

to admit that it provides for the saints sufficient means of knowing that they are "heirs of God."

4. We have many instances of such attainments, in the history of the personal experience of the pious.

Upon the experience of the godly I might rest the argument. This evidence is abundant; it is perspicuous; it is adapted to our own feelings; and it is always at hand while we read the scriptures and reflect upon their contents. It is not to the experience of men who may possibly deceive you by false representations, relating what they never saw or felt: it is not a romantic tale, composed ingeniously in order to please or amuse; a tale partial in its statements, exaggerated in its assertions, or embellished by hyperbolical metaphor, the suggestion of a morbid fancy: it is the experience of men whose personal piety is attested by the omniscient God; and whose expressions, in declaring it, are all guided by inspiration of the Holy Ghost. It is to the scriptural experience we refer you for proof and for example. The saints described in divine revelation, were in the habit of exercising "the assurance of salvation." Those expressions, which are descriptive of the pious sentiments of believers on this interesting subject, and not limited in their use to favoured or distinguished individuals, are enough to show, that the conviction is common to a great many, and that it proceeds upon the principle of the true religion, without being dependent upon any special revelation to a single person under peculiar circumstances. Such is the case, in a very remarkable manner, with the language of modest confidence and affectionate trust ascribed to the church, in her collective character, by the writer of that fine dramatic poem, called THE SONG OF SONGS. "I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting-house, and his banner over me was love. His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me. My beloved is mine, and I am his; I am my beloved's, and his desire is towards me. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem." In the book of Psalms too, the experience of the saints is represented in all its changes; and the language of full assurance is frequently put in the mouth of the children of Zion. "Thou art my hope, O Lord God: thou art my trust from my youth. I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me;

thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory."

If it be possible that any doubt should yet remain, I beseech you, my hearers, to attend to the words of Job. You will admit that he spoke the language of assurance in the midst of his afflictions. Yea, while he felt the terrors of the Almighty, *fencing up his ways, and setting darkness in his paths; when his kinsfolks failed, and his familiar friends had forgotten him; when the maids of his house counted him for a stranger, and his servants answered not to his call; when his breath had become strange to his very wife, though he entreated her for the children's sake of his own body, even then,* he said, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." Job was persuaded of his salvation: *for the root of the matter was found in him.*

David, the son of Jesse, was long subjected to trouble and sorrow. Hunted like a roe of the forest, and exposed without shelter to the mountain storm, he lifted up his eyes to the place on high where his Father and his God hath established his throne; and he felt and expressed a confident persuasion of being himself admitted to the celestial city. "Arise, O Lord; disappoint the wicked; deliver my soul. As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness." Indeed, pious men whose names are mentioned in sacred history, knew as did Isaiah the prophet, that assurance of salvation is attainable in this life; they knew that *the work of righteousness is peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever.*

Abraham, who by faith sojourned in the land of promise as a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob the heirs of the same promise, looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God; and persuaded of his interest in the heavenly country, confessed himself a pilgrim, although at the same time the heir of the land of Canaan. Moses esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward, which he confidently expected from the invisible God, at the end of his life.



The experience of New Testament believers is still more plainly expressed. The apostle Paul will serve as an example. Behold him struggling with temptations, striving to keep under the body, contending with persecutors, and buffeted by a messenger of Satan. Confessing himself in bodily presence weak, and in speech contemptible, no man better understood than he the vanity of boasting in created strength. You see him, however, a soldier of the cross, still under arms, and surrounded by innumerable enemies. Fearless, he predicts the result of the combat. Knowing the power of him in whom he had believed; and certain of his protection, he speaks the language of assurance, and hurls defiance at every creature in the universe. These are his triumphant assertions in behalf of all the saints. "We are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."\* Upon another occasion, he declares his assurance of future felicity, and his willingness, nay, his ardent desire in consequence of his assurance, to be released from the body, that he might immediately enter upon the heavenly enjoyment. "For we *know* that, if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens: for in this we groan, *earnestly desiring* to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.† For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain—I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.‡ For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth, *there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day.*"§

II. I shall now lay down some *principles* which must be taken for granted, in all accurate examinations of our own religious state.

In the first part of this discourse, I have endeavoured, I hope not unsuccessfully, to prove, from the scriptures, that assurance of salvation is attainable by Christians: it is of course a duty incumbent upon you to ascertain for yourselves, what

\* Rom. viii. 37—39.

† Phil. i. 21, 23.

‡ 2 Cor. v. 1, 2.

§ 2 Tim. iv. 6—8.

is your present state, as to personal godliness. I speak to each of you as a friend speaketh to a friend, plainly and affectionately: Are you a Christian? Are you sure that your sins are pardoned? Are you sure that *to die* would be your *gain*? Come, brethren, let us reason together, on this interesting subject. Some of you are, perhaps, too melancholy, and afraid of assuring your hearts before the Lord. Some of you, on the other hand, may have more confidence in your state, than its attainments warrant: none of you can be injured by taking a review of the evidence upon which you have rested your present estimate of your own personal religion; let us therefore, all consider attentively four plain principles which ought to be taken for granted, and kept in remembrance in all seasons of self-examination. Such is true religion, that any one part of it is decisive evidence of character—There is great variety in Christian attainments—God effectually calls his people under very diversified circumstances—In self-examination, as in other cases, the aid of the divine Spirit is necessary to a happy issue.

All these principles are not only capable of proof; but they are also necessarily implied in that investigation which the believer institutes in order to ascertain the spirituality of his own character and conduct. This will appear from a cursory survey of the ground which each of them actually covers.

1. Such is the nature of true godliness, that any one gracious exercise is conclusive evidence of piety. *Whatsoever is born of the flesh is flesh; and whatsoever is born of the Spirit is spirit. But to be spiritually minded is life and peace.*

The most pious and practical teachers of Christianity have been in the habit of directing inquiring minds to try their own state in regard to true religion upon this principle, assuring them that a *few good evidences*, well understood, are perfectly sufficient to determine the great question of a saving interest in Christ. The advice is judicious and discreet; and has undoubtedly been suggested by correct views of the nature of religion, and of the character of the human mind. Those teachers, however, who labour either to bring into disgrace the doctrine of personal assurance, or at least to give it a foundation which is not evangelical, have with more zeal than discretion denied this maxim, and have diligently inculcated an opposite opinion. They have reprobated the idea of the sufficiency of a few evidences of Christian character:

and yet, such is always the difficulty of being consistently erroneous without travelling very far from the regions of truth, that of the numerous evidences recommended by themselves, each is represented as in itself decisive. The apostle John evidently acted upon the principle which I have stated: for he, in the chapter from which I have taken the text, specifies a certain part of Christian character,—complacency in the pious; and declares that it is a sufficient evidence of a state of grace.

Philosophers, and what ought to be of equal weight in the formation of our sentiments, all men of common sense in the business of life, proceed upon this principle, in determining, from certain well-known characters, the class to which a particular thing belongs. Without any knowledge of comparative anatomy, as it is studied in the medical schools, a peasant would decide, at sight of a human hand or foot, that the member belonged to a fellow-creature of his own. Children learn to classify at a very early age.

Those who have made any proficiency in the science of mind, know how difficult it is to introduce demonstration into metaphysical studies; and if there be any thing obscure or indistinct attached to the discussion and classification of mental phenomena, when man is viewed merely as a reasonable creature, it must be much more hazardous to pretend to a complete comprehension of all his faculties and operations, when regarded in the light of Christian philosophy, not merely as man, but as one who has fallen into total depravity, and has been recovered to a new and spiritual nature and life. It is of course necessary, if we decide at all upon our own spiritual character, that we do it from a knowledge of *some* of its attributes. We should never have assurance of eternal life, were we to wait for a perfect acquaintance with all the powers of our own soul, and with all their qualities. It is easier to examine a few witnesses to satisfaction, than to determine a case upon testimony, which is not only multiplied and complicated, but is even endless.

The very nature of the life of piety, however, effectually precludes the necessity of such indefiniteness in determining the question to which we refer. It is a spiritual life, distinct in its nature and exercises from any thing appertaining to the natural man: and whatsoever is evidence of such life at all existing, is evidence of regeneration by the Spirit; and of course, it is evidence of a justified state: *for there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after*

*the flesh, but after the Spirit.* If grace should exist in the soul, though only as the grain of mustard seed, or as the handful of leaven, it will inevitably increase: *being confident of this, that he who began the good work will carry it on to the day of Jesus Christ.* No one grace of the Spirit is ever alone in the soul; for the change effected in conversion by the Holy Ghost is a change of nature, and extends to all the *faculties* of the moral constitution; to all the *exercises* of the rational creature.

Indulgence in those habits and transgressions, which indicate the total dominion of the corruption of nature, are evidence that no saving change has taken place; for *whosoever abideth in him sinneth not.* By the very same rule, he who from *spiritual* motives relinquishes one evil course, relinquishes also all, so far as his spirituality prevails over innate corruption; for *whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.* It is perfectly true, that he that sinneth in *one point* against the law, is guilty of *all*; because he resists that authority from which the whole law derives its binding power: but it is equally true, that he who exercises any grace of the gospel, has the seed of all the graces planted in him, and cultivated by the Spirit of God. By the *law* is the knowledge of sin; but life and immortality are brought to light by the *gospel.* Such then is the nature of the Christian's new life, that any one *gracious exercise*, well ascertained, warrants you in the conclusion, *I am born of God.*

2. There is great variety of Christian attainments; and this fact must be remembered by him, who would succeed in self-examination.

In a congregation met for the public worship of God, according to the laudable practice which obtains in Christian countries, it is reasonable to expect that we shall find many descriptions of character. Here, we meet together, the rich and the poor, the young and the old, the man of leisure and the man of business. Here, we meet those who have made a public profession of religion, and many who have not as yet approached under the oath of God, the table at which the saints enjoy the communion. The bride, the Lamb's wife, and the daughters of Jerusalem, enter together into the sanctuary. Real Christians, too, whether they have or have not made a public profession, exhibit great variety of religious attainments: and the standard of one will not answer to ascertain the measure of another. There is, it is true, one rule

by which all cases must be tried and judged, the word of the living God ; but this rule itself describes a variety of graces, and of degrees in each of these graces, which it is necessary to understand and to compare with our own experience. The difficulty lies in judging impartially according to that rule. It requires attention and discernment, to ascertain the facts in our own case, to ascertain the law as it is laid down in the scriptures, and to apply correctly the unerring standard to that of which we are conscious in our own minds.

It is impossible not to be influenced, in some measure, by the estimate which we form of the religious character of others. Your opinion of one is too high ; and comparing that opinion with your own attainments, you are discouraged. Your opinion of another is too low ; and, upon comparison, pride starts up in your own heart. One of your acquaintances is intelligent, and of superior integrity and tenderness in all the concerns of religion. You make this the criterion of godliness, and again you despair of your own piety. Another is childish, and frail, and disorderly ; again you become too confident of your personal goodness.

“ Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.” One is distinguished by his humility, another by his charity, a third by his patience, a fourth by his joy. One is zealous, and another is deliberate and constant. Let not these diversified gifts confound you, or render your exertions, to understand your own character, abortive. “ There are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.”\* Beware that the variety of objects does not occasion an indistinctness of perception and a confusion of ideas that may prevent a discovery, in endeavouring to find what is the religious state of your own souls. Great attainments do not belong to babes in grace ; and you would be only practising a deception upon yourselves, should you expect to find in every true believer the meekness of Moses, the wisdom of Solomon, the mild but stubborn and uniform integrity of Samuel the prophet, and the triumphant assurance of Paul the apostle.

The circumstances of the times have an effect upon Christian attainments. They have so, as moral causes influencing temper and conduct ; and still more, as considered by the omniscient God in the distribution of his gifts of grace—He

\* 1 Cor. xii. 1, 4—6.

adopts the rule, *as your day is, so shall your strength be*. In times of persecution, boldness, prudence, and fortitude, are peculiarly required and provided. In times of abounding error, there is need of discrimination and fidelity; for heresy comes *that they who are approved*, as being of the truth, *may be made manifest*.\* In times of general devotional excitement, extraordinary emotion is no certain sign of piety. Social sensibility is infectious; but true religion is by the grace of God. Crowds may ignorantly weep at hearing of the sufferings of Jesus Christ, who under other circumstances would cry out for their idols. The condition of body has itself an influence in producing the varieties of Christian exercises. The same holy principles may operate upon the bedridden female, and the vigorous and healthy missionary of the cross; but the mild and silent endurance of the one, is distinguished from the calculating and enterprising spirit, and the ceaseless activity of the other.

You would require, in a special manner, to remember, that there are different degrees of grace, when you compare yourselves with the saints set before us in scripture as an example. How vastly different the attainments of the apostles before and after the day of Pentecost. Who would take for the same person, that stood trembling at the door of the high priest's palace, when the maid-servant of Caiaphas charged him with being a Christian, that Peter, who, in the assembly of Priests, and Rulers, and Elders, in the presence of Caiaphas himself, said, "Be it known unto you all, that Jesus Christ, whom ye crucified, God raised from the dead. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other?"†

The saints under the Old Testament, it must also be considered, lived under a different dispensation. The measure of their inward piety is in those cases which are *extraordinary*, (and these are most conspicuous) too high for the *ordinary* standard of common Christians; but the measure of their doctrinal information, and their outward character as members of society, do not furnish a correct criterion of evangelical intelligence and morality. They had not so clear and copious a revelation as we possess: nor were the laws of social religion so plain, so spiritual, or so well understood, as they are since the promulgation of the New Testament. *Among them that are born of women, there is not one greater*

\* 1 Cor. xi. 19.

† Acts iv. 6—12.

than *John the Baptist*, nevertheless, *he that is least in the kingdom of heaven, is greater than he.* The character of Abraham, of David, and of Solomon, as it respects the several degrees of inward holiness and spiritual mindedness, is too high a criterion for the state of our gracious affections; but in outward domestic deportment, these saints are in some instances by far too low examples for our imitation. No decent religious society would now receive into the visible communion of the church, the Father of the faithful, while keeping Hagar as a concubine, David with his numerous wives, or Solomon his son, notwithstanding their piety, their inspiration, their eminence, their wisdom, and the certainty of their title to the kingdom of God in heaven.\*

3. God *effectually calls* his redeemed children, in different periods of life, and under different circumstances.

Regeneration is in all instances the same holy change, and religion itself is in all men the same; yet it is necessary, in surveying the ground upon which the saints build their assurance of salvation, to advert to the different circumstances under which the grace of God was in the first instance communicated. Some saints have, in the very circumstances of their conversion to God, certain means of ascertaining their own state—peculiar means which are not common to others. Some of the elect are regenerated in their infancy—Some, in advanced years, are suddenly, and as if it were by miracle, changed in their sentiments and affections—and some are so gradually instructed in Christian doctrine and morals, that the precise time of spiritual quickening is not to be discovered by the most careful reflections.

Infants are not capable of understanding the doctrines of divine revelation, or of exercising faith on the testimony of God: they know not their own relation to the moral law, the nature of sin, of holiness, of pardon, and of penitence. The formation and execution of the covenant of grace are as far from the reach of their intellectual faculties as are the rules

\* The Church of God is a society formed by divine direction; and under the New Testament, the several members are to be governed by the precepts and rules of the New Testament. *Specified characters* are associated ecclesiastically upon specified principles and for specified purposes. Next to the error, that the seals of the covenant are to be dispensed to those who are apparently unholy, or confessedly unsanctified, there is none more subversive of the good order of the church, than the error so common, that *grace in the heart*, in any degree, is the *criterion* of church membership. True believers often commit *offences* which require censure, even to exclusion from sealing ordinances.

of civil society, or the arts of the husbandman and the manufacturer. The child is, however, man, in miniature; and has the capacity of being gradually instructed in language, in science, and in arts, in proportion as time promotes the developement of innate genius. He has in like manner the capacity of being renewed and sanctified, whensoever the Holy Spirit chooses to produce this saving change upon him: and, in proportion as the rational faculties are exercised and unfolded, the converted child will display the graces of repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The same divine power, that causes the bones to grow in the womb of her that is with child, and breathes into the infant nostrils the breath of life, is perfectly competent to the spiritual renovation of the living soul. Jeremiah the prophet was *sanctified before he came forth from the womb*;\* and John, the forerunner of Messiah, was *filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb*.† The ordinances of the covenant of promise, under its various dispensations, dispensed to children in their earliest days, and as they grew up before the Lord, appear to me also to be predicated upon this principle, that children are *capable of being born again*; and of course, pious parents have not only a right, in submission indeed to divine sovereignty, to expect a blessing upon domestic instruction; but also to exercise a hope that those of their offspring who are called away to the world of spirits before they arrive at years of maturity, have, in fact, been renewed in their minds before they were snatched off from the evil to come.‡

\* Jer. i. 5.

† Luke i. 15.

‡ By this hope alone we can satisfactorily explain the problem, 2 Sam. xii. 15, 23. David seemed inconsolable while his beloved child lay under the agonies of a mortal disease; but so soon as he was informed of the death of his infant, he arose from the earth, "washed and anointed himself, came into the house of the Lord, and worshipped: then he came into his own house, and he did eat." His conduct appeared inexplicable to his domestics: but he himself explains the principles upon which he acted. "He said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? *But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I SHALL GO TO HIM, but he shall not return to me.*"

The prophet David knew that there is no knowledge in the grave. He was one of those who by faith obtained the promise of the resurrection, and desired to see the heavenly country. To him it could be no consolation to go down with his child to perpetual oblivion. To the heavenly city he was himself going; and where, he by faith expected to be; *there he expected to meet his infant offspring. I SHALL GO TO HIM.* The pious parent had assurance of his own salvation, and he is confident also of the safety of his departed child. How different from this was his conduct, how vastly different his expressions, at the death of another



The words of our Redeemer seem also to convey this idea ; and considered in connection with his action at the time, give

son, the profane Absalom? 2 Sam. xviii. 33. " And the king was *much moved, and wept*—thus he said, O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

The salvation of his child was not revealed to David by any special private revelation. *All pious parents have reason to believe, that their children, dying in infancy, shall be saved in Jesus Christ.* That you may have such confidence, discard, 1. *prejudices.* It is not any virtue in your own desires; it is not any merit in your prayers; it is not the efficacy of baptism, that gives a right to this confidence.

2. Reject false reasonings, that are employed to allay parental grief.—It is not their personal *innocency* that can save their souls: if this cannot save the infant from perverseness, from pain, and from death, it cannot save from future misery. Besides, if they are not guilty before God, there is no room for their having any part in the atonement made by Jesus Christ. *The whole have no need of the physician.*

3. Reject inconclusive probabilities. They do not warrant our faith and our hope. That all who die in infancy shall be happy in heaven is nowhere declared in divine revelation. Granting that all are judged according to their works—that children have done no injury in this world—that the number of the saved would be greatly increased by including all infants; still, this is only *PROBABILITY*; and our knowledge is too superficial to warrant any positive conclusion. Revelation is our only sure guide.

Christian hope rests only on Christ himself: and in the *revelation* of the covenant of grace we have the *only ground* of faith and confidence. This is, in the present case, the ground of the pious parent's confidence. To the *impious* there is no hope.

The promise of God *secures* the salvation of the offspring of believers, dying in infancy. My argument is this. A general promise covers all cases, which are not excepted by him who promised: and where there is no exception, there is ground of faith. But the promise of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ; and there is no exception, not one, in relation to those children of believers who die in infancy. Heb. ix. 15. Christ suffered, *that they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.* This very *PROMISE*, Acts ii. 39. is unto you, and to your CHILDREN. It is not to the Jew only; but also to *as many as are called*; and *these* being called, it is of course to *their children.* To the operation of the promise there is no possible *exception*, but an unbelieving rejection of it. Those professors, who die in unbelief, are not interested in the promise: but the children of believers, who do *not live to reject by unbelief this promise*, are included in its blessings. I have, therefore, the same ground, the self-same foundation, to believe in the salvation of my children, who have *not rejected* the covenant of grace, as to believe in my own salvation, who have *embraced* that covenant. I have the same promise in both cases. It is first to me, and then to my children: and I know, if any of my children are not, in fact, in the covenant of grace, they will not leave this world until they have in their own souls rejected the promise, and put themselves among those who are excepted by the promiser from the blessing. The wisdom of God—the constitution of the church—the hopes of the saints—the general scope of scripture, confirm this exposition of God's promise.

us reason to conclude, that, as our infant children are placed by divine goodness along with ourselves in the visible church, so, too, unless it shall actually appear that they have, by their personal misconduct, cast themselves out, they shall enter into the celestial enjoyments of that kingdom of the God of heaven, which is visibly dispensed, under an outward economy, to his people while yet on earth. Mark x. 13—16. "And they brought *young children* to him; and his disciples rebuked those that brought them: but Jesus, when he saw it, was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: *for of such is the kingdom of God—And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.*"

It seems, therefore, not to admit of a doubt, that their circumcision, their baptism, the prayers of their parents and their pastors with the whole church, have in many instances been blessed, as means of grace to little children, before their own rational faculties had attained to that maturity, which is necessary for understanding and remembering the time or manner of their conversion from a state of nature to a state of grace. This mode of bringing home to the great Shepherd the lambs of his fold, seems to be more congenial with the order of his kingdom, than the sudden incursions which are made into the territory of the god of this world, in order to pluck the prey from the mighty, and bring a stranger into the commonwealth of Israel. The mode of conversion, alluded to in the latter case, is indeed more remarkable; but this fact indicates, that it is somewhat extraordinary; and confirms the idea, that in well regulated churches, where piety is cultivated by the pure preaching of evangelical truth, the ordinary means of growth are the noiseless conversion of the children of Zion to the image of him that created them. Thus, the church herself furnishes, by the blessing of God, from the families in her fellowship, the greater part of those godly men, who maintain her interest and her strength. The promise annexed to that commandment, which prohibits unauthorized forms of religious worship, the second precept of the moral law, furnishes a confirmation of my remark: \* and actual history gives ample testimony in its support.

\* Exod. xx. 17. 19. "I the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and *showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.*"

It is evident, from *this reason*, annexed to the prohibition of idolatry

It is obvious, from this view of the subject, that men who inquire into the certainty of their own religious state, behove to consider the peculiar kind of evidence adapted to each peculiar case.

Men, who suddenly, like Zaccheus, Luke xix. 1. undergo a change of sentiments and affections, in an extraordinary manner, while in the full possession of their natural powers of reasoning and reflection, cannot fail without an entire derangement of these faculties to know their conversion. The time, the place, the circumstances, are not to be forgotten. It requires, upon their part, no more than a sound state of intellect to maintain a constant assurance of their saving interest in Christ. This man had been *chief of the publicans*, rich, powerful, avaricious, and detested by his countrymen.\* He had, however, a curiosity in common with the other inhabitants of Jericho to see the personage, whose fame had spread so far abroad, Jesus of Nazareth. From the branches of the *sycamore*, in which he stood in order to gratify that curiosity, he heard and felt the voice of the Son of God effectually calling him from death in sin to life and holiness. It is impossible, therefore, that he could afterwards doubt of his own state, to whom the Redeemer said expressly, *This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham.*

Changes of a religious nature, produced under very singular circumstances, whether from Pagan idolatry, or mere formality, or from zeal unenlightened and unsanctified, carry

and superstition, that God's purpose contemplates the preservation of the church, through the medium of pious persons; and that although piety is not hereditary, it will, nevertheless, in the providence of God, be made, in fact, more conspicuous, in the families of pious men, calculating upon the general scale, than in those whose parents are in the habit of walking after their own evil inclinations. The seed of the righteous are usually, though not necessarily, the sons and daughters of Zion. A branch from a good stock is always an object of regard, although in some instances, strangers are brought into the family, and the children actually thrust out.

\* *Αρχιτελωνης*. Zaccheus was the chief of the publicans, in that district. It is certain that these principal farmers of the taxes, having collectors under them, were Roman knights. It is equally certain that they were hated by the Jews. Tax-gatherers are rarely agreeable visitors. These were, moreover, petty tyrants and extortioners. The servants of *imperial Rome* reminded the descendants of Abram of their vassalage. The spirit of civil and religious liberty was aggrieved at the very sight of their oppressors: For if a few parasites flourished, while supported by arbitrary and immoral power, the church and the nation were in mourning.

also with them their own evidence. Such extraordinary testimony, so long as it is not forgotten, must of course maintain a conviction of one's own personal safety. There are miracles in the kingdom of grace, when the ordinary forms are omitted or suspended: and the very circumstance of an extraordinary or miraculous call is enough to preserve the event itself from falling into oblivion. I have heard of conversions in the midst of riot and licentiousness, and even while indulging the spirit of persecution. God is, in his mercy, *found of them that sought him not*. Such was the case with one of the most distinguished and useful of the ministers of the New Testament—Saul, afterwards called Paul. “Breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord,” he journeyed to Damascus, with letters of authority to bind *either men or women that he found of this way*. On the road thither, while full of enmity and of crime, mercy overtook him; and the impression made at his conversion cannot be supposed to have been ever forgotten. The light from heaven which suddenly shone around him; the voice which spake to him; his fall to the ground; his own subsequent blindness; the vision of Ananias, and the consequent recovery of the use of his sight, connected as they were, with his religion, were sufficient to keep that day of his espousals in everlasting remembrance.

We are not to conclude from the fact, that extraordinary facilities for obtaining assurance of salvation are furnished in cases of singular conversion, that it is upon the whole more desirable to be renewed by grace, in advanced years, than to be sanctified in the ordinary way—the Spirit blessing the means of grace to youth within the pale of the church. On the contrary, early piety hath great and peculiar advantages: for although uncommon attainments sometimes follow in the case of those, who, like the apostle Paul, *are born out of due time*, in general, there is more intelligence, equanimity, and steadiness of Christian character displayed by those who are religious from their infancy. If there is less of wonder or of show, there is in their godliness, more of the spiritual ease, wisdom, and regularity that are necessary to the perfection of both personal and social religion. When piety grows with our growth, and strengthens with our strength, we are more at home with divine things; the understanding is more copiously filled with ideas of truth and order; the heart is more uniform in the exercise of its affections: and

we have not to struggle so much with the passions and the habits of inordinate selfishness, which have gathered strength in minds that have run the career of ambition, of avarice, and of dissipation before they were made to know the Lord. Traits of character, whether natural or acquired, when rendered habitual by continued exercise, must, in ordinary cases, exhibit themselves in some degree, even in the sincerely pious; and of course, the hackneyed slave of sin and Satan, although he has been renewed by grace, is not likely even when he excites more admiration to have become, in the experience of a few years, so holy and spiritually-minded as the man who has been a child of God from his youth.

I well know, brethren, that adult converts attract more notice: for novices in any department of social life, whether political or ecclesiastical, are more inclined to obtrusive forwardness, and usually command more of the admiration, and perhaps the attention and respect of the community; but wisdom, and Christian prudence particularly, justify our placing more confidence in him who has grown up, like Samuel before the Lord, in all the various attainments of real religion. Early and habitual respect for divine things; preservation from the criminal extravagancies into which others fall; aversion from the sinful pleasures of the world; chastened passions; and a regard to God's truth, in all things; accompanied with tenderness of conscience, and a disposition to prayer amidst the various changes of life, are the genuine fruits of early godliness, and the certain evidence of having been kept by the Holy Spirit.

4. In self-examination, as in all other religious exercises, it must be remembered, that the aid of the Holy Spirit is necessary to success.

I mention this principle, as one to be taken for granted in our investigation of the state of our souls, because without the Spirit of our Lord, we can do nothing. It is not my design now to anticipate what more properly belongs to my next discourse. I shall then explain more at large the testimony of the Holy Spirit in the soul of man: but here I must be allowed to say that you should ask God for the aid of the Comforter, whenever you strive to obtain assurance of salvation. The doctrine, by which you are directed, is the revelation which the Holy Ghost provides, and the principles of grace, for which you are inquiring, are communicated only by him. Looking, then, in your frail hearts for his own work, and through the medium of his own light, it is not

reasonable that you should offer him, at the very time you are so employed, such a degree of personal disrespect as to omit calling for his aid. He is at hand for the purpose of yielding assistance. He is the promise of the Father, the gift of the Son, and the guide of the saints. Come, blessed Spirit! shine upon our souls, that we may know that we are *of the truth, and may assure our hearts* before thee.

#### APPLICATION.

As the assurance, which we obtain of our gracious state, depends upon evidence, it is certainly incumbent upon every man to use the means of determining how it stands with his own soul. I call upon you to do so without delay—I call upon you, my hearers, not with questionable or usurped authority. I repeat the commandment of my God and your God. *Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith.* It is not an assumed superiority, founded upon pretensions of a right to dictate your faith or deportment: it is that power, which the actual preacher has, for the time, while delivering the message of Jehovah, over all his hearers, that authorizes me to call upon all to attend to the present duty. Examine yourselves. In your self-examination let there be a definite object of pursuit. Whatever is the result of your inquiry, engage in the duties of your station and continue in them. Commit yourselves, for life and salvation, to the Lord your Redeemer: for, this is always the great business of true religion.

These are my concluding directions.

1. Examine yourselves. It is your interest to do so. It is highly reasonable that you should know in what state you are. It is your duty to ascertain it: for God our Lawgiver commands you, 2 Cor. xiii. 5. *Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves: know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you except ye be reprobates.*

The Jews were directed to search their habitations, before they celebrated their passover and the feast of unleavened bread, in order to purge them of all leaven—the emblem of corruption and deceit. It is still the practice of that people, on the night of the fourteenth of the month *Nisan*, to examine with a lighted lamp or candle every corner of the house for that symbol of iniquity. They perform the ceremony; but they neglect the thing signified thereby. Do you, Christians, neglecting the ceremony, attend to the substance. Institute a

strict inquiry into the state of the heart. The word of God is your lamp. By its light we are to discover and to try our principles, our disposition, our actions, and our motives. It is not an idle curiosity we have to gratify by such an examination. Let us detect our transgressions and corruptions, that we may confess them before the Lord; that we may apply for the blood of sprinkling to remove the guilt and destroy the pollution; that we may ask for the aid of the Holy Spirit in the exercise of repentance, and in our resolutions of reform. "They who, in a crazy vessel, navigate a sea wherein are shoals and currents innumerable, if they would keep their course, or reach their port in safety, must carefully repair the smallest injuries, and often throw out their line and take their observations. In the voyage of life, also, the Christian who would not make shipwreck of his faith, while he is habitually watchful and provident, must make it his express business to look into his state and ascertain his progress."\*

Permit me, then, to urge the duty of self-examination upon all Christians. Let it be performed deliberately, frequently, and with impartiality. It is essential to your improvement and your comfort.

2. In self-examination, for the purpose of judging of your own state, it is necessary to success, that you have a definite object immediately in view.

Those who desire to attain assurance that their faith is "the faith of God's elect," whether they undertake for *the first time* to ascertain the character of their religious emotions, or endeavour to *renew* the satisfaction which they formerly derived from the evidence before them, have one common end to answer by their inquiries; and that end is sufficiently specific. But, if the *end* be, to assure their hearts of a saving change, the *means* of assurance is the immediate object of self-examination. The *fact* is to be ascertained by *evidence*; and it is the evidence, in its truth and relevancy, that must be examined in the course of the trial. In this case, your own exercises decide what is the present state of your souls. The *qualities* determine the *nature* of the subject under trial. It is of the quality and character of your mental exercises you have to judge. *That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.* By the *spirituality* of your disposition, your thoughts, and your actions, you ascertain the *spirituality* of your nature—you know that you are *born again*. When, therefore, you institute an examina-

\* Wilberforce's *Prac. View*.

tion, you must have a definite object before you. Before you examine your witness, you ought to know what amount of testimony would suffice. Unless you are aware of the degree of evidence sufficient to establish the fact, you know not what inquiries to make, or what use to make of your discoveries; the business of examination is wearisome, endless, and unprofitable. Every thing is unskilfully performed, by him who has no correct ideas of his work. The work of self-examination is unpleasant, fatiguing, and useless to him, whose ideas are confused and vague; to him, who really does not know what he wants in order to be satisfied.

Vague inquiries relative to yourselves, are always irksome and dangerous to your peace. The work of self-examination it behoves you, to perform wisely and discreetly. Many have spent much of their time with uneasy hearts, in looking for the comforts of assurance; and wearied, with the uncertainty in which they were involved, sat down at last satisfied with what is no sure sign of a gracious state. They commenced their labours without a definite object; and they rested at last upon an indefinite foundation, esteeming any kind of confidence less vexatious than their doubts and fears. Others, and this is remarkably the case with those young believers, who have had no regular doctrinal instruction in the true principle of the Christian religion, have long perplexed their own souls in seeking for the special comforts of a state of assurance, without ever waiting to ask themselves the question, Oh! my soul, what evidence would satisfy thee? Allow me, then, to urge it upon you, who are alive to a sense of your wants; who are alarmed at the danger of a graceless life and unsanctified death; who are wearied with the toils of disconsolate reflections; who are anxious to discover your actual state before the Lord; allow me to urge upon you to correct your *vague* ideas of religion, and to *specify* your object before you again begin to examine. What will satisfy you? What have you to ask the Witness before you? What will suffice to decide the question in your favour, or, to decide it, in opposition to the present vague hope which you indulge? Answer this question; and then set about the investigation of your own state in the light of truth.

3. Whatever may be the result of your examination, your duty is obvious. Engage in a course of obedience to God, and continue perseveringly in pressing forward to the prize. *Be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion,*



*walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.\** By self-examination, you have either attained to assurance of a saving interest in Christ, or have reason to conclude that you are still in your sins, unless you are left in your former uncertainty. Be ye therefore sober and vigilant. Assurance *ought not*, and certainly *will not*, occasion a relaxation of your pious exertions. If you seem to yourself to be still in your sins, it is high time to awake out of sleep, to be sober and vigilant. If you are in doubts, sobriety, and prayer, and vigilance, are obviously required as your duty. In all cases, study what is God's will, promote his glory, obey his commandments, attend his ordinances, serve him with love and with godly fear. Press forward. Strive to enter in at the strait gate. The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

If you are sincerely desirous of *knowing*, whether your religious experience be of a holy kind; are you not equally desirous, that you should be *in fact* holy? Be so then. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings. Cease to do evil. Learn to do well. What do you wait for? It is time to be earnest. Are you anxious to ascertain, what is the nature of the exercises of your mind to-day, during this discourse, when you were in the closet, or under the fig-tree, last night or this morning? Are you anxious to know whether your experience, a week ago, a month ago, or years before to-day, has been of a spiritual and saving nature; and do you examine yourself for this purpose? You do well. We approve of your anxiety, and of your exertions: but wherefore this anxiety and these exertions? Do you seek for the comforts of assurance, in order to lie down and sleep, in order to lie at ease in Zion, in order that you may henceforward cease to lament your transgressions, cease to exercise repentance towards God? Such assurance would be presumption. It is your mercy that it has been denied to you.

Again I ask, wherefore have you sought for assurance? Do you know yourself the motive? Is it in order to go on your way rejoicing in a sense of your personal safety? A sense of personal safety does indeed afford joy, rational joy—such joy is recommended by the Lord, as an object worthy of pursuit. *Let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have REJOICING in himself alone, and not in another.†* But what, if you have been disappointed in your expectation of

\* 2 Pet. iv. 7. and v. 8.

† Gal. vi. 4.

joy? May not your self-examination have, notwithstanding, been of use? Go on your way, mournfully, if not joyfully. If you have not assured your heart of grace, you have assured yourself that you stand in need of it. If you have not discovered that you are safe already, you have discovered that you have a stubborn enemy to combat. If you have not evidence of personal holiness, you have ample evidence that you have sinned. Having seen your sins, confess them before the Lord. Having a sight of the enemy, prepare for the battle. Put on the whole armour of God. Call upon the Captain of your salvation. Push the victory. *Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.\**

4. I conclude this discourse, by directing all my hearers to him in whom alone is salvation, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world.

Faith in him is the means of personal safety: for he that believeth in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. Let *believing* be the concluding act, as well as the commencing act of your hearts, on all times when you engage in the work of self-examination, or any other religious exercise. The life of the Christian is a *life of faith* upon the Son of God; and the employment of the Christian is a *walk of faith* in him.

Whatever may have been the conduct or the condition of my hearers, in the days that are past, which can never be recalled; whatever may now, at this very moment, be your religious state, it is the will of God, revealed in the scriptures—the command of God, repeated from the pulpit, *that ye believe in his Son, whom he hath sent*. It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world for our redemption. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. For sinners he descended to the earth; for sinners he obeyed and suffered. Behold him, mortal man, in your nature, in your own nature, tasting death in our behalf. He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed.

You all have need of his salvation; and he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him. His salvation is offered to every gospel hearer; and to-day, you have the assurance furnished directly, without any dependence on your former piety. *He that cometh shall not be cast out*. He that *now* cometh, may come with *assurance* of safety.

Ye, whose hearts are already assured of his grace, will

\* Psalm xxx. 5.

again welcome the well-known offer; again receive your Saviour in your arms; and, again, commit your souls to him. This action and reaction of the Redeemer and redeemed, are always in character. It is the energy of the covenant, proceeding from the Head, and actuating the members. It is our health and our work; our duty and our joy. "My Beloved is mine and I am his. He shall say, it is my people, and they shall say, the Lord is my God." Ye too, who long for the assurance of salvation, and have not succeeded to your satisfaction in examining your state, are now invited to come directly to the Lord, in the full assurance of receiving salvation.\* Had you ascertained to the full, that you were pious

\* There has been much controversy in the Christian church on the subject of *Assurance*. I do not intend, in this note, to review that controversy, or to refer to any particular sect or writer; but I make two remarks, that may satisfy the inquiring Christian of the propriety of this invitation.

1. There is an evident distinction made in the common language of the churches of the Reformation, between "*Faith in Christ*," and "*The Assurance of Grace and Salvation*." These expressions have become *technical*; and it would be well to use them in their received acceptation. *Faith* denotes, the exercise of our minds in receiving and resting upon Christ for salvation; and *Assurance* denotes, the persuasion we have, from inspecting the work of God upon our souls, that we are in a state of grace, and shall certainly be saved. SAVING FAITH is distinctly described in the 14th chapter of the Confession of the Presbyterian Churches; and ASSURANCE OF GRACE AND SALVATION is explained in the 18th. In like manner, the Constitution of the Belgic Churches describes faith, Con. Art. 22. as that "which *embraces* Jesus Christ with all his merits, *appropriates* him, and seeks nothing besides him;" and Assurance is described Canons, Head 1. Art. 12. as the result of "observing in themselves the infallible fruits of election pointed out in the word of God." If these phrases were always used in this technical sense, there would be little danger of ever confounding the one with the other. The ideas are obviously distinct, and the terms which have been employed to represent them should be also kept equally distinct.

2. There is, nevertheless, *some assurance* in the faith of God's elect. In every act of faith there is not only a reality and a certainty; but, in proportion to its strength, saving faith necessarily involves a persuasion, or assurance of the truth of its object. We usually distinguish the degree of conviction which we have of any truth proposed to the understanding by such phrases as these, I think, I believe, I am sure, it is so. When I believe without doubt, then I am sure. So far then, as strong faith is an exercise of intellect, there is an assurance of the truth of the proposition believed. "We *believe* and *are sure* that thou art the Christ." To give assurance of the truth is, in Scripture style, to give *faith* of the truth, *πιστιν παρασχων*, Acts xvii. 31. Here the very same word *πιστιν* which is rendered usually by faith, is translated *assurance*. In all the other passages in which the New Testament employs the term assurance, whether it be assurance of understanding, Col. ii. 2, assurance of hope, Heb. vi. 11. much assurance, 1 Thess. i. 5. full assurance of faith, Heb.

months or years ago, still you would depend on unmerited grace ; and if your sins have, upon examination, proved more obvious than your piety, you are at this moment authorized to rest your hope upon perfect righteousness : for that righteousness which satisfies God, is unto all sinners that believe. If you were ever, in earnest, seeking a sense of your safety ; you will not now refuse that very safety, when freely offered by God's own authority. *Come unto me, and I will give you rest.*

And ye, criminals, who have hitherto remained in unbelief, slothful, voluptuous, obstinate, proud, blasphemers ; ye, too, are invited by the God of mercy to cease from sin, and accept the salvation of your souls. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts ; hear, and your souls shall live. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. Then shall ye, too, understand our language, when we repeat the words of inspiration, " Let us not love in word, neither in tongue ; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him." AMEN.

x. 22. the same Greek word *πληροφορια* is used. And it signifies a high degree of that act of mind with which it is connected. *πληρης φορεω*, fully carry. Christ is offered in the gospel for salvation. Faith receives him for that purpose ; and in the act I may be certain of the object. In *believing*, I am sure that Christ is offered to me, and I receive the offer with assurance that he will save me.

## THE EVIDENCES OF TRUE RELIGION IN MAN.

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### SERMON VII.

1 JOHN iv. 13.—*Hereby we know that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.*

THE record of human feelings and actions, in the various ages and conditions of life, is universally interesting to the man of sensibility. Those histories, which in the narration of facts, display the secret springs of individual enterprise, and which, together with great public events, describe the various dispositions and the real motives of the agents in bringing them to pass, are the most instructive both to the philosopher and the statesman. Indeed the accurate delineation of the principles and the passions, which ordinarily govern men in the several departments of social life, stamps some value upon even fictitious composition; and unquestionably constitutes the principal charm of parable and poetry. Aware of this, they who write for public amusement, take care to interweave with their story, the strongest and tenderest passions of the heart. It is by the vivid description of incidents which develope character, that such authors succeed in producing the enchantment, which fixes the attention of the most giddy and the most thoughtless to the wild and extravagant romance, in which the present age unhappily abounds.\* It cannot then be deemed uninteresting to the intelligent Christian, or un-

\* However the judicious moralist may deprecate the tendency of the frivolous and wanton productions of the press, the state of society, which is indicated by a general taste for works of fancy, is less productive of actual misery than that barbarous condition, which cultivates and excites restless spirits in plotting schemes of iniquity, and executing deeds of blood; and which leaves the great mass of society to sink in the more beastly indulgences of sensuality. The pleasures of the imagination, if not more favourable to piety, are certainly more humane than the gratification of vulgar passions and appetites.

profitable to any sincere disciple of our Lord, to attend to the peculiarities of a character formed by the "power of godliness." When a man has been for some time influenced by the precepts of religion, however others may choose to act, "he will be happy to look back to the circumstances under which piety commenced her operations, whether they were mingled in early life almost insensibly with his thoughts and his feelings, or came on him with mighty force, at some particular time," and in connexion with some memorable event, which was the instrumental cause, or the providential occasion of his return to the favour and friendship of God. He will, of course, trace the steps of his progress, with grateful acknowledgment, to that power which advanced him to the decidedly religious habit that renders valuable his very immortality.

High were the hopes, and yet serene the enjoyments of the amiable apostle, who outlived all the companions of his early ministry, when taking a retrospect of his Christian course he said—"Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit."

In these words, three distinct ideas are proposed: we have *a fact asserted* of all sincere Christians; "we dwell in him and he in us"—we have it also asserted, that this fact is *capable of being ascertained*; "we know that we dwell in him"—and *the evidence* of the fact is declared; "hereby know we, because he hath given us of his Spirit."

"To dwell in Christ Jesus, and have him dwelling in us," signifies, the union of Christians with their Redeemer as their living Head. He chooses us as his habitation, to be the subjects of his grace and power: and we choose him as our dwelling-place for perpetual safety and happiness. He takes possession of his people, and abides with them for ever: they commit themselves to him; and with persevering constancy dwell in him, and are *one in him*. The union of these distinct agents, the Surety and the ransomed, is effected by their mutual act. He offers himself in his word, and we by faith receive the offer: quickened moreover by his power, we consent to his covenant, and offer our souls to him: he accepts and saves. The union is real, is sustained in law, is of a spiritual nature, and absolutely indissoluble. *We dwell in him and he in us*.

Christians are capable of ascertaining the fact of their mystical union to Christ Jesus their federal Head, and thereby of assuring themselves of a saving interest in him. Par-

ticular texts of scripture assert this assurance; the general scope of revealed religion supports the doctrine of personal confidence; there is an evident absurdity in the contrary supposition; and facts numerous and conclusive, are recorded in the bible, to show that the saints did obtain evidence of their own piety. *We know that we dwell in him and he in us.*

In the preceding discourse, I have showed that assurance of a religious state is attainable, and have explained the principles upon which self-examination should be conducted. It is my intention, in this discourse, to exhibit

#### THE CERTAIN EVIDENCES OF TRUE RELIGION IN MAN.

“Hereby know we that we dwell in him and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.” This evidence is common to all the saints; and it is, therefore, more desirable that it be examined and understood than that which is either occasional, or incidental. Extraordinary cases carry with them their own proper convictions; but that species of testimony, without which even extraordinary instances of conversion cannot be verified, and which apply to all possible instances, is undoubtedly of more importance to be known, than that which is more limited in its application, because peculiar to a few of thy sons and daughters of Zion. The *evidence*, to which the apostle John points, in my text, is common to all believers. They all dwell in Christ: He dwells in every one of them: there is an intimate *union* between him and them: *for two (saith he) shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord shall be one Spirit. And hereby we know it to be the case with ourselves personally, because he hath given us of his Spirit;\** for if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. Every one that believeth hath the witness in himself; and the Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirits that we are the sons of God.

\* “He hath given us of his Spirit”—*εκ του πνευματος αυτου δεδωκεν ημιν.* The phrase is elliptical. The meaning is, he hath conferred the *gifts* of his Spirit. This is our EVIDENCE of personal piety, WE HAVE SPIRITUAL ATTAINMENTS. Not common understanding: for this is no evidence, although from the Spirit of God. Not animal life or bodily vigour: for this is no evidence of union to Christ, although from the Spirit. Not miraculous power: for this too, as appears from 1 Cor. xiii. is no evidence of piety, although also from the Spirit. The *sanctifying* operations of the Holy Ghost are peculiar to redeemed men: they are the means of assurance.

The exercises of the mind, influenced by the Holy Spirit, are the evidences of true religion in man. The state of the mind is known only by its exercises; and spiritual exercises indicate the operations of the Spirit of Christ: "to be *spiritually minded* is life." I describe, as the means of assurance, those works of the Spirit which are most obvious; which are common to all believers; which are always present with every Christian who undertakes the duty of self-examination; and of which each one, being proof of spiritual mindedness, is of course conclusive evidence of our union to the Saviour in the covenant of grace. *Self-abasement—Dependence on Jesus Christ—Submission to the Saviour's will—Joy in his salvation.*

This is the most simple arrangement of the gracious exercises of the heart; for it exhibits evidence sufficient to warrant our assurance, and not peculiar to any one period of the Christian's new life, but accessible to every regenerate man from the earliest days of his piety to the close of his career on earth. Let us examine and apply each in order.

I. *Self-abasement* is a certain evidence of true religion. It is a gracious exercise, the effect of a saving work of the Spirit in the soul. I shall *describe it; examine what it implies; and prove my assertion.*

1. Abasement is depression; and self-abasement is that exercise of mind, by which, convinced of sin, we humble ourselves for mercy before God our Saviour. It is not an undervaluing; but a proper estimate of one's self. It is not contempt poured upon a fictitious character which we imagine to be our own; but knowing what we really are, in a religious point of view, as distinct from every other being, we humble ourselves before God. We humble ourselves, not merely for the sins of yesterday; not merely for what we have been in time past; but as we are now, with all our present attainments, we humble ourselves before our God. In self-abasement, you do not compare yourselves with yourselves, and feel depression for a part of your conduct compared with another part. You do not compare yourselves with other men; and feel mortified at your inferiority. You present yourselves before the Lord, sensible of your unworthiness. It is before "the Lord our God" we come in this exercise; not to the god of the heathen, or the god of the infidel, which are no gods; but to the God of Abraham, to the God of the Scriptures, to God in Christ glorifying himself in the redemption of sinners. In self-abasement, the creature



humbles himself before the Creator ; the subject gives reverence to the sovereign ; a being, of little power, bows before one who is omnipotent ; one of little wisdom, does homage to infinite intellect ; a creature of imperfect morals is ashamed in the presence of him who is moral excellence itself, who is *glorious in holiness*. But this is not all ; this is not, by any means, the *principle* of self-abasement. It is, that man, under the light of the gospel, humble himself for his sins before his God—the God whom the gospel reveals ; God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. It is, that the Christian humble himself before the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, in whose name we are baptized. This is self-abasement, the work of the Spirit, whereby we know that he dwelleth in us and we in him.

You have heard a man glory in his strength, in the form of his body, in his wealth, in his talents, in his literature, in his power of drinking wine, in his artfulness and success in deception ; you have heard many glorying in their shame. These were *proud* of their distinction, however obtained. You have heard men boast of their religious knowledge, of their religious delight, of their supposed attainments in piety, nay of their humility, while they, in accommodation to the prevailing modes of speech, ascribed their excellence to the grace of God. These, too, were proud of *their* distinction. Natural genius is a benefit, and it cometh from God. Literature is valuable, and it is obtained through his providence. Rank, and wealth, and power, have their advantages ; and are owing to the same goodness. They are the gifts of heaven. It is lawful to esteem and to desire such benefits : and for the possession of them, it is our duty to be grateful to the Giver of all good. The evil of pride, does not lie in the esteem of great and good qualities ; nor does humility consist in referring these qualities to their proper source. The sin of pride, is an *undue self-complacency*, on whatever account. Its exercises may be *occasioned* by any quality which is supposed to confer distinction ; but the *cause* of such exercises, the principle of pride, lies in the corrupt nature of man. There was a man who appeared to take great complacency in speaking of God's distinguishing goodness, and greater still in setting forth his own actual goodness, by comparing himself with others ; he gloried in his own pious exercises, as he supposed them to be, and he professed gratitude to God, as the one who made him to differ. This is the description of a high professor. It is the kind of character which passes with most

respect, among those who acknowledge the importance of experimental religion without understanding the nature of true godliness. It is an imposing character, believing himself a saint and despising others. The Searcher of all hearts describes the man of self-complacency, in contrast with the man who practises self-abasement. Luke xviii. 10—14. "Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a Publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this Publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the Publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner."

The Pharisee was a *high* professor; a professor of a high degree of piety. 1. Exemplary in his attention to public ordinances, *he went up to the temple*. 2. He practised, as one personally interested in the true religion, he *prayed within himself*. 3. He was of a good moral character, chaste, just, conscientious, and punctual in all the forms of religion, and in the support of it by his worldly substance. 4. He was quite orthodox in his opinions, and no legalist in his own eye: He acknowledged that his goodness was from God, and accordingly, with great devotion, he gave God thanks, as the God of grace, by whom he was made to differ from other men. *He prayed, God, I thank thee that I am not as other men*. What more would you have in a professor? What more than this is inculcated or expected by those ministers of religion who are themselves novices? What more than this, is necessary to give celebrity and eclat to what usually passes with superficial minds for the "work of God?" What fault would you find with the profession of the Pharisee? He gave God thanks for the holiness of which he boasted. Was he not then evangelical? No, brethren, he was not of an evangelical disposition. Behold, another standing afar off, with modest mien and downcast eye, so full of reverence and godly fear, that he thinks himself too unworthy to take pleasure in his own exercises. He *smites upon his breast*, sensible that it contains a deceitful heart. Listen to his prayer, "*God be merciful to me a sinner*." He is the man of an evangelical disposition. He, by the Spirit, practises self-abasement. Publican as he is, and of course despised by the high professor, "I tell you," said the Judge of the world,

“this man went down to his house justified rather than the other : for he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

The religion of the Pharisee was essentially defective, because he rested upon his personal attainments. It did not alter the case that he ascribed those attainments to supernatural influence.\* The proud man will rarely deny, that the qualities for which he esteems himself, are derived, either immediately or ultimately, from the Creator of the world. The body, and the mind, and the wealth, and the talents of all men, are from the Lord ; and, whether the gifts, on account of which we overrate our personal excellencies, be said to have come down from the God of nature or from the God of grace, the disposition of self-complacency in the sinner before his God is essentially the same. It is necessarily sinful. True religion causes man to rejoice only in the Lord, always in the Lord, and never in any exercise or disposition of his own faculties towards the Lord. The reason is obvious. Every exercise of the heart, yea, the whole disposition of the soul, whatever may be his attainments in this life, comes short of the perfection which the law of God demands. Those very affections, which are certain signs of a state of grace, are nevertheless so far from perfection, that we need mercy and pardon even on their account ; and, consequently, they can never warrant the complacency which is opposed to self-abasement. *O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord : my goodness extendeth not to thee. For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.* †

2. Having now, brethren, described self-abasement, as that exercise of the regenerate heart, wherein, a man under a sense of his own personal unworthiness before the Lord, presents himself for mercy, I proceed to specify distinctly what is implied in this spiritual exercise.

It implies, *first*, conviction of sin : *Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son* ‡—*Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities.* §

\* “The person who is apt to think that he is a very eminent saint, distinguished in Christian experience, is certainly mistaken : he is no eminent saint ; but under the great prevailings of a self-righteous spirit. And if this be habitual with the man, *he is no saint at all* : he has not the least degree of any true Christian experience, so surely as the word of God is true.”—*Edwards on the Affections.*

† Psalm xvi. 2. Rom. iii. 23.

‡ Luke xv. 18. &c.

§ Ezek. xxxvi. 31.

It implies, *in the second place*, self-abhorrence in the sight of God on account of our iniquity. *Lord, now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.\** It implies, *thirdly*, a sentiment of dejection, as it regards all our own personal qualities and attainments, both of nature and of grace. This is described in Scripture, as being *poor in spirit, lowly in mind, having a broken heart, humbleness of mind, &c.* It implies, *fourthly*, fear of God's displeasure, and anxiety to escape his holy indignation. *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?†* It implies, *fifthly*, approbation of that constitution of mercy, whereby all God's attributes are displayed. *Out of the depths have I cried unto thee: if thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. For with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption.‡* It implies, *in the sixth place*, an acceptance of the mercy offered to us by the Lord, and application for it by prayer unto him. *The publican standing afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. And behold, a woman in the city which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hair of her head. Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt.§*

It is generally admitted by all, who have any idea of the necessity of conversion to God, that in the origin of vital religion, there is such a thing as conviction for sin. The language is indeed become technical, that *such a one is under conviction*, when it would be represented that he is becoming religious. I readily admit, that pungent conviction is necessary to piety even in an incipient state; but I am deeply concerned, lest self-abasement should, *in theory*, be limited to that state. I know that this cannot be the case *in the practice* or experience of true godliness. Many imagine that *conversion* consists, in a few fits of anguish, accompanied with visible effects, such as tears, and sobs, and trembling, followed speedily with gladness: hence the use of the terms, "he is under concern," "he has received comfort," as the certain descrip-

\* Job xlii. 5. 6.

† Rom. vii. 24.

‡ Psalm cxxx.

§ Luke xviii. 13. &amp; vii. 37. Matth. xv. 22—23.

tion of regeneration. Among deluded fanatics, the test of progress in sanctification, is the confidence and the joy of men in their own experience. Beware, brethren, beware of such deceits. Measure rather your sanctification, by the degree of self-abasement which it produces; and let God only be your joy. The more you think as angels do; as the spirits of the just in heaven; as God the Judge of all; the more correctly do you think. In their sight, your attainments are few and small; your imperfection is obvious in every thing; and your transgressions numerous and aggravated. By the inhabitants of heaven, the attainments of the saints on earth appear no more than the power and the wisdom of mere children. They judge correctly; and the greater your holiness, the more will you judge like them. They think you are still low, compared with the standard of duty and perfection.\* It behooves you to think lowly of yourselves by the same rule. *God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*†

3. I prove the assertion, self-abasement is a certain sign of true religion.

The Holy Spirit is appointed, in the economy of the covenant of grace, to bring all redeemed men into this state: The God of all truth positively declares that every one, who is in this state, is, in fact, blessed with a saving interest in Christ; and consequently, every one who is conscious of self-abasement, has a conclusive evidence of his title to the kingdom of heaven. The scriptures support me in these assertions; "When the COMFORTER is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin.‡ And I will put my Spirit within you—then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities.§ For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy, I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and hum-

\* Truly, brethren, when I see the curse of God upon many Christians, that are now *grown full* of their parts, gifts, peace, comforts, abilities, duties, I stand adoring the riches of God's mercy to a little handful of poor believers; not only in making them empty, but in keeping them so (*poor in spirit*) all their days.—*Shepard's Sound Believer.*

† James iv. 6. Matth. v. 3.

‡ John xv. 26. & xvi. 8.

§ Ezek. xxxvi. 27, 31.

*ble spirit.* The sacrifices of God are a *broken spirit*; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. *Blessed* are the *poor in spirit*; for theirs is the *kingdom of heaven.*"\*

No doubt can remain, that such Christian humility, as arises from a sense of our personal unworthiness before the God of our salvation, is the work of the Spirit of grace in the soul. Let it appear in the form of reverence and godly fear; in the form of anxiety to be delivered from the power of sin; in the form of self-denial; in the form of utter despair of attaining to salvation on account of any goodness in ourselves, whether natural or acquired, either by our own exertions or by the favour of God; or in the form of prayer for mercy on account of the merits of the Lord Jesus our covenant Surety: in whatever form or degree it appears to our own consciousness, it is certain evidence of the truth of our piety: it does not *make* a title; but it is *proof* of our title to "the inheritance of the saints in light." The *title* itself is, indeed, constituted by our *union* with the Head Christ; but, hereby, we know that he dwelleth in us and we in him, because he hath given us this work of his Spirit.

II. Entire dependence on the Lord Jesus Christ is certain evidence of a state of grace.

*No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.* Any one, it is true, may read or repeat these words; but no man can say with truth, that Jesus, the only Saviour, is in fact the Saviour of his choice, and that he depends upon him, as the Lord of life, for eternal salvation,—no man can say this, at any time, but by the Spirit of God. It is an exercise of saving faith, and a certain sign of spiritual life.

The Scriptures assure us that salvation is of grace, through faith; and that saving faith is not of ourselves, but is the gift of God. Dependence on Christ for that salvation is, of course, an essential part of "the faith of God's elect." The exercises of faith are indeed various, according to the various occasions furnished by him that made us, for our improvement in Christian experience and usefulness. Believers, when they act appropriately, under all the circumstances of their condition in the world, act piously, intelligently, and discreetly. The exercises of faith are of course exceedingly diversified. The several parts of divine revelation, which is always the light in which Christians walk, and the rule by which they act, afford ground for several distinct exercises

\* Isa. lvii. 15. Ps. li. 17. Matth. v. 3.

of our new nature upon evangelical principles. Faith assents to the truth of the facts asserted in the Bible ; complies with the precepts, and the invitations ; embraces the promise and the offer ; and with an unwavering conviction of the reality of divine things, seeks and expects the enjoyment of them in heaven. *It is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.*

Faith has respect to the divine Being ; the persons of the Godhead ; the attributes and the works of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost ; to the person, the offices, and the graces of the Mediator ; the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Spirit of God and of Christ. It is the soul's desire of enjoying God ; it is the acceptance of the good things which are offered in the gospel ; it is the act of the renewed understanding assenting to the doctrines of truth, and of the renewed heart uniting itself in love to Jesus Christ, the SECOND ADAM, as our new covenant head. Faith is the seeing, the hearing, the receiving, the eating and drinking, the walking, the resting, of our spiritual man. It is the living energy of the new creature exercising itself in godliness, in the strength of the Lord of life. *The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the FAITH of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.* This is the faith, without which there is no salvation to any soul of man, and with which there cannot possibly be final condemnation. There is no proposition more positively asserted in the word of God than this—*He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned.* God hath spoken it ; and it must be true. God hath promised ; and he is faithful that promised, and able also to perform. Faith is the gift of God, for the express purpose of uniting us to his Son, that we may have everlasting life. It does, in fact, unite us to the Redeemer ; and the divine law sustains the union : he is *the Lord our righteousness.* Being united to the Redeemer, the law cannot condemn ; because it no more applies, for the purpose of either *justification or condemnation,* to the sinner in his own person. The believer *must be treated* according to the newly constituted relation of his soul to the Saviour. *“ We are dead to the law by the body of Christ, being married to another husband. God is just, and who is he that condemneth ? There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.”* Faith is a gift and a blessing of the covenant of grace, and that covenant is ordered in all things and sure. It is the will of God that believers

should be saved. From all eternity he determined it should be the case. In order that it might be so, he sent his Son into the world; the Redeemer came, and obeyed, and suffered, and died, and rose again, and ever liveth to make intercession for us. For this purpose the gospel is published, ministers are sent, a church is formed and preserved; ordinances are appointed and administered, and the Holy Ghost is given. It must be so. "He that believeth shall be saved."

Will you, my hearers, admit this truth? If you reject this truth, I cannot reason with you upon the subject of personal assurance of salvation. There is no ground upon which the preacher and the hearer can meet for the discussion, if you deny salvation to the believer; if you can even doubt whether the believer shall be saved; if you doubt God's word, so often, so unequivocally, so clearly and powerfully repeated from heaven. Again, I ask my congregation, will you admit the truth, "The believer shall be saved?" Grant me your assent to this sentiment, and I now ask no more. You grant it then. I know that you believe and are sure, that Christ is able to save to the uttermost. I proceed to the demonstration—cordial and entire dependence on Christ for salvation is conclusive evidence of a state of grace.

Come, then, ye anxious children of my God, let us look around for subjects in this congregation, to whom the text may be applied. Look within you for the character specified, dependence on Christ for eternal life.

This character is simple; the examination will not perplex the most feeble disciple: it is obvious; and may be discovered by every one: it is common to all Christians; and therefore whatever difference there be among the saints, each has this witness within himself; this character is not temporary or occasional, but habitual and permanent; and therefore you have at all times this certain sign of true religion.

I show you *what is implied in this character, and that it is proof of spiritual union to the Saviour.*

1. Dependence on Christ for salvation implies, *first*, that you really desire salvation. You certainly know, whether this is the case with you or not. It implies, *secondly*, that you know who is the Saviour sent from God, and of whom the Scriptures testify. It is upon him we must depend; for this is the true God and eternal life. I am not speaking of dependence on a fictitious character; but upon the very Christ described in the Bible. The meaning of *dependence* you know. It is the *third* idea implied in the character. It is



the laying all your weight upon him—casting a burden on him, leaning yourselves upon him, resting your souls upon him, trusting your interests to him. *Fourthly*, it is a dependence for a specified purpose—for eternal life. This includes all your needs: Pardon, peace, holiness, comfort, life, hope in death, and a glorious immortality—dependence for eternal life, and nothing short of this, nothing but what is involved in this. *Fifthly*, the dependence is cordial—a matter of choice, of intelligent choice: it is entire, without reserve, and without doubt of his power to support you: it is exclusive; for there is none associated with him as in part a Saviour, nor works, nor gifts, nor friends, nor saints, on earth or in heaven, nor angels, nor personal attainments of any kind: Christ stands alone as the Rock. There he is before you, a sure foundation, elect, precious; he that believeth in him shall not be confounded. All this is plain to the meanest capacity: and it remains for me only to ask you, are you conscious of such dependence? Then you stand upon the Rock, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail.

2. This dependence is evidence of true religion in the soul.

You will readily perceive, that, by the description we have given of saving faith, dependence on Jesus Christ for eternal life is an exercise of that distinguished grace, and is a work of the Spirit which is given to us. The whole description of *faith* may summarily comprehended in this short sentence, a “receiving and resting upon Christ alone for eternal life.” This is saving faith; and it follows, that dependence on him for future happiness, being an exercise of faith, is certain evidence of its existence.

The faith of the saints is made manifest by works, for it *works by love and purifies the heart*. The Apostle, who said that *faith without works is dead*, taught us to show, both to ourselves and to others, *our faith by our works*. This principle is applicable to every power and faculty of man. The effect indicates the presence of a cause; the exercise proves the existence of the faculty. Every man, and every body of men, under the dictates of common sense, act upon this principle. If you are a good reader, a good speaker, or a good writer, give us a specimen of your powers. This is preferable to the testimony of a hundred witnesses. Are you benevolent? show it by your beneficence; disinterested? seek not an increase of ease, or pleasure, or emolument, show us your mildness, your self-denial, your public spirit. When I

was in *Cyprus*, said the boaster, I leaped over a bar elevated twenty feet above the ground ; do it *now*, said his opponent, and I will believe your assertion. This is the mode in which self-examination should be conducted. Faith is its own best evidence. Are you a believer? exercise that faith ; and depend, at this present moment, upon the Redeemer, for eternal life. True faith may be every where and always exercised. It is never out of time or out of place. Dreams, and visions, and voices, and suggestions, sudden alarms, and extraordinary fears or joys ; tears and sobs, and cries, and songs, and ecstasies are deceitful : bodily service profiteth little. Even inspiration, the gift of tongues, prophecy, and other powers of miracle, may be communicated without true holiness, but the work of the Holy Ghost, is the infallible indication of his presence with our spirits. The believer shall be saved ; and he is a believer who trusts in the Redeemer, in fact and exclusively, for that salvation. *These things were written that ye might believe, and that believing ye might have life in his name.*

III. Submission to the law of Christ is an evidence of true godliness.

There is no system of religion, however otherwise absurd, that does not recommend morality. All mankind, even the most wicked and profane of our race, acknowledge that decent moral conduct is essential to a virtuous life. The institutions of civil society, for the education of youth, the preservation of good order, and the exercise of jurisprudence, all proceed upon the principle, that sound morals should be cultivated and observed, as conducive to personal happiness and the public prosperity. The moral tendency, of the Christian revelation, has been observed and inculcated by all who profess respect for the Bible ; and the several churches require, as evidence of a good conscience, outward conformity to the precepts and ordinances of religion. We cannot, therefore, be mistaken in saying that Christian obedience is a sure sign of a Christian disposition. It was the Saviour himself who said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments : and if ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love."\*

That you may be enabled to apply this text to your own experience, I will explain what I mean by the law of Christ—show wherein submission to it consists—and prove, that such submission is decisive evidence of union with him for eternal salvation.

\* John xiv. 15. and xv. 10.

1. The law of Christ is the entire rule of moral obligation dispensed by Messiah to the sons of men.

God hath not left any of his creatures in a state of absolute insubordination. No created being, animate or inanimate, exists independently of his will. There is not a particle of matter, nor any combination of material atoms, from the dust of the balance, to the sun in the firmament, which he does not uphold, and govern by laws suited to their nature and design. There is not a single mind, nor any community of intelligent beings, which he does not control, or over which he has not legislated. He has not left us, on our creation, without proposing and enacting statutes for the regulation of our thoughts and our actions : and he hath sent his Son into the world, not to destroy the law, and set us upon a footing of disorder and independence, but to fulfil the law ; to set aside its condemning power ; and to establish its obligation upon our consciences. If there were no law, there could not be any virtue or vice, any sin or holiness among dependent creatures : for where there is no law, there is neither obedience nor transgression. Christians are of course still under a rule of duty. They are indeed become *dead to the law*, as a covenant of works—as a rule of probation, upon which depends their acceptance and adjudication to the state of confirmed felicity in heaven. They are married to another husband, in whom they have both righteousness and strength ; and their right to the kingdom of God, is unalterably secured by the merits of their Redeemer. They are delivered by the New Testament from the legal ceremonies of “the law given by Moses ;” but they are still under a rule of righteousness. *Do we then*, said the Apostle, to those who attempted to turn the grace of God into a system of licentiousness, *do we then make void the law through faith ? God forbid : yea, we establish the law.\** Reasoning with the Corinthians, the same Apostle urges upon their attention his own industry and self-denial in promoting the objects of his ministry : he refers to his accommodating disposition, conforming to all outward

\* Rom. iii. 31. A confusion of ideas often takes place in relation to this subject. The new dispensation sets aside the obligation of the Old Testament ritual ; and the covenant of grace sets aside, from believers, the penalty of the covenant of works. These are facts : they are Christian privileges ; and the day we forget this, we forget the gospel of the grace of God : for in both these cases, we are *delivered from the law* by Jesus Christ. “We are dead to the law ; we are without law ; we are not under the law, but under grace.” But we are under the law as a

varieties of condition and manners, consistent with the purity and fidelity of a public servant of God. Comparing Jews and Gentiles, he had occasion to speak of the former as *under the law*, and of the latter as *without law*; and lest the Christians who lived without observing the *Jewish law* should be suspected of opposition to the principles of *all law*, he adds in a parenthesis, as a description of their condition, *being not without law to God*, but UNDER THE LAW TO CHRIST. This, then, is the situation of a truly religious man: he is under the law of Christ.

God reveals himself to fallen sinners in the Mediator: and the whole doctrine of the Bible is the word of Christ. The light imparted in the sacred volume, and the precepts which it contains; the motives of action which it presents to the mind; all its contents; the whole Christian revelation, is an expression of the will of God in Christ. As such it is applied by the Holy Spirit; for the whole of the work of the Comforter consists in taking from Christ to his disciples. *Therefore, said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you.\** Wielding the sceptre of universal dominion. Messiah is head over all things to the church which is his body: He is clothed with the whole authority of the Godhead for the government of the world; and his Spirit applies HIS LAW to the saints. “He shall not speak of himself—he shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine.”†

The whole system of moral obligation is administered by Jesus Christ; and of course all real Christians submit to the law as thus proclaimed from on high. Outward conformity to the rule answers the purposes of visible order in society, whatever may be the respect which the inner man pays to the authority of the LORD our Redeemer; but in order to try the heart for the purposes of assurance before God, it is indispensably necessary to recognize the authority of Christ. Natural religion may be cultivated, by urging and observing the authority of a Supreme Being over the rational creature; and that religion may be affected in its observances and enlarged in its code, by coming in contact with the christian revelation: there may be a nominal and apparent christian obedience, that will pass even in the church, while respect is had only to the authority of Jehovah absolutely considered as the Lawgiver; but there is no christianity without viewing the whole system of moral obligation as the law of Christ.

\* John xvi. 15.

† John xvi. 13—15.

He is our LORD: "and the Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our King; he will save us. For he is thy Lord, and worship thou him."\* There is one lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy. However, brethren, you may read books, and support churches, and hear sermons, that have no respect to *God's being in Christ*, when you try yourselves, as to your religious state, it is indispensably necessary for you to ascertain that you have received the law of Christ as your actual rule of life.

2. I shall show wherein submission to the Saviour's law consists.

Submission, is the delivering one's self to the disposal of another; and applied to the will of God it denotes our cordial obedience to him when his will is made known. It is consonant to reason, that we submit ourselves to the King of saints. The dignity of his person, who thought it not robbery to be equal with God, who is God over all blessed for ever, renders it becoming that all creatures that are on earth and in heaven should obey him. The official relation in which he stands to us, as the Mediator between God and man, is an additional consideration for our doing homage to him. It is the will of heaven too that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father: for he is the image of the invisible God, the express image of the Father's person. As our Representative he stands on high making intercession; and as the Representative of God in upholding and governing the world, and in dispensing laws and blessings to believers, it is becoming the subjects of his peculiar kingdom to maintain the principles of obedience as due to him from all men in their several relations and capacities; and to practise themselves upon that principle in all their personal and social concerns.

In Christian submission to the law of God in Jesus Christ, is implied, conscientious abstinence from all sin—punctual and solemn attention to all his ordinances of religious worship—the subjection of the temper of the heart, to all the principles of holiness—and the active performance of the several duties we owe to all our fellow-men.

This is the conversation which becometh the gospel. The question is not indeed in the present discourse, about the perfection of this obedience; but about its sincerity. We are not speaking of the condition of our acceptance with God to favour—to pardon, peace, and glory. We are speaking of the

\* Isa. xxxiii. 22. Psalm xlv. 11.

means of assurance that we have already been accepted of him for the sake of Christ's righteousness: And the evidence is a sincere submission to his known precepts. We know indeed that you are imperfect. We know that in every thing you fall short of your obligations. We urge at all times perfection as a duty upon man. We exhibit perfection to your hopes, as an object to be attained on the dissolution of this tabernacle; but we require sincerity as an evidence of piety, as an evidence that the work is begun which shall be carried on unto perfection. Of this you can judge: and you can readily ascertain whether you sincerely submit yourselves to the law of Christ.

3. Such submission is a certain sign of true religion: for it is an essential part of godliness. No man, except a pious man, renewed and enlightened by the Spirit of God, has a spiritual discernment of the law: for *the carnal mind is enmity against the Lawgiver*. Divine revelation affirms, that obedience is the fruit and the evidence of the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost. "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. For this is the love of God, that ye keep his commandments."\* The same Apostle, in another place, expressly teaches, that keeping the commandments is an evidence of our vital union with the Saviour. "He that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him: and hereby know we that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us."†

The personal experience, of inspired men, proves that Christian obedience is evidence of piety. Therefore are they said to "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit: for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death."‡ I shall add for further confirmation, two other texts of Scripture. One refers to the covenant of grace, the source of all vital religion—that covenant, which the Saviour himself dispenses; and it shows that the principles of evangelical obedience are communicated by him according to that covenant. *This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*§ The other informs us of the nature of the kingdom of God,

\* 1 John v. 1—3.

‡ Rom. viii. 2.

† Chap. iii. 24.

§ Jer. xxxi. 33.

of which all the saints are admitted members ; and points out the consequence of serving the Lord Jesus Christ. *For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy, in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men\**—he is of course truly pious.

IV. Joy in God, the Saviour of the soul, is an evidence of piety.

Joy is a high degree of gladness, and is naturally produced, in a mind of sensibility, by whatsoever happens in conformity to its inclination. Christian sensibility is duly affected with spiritual things ; for the affections are set upon them. The *spiritually minded* man is of course disposed to set a high value upon all the blessings which the covenant of grace reveals ; and as the Spirit of Christ takes the things of Christ and shows them unto us, we cannot fail to have complacency in them. The new nature is adapted to heavenly things, as the eye to the light of the morning, and it must be joyfully affected by the discoveries obtained through the grace of God. *How excellent is thy loving kindness, O God ! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thine house : and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures.†*

By natural constitution we are fitted for taking delight in the beauties and enjoyments of the world. It is an evidence of the goodness of the Creator that so many avenues are opened to the temple of felicity. He is himself, nevertheless, he must be himself, the great and the principal object of delight to every good mind. *Whom have I in heaven but thee ? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.‡*

Unregenerate men, in the society of their pious neighbours, whom they esteem on some account or other, may from sympathy, rejoice, as well as weep. Deluded men have joy in

\* Rom. xiv. 17—18. † Psalm xxxviii. 7—8. ‡ Psalm lxxxiii. 25.

“There is a suitableness to our *natural constitution*, in the proper actings of natural life for its own preservation : there is so also in our *spiritual constitution*. The graces in their due exercise compose and refresh the mind : thence a blessed satisfaction and complacency befalls the soul. Now, God is the fountain and centre of all spiritual refreshments ; and in access to him, there is a refreshing taste of them communicated to the soul.”—*Owen*.

“Spiritual good is of a satisfying nature ; and for that very reason, the soul that tastes and knows its nature, will thirst after it, and a fulness of it, that it may be satisfied.”—*Edwards*.

their own fancied attainments ; in imaginary views of the divine character ; in their expectations of future good, however groundless their hopes : and they, thus, sit down contented. But good men rejoice in the Lord always ; and the greater their joy, the more they press forward to perfection. They joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have received the atonement. Intimate communion with the Father and the Son, Jesus Christ ; a peace of conscience, through the application of the blood of sprinkling ; the substantial glories of the land of promise, unfolded by an almighty Spirit, are the exciting causes to the joy of believers. In the preaching of the word of God ; in the sacraments of the church ; in the conversation of the saints ; in their own meditations and prayers, they find occasions for high satisfaction in him who is precious to their souls, who is altogether lovely, the chief among ten thousand. The experience of this sanctified joy is ample means of the assurance of salvation. It is, also, easy to ascertain whether you have this witness.

You know whether you have any joy in or about religion ; and you can speedily determine, whether it proceed from religious principles or not. Does a view of the covenant of grace, as revealed in the scriptures, induce you to say, "this is all my salvation, and all my desire?" Do you experience inward delight in the contemplation of him who is glorious in holiness? Do your hearts welcome the distinguishing excellencies of evangelical religion as congenial to your disposition? Does the Lord Jesus appear in your estimation altogether lovely? Are your spirits exhilarated by the streams of the city of God, by the hope of eternal life in the perfection of holiness, in the celestial paradise? then have you the fellowship of the Spirit, and are qualified to say of the Son of man, I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. This is *joy in the Holy Ghost*. It is a certain sign that you are truly religious. Your faith stands not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God : for you, this is the power and demonstration of the Holy Ghost, that although we see him not, yet believing in him, we should rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

I do not pursue this subject further. In another discourse, I shall exhibit more at large the consolations of the grace of God ; but shall now bring this discussion to an end.



## CONCLUSION.

It must have been observed, by all my nearers, that while describing the means of assurance, I took for granted that there is a work of the Spirit perfectly peculiar to redeemed men: and that this work is in fact that testimony of the Spirit, whereby he beareth witness with our own spirits that we are the sons of God. You will allow me now to explain both these principles.

1. There is, in the communication of grace to fallen sinners, a *special work* of the Spirit of God, distinct from his agency in the creation and sustentation of the universe.

The scriptures assure us that this is the fact, by describing Christians as *having the Spirit*; and representing others as *not having the Spirit*. There must, therefore, be a *peculiar sense*, in which the omnipresent Spirit of God influences the saints. "What, know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is *in you*, which *ye have* of God?"\* "But, beloved, remember ye the words that were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; how that they told you there should be mockers, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts—sensual, *having not the Spirit*."† It is sufficient for my purpose to ascertain the fact, although I should be unable to explain it: and it is enough for you to know the fact, whether or not you fully understand the grounds of the distinction. "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God DWELL in you. Now if any man HAVE NOT the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."‡ He who knoweth all things, understands the difference between the common operations, and the sanctifying influences of the Spirit: He maketh us to know that it exists.

I do not say, brethren, that there is any difference as to the ultimate source of power; for there is no power but of God; and it is *the same Spirit* that *reneweth the face of the earth* in the spring, and giveth to redeemed men the saving change, denominated emphatically *the renewing of the Holy Ghost*. It is he, *who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, that hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*.§ I do not affirm, that this difference consists in the *degree of energy*,

\* 1 Cor. vi. 19.

† Rom. viii. 9.

† Jude 17, 19.

§ 2 Cor. iv. 6.

employed by the omnipotent God, in producing the several effects. It is not for creatures to measure the extent of power put forth by the Almighty. We know that he is incapable of any expenditure of strength. He spoke, and it was done: he commanded, and it stood fast. And who will pretend to determine, whether more of power was employed by the Spirit of God when "he moved upon the face of the waters, when the earth was without form, and void," or when he "beareth witness with our spirits that we are the sons of God?" I do not intend to convey the idea, that this *difference* depends on the diversities of effects produced according to the nature and character of the subject on which it operates. An indefinite variety of effects is apparent in the fields and the forests of the vegetable kingdom; among the ranks of animated beings, rational and irrational; and even in the church itself, *there are* DIVERSITIES OF GIFTS, *but the same Spirit: and there are* DIVERSITIES OF OPERATIONS, *but it is the same God which worketh all in all.\**

Thus far, however, the scriptures clearly point out a *difference* between the common and saving operations of the Spirit—They belong to entirely distinct *economies*, or establishments. The *common* belong to the establishment of nature; the *special*, or saving, to the economy of the covenant of grace.

The system of grace was devised, in the counsel of peace, before the world began. God foreknowing the fall of man, as a particular member of the system of creation, WILLED THE RECOVERY OF SOME OF THE HUMAN RACE. In order to effect this, the Father represents and sustains the entire divine authority and glory: the Son effectually redeems the elect seed given to him; and the Spirit quickens and prepares each of them for eternal glory. Such is the economy of the covenant of grace. You see how plain, how intelligible. This is a distinct system: and to this must be referred the distinction between the special agency of the Spirit, and his common gifts. According to this gracious establishment, to promote the glory of the Trinity by the salvation of elect sinners, the Spirit acts a special and appointed part. He is sent by the Father and by Christ upon a distinct business: He comes, as the Comforter, to a chosen people: He works in them to will and to do of his good pleasure—He works spiritual life and all its holy exercises. It does appear to me, brethren, that this distinction is very easily perceived, if not completely understood, in all its parts. If there is a differ-

\* 1 Cor. xii. 4, 6.

ence between the works of nature and the works of grace ; if there is a difference between depravity and holiness ; if there is any thing more in true religion, than policy, and fashion, and party, then, surely, there is a difference between the system of nature and the economy of redemption ; and there is of course a very obvious distinction between the common operations of the Spirit, and his work, as the Holy Ghost, *communicating holiness according to the specifications of the covenant of grace, to elect and ransomed sinners.* If this distinction were generally admitted, and carried out in all its applications to the several doctrines of religion, there would be little dispute among intelligent and pious men relative to evangelical principles : and yet if there be, indeed, no foundation for making the distinction, it is in vain to speak of conversion, of the new birth, of a state of grace, or of assurance of grace and salvation.

2. It is this special work of the Holy Ghost on the soul, that gives evidence of our personal safety.

Knowing, brethren, that the operations of the Spirit of grace are confined completely within the bounds of the system of salvation, every such operation is evidence that the subject is included in the everlasting covenant. The *work* of the Spirit is the *testimony* which he gives, assuring believers of their adoption and consequent safety.

It has been falsely supposed by many, that some new inward revelation, or extraordinary suggestion, that such a one is pious, and shall be saved, constitutes the *witnessing* ascribed to the Holy Ghost. Such an idea is not only delusory, but very degrading to the Spirit's actual testimony ; for it really contains nothing of the nature of holiness. The mere indication, by word or writing, or extraordinary means of any kind, of a historical fact to any one, is not at all essentially connected with true piety. There are, however, no new revelations promised : and there are, of course, none to be expected by the Christian. His bible is sufficient to him as a rule and a light. Satan, moreover, can readily suggest delusory ideas ; and those who trust in extraordinary suggestions respecting their personal piety, are generally subject to his temptations. It should not be forgotten, that weak minds, agitated highly by any important concern, are easily affected by the imagination. It is not wise, then, to trust to those notions which may have been occasioned by nervous affections, as if they could certify the salvation of the soul.

I repeat it, Christians, the *work* of the Spirit *bears witness.*

Facts frequently speak more distinctly and more truly than words. The Spirit of God *seals* believers, and leaves his own impression upon them. He is "the earnest of our inheritance;" and the *earnest* in possession is preferable to a voice from heaven. By presenting the things of Christ, as explained in divine revelation to the mind of man; by communicating and cultivating spiritual life in the soul; by influencing the understanding and the affections to holiness of thought and of action; and by rendering the grace which he has given vigorous in its exercises, the Comforter works out proof more decisive, more excellent, and more to be desired than words: and thus, conducted by him, we draw near to the High Priest of our profession in the full assurance of eternal life in him. O believers, you have a hope which shall not make ashamed. Established upon an immutable foundation, it must stand out the storm. Raise up your eyes to the place, in which your Redeemer dwells on high, and there fix your affections. Be not discouraged at your pains and your trials: Let not even the magnitude of your personal criminality occasion a doubt of his power to save. Conscious of your self-abasement—of your entire dependence on the righteousness of God our Saviour—of the sincerity of your obedience to his revealed will—and of your joy in the excellency of the covenant which is ordered in all things and sure, you have the means of assurance, that the good work is commenced. You may, therefore, confident of your connexion with that ransomed society, of which Christ is the Head, and the Holy Ghost the animating Spirit, ascend the hill of Zion, with songs—"Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." "Joined to the Lord and one spirit" with him. "He will guide us with his counsel, and afterwards receive us to glory." "We know that he dwelleth in us, and we in him, because he hath given us of his Spirit." AMEN.

## THE DUTY OF THOSE WHO HAVE NOT ASSURANCE.

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### SERMON VIII.

ISA. l. 10.—*Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.*

THIS exhortation was addressed, by Isaiah the son of Amos, to the commonwealth of Israel, in a dark and dissolute age. It is at this day, also, applicable to the professors of religion in the Christian church. There are so many calls upon our attention to the concerns of this world, that the best interests of our souls are frequently altogether neglected; and always but partially understood and followed. Perplexed with the multiplicity of their cares and employments; afflicted, too, more or less, in body and in mind; and distracted by disappointments in business and in friendship, many good men are occasionally left to darkness and despondence. It is, therefore, to be expected, that among the few, who attend on public ordinances, there will be a large proportion of persons, who have sometimes doubted, and have reason to doubt, the correctness of their own religious temper and conduct; and so call in question, the reality of their piety. It must also be acknowledged, that no rules, laid down and applied by man, can be relied upon as sufficient, in all cases, to detect and expose hypocrisy, or lead to assurance indiscreet, feeble, or decaying saints. Nevertheless, we use the means, in hopes of the divine blessing; and urge TRUST IN GOD, as, at all times, the duty and the refuge of the timorous, the needy, and the dependent—"Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him *trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.*"

In explaining these words, our attention is required *first*, to the character addressed, and *secondly*, to the duty recommended, in the exhortation.

The character addressed is distinctly drawn. It is "a child of light walking in darkness."\* One that feareth the Lord and obeyeth the voice of his servant, is one, who from a principle of reverence for Jehovah, conscientiously submits to the direction of his revealed will. It is one, who is in principle and in practice a Christian. Obedience to the voice of God's servants, as such, is obedience to himself; and the fear of the Lord, which is productive of such obedience, is perfectly consistent with the highest exercises of faith and love. The Old Testament phraseology more generally employs this term, as expressive of true piety, than the New Testament; but even in the writings of the New Testament, filial fear, as distinguished from servility and terror, is represented as a proper principle of action in the worship of God. *Wherefore we, receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear.*†

The pious person, who fears God and keeps his commandments, according to the measure of grace given to him, is represented in this instance as *walking in darkness, and having no light.*

The ideas, which we are to connect with the well-known words, *darkness* and *light*, must be determined by the connexion in which they occur, both as to the kind and degree of either the one or the other. Darkness may be partial or total, and may be understood, either as it respects the natural or the spiritual world. The scriptural use of this word, in relation to personal religion, is perfectly coincident with the common use of it, in relation to the concerns of life. Any privation of information or of comfort may be denoted by the word *darkness*. It is indeed employed, in the bible, to signify ignorance, unbelief, depravity of heart and of manners, sin in general, the grave, and even hell itself.‡ When applied to a pious man, a state of darkness indicates, that he is, at the time, under those afflictions which produce deep perplexity and sorrow.

\* Many of my hearers are acquainted with an excellent treatise under this title, by *Mr. Thomas Goodwin*. It is a work on experimental and practical religion, which all who are religiously exercised may peruse with profit.

† Heb. xii. 28.

‡ John iii. 19. Eph. v. 8. Col. i. 13. Job x. 22. Matt. xxii. 13.

God, who is rich in mercy, does often, in his holy sovereignty, leave his own children, whom he still loveth with an everlasting love, to walk in darkness, deprived of the light of religious consolation. To teach them the necessity of his constant presence with them; to chastise them for their transgressions; to make trial of their faith and their patience; to fit them for the work of comforting others who are in their turn in afflictions; and to promote his own glory in displaying the wisdom of his plans, and the fulness of his covenant, God leaves his own people, at times, to a disconsolate state of mind. Poverty, disease, litigation, oppression, perplexity, the loss of intimate friends and relations, doubts, disappointments, errors in religion, actual transgressions, and the temptations of the adversary, working with the corruptions of the human heart, are permitted in the providence of God, to affect Christians in various degrees of perturbation and sorrow, until they *walk in darkness and have no light*. Some such condition is supposed to exist, in the text which I am explaining; and to persons, in such a state, is the duty recommended. *Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.*

I had a particular design in selecting these words for discussion. The subject of spiritual declension and desertion is indeed important; and the Christian has need of understanding both the *nature* and the *causes* of decay in personal religion; and, also, the end for which such decay is permitted in divine Providence, to take place. Upon that subject, however, it does not comport with my plan, to enlarge in this discourse. I would only observe, that decaying Christians, who stand in need of revival; fainting Christians, who stand in need of being strengthened; wandering Christians, who stand in need of being restored to the path of righteousness, all, are either shaken in the assurance of salvation which they had before, or have not yet attained to a comfortable persuasion of the truth of their personal piety—*they walk in darkness*. It is my design to point out the means of comfort to them who are in such a state as this; to show to them the path of life as a shining light: for it is the object of this discourse, to exhibit

#### THE DUTY OF SUCH AS HAVE NOT ASSURANCE.

The duty immediately pointed out in the text, is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—"Let him trust in the name of the

Lord, and stay upon his God ;” but in order to act believingly in any particular case, it is necessary to know the several exercises of faith indicated by that case: therefore, in directing those persons, who are in doubts of their interest in the salvation of God, to trust in his name, I feel myself not only allowed, but required, by the subject under examination, to describe the following exercises of an evangelical disposition as proper for your relief from perplexity.

They, who would obtain assurance, must *learn to distinguish doubting of their own state from the sin of unbelief—Ascertain what is, in their own case, the cause of doubting—continue still in practical obedience to God—and go to him in the direct exercise of faith in Jesus Christ.*

I. Distinguish doubts of your own piety, from the sin of unbelief.

The indefiniteness of words, in every language, is some impediment to discrimination and distinctness of thought. With all the imperfection of our phraseology, however, and probably while we are ourselves imperfect, this evil will not find a remedy, the humble inquirer after divine things, will ultimately succeed in knowing what is truth. In common use, the words *believe* and *doubt* convey opposite ideas; for so far as you *doubt* my veracity, you do not *believe* my words: hence, it is not surprising, that, when these words are employed in regard to personal religion, it should be laid down as a maxim, that he who is in doubt, has no faith. The manner, moreover, in which some have spoken and written of the subject of assurance itself, is such as to confound the distinction between that confidence with which the mind acts in believing in Christ, and the confidence which is subsequently derived from self-examination. In common concerns, men of the least discernment—plain men, unaccustomed to reflection, constantly make a distinction, and perfectly understand it, between the confidence with which they perform an action, and the certainty that they have performed it: you all know the difference, between the confidence with which you took your seats in this church, and the assurance you now feel that you are actually seated. Before you sat down, you did believe, that the seat was strong enough to bear your weight; in sitting down, you were confident that it would in fact bear your weight; and, now, you know that you are sitting thereon, and that it does bear you. It is a pity that men, anxious to distinguish in matters of religion, should have been so often perplexed by their public teachers upon



the subject of confidence or trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Without faith, and before its exercise, men may know that Christ is able to save all believers ; in the very act of believing, you trust that he will save you ; and, after having committed your souls to him, by reflecting upon your faith, you attain to a certainty, that you are now in a state of grace. These are three distinct exercises of the human mind. The *first* is mere knowledge: the *second* is the confidence of faith: the *third* is assurance of grace and salvation.

You will permit me to specify, in several instances, plain to every capacity, the difference between *doubting* of one's personal religion, and an unbelieving rejection of divine mercy.

1. *Doubting*, respects ourselves ; and calls in question our having already become subjects of divine grace: but *unbelief* respects the Lord, and calls in question, either the reality of divine things, or Christ's willingness and power to save them that believe.

2. *Doubting* of our safety does no more than reject the evidence which is furnished by our own minds ; an evidence which is often very imperfectly delivered and received: but, *unbelief* always rejects the testimony which God has given us of his own Son, and so, by contradicting God, make him a liar, so far as the sinner has it in his power.

3. *Doubting* of one's piety, may be at times both reasonable and profitable ; for when a man has but a small measure of grace, it may lead him to seek for more: but *unbelief*, always against the word and the attributes of the God of our salvation, is unreasonable, unprofitable, and impious.

4. *Doubting* of one's personal piety, often includes, not only anxiety to be saved by divine grace, but also a sincere desire to attain to an assured interest in the everlasting covenant: but *unbelief* excludes the idea of love to the true God, rejects the covenant of grace, and distinctly relinquishes the mercy which is offered in the Lord Jesus Christ.

5. *Doubts* are consistent, not only with sincere piety, but also with progress in sanctification: but *unbelief* is the exercise of a carnal mind—of an unregenerate heart.

6. *Doubting* of one's holiness, humbles under a sense of sin, and produces penitence and sorrow: but, *unbelief* hardens the heart into negligence or despair ; or exasperates the sinner more and more against divine things.

Be careful, then, my brethren, if it should be your lot to

weep through the night, or to walk without the light of gospel consolation, to distinguish doubts and jealousies in relation to *subjective* grace, from doubts relative to what God has declared in his word, and placed *objectively* before you as worthy of all acceptance. Let no man be so far a self-deceiver as to call his hardness of heart; his negligence of experimental religion; his contempt for the free offer of salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ; his aversion to the doctrines of the grace of God, and to holiness in life and conversation—let no man deceive himself by calling this obdurate and malevolent disposition of the soul towards God and godliness, by the soft and delusive name of doubting a man's own piety. There is here no room for doubting. You are certainly an unrenewed sinner. You may be certain of your unbelief: and I say unto you unhesitatingly, Except ye repent, ye shall perish. On the other hand, let no child of God, while he loves his Father, and trembles for fear of offending him; while he assents to the truths of the gospel; approves of its evangelical exhibitions; and desires an interest in the covenant of grace, deprive himself, foolishly or peevishly, of the high and holy hopes, of the abundant consolations of the gospel, by confounding his own want of assurance, with the unbelief of the sinner, and the despair of the damned.

II. Ascertain, with all diligence, the *Cause* of your own doubts and uneasiness: for it is by understanding your disease, you will be qualified to apply the remedy provided in the gospel of God.

It is very difficult, my dear hearers, to speak upon this subject, or, indeed, upon any subject belonging to experimental religion, without considering those whom we address as having some concern in the matter. Unbelievers rarely attend to such discussions with any other interest than what arises from their regard to decency, or their respect for the person and talents of the minister. Should they attend to self-examination at all, it would only tend to disquiet their consciences. It is not usual for the ungodly to be long or frequently uneasy about the question, Am I in a state of grace or not? *They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Pride compasseth them about as a chain.* Their fears and pains respect rather the natural evil of sin, and the danger of final punishment, than the loss of communion with God in the present life, or the want of that spiritual-mindedness which indicates the renovation of the Holy Ghost. Such of them as profess to have become the

subjects of conversion to God, are too well satisfied with their own exercises and attainments, to suffer much despondence on account of their sins, or to have their false confidence shaken or destroyed. *For there are no bands in their death; but their strength is firm.* It is true, that God may honour his own doctrine and ordinances, by accompanying discourses on experimental religion with his Holy Spirit, for the conversion of sinners, as well as for the comfort of weak believers, though we have no ground to expect that his grace shall be conferred in concurrence with unsanctified endeavours. It is to believers, therefore, that we more immediately address the remarks made under this head. They are the persons described in the text. "Who is among you that *feareth the Lord*, that *obeyeth the voice of his servant*, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light?" Let him ascertain the cause of his doubts. To every one who is sinking into despondence, I address the words of our Lord, to his servant Peter, when sinking in the sea of Tiberias, *O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?*

Pious minds are liable to be affected by the common afflictions of life; and such is their infirmity, notwithstanding their piety, that they call in question their own state of grace. How feelingly does an inspired man, *Asaph*, in the 77th Psalm, describe this case: "My soul refused to be comforted. I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. I commune with mine own heart; and my spirit made diligent search. Will the Lord cast off for ever? Will he be favourable no more? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? And I said, This is my infirmity." In such a case as this, it is important for you to know the cause of your own doubts; because confidence in God alone can preserve from despondence in the midst of afflictions. ERROR, INDOLENCE, PASSIONS, SATAN,—these are the principal causes of the believer's doubts and fears. When you have discovered the immediate cause of your own distress, the remedy is of more easy application.

1. Error causes darkness and doubt. Clear views of divine truth is the preventive and the cure.

The opinion, however prevalent, that articles of faith have little influence over the religion of the heart, is very incorrect. In a philosophical point of view, nothing is more absurd than to suppose that good affections can be exercised to as good a purpose under the influence of ignorance and prejudice, as

under the guidance of intelligence and discernment. In the light of Christianity, it is not only unreasonable, but impious, to undervalue the doctrinal truths, which the Lord our Redeemer declared with his own lips, exemplified in his own life, and sealed with his own blood. It is no less than absolute contempt of the very work of the Holy Ghost, who inspired the prophets, and still enlightens the minds of redeemed men, to place error, the work of Satan, upon the same footing with the truths of God. The scriptures are profitable for doctrine; and religious knowledge is necessary to our faith and our hopes, to our duties and our joys. It has been lamented by the most judicious observers of Christian character, in the present day, that too little attention is paid to *objective* religion: and yet, *subjective* religion cannot be sound or comfortable, if the word of truth be neglected or misunderstood in its cultivation. Many have been misled by a partiality for great excitement in the worship of God, to make a righteousness within them of their own religious feelings, instead of looking out of themselves to the Lord, who is made of God unto us, both righteousness and redemption. Perhaps sincere Christians, too, in consequence of indistinct views of the economy of grace, are occasionally elevated with unscriptural, and of course delusory, enjoyment, and then cast down into perplexity and fear. Alas! there is in our own city, as well as in other parts of the world, a great expenditure of feeling and exertion unprofitable, because unaccompanied with correct discoveries of evangelical doctrine. Few seem to be aware of this precious truth—"that the first scriptural consolation received by the believer arises from the gospel, and not from reflecting on the feelings of his own mind towards it." The public instruction given by inspired men, and the conversation, in which the saints according to the scriptures indulged, respected more the sacred objects which excited sensibility, than the good qualities of the emotions themselves which were thus excited: and while these saints felt powerfully the influences of the Holy Spirit, and expressed those feelings, the doctrines and ordinances of evangelical religion principally commanded their attention, and always formed the beloved subject of their discourse.

No mere man is, notwithstanding, in this life, arrived at perfection of Christian knowledge. The inspired writers themselves, saw but in part, and prophesied but in part: we all see as through a glass darkly: and very eminent saints fell at times into despondence. *Asaph* was remark-

able for that sensibility which renders some men susceptible alike of high delight, and of exquisite anguish. He frequently doubted; he ascertained the cause; and from the doctrines of divine revelation he derived the cure. *Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. So foolish was I and ignorant; I was as a beast before thee. Nevertheless I am continually with thee; thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.*

HEMAN, the *Ezrahite*, in his doubts and fears, had recourse to the God of all consolation for light and direction. "O Lord God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee—My soul is full of trouble—Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me—Lord, why castest thou off my soul? Why hidest thou thy face from me?"

Whatever, therefore, Christians, may be the kind of despondence that overwhelms your spirits, examine whether it be a mistake respecting the principles of objective religion, that subjects you to sorrow. There is one class of mistaken ideas, which I shall take the liberty of specifying—The tendency in the human mind, imperfectly enlightened, to confound the doctrines of *justification* and *sanctification*, is the source of many errors. It is obvious to every man that there is a distinction between them; but when that distinction is not clearly perceived and applied, there is a confusion of ideas, which, if it does not lead to an abandonment of sound doctrine, must unhappily affect Christian experience. Justification is an *act of grace*, wherein God pardons our sins, and accepts our persons, for Christ's sake; but sanctification is a work of God's Spirit on the whole man, restoring us to the image of God. Should any awakened sinner be directed for peace of conscience to his own feelings, instead of being led directly to the finished righteousness of the Lord Jesus, it is evident, that in such a case, he must either remain comfortless, or derive hope from an unscriptural source, which cannot yield permanent support.\*

I shall only add, in confirmation of these remarks, that the

\* *Justification* differs from *sanctification*, as much as condemnation differs from the work of corruption. Justification is an adjudication of the believer to eternal life for the merits of another. Sanctification is a change of temper and of conduct, preparing the believer for the enjoyment of the heavenly inheritance. In the one, righteousness is *imputed*: in the other, the sinner is *rendered* holy.

Scriptures always direct those who are in doubts to the light of truth for relief. *Arise*, said the Lord, to his disconsolate Israel, *Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee.\** O send out thy light and thy truth, said the mourning Psalmist, when afraid of being cast off from his God; *let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles. Then will I go to the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy.†* We have the testimony of the Redeemer himself in proof of the assertion, that correct information is essential to Christian liberty. *Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.‡*

2. Indolence, and consequent inattention to the due improvement of our talents, often occasions spiritual decline and despondence. The remedy is found in vigilance and Christian activity. *He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary, and they shall walk, and not faint.§*

Wisdom and goodness are equally conspicuous in the formation of man. Every organ of his wonderfully constituted body, and every faculty of his more wonderful mind, is made capable of improvement by proper activity; and regular exercise is essential to both his improvement and usefulness. Life is valuable only by the employment of its powers: it is not even known but by the exertion of the vital principle. Indolence not only disqualifies for usefulness in society; but also effectually precludes from enjoyment. In order to show his own power and benevolence, and to preserve the mind of man from cares numerous and complicated, and not immediately connected with morals, God our Creator and constant benefactor carries on a system of perpetual action in our bodies. The vital organs perform their functions independently of our will, generally without our knowledge, and in many instances entirely beyond the reach of examination. The stomach acts upon its contents without waiting for

\* Isa. lxi. 1, 2.

‡ John viii. 31, 32.

† Psalm xliii. 3, 4.

§ Isa. xl. 29, 31.

your directions ; and its several auxiliaries move with an accuracy and an energy altogether beyond any thing affected by the will of man. The process of respiration, too, commencing at the birth, and unintermitted until we retire from the world, is left only partially at our option, and that itself, for purposes connected with our moral improvement, and perfectly distinct from the mere maintenance of the animal economy. That admirable organ, which all languages have called the seat of life and energy, the heart, acting by a power independently of our volitions, propels the living treasure, which nourishes and warms every other organ, to the remotest part of the body, and through the most minute fibre of this mortal frame. Thus the Creator leaves to man little other control over the tide of life in his own body, than he has over the ebbing and the flowing of the sea.

All nature is in action within us and around us ; and shall we then be idle ? Having so many organs unweariedly employed in our service, without requiring, from us, any more than a very general superintendency, the intellect, the conscience, the affections, and volitions of men, are left to attend to those concerns, which respect more immediately the improvement and happiness of our intellectual and moral constitution. The Christian religion, moreover, in bringing life and immortality to light, hath set before us, in the most clear and convincing manner, the folly of selling the soul for any worldly enjoyments. Christians, realizing in the death of Christ, in the sanctification of the Spirit, in the everlasting love of God, and in the excellency of the purchased inheritance, as well as from a consciousness of its own energies, the value of the living soul, cannot need to be told, that it is both unwise and ungrateful to leave its energies unemployed and its faculties without improvement. The Redeemer hath taught us, by the parable of the talents, both the sin and the danger of indolence, and even of inattention to the exercise of our powers, in the service of the Lord God. Believers cannot, therefore, expect to *lie at ease in Zion*, without giving offence to their heavenly Father, and provoking him to withdraw from them some portion of that comfort, which, in a course of greater exertion and usefulness, they might calculate upon enjoying.

The graces, moreover, in which the Spirit abounds to believers, are made manifest principally by their exercises ; and if they remain without employment, in a quiescent state, they languish ; they cease to be objects of consciousness ; and

doubts of their existence come like a dark cloud over the mind. Great activity about the forms of religion is undoubtedly consistent with an unrenewed state; for the Spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience has no objections to keep his servants employed: but a state of entire negligence respecting the things of God is utterly inconsistent with the life and power of godliness.

It is not the policy of Satan, or even the tendency of corrupt nature, to induce the saints to live in total idleness. This is so palpably opposite to the precepts and principles of true religion, that the temptation would instantly be perceived and resisted: but if professors are kept engaged so much about the worldly business of religion, as leaves them little opportunity of studying the principles of evangelical doctrine; if they are kept so much in action about outward forms, as to neglect the spirit of personal piety; if they are hurried about among the ordinances so as to prevent the reflection necessary to profiting by any of them; in a word, if an excitement be kept up about their own feelings, without improvement in knowledge or growth in grace, a man may, in the midst of such activity, be no more than an indolent Christian, if indeed, at all a subject of the grace of God. *Spiritual* activity is that which improves the soul in holiness; and which is opposed to the negligence that occasions fear and despondency. Men may be very busy in what passes for religion in the world, and be at the same time negligent of experimental godliness. A man may be even useful in promoting the good of others, and be very deficient in attention to personal sanctification. When the sympathies of social life have, from the influence of example, of self-interest, or of party spirit, received an ecclesiastical excitement, great exertion for the external concerns of Christianity may be found where there is criminal remissness in relation to the power of godliness in the heart—*they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard I have not kept.*

Whatever may be the cause of slothfulness in the spiritual life, it is certain that sloth is one of the causes of decline and consequent despondence. *By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands, the house droppeth through;\** *I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and lo, it was all grown over with thorns—I looked upon it, and received instruction.†* These general declarations are intended to apply to the con-

\* Eccles. x. 18.

† Prov. xxiv. 30—32



cerns of piety, as much as to those of property. They of course confirm our remarks. The same writer, Solomon the son of David, in that elegant collection of conversations relative to experimental religion, which is called the Song of Songs, describes in several instances the gloomy effects of indolence, and the happy success of religious diligence, in re-establishing communion with God in the fine enjoyments of spiritual consolation.

The pious mind, under the influence of partial indolence, but still retaining its characteristic knowledge of the Lord, is described, Song v. 2. *I sleep, but my heart waketh.* Even in this state, the voice of the Shepherd, the true evangelical doctrine is understood and appreciated—it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night. In despite of the condescension and love expressed, upon the Redeemer's part, to the believing soul, in these tender, these touching words, spiritual indolence rejects the offered enjoyment, and makes a plausible but insincere apology, verse 3. *I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?* The omnipotence and the necessity of supernatural grace, to give the ability of willing and of acting aright to man, are acknowledged; and the consequent inclination of the heart to God is described in the fourth verse. Diligent attention to the means of grace, accompanied with the exercise of grace itself, is represented in the fifth verse, as the effect of the Redeemer's hand extended for the revival of the slothful. But, still, after the removal of the cause, the effect of criminal indolence remains for some time, in painful doubts and disappointments. Verse 5. *I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had withdrawn himself and was gone: my soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer.* The certain success, however, of that pious diligence, which by divine grace is communicated for the purpose of enabling us to overcome habits of negligence, is described in the third chapter. *By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth;* this was in vain; it was an indolent misguided pursuit. There is a call for more vigorous exertion. The deserted heart then seeks the Lord in the several ordinances of the sanctuary, and converses with the pastors of the churches for relief: these exertions failed also, for a time, but not ultimately. The longing soul passed through ordinances, and beyond ministers, to

the throne of grace, and succeeded to communion with God and assurance of salvation. *It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth; I held him and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me.*

Awake, then, from your sleep, and arise from your beds, ye children of light, who are in present darkness and doubt; seek the Lord while he is to be found: Call upon him while he is near. It is not proper that the negligent should enjoy the transporting joys of religion. These cordials are freely but wisely given to those who live near to the Most High in purity of spirit. Would you have your doubts removed, and your confidence in God augmented? Go to his throne, with renovated vigour and increasing industry; *at evening-time it shall be light.* "And, besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity. He that *lacketh these things, is blind*, and cannot see afar off, and *hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.* Wherefore, the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."\*

3. The passions, through the remaining corruptions of the heart, often cause transgressions, and consequent doubts and despondence.

The professors of religion, notwithstanding their regeneration, generally retain, through life, the leading traits of their mental character, as well as the distinguishing features of their countenance. Although the mind is, more immediately than the body, the subject of sanctification, yet the body itself, also, is the temple of the Holy Ghost, and is consecrated to God: and as the Spirit's influence upon the outward man, does not affect the length and strength of the sinews and the bones, nor destroy the natural arrangement or contour of the muscles, neither does it affect directly the extent of intellectual capacity, the acuteness of our feelings, or the strength of our passions. Diversities of genius and of temper appear in the church, as much as in the world. It is hard to say, how far the powers of the soul depend for their peculiarities, upon the character of the instruments, by which they are brought to

\* 2 Pet. i. 5—11.

feel and to act—the nerves and the muscles of the body: but it is certain that there is some such influence in the human constitution; and so far as it goes, the work of regeneration seems not to be designed for altering those phenomena of mind, which naturally depend upon our bodily organization, any more than for altering that organization itself. Religion undoubtedly sanctifies the whole man; and must, in its progress towards perfection, shed a benign influence over the temper of the heart, as well as over the understanding and the conscience: but as the good work is not completed in any until the day of the Lord, and as it is in many scarcely perceptible, passions are frequently indulged, which prove the means of plunging the soul into perplexity and sorrow.

It is a matter of common remark, that the passions have great influence upon the opinions and the actions of men. This influence extends equally to religious men. Agreeable passions prepossess the mind in favour of their own objects; and disagreeable passions produce a prejudice against them. When it is considered, that there is, in every man, a tendency to justify his own emotions, as well as his actions—that the association of our ideas depends in a great measure upon the disposition—that the importance attached to the notions, which are at any time indulged, is in proportion to the impression which is made on the heart more than to the force of the argument—and that mere abstract opinions are frequently the result of very complicated views, and therefore slight and wavering, we shall not be surprised that our passions should have so great agency in the formation of our opinions and sentiments.

The passions also influence our conduct. “The actions of men are those exertions which are consequent upon their volitions. The primary sources of our activity, therefore, are the circumstances that influence the will. Of these there are some which make a part of our constitution, and which on that account are called *active principles*.”\* It is to these active powers, excited beyond the bounds of moderation, that the term passions is usually applied; and it is, in this general acceptance of the term, including the passion of resentment, that I now employ this word. “When passion of any kind is excited, a sensible agitation or commotion of the body is produced; our reason is disturbed; we lose, in some measure, the power of self-command, and are hurried to action by an almost irresistible impulse.”\* A knowledge of the

\* Outlines of Moral Philosophy, by Dugald Stewart.

influence of the passions upon the belief and the behaviour of men, is of use to those who reason with others in order to carry conviction or produce persuasion: it is of use in the study and the practice of the fine arts, as well as in the common and political concerns of social life; and it is still more useful to him who strives to live with a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man.

When appetites, desires, or affections, under corrupt excitement, usurp the control over the conduct of a Christian, for however short a time, the passion is at war with pious principle; impels to criminal action; and at last, after producing its mischievous effects, ends in remorse, often accompanied with great horror. Not only do sudden gusts of passion oppose the progress of the soul in sanctification; but also those lusts of the flesh, which have acquired force by habitual indulgence, and which, of course, give character to man, prevent the progress of spirituality, and render many, of naturally strong minds, mere children in understanding, and in the practice of godliness. *I beseech you, therefore, dearly beloved, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from FLESHLY LUSTS which war against the soul. Among whom we also had our conversation in times past, in the LUSTS of our flesh, fulfilling the DESIRES OF THE FLESH AND OF THE MIND. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the LUST of the flesh: For the flesh LUSTETH against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.\**

When a Christian is left so far to himself, and to the temptations of the world, as to indulge frequently or habitually those fits of extravagant passion that agitate the body, unsettle reason, stifle conscience, and impel to inconsiderate

\* 1 Pet. ii. 11. Eph. ii. 3. Gal. v. 16, 17. The LUST referred to in these texts, is *strong desire*. *Επιθυμία* is any powerful emotion or passion of the mind. *Θυμός* itself, from *θυω* "to move impetuously," signifies both the mind in action, and any temporary or sudden appetite or desire rising into passion. Strong desire may exist for a good, as well as for a bad object; and is used in Scripture in both cases. 1 John ii. 16. Luke xxii. 15. And yet, extravagant desire, or *passion*, simply considered, is represented by the Apostle Paul, Rom. vii. 7. as sin discovered and condemned by the law of God. Lust, appetite, or desire, become so powerful in impelling to action, that man is unable to do what he would otherwise feel inclined to perform—*Ye cannot do the things that ye would*. The *passion*, which governs the will, instead of leaving it to be directed by wisdom and piety, in its exercise, is criminal. Of this kind are, *Avarice, Ambition, Emulation, Anger, Grief, Fear, Jealousy, and Love*.

action, it cannot be expected that he will retain very distinctly on his spirit, the holy impressions of divine truth. Nay, if a man be habitually ambitious, avaricious, or vain of worldly applause, his meditations of God cannot be frequent or sweet, nor the graces of the Spirit much in exercise. The soul cannot attend to more than one object at once. How can you indulge in wrath against a neighbour, a master, or a servant, at one moment, and rejoice in the mercy and the grace of God, on the next? How can you indulge in extravagant grief for the losses incurred here, and look, at the same time, by faith, to the riches of eternity? How can the avaricious reconcile the love of the world with the love of God? How can the vain, and the ambitious man, expect to maintain communion with the Holy One of Israel? Be not deceived, brethren, you cannot enjoy the unclouded prospects of heavenly felicity, and indulge yourselves in the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life. You are not to look for the comforts of assurance, among those professors of religion, who have not grace sufficient to rule their own spirits, and triumph over their own corrupt inclinations and passions.

4. Satan is the principal cause of those doubts and fears, into which the saints are sometimes reduced; and resistance to his exertion is the means of assurance.

This enemy of truth and righteousness, where he cannot destroy, endeavours to disturb. *We are not ignorant of his devices.* He is intelligent, industrious, malicious, and powerful—"the god of this world, the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." He is the *accuser of the brethren*, to God and to their own consciences; and he succeeds, in many instances, if not to bring the saints into despair, at least to diminish their comfort. God, in his providence, permits him to try us, as in the case of Job; to buffet some, as in the case of the apostle Paul; and to keep, through the fear of death, others in a state of mental bondage, until the Lord our Redeemer take the prey from his hands, and administer deliverance. The excommunicated person was given over into his hand for temporary torture.\* Those who by transgression merit the censures of the church, whether they be inflicted or not, are often held by him for a time in durance. The self-confident and the vain, are placed under his power, in order to learn humility and modesty by a painful experience. He takes

\* 1 Cor. v. 5.

advantage of the bodily diseases of the saints, making the weak and the hypochondriacal to doubt of their own safety. He mingles his influence with the natural sorrow of the mourner, from whatever cause; he assails the feeble in the hour of death; he pours out his fury through the fever that occasions phrensy: ignorance, error, indolence, inexperience, convictions for sin, a sense of personal demerit, shame, persecution, and passions, are all observed and improved by this enemy, who goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. He will strive to harden your hearts, so as to make light of sin; and if he fail in the attempt, he will transform himself into an angel of light, that he may administer opiates which shall lull the soul into repose, or lead you to trust in something different from the grace of God: and should he fail in all endeavours to blind your minds, that you should not believe, he will cast your sins in your teeth; turn your own confessions against you; magnify your transgressions above the power of grace to save you; and so lead you to the dungeon in which dwell the furies, that you may be tortured with the apprehensions of eternal burnings. The subtlety of this fallen angel; the untenderness of this minister of cruelty; the boldness of this impious rebel against the government of God; and the daring blasphemy which he suggests to the troubled spirit against divine truth, are the means of distinguishing his efforts in producing despair, from the natural emotions of your own minds. He studies your temper, he observes your condition, he watches your pursuits, he understands your pleasures, he practises upon your connexions, in business, in domestic retirement, in the church, and in political society, if by any means he may diminish your happiness and your usefulness, and augment your misery.

Resist, O my brethren, this adversary. Yield not to his assertions an attentive ear. He is the father of lies; the enemy of you and your God. Fear him not. His head is bruised by the power of the Son of man. It remains for you to call upon your God, and to push the victory. Behold the cross upon which your sins are expiated. The blood of the covenant, by which we are sanctified, flows from the Redeemer's side, to cleanse you from all iniquity. In that hour of suffering, the King of saints destroyed the power of the king of terrors—spoiling principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly. Why then should the gospel hearer despair? A light bursts forth from the bloody Calvary, that

shines upon the habitations of Zion; and the children of light need not continue to walk any longer in darkness. Let them trust in the name of the Lord. *Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*

III. In pointing out the duty of Christians, who have not the assurance of salvation, I must not omit, *Steadfast continuance in practical obedience* to all the commandments.

It is taken for granted in my text, that although it may be the lot of a good man sometimes to walk in darkness, he will still continue to fear and to obey his God. "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant?" is an interrogation which includes this principle: and upon this principle the direction which I now give is founded. Continue, even in your disconsolate state, to fear and to obey, and you will find in due time, light poured out upon your path. God hath assured us, that *unto the upright, there ariseth light in the darkness* :\* and unto them that fear him, he hath promised illumination, and health, and growth unto perfection—*Unto you that fear my name, shall the Son of righteousness arise, with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.* †—"Having, therefore, these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all pollution, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord."

I know that the desponding Christian has a mode of reasoning, which serves to exclude the consolation which such promises bring. By the same argument which makes him think that he is not a Christian, he persuades himself to distrust the promise. Thus he reasons, There is no reward promised to the doings of the unregenerate: I am not a sanctified man; therefore there is no blessing promised to me.

It is necessary to meet this objection; and to show to you, also, that whether I can satisfactorily obviate it or not, the course of conduct, which I recommend, is your duty.

Perfect obedience to the divine law is the duty of every man. What the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law. And of course, every one, who is a subject of moral obligation at all, is subject to it in all its extent. The law is satisfied with nothing short of perfection, in disposition, in thought, in word, and in deed, in every period of life and

\* Psalm cxii. 4.

† Mal. iv. 2.

without intermission. It is commonly said by those, who are averse from urging on the unregenerate, the use of the means of grace, that there is no blessing promised in concurrence with the doings of the unregenerate : and they assign as the reason, that God looketh at the heart : and that he is displeased with its depravity—that God is holy, and cannot of course be pleased with what is unholy. Far be it from me, to dispute this truth. God forbid that I should ever teach any of my fellow-sinners to believe, for a moment, that God is satisfied with outward obedience, while the heart is at enmity with himself, and with his law. Upon the contrary, I not only embrace the proposition, that God does not bless the deeds of unregenerate men with a reward expressive of such satisfaction ; but I extend the general principle, that he is displeased with every thing which falls short of perfection in holiness. It is not of works, that we are saved or blessed, otherwise grace would no more be grace. Neither the works of the regenerate, nor the works of the unregenerate, give *satisfaction* to the Lawgiver ; for neither the one nor the other extends to the whole obligation, under which God hath placed his creatures. By grace alone, *free grace*, we are saved ; and every blessing of salvation is a gift of grace, and in nowise promised or bestowed *on account of any goodness* in our deeds, either before, or after the new and second birth. All is of FREE GRACE to us, through our Lord Jesus Christ : for grace reigns, not only in the origin, but also in the progress of the Christian life. *Grace reigns through righteousness, unto eterna llife, by Jesus Christ our Lord.* It is not a fact that our obligation to perfection is diminished by regeneration ; or that sincerity is admitted as a *substitute* for perfection. We do not make *void the law* through grace, “God forbid ! we establish the law.”

In vain you are told by those who convert the grace of God into a system of licentiousness, that faith without works is the living faith, through which we are justified and saved : *Faith without works is dead.* It is equally in vain, you are told, that love without works, is the fulfilling of the law : *for this is the love of God, that ye keep his commandments.* It is not a *bare good will* to any being, or to all being, that the scriptures recommend, or the Holy Ghost pours upon the heart, as the love of God. Never was there a more happy invention of the father of lies, than to reduce the love of God to a speculative idea, of *mere good will to general being.* The love of God is an active principle. It is a propensity of the



heart towards God and godliness—a principle which impels to action: for it *constrains* us, by influencing the will, to act agreeably to the light of divine revelation. It seeks the vision of God, the enjoyment of God, and the glory of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Neither faith nor love opposes the principles of moral obligation; neither the one, nor the other can be admitted as a *substitute* for perfection in holiness. They are both gifts of the grace of God, and both parts of the duty required of man. Sincerity, and love, and hope, and repentance, and indeed, every holy exercise of mind, or state of mind, is approved of God, as his own work within us; and to each of them, as well as to faith, is the promise of, not only some particular blessing, but of entire salvation with all its blessings, *graciously* made on account of Christ's merits; not on account of our goodness. These graces are the evidence of our union to Christ in the covenant of promise; and of course, of our title to what God hath promised in that covenant. The promises of the covenant of grace are made from all eternity to Christ our head, and in him to all the elect as his seed.\* *For all the promises of God in him, are yea, and in him, amen, unto the glory of God by us.†*

Permit me now to place before you, in distinct propositions, the several principles involved in this discussion. You may judge of their truth one by one. Examine for yourselves, in the light of revealed truth. "I believed, therefore have I spoken:" but let your faith rest not on the wisdom of man, but on the power of God. Prove all things, hold fast that which is good.

1. Obedience to the revealed will of God, is the duty of those who doubt their own personal piety, as much as it is the duty of those who have obtained assurance. It is the duty

\* So say the Scriptures. Tit. i. 2. *Eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.* This is the promise of the covenant, and is coextensive with the covenant: therefore it is called the *covenant of promise.* Gal. iii. 16. Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.

In this sense, all the churches of the Reformation understand the doctrine of the evangelical promise. Take for example the Catechism of the Presbyterian Churches. LARGER CAT. QUEST. 31. *The covenant of grace was made with CHRIST, THE SECOND ADAM, and in him, with ALL THE ELECT as his seed.* 32. *The grace of God is manifested in the second covenant, in that he freely PROMISETH and giveth his Holy Spirit to ALL HIS ELECT, to work in them that faith with all other saving graces.*

† 2 Cor. i. 20.

of *all men* to obey God, perfectly. *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.\**

2. No human obedience whatsoever, can now deserve any portion of happiness whatsoever, from the Lord. The greatest perfection of man, cannot entitle to the least of God's mercies: much less can the imperfect holiness of man make our title to the greatest happiness—even eternal life. "Grace stands in opposition to works: all works, whether they be called works of the law, or works of the gospel; exercises of the heart, or actions of the life; done while we remain unregenerate, or when we become regenerate; they are all and *equally* set aside in this great affair; † adjudication to eternal life. "*We shall be saved. But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.*" ‡

3. Promises of happiness are made to holiness; and an appropriate promise to every holy exercise. This is the fact. The reason *why* it is so, is not that God is put under obligation by the work of man—not that he is bound by any compact to reward human *merit*: for the covenant of works is broken; and its penalty or curse, alone remains in force, since the condition is violated, and the promise forfeited. I give you the reasons. *First*, It is a law of God's moral government, that the holy, and none but the holy, shall be happy. The promise predicts this future fact. *Secondly*, The exercise of grace, is evidence of an interest in Christ; and the promise addressed to the sign of our union to Christ is intended for the thing signified: for God has bound himself by covenant to give grace in Jesus Christ, for his righteousness sake, to all that are by faith *joined* to him. §

\* Matth. v. 48.

† HERVEY, quoted with approbation, both by *Mr. Sandeman*, and *Mr. Andrew Fuller*. In such an important truth, it is pleasing to see men, of otherwise different opinions, agree.

‡ Isa. lxiv. 5. 6. Tit. iii. 5. Luke xvii. 10.

§ "The *obedience* of a Christian, so far as it is truly evangelical, has all relation to Christ, the Mediator, and is but an expression of the soul's *believing union* to Christ. All evangelical works are works of that faith, that worketh by love; and every such act of obedience, is only a new *effective act of reception of Christ and adherence* to the glorious Saviour. That proposition may be a truth, that he that obeys shall be saved; because obedience and salvation are connected together in fact; and yet an

“Blessed are they that do his commandments. And in keeping of them, there is great reward. Holiness becometh thine house, O Lord, for ever. But unto every one of us is given grace, according to the measure of the gift of Christ. That ye put on the new man, which after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness. Moreover, I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant: and the heathen shall know that I the Lord do sanctify Israel.”\*

4. Christians, although not *assured* of their own salvation, have, notwithstanding, a *certain interest* in these promises. The promises are in Christ, yea and amen; and if you are, in fact, in Christ, whatever may be your doubts and fears, *all things are yours*. The promises predict blessings to those who have grace, and are not limited to the consciousness of having it:—They shall all be accomplished because God is true; and therefore *they that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength*. “For thus saith the high and the lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made. I have seen his ways, and will heal him; I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him. I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the Lord; and I will heal him. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. At that day ye shall know that I am in the Father, and ye in me, and I in you.”†

5. The doctrine of Christ gives relief to the conscience *irrespective of any consciousness of a change by regeneration*. “The very first scriptural consolation, received by the be-

acceptance to a title to salvation, not be granted upon the account of our obedience. What is a promise, but a declaration of a future truth, for the comfort and encouragement of the person to whom it is declared? Promises may rationally be made to signs and evidences of faith; and yet the thing promised not be upon the account of the sign, but the thing signified. Promises of particular benefits implied in justification and salvation, may especially be fully made to such expressions of faith as they have a peculiar suitableness to: as forgiveness to a forgiving spirit, and mercy to the merciful—and this not be at all to the prejudice of the doctrine we have maintained.”—*Edwards on Justification*.

\* Rev. xxii. 14. Psalm xix. 11. and xciii. 5. Eph. iv. 7—24. Ezek. xxxvii. 23.

† Isa. lvii. 15—19, and John xiv. 18, 20.

liever, arises from the gospel itself, and not from reflecting on the feelings of his own mind towards it ;” and the consolation of desponding Christians is derived, not so much from an examination of their own faith, as from beholding by faith the Lord their Redeemer, manifesting himself unto them. “Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: Not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will joy in the God of my salvation.”\*

If these principles be correct, brethren, the mourner in Zion is bound in duty to himself and to his God, to continue in the practice of religion. God’s statutes are obligatory upon you, whatever you may think of your own unworthiness. This is the method appointed by your Redeemer for giving relief to the afflicted. In this way many have obtained relief, and have been led to sing a new song, like David in the fortieth Psalm. *I waited patiently for the Lord, and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God.*

IV. Let him that now doubts of his own safety, believe instantly in the Lord Jesus Christ, and be saved.

This is my last direction. It is the way to put an end to doubting. Come now, whatever you have done before, to the Lord our Redeemer, for pardon and for peace. This is the precept of my text—*Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.*

*Names* distinguish one thing from another. A man’s name is that by which he is known. *The name of the Lord*, of course, denotes *himself as revealed to us*. The clearest revelation is in Christ Jesus, the image of the invisible God: and the Lord our Redeemer, is, therefore, the NAME, as well as the WISDOM, and the WORD OF GOD. EXOD. xxiii. 21. *My NAME is in him.* Jer. xxiii. 6. In his days Judah shall be saved,

\* John xiv. 24, 27. Habak. iii. 17, 18.

and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is his name whereby he shall be called, **THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

In this name the afflicted and disconsolate are directed to *trust*. "To trust" in any thing, is to depend upon it with a confident persuasion that it will answer the purpose to which it is applied. To "trust in the name of the Lord," is firmly to expect that he will protect us in time and through eternity, in correspondence with his own perfections, his relation to us, and his holy word.

To *stay upon*, signifies to lean upon one for support, with confidence that it shall not be withheld. The desponding is here directed to depend for support upon God as *his* God. The personal pronoun *his*, denotes a peculiar interest. My God, your God, his God, like my people, his people, all refer, in scriptural phraseology, to the covenant connexion between God and Israel. It is the language of *appropriation*. The tenor of the everlasting covenant is, *They shall be my people, and I will be their God.* To "stay upon his God" is, of course, to depend upon God according to *the covenant of grace*. The import, therefore, of this precept is, If any of you should be in trouble, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, trusting in him for all the purposes to be accomplished by the covenant of grace—Commit yourselves to him with confidence that you in so doing shall be saved.

This is the last and the most important injunction to be laid upon those who have not assurance. To exercise faith in the Lord our Redeemer, is the first and the last duty of man under the gospel. It is the duty of every one that hears the gospel, at all times, and under all circumstances. *This is his commandment*, by way of eminence, *that ye believe in his Son whom he hath sent.* In vain will you have examined yourselves, unless self-examination issue in the exercise of faith. The light of the recollection of former experience, and of previous enjoyment, will, for the present, afford no profit, without grace be at the time in exercise, leading you to a believing application of the promises of God to the soul: and however sensible you are of former failures and of present guilt, however you may doubt of the piety of your past life, the present exercise of faith in God and in Christ is immediate relief from trouble and anguish. *Let not your hearts be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in me.*

Approach then, ye "who walk in darkness, and have no light:" for Christ is **THE LIGHT** of the world. Behold him in the glory of his own perfections and doctrines. He

is "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world." *Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.* Do you labour to obtain assurance of salvation? *Trust* in him; for these things were written expressly for your use—that ye may know that ye have eternal life. Do you apprehend that you have never yet believed to the saving of the soul? *Trust* in him, who is at this moment inviting you to come unto him, that you may find rest. It is high time that you should now commit your soul to him who alone can save to the uttermost. Do you feel the assurance of your personal title to the kingdom of God in Christ? *Trust* in him: Again believe, and continue in the exercise of faith: for of you it is required—yea, it is expected that your very assurance will lead to new and vigorous exercises of the faith of God's elect. *These things have I written unto you THAT BELIEVE on the name of the Son of God, that ye may KNOW THAT YE HAVE ETERNAL LIFE, and that YE MAY BELIEVE on the name of the Son of God.\**

The most ready way of attaining to that state of comfortable enjoyment, which is so desirable to all who are sensible of their iniquities, is to approach, according to divine direction, the source of all consolation, without hesitation and without delay. "Let us therefore *come boldly unto the throne of grace,†* that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." It is thus, that faith itself acts with full assurance; and independently of a retrospect of our own feelings, we become free of all doubt at the time, and in the very *act of believing*, have a full expectation of eternal life. "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus—Let us draw near with a true heart in FULL ASSURANCE OF FAITH."‡

Nothing is more plainly and frequently declared in the word of God than the duty, the importance, and the necessity of faith in Jesus Christ. All professed Christians acknowledge this; and no one will deny, that true faith is necessary in our justification before God. However different and opposite the opinions of men relative to the nature of saving faith, all will acknowledge that it is necessary in some sense or other to the salvation of the sinner. "He that believeth not shall be damned," is too unequivocal an expression to be flatly denied by any one, who receives the New Testament as a divine revelation.

Seeing, however, that I urge as the last and greatest duty

\* John v. 13.

† Heb. iv. 16.

‡ Heb. x. 16—21.

of *doubting* Christians, to put their "trust in the name of the Lord," I feel myself compelled to explain, more particularly, the *nature* of the faith recommended. I would have you to know what it is, that is required of you, when you are summoned to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. I would have you to know, what it is you *do*, in believing in him. Unless you know what is required, how can you perform it? how can you ascertain afterwards that you now believe, unless you are capable of distinguishing this act of the renewed soul from all other acts or exercises?\*

In order "to escape the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin, God requireth of us faith in Jesus Christ." He requireth of us, to "receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel." With these words, brethren, you are familiar from your infancy. You were taught to repeat them by your parents; and you teach them to your children; and long may the whole form of sound words, of which they are a part, be had in remembrance by the Churches. In the quotation I made from the Shorter Catechism, are the following principles, explanatory of the duty of believing to the saving of the soul.

1. It is in order to escape God's wrath and curse due to us for sin, that faith is enjoined as a duty upon any individual.

There are, it is true, other ends to be answered by believing; there are other consequences for the glory of God and the good of men to result from it: there are other motives to be

\*The *doctrine* of faith admits of very extensive discussion. The place which it occupies in the economy of the covenant of grace, as the gift of God, on the behalf of Christ, worked in fallen men by the Holy Ghost, communicated by the exalted Lord of the covenant, and carried on in all its exercises by the Author and Finisher of it; and the influence which it has in *uniting us to Christ for justification*, in living in Christ for sanctification, and in repelling the fiery darts of the adversary, furnish a subject of profitable contemplation. To distinguish "the faith of God's elect" from counterfeits; to distinguish *saving faith* from historical belief—the temporary reception of the gospel—the vain confidence of the presumptuous—and the belief which receives or exercises miraculous power; thus to treat of the nature of faith, is edifying to the Christian. To explain its inseparable connexion with the love of God, Father, Son, and Spirit, with the law and government of God, and indeed with all divine things—with the grace of repentance—with knowledge—and with Christian hope, would be both pleasant and profitable. To examine and detect the errors uttered by ignorance or design, in order to mislead us upon this important part of actual godliness, would also tend to our improvement and confirmation: but such discussions would not comport with our present design. I now consider faith merely as the *duty* of man: but I do not forget in the mean time, that it is the *gift* of God.

urged in recommending it; but this is the great leading object to be accomplished by faith—To escape the personal danger of hell-fire.

There is therefore necessarily implied in faith, a sense of sin, and merited wrath—pungent spiritual convictions. In *effectual calling*, which precedes faith, the Holy Ghost produces in the soul of the sinner these convictions; he enlightens the mind also in the knowledge of Christ; and, *renewing the will*, persuades and enables him to embrace Christ, that is, to *believe in him*. This is the order. There is no faith, no saving faith, without a sense of sin, and a desire to escape from its danger and pollution. It is strange, that it ever entered into the head or heart of any man on earth, to suppose that faith could be exercised without a sense of sin and danger. “The whole have no need of the physician, but they who are sick.” The keeper of the prison came *trembling* before Paul and Silas, and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, *Believe* on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

2. God requireth of fallen sinners to believe in Christ. *This is his commandment, that ye believe in his Son, whom he hath sent.* Faith is the duty of the sinner, notwithstanding his inability to believe without divine illumination, and renovation of will. So far from man’s impotence being an excuse, it is a crime. It is itself the principal evil for which the remedy of the gospel is provided. Sinners, can you imagine that the corruption of your fallen nature—the wickedness of your own evil hearts, shall either discharge your obligations to God, or justify you in continuing in rebellion? Learn to correct such absurdity. No, you dare not plead your sin as its own apology. He who declares your impotency, calls upon you to act. This may appear paradoxical: but it is truth. *No man can come unto me, except the Father who hath sent me draw him.* You therefore cannot come without divine aid. Behold your impotency. But you are commanded to come. *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and turn unto the Lord.* Behold your duty. Both your impotency and your duty are affirmed by him who cannot lie.\*

\* It is not necessary, in order to justify wisdom in this case, to have recourse to words without meaning, or to false doctrine. We do not affirm, that sinners have *ability* of perfect obedience to God; for this is not true: An ability, which is acknowledged to be incapable of performing the work, is too palpable a contradiction to be adopted for the purpose of



3. In the gospel, Christ Jesus is freely offered to sinners for their salvation. *Who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.\**

Faith receives him as he is offered: and if there were no offer, there could be no faith. THE GOSPEL OFFER is the sum of all evangelical preaching. For this purpose chiefly, we explain the doctrines, we illustrate the precepts, and publish the promises of divine revelation—that the gospel offer might appear *worthy of all acceptation*. This offer is *freely* made to the chief of sinners. All the calls and the invitations, all the commands and all the threatenings in the book of God, are subservient to the evangelical message—*That God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself*: We, as ambassadors, therefore, pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. We offer to the sinner, without respect to previous subjective emotions of his own mind, we offer directly to the chief of sinners, the Lord Jesus Christ, and salvation in him; and in the name of God, we assure every one who accepts this offer, that he himself shall be saved: “for God so loved the world that he *gave* his only begotten Son, that *whosoever believeth* in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”†

4. Faith is receiving Christ for salvation, and resting upon him alone—*These are written that ye might believe—and that believing, ye might have life through his name.‡*

In saving faith there is, of course, an exercise of intellect; for there is necessarily an *assent* to the truth, which God proclaims in making the offer. By the illumination of the obviating a difficulty which is only imaginary. A self-determining power is absurd.

The question is one of moral agency, and the only power concerned in the case, is that of discharging a moral obligation. To a moral action it is essential that it be voluntary. What comes to pass involuntarily is neither virtuous nor vicious. Will is governed by motives; and the circumstances which influence the will are the primary sources of our activity. Of these there are some which make a part of our constitution, and which, on that account, are called active principles. They are depraved by original sin: and this corruption of the whole nature is itself both our sinfulness and our impotency. This being the case, the will cannot be influenced to good without a change of nature. It is not only a fact, that the sinner is *unwilling* to do good; but it is also a fact, that “the corruption of his whole nature” renders it *impossible for him to become willing*. “Man by his fall has wholly lost all *ability* of will to any spiritual good.”—*Con. Faith.*

\* 1 Cor. i. 30. and John i. 12.

† John iii. 16.

‡ John xx. 34.

Spirit, the soul is enabled to perceive the excellency of the Saviour, and to experience an assurance of what is revealed concerning him: but although subjects of the Spirit's influence, previously to the exercise of faith, it is without any consciousness of subjective piety we become certain of the truth objectively revealed.\* Faith, nevertheless, is more than either a perception or judgment; more than even a spiritual perception of Christ's excellency. It is a *consent*, as well as an *assent* of the soul: *for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness.*

In believing the mind is not passive. Faith is a duty required, and an act of obedience performed. To believe, is an active verb. Action, however, is consequent upon volition; and of course, saving faith is a voluntary exercise of the soul—of the regenerated mind.

Mere perception cannot properly be called a voluntary action: nor can mere affection of the heart, though it tends to influence volition, be called a voluntary action. We are *constrained* both to perceive and to feel, either pleasantly or painfully, as the case may be, by the impressions made upon the mind. If *passiveness* can at any time be predicated of the human mind, it is in regeneration. Effectual calling found me passive, and rendered me active. My soul is made to see and to feel, in a spiritual manner, by the Holy Ghost: I am thus quickened; and being at the same time affected by a spiritual sight of the Saviour, and a sense of his excellency, I become willing to act—I voluntarily act upon the object before me in the gospel offer. I embrace the Saviour offered unto me, for the express purpose for which he is offered.† This, brethren, is appropriation. It is the very essence of faith. Mistake me not. By *appropriation*, I mean nothing more or less than

\* There is an *objective assurance* in the nature of faith. I am *sure* Christ is offered to *me* a sinner. I may therefore say, without hesitation, in the act of faith, the Lord Jesus Christ is *MINE*, by the offer of Jehovah; and I take him to be *MINE*, in possession.

† Faith, as the act whereby the soul becomes *spiritually united* to the Redeemer, produces, of course, a new relation to God. By it we have a saving interest in Christ. *He that believeth shall be saved.* Before faith, the sinner was under condemnation. By faith he is introduced into a state of justification: Faith, therefore, makes that to be, which otherwise would not have been. The affirmation, "I shall be saved," in unbelief, is false: in believing, it becomes true. Faith brings about that relation to God, according to the new covenant, which justifies the use of the assertion, "Christ is mine, and I shall be saved by his merits." It makes that assertion to be true, which otherwise would have been false. The believer may, but the unbeliever may not say, "salvation is actually mine."

a cordial acceptation of Christ to be my Saviour, as he is offered to me in the gospel. I entreat you not to misunderstand or misrepresent my meaning. If any of you should dislike the *expression*, I pray you not to blame any one for the *thing*. There is nothing blameworthy in accepting this gift of God. In receiving, for my personal salvation, that which is freely offered to all who hear the gospel, I do not see that I incur the just displeasure of any one. Christ takes me to himself by his holy Spirit; and he offers himself to me as my Saviour. I take him to myself for this purpose, and commit myself to him. I appropriate to myself Christ and his salvation, being warranted by the free offer of the gospel, to embrace him for the saving of my soul. *My beloved is mine, and I am his. I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine.\**

I will now show the applicability of this doctrine of faith to you who "walk in darkness, and have no light." My text directs you to "trust in the name of the Lord, and stay yourselves upon your God." This, therefore, is your present duty, and your constant duty. You are urged by the invitation, and encouraged by the promise. *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you. If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely—and him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.†*

My dear hearers, if you have already believed in the gospel of God, you will not be unwilling to exercise your faith at this moment. You live by the faith of the Son of God. If you have never yet embraced the offer of salvation, it is time to embrace it now. I beseech you, by the mercies of God, to draw near with a true heart, in the full assurance of faith. Wherefore do you hesitate? Your warrant is complete. Your need is manifest. Your duty is urgent. Your welcome is indubitable. The invitation is given with sincerity. Hear, and your souls shall live. Trust ye in the Lord Jehovah for ever; in him there is everlasting strength. Trust in him, directly, unhesitatingly, and with assured confidence. When wearied with the toils of the day, you lie down for repose, you trust in the strength of your couch to support its burden. When you walk on the streets, you trust

\* Song ii. 16. and vi. 3.

† Matth. xi. 28. Isa. lv. 3. John vii. 37. Rev. xxii.

in the solid earth that it will bear your weight from sinking down to the centre of the globe: And will you not commit your souls to the everlasting arms of him who supports the pillars of the universe, with equal confidence, that he will bear you up, and save you with a great salvation? Awake, ye sons of indolence: arise, ye children of sorrow: wipe away your tears, ye daughters of despondency, whatever may be the view you take of your own subjective religion, approach the throne of grace with boldness, that you may obtain mercy. Stretch out the withered arm, that you may lay hold of his strength. It is God that calls you to his Son for wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. The prize of the high calling is before you. Trust, then, in the name of the Lord, and stay upon your God.

#### CONCLUSION.

I have now finished what I intended to say upon the duty of those who have not the assurance of grace and salvation. Before I close my discourse, I feel it my duty to administer a caution respecting experimental religion. I am not apprehensive, indeed, that any one will ever, in fact, substitute his own *actual godliness* for the merits of Christ in the matter of pardon and acceptance with God: But alas! many are in the habit of substituting *imaginary piety*, for the righteousness of Messiah. I am not afraid that any disciple of Christ, will, in fact, urge his speculative orthodoxy, or his experience of the power of religion, as an excuse for negligence in the practical duties of the Christian life; but it is too evident that many zealots for particular doctrines, and for particular kinds of religious experience, are grossly negligent of their duty to God and to man. I warn you, solemnly, against this course of conduct. However great the importance of inward piety, it is not by any means the whole of religion. If you have tasted that the Lord is gracious, if you cherish a comfortable hope of happiness in heaven, is it possible that you can be negligent of the glory of God, and the good of mankind? Are you made for personal enjoyment alone, and not also for usefulness to others? Are you made new creatures merely to satiate your souls with personal joys, and not also to glorify the Lord that bought you? This would be ignoble, base, and sordid selfishness. No, Christians, if this be the taste and the disposition, the habitual disposition of any man, whatever may be his profession, he is destitute of true godliness.

The disciple of Christ, is a man of disinterestedness and magnanimity. He loves God, he loves the saints ; and while he works out his salvation with earnest desire to enjoy God in heaven, he peculiarly delights to serve his Redeemer ; to support the honour of Jehovah's government ; to defend the truth ; to observe the positive statutes of the sanctuary. He is honest, sincere, benevolent, and beneficent ; he is humble, candid, and faithful to his own professions, and to his God, so far as the power of religion extends its influence. Whether in sickness or in health, in adversity or prosperity, whether walking in darkness, or standing in triumph on his strong mountain, he is still engaged in doing good ; in defending the true doctrine of the grace of God ; in maintaining pure and entire every ordinance ; and with a holy self-denial, making his temporal honour and interest bend to the interests of true religion. "*Seek first the kingdom of heaven, and its righteousness. Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price, whether therefore ye eat, or ye drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*"

Let the sensualist take pleasure in his wine ; let the avaricious rejoice in his gods of gold ; let the daughters of vanity walk after the sparks of their own kindling ; let the bustle and the noise of ignorant fanaticism pass away with the wind ; let the splendour and the pomp of superstition, engage the attention of the crowd ; let Pharisaical sanctimony, practised in intrigue, deceive and rule the populace : but let us hear the word of the Lord our God. *Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks ; walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand ; ye shall lie down in sorrow.* Whosoever, therefore, is among you that feareth the Lord, and obeyeth the voice of his servant, let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God. AMEN.

THE CONSOLATIONS OF PERSONAL  
RELIGION.

## SERMON IX.

PSALM lxiii. 3—7.—*Because thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips; when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night-watches. Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.*

FEW men ever experienced so great a variety of trials, or were called to act in so many different conditions of life, as the writer of this Psalm, David, the son of Jesse, of Bethlehem-Judah. Happy and virtuous, in the bosom of his father's family, he spent his early years remote from scenes of turbulence and ambition. With a fine mind, well cultivated, and deeply imbued with sincere piety, he enjoyed a vigorous and healthy constitution of body, and led a life of innocence and peace—the pastoral life, in more than Arcadian perfection. Sitting upon the side of his native hills, in the shade of the palm-tree, he often played upon his beloved harp, and knew nothing of the cares of empire. Thus, he might have lived happy, and have died without renown, had he not been destined to greater usefulness, though greater pains and toil, by the Governor of the world.

At the age of *fifteen*, this was announced to him by Samuel the prophet, who anointed him king of Israel; but David had reached his *twenty-third* year before he left the peaceful scenes of the shepherd's employment, when he was first introduced to public life, and admitted into the family of Saul, the reigning king. From this period, the history of his life becomes exceedingly interesting, and strangely diversified,

until in the *seventy-first* year of his age, he died in Jerusalem, after a troublesome, though victorious reign of *forty* years.

For *eight* years before his coronation at Hebron, on the defeat and death of Saul at Gilboa, his condition was peculiarly trying. It was in this school of affliction, that he laid the foundation of that exalted reputation which he acquired and sustained as the ruler of Israel. In the midst of these afflictions, when *twenty-seven* years old, and after he had been declared an outlaw, David escaped from his persecutors into the wilderness of Judah, the forest of Hareth. There, with a scanty and precarious supply for the subsistence of himself and his companions, having no other shelter from the storm than the trees of the forest and the cliffs of the rocks, "the sweet Psalmist of Israel" was at home with God; and enjoyed, for his support, amidst his daily perils, the consolations of the grace of God. There he composed and set to music the *sixty-third* psalm. It is a fine description of the life and power of godliness, in its commanding influence over the temper of the mind, and especially of the support which personal piety affords in the deepest troubles.

I shall, with divine assistance, *explain* the words of my text; and then, *describe the consolations of true religion*.

I. I explain my text.

In the sixty-third psalm, the inspired writer displays, in the most expressive terms, the operations of true religion in a heart enlightened by divine truth. It kindles a sacred fire which makes itself sensible by its light and by its heat. It produces sincere desires for the enjoyment of God—It gives satisfaction to the soul in communion with God—and it imparts that confidence, in the power and protection of the Most High, which both confirms pious resolution, and strengthens the hope of ultimate triumph.

The desire of enjoyment is one of the most powerful of the active principles of the human mind. By the sanctifying influence of religion it is directed to the only certain source of happiness, to the infinitely glorious God. The recollection of past joy is one of the means of exciting present desire: and, thus, religious experience produces an aptitude of heart for evangelical pursuits. In the *first two* verses, David displays the power of this habit in the midst of his trials. He *early*, every morning, sought the Lord. His desires were as the summer drought waiting for the rain, a *thirst* of the soul, and a *longing* of the flesh. The object was to *see the*

*power and the glory* of God ; and the *kind* of enjoyment desired, was the same as that formerly experienced, in the ordinances of the sanctuary. He longed for the good things of which he had already tasted.

When the love of God is shed abroad on our hearts by the Holy Ghost, there is not only a propensity to approach the Lord, and to enjoy the friendship of him who first loved us ; but the longing soul is also satisfied ; and confidence in God is restored. In the *last three verses*, David expresses this confidence in a triumphant manner. His enemies disappear, and he is persuaded that his joy shall be abundant. With the delightful recollection of the past, and the certain prospect of the future, the mind experiences present satisfaction. Hence the expressions from the *third* to the *eighth* verse, which I have chosen as my text, and which I am now to explain.

Verse 3. *Because thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee.*

In these words we have an expression of a good intention, and the reason upon which it is founded. The *intention* expressed is to praise God before the world—with the lips, so as to be seen of men ; but not with the lips alone : for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. It is not *merely* in order to be seen of men ; for piety excludes this limited construction. Praise is comely for the upright. It is thus they express their own sense of the divine excellency ; and they ought not to be ashamed to do so publicly. The manner of expressing the intention of praising God is worthy of notice. David declared his resolution to God himself in this act of devotion ; and, in singing his words, we should follow his example, engaging, in a vow to the Searcher of hearts, that we shall henceforward promote his glory.

The *reason* is as conclusive with respect to our duty, as it was to the Psalmist. *The loving-kindness of the Lord is better than life.* There is more in this expression than an allusion to the general benevolence of God. Of that, life itself is an effect ; and it is not the design of the Psalmist to compare the cause with its effect. He is speaking, not of the benignity from which life emanates ; but of that, which renders life valuable—of that, without which, life itself would become an evil. Of Judas, it was said by the Saviour, “better for that man he had not been born.” Life without piety, is a burden, and will become a curse. The mercy of God, communicating its saving influence to man, is of course more valuable than mere living existence ; for it is by the love of



God shed abroad upon the heart, that our life becomes a blessing.

Verse 4. *Thus will I bless thee while I live : I will lift up my hands in thy name.*

The writer, in correspondence with the pious purpose formerly expressed, now declares that a life, rendered more important by the grace of God, shall, while it continues to exist, be devoted to the service of its author. To *bless* God, is to declare him independently happy, and to speak of him as if we delighted in contemplating his self-sufficiency. When he blesseth his people, he communicates happiness and safety. His declarations are operative. He giveth to man ; but he receiveth nothing in return. We cannot profit the Almighty. *Lifting up the hands*, is the sign of earnestness ; it is the mode of making known our will ; it is an appeal to heaven. When we “ lift up our hands in *God's name*,” we declare our sincerity in Christ Jesus ; we affirm our allegiance to him : and apply for more grace to carry the pious intention of our souls into effect. It is the action of a believer under the influence of the gracious power of him that made our hands and our hearts.

Verse 5. *My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness ; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips.*

Remember, brethren, these are the words of a wanderer in the wilderness, accused of treason, and proclaimed an outlaw. A fugitive from misused power, David depended, both for himself and those who were the partners of his perils, for their daily bread, upon the private supplies of personal friendship, or the use of their own bows and spears. For them, while flying from persecution, the fertile fields of Canaan afforded no corn ; nor did the hills of Judah yield to them the fruits of the fold or of the vintage. Behold the Chief, amidst a group of exiles, with a spirit unsubdued by hunger and toil, unruffled by the injuries inflicted on him, leading the devotion of those worshippers assembled at the mountain-side, and singing, under the inspiration of the Almighty, with joyful lips, “ my soul shall be satisfied, as with marrow and fatness.” Say, were *Saul* the king, and his flattering courtiers, more happy in their splendid halls, and at their plentiful tables ? Ah ! how often does religion turn away in disgust from the gilded palace, leaving the occupant troubled with an *evil spirit*, and take up her own abode in the humble residence of the poor and the oppressed, shedding contentment and joy around in abundance. It is, in such a case, that the

lips move with delight in the praises of redeeming love. The consolations of religion are to the spirit as marrow to the bones. The soul is satisfied.

Verse 6. *When I remember thee on my bed, and meditate on thee in the night-watches:* At such time, the soul, satisfied with the goodness of God, is prepared for prayer and praise.

The *active powers* of our minds are more influential, in moving the will, and in fixing our choice, than are outward objects. Indeed, external *motives* cannot produce volition otherwise than as they affect our moral constitution: their strength depends upon the manner in which they are perceived by the understanding, and impressed upon the heart. We are influenced to act, in all cases, accordingly as we are *affected* by the motives presented to us. By the grace of God, the soul is affected in a holy manner; for by the power of the Holy Ghost, is communicated that wisdom or *spiritual understanding*,\* which is essential to the formation of a proper estimate of divine things; and *the preparations of the heart in man* are also from the Lord.† When, of course, the intellectual and the active powers are under this holy influence, the thoughts and intents become religious. The association of our ideas becomes piously affected, and, wheresoever we are, God is continually present with us. The religious man, even upon his bed, thinks of heaven; and, during the silent watches of the night, all within is light and activity, while the soul, abstracted from the concerns of the body, and from the bustle of social life, is left to enjoy undisturbed fellowship with the invisible God. When wearied with the toils of the day, the spiritually-minded man seeks rest and repose: when he retires from those vexations which are so frequently occasioned by the temptations of this present evil world, and looks up to him who giveth sleep to his beloved: after pouring out the complaints of his troubled spirit, in penitential prayers, into the affectionate bosom of that friend, who, touched with the feelings of our infirmities, sticketh closer than a brother: then meditations of God are both sweet and abundant; the soul is nourished and invigorated; and it is filled with serene delight, in which no stranger to godliness can possibly participate.

Verse 7. *Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.*

God is "the help" of his people—therefore they rejoice in

\* Col. i. 9.

† Prov. xvi. 1.

him : and a sense of the divine assistance makes the believer's joy to increase at all times, whether in his bed or at work, by night or by day.

Christians are "aided" by the Lord, in their *temporal estate*. By his providence, they are upheld in being ; they are furnished with the necessaries and the comforts of life ; they are protected from danger ; supported under trials ; and rendered useful members of society, until the purpose of life is accomplished, and death is directed to set the spirit free from its prison and its chains, that it may enter upon the possession of an everlasting inheritance. Christians are also aided of the Lord in their *spiritual estate*. It is he who provided a Redeemer ; who appointed the ordinances of the new covenant ; and who communicates the Holy Spirit, in order to apply the benefits of redemption by means of outward ordinances. He administers assistance according to our need. In youth and in old age, he is the support of our piety. In times of peril and persecution ; in times of error and declension ; in times of revival and exertion ; during conversation with private Christians ; when waiting upon him in the ordinary exercises of devotion ; and at the holy table of the communion of saints, in the celebration of the Lord's supper, God is our help : therefore *let us rejoice in the shadow of his wings*.

*Wings* are those feathered members of the fowls, where-with they fly through the air, and protect their young. The Saviour compares with these the protection which he himself yields to his peculiar people. *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thee, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings.\** The fine idea suggested by this humble object, is not lost upon the saints. When the Almighty is pleased to compare the benefits of his love for men, to the shelter which the tender dam affords her little fluttering family, it is our business, from the same simple fact, to draw an additional motive for rejoicing in him. He is *the Sun of righteousness arising with HEALING in his wings.†* *He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust.‡*

Encouraged by the promise of protection, the saints present their petitions to God, *Hide me under the shadow of thy wings, from the wicked that oppress me, from my deadly enemies, who compass me about.§* They truly are safe who have fled to

\* Matt. xxiii. 37.

† Psalm xci. 4.

‡ Mal. iv. 2.

§ Psalm xvii. 8, 9.

this refuge. If the Father of eternity, who stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, spread around us the wings of his own almighty love, we shall have cause to rejoice, whatever may have been the sacrifices of worldly ease, of comfort, of connexions, and of property, that the interests of true religion required at our hands. The words of a virtuous Israelite, Boaz the son of Salmon, to the pious Moabitess, furnish a satisfactory evidence of this encouraging truth. "Thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, *under whose wings thou art come to trust.*"\*

The meaning of the expression, "*rejoice under the shadow of his wings,*" is this. Enjoying the shelter and the refreshment, provided for those over whom the divine perfections are providentially exercised, there is cause of joy; and as this is the case with all Christians, they all have, with the life and power of personal religion, both safety and comfort. Having thus explained my text, I proceed to show,

## II. THE CONSOLATIONS OF TRUE RELIGION.

There is danger, in treating of the comforts of the gospel, lest sinners should be encouraged to expect them without having fled for safety under the wings of the Lord their Redeemer: and there is some reason to fear too, that the mere love of pleasure may induce unsanctified sinners to seek religion for the sake of the comfort which it is supposed to yield. When we perceive the ignorant and the immoral, the superstitious and the fanatic, exhilarated by spurious devotion; and hear them boasting of their mental satisfaction, as proof of their own goodness, and the goodness of their principles and practice, we cannot but lament the deceitfulness of the human heart, and feel the necessity of divine assistance in all our ways. If any should value religion only for the sake of its pleasures, that man's religion is vain. Those persons, who designedly neglect any part of the divine law; who despise any of the statutes or positive institutions of religion; who hear the word, and read the bible, only for the sake of finding comfort, are certainly far from being actuated by the spirit of faith and holiness. We absolutely protest against that religious comfort which is of immoral tendency, or which

\* Ruth ii. 11, 12.

is consistent with opposition to sound doctrine: We protest against that miserable, and soul-ruining selfishness, which makes immediate gratification of feeling the principal object of pursuit in the Christian life. We must, in respect of mental pleasure, as well as in respect of the supply of bodily wants, urge continually, the Christian rule, *seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*\*

The great business of life, is to glorify God, according to his will revealed in the Christian scriptures. Thus we shall receive from him, the measure of comfort which wisdom sees meet to bestow. While, nevertheless, we disapprove of making subjective enjoyment the ultimate end of your exertions in Christianity; while we require you to hear, to read, to meditate, and to pray for your increase in holiness, and usefulness; while we exhort you to understand, that you may defend, the doctrines and ordinances of the church of God; while we consider these of more importance than any degree of pleasurable feeling, of which your mind is susceptible, we bless the Lord, who in wisdom and mercy, made the path of Christian duty, to be the path of enjoyment. Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. *She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her.*†

Far be it from me, my Christian brethren, to undervalue the consolations of the Holy Ghost. The carnal, selfish pleasure of religionists, for which they sacrifice faithfulness to God, and the best interests of their own souls, and the souls of others, is not to be compared to that delight which heaven imparts to those who suffer loss for Christ, and "endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory."‡ Novices, who have zeal without knowledge, may despise consolations which they never received; and carnal minds, without holiness, may rejoice in pleasures which are sensual or fanciful: but the sanctified soul will never esteem as ignoble, the fellowship of the Comforter; nor become unfaithful and indolent under the exhilarating influence of those spiced wines which *go down sweetly, causing the lips of those that are asleep, to speak.*§ I am confident, that Jehovah, who kindled, with celestial fire, a desire of happiness in every renovated heart, hath consecrated religious consolation; and

\* Matt. vi. 33.

‡ 2 Tim. ii. 10.

† Prov. iii. 17, 18.

§ Song vii. 9.

that believers appreciate the blessing. It is our Lord that said before he left the world, *I will not leave you comfortless.\** Let us say unto him, who is now on high, *in the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul.* "Because thou hast been my *help*, therefore, in the shadow of thy wings will I *rejoice.*"†

TRUE RELIGION IS THE BEST SOURCE OF COMFORT.

It removes from our minds the principal causes of grief and pain—It supports us under those cares which necessarily remain—It spreads out for our contemplation, the most excellent objects—It affects the heart with the purest love—It gives assurance that we are beloved by the best of beings—And, finally, it inspires with the hope of future glory in heaven without intermission, and without end.

When I shall have explained these six assertions, I shall bring this discourse to a close. It will then have appeared to all my hearers, that if religion be represented as gloomy and joyless, she is in fact of a very different character. "She is more precious than rubies, and all the things thou canst desire, are not to be compared unto her. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."

1. By true religion, we are delivered from the principal causes of pain and grief.

Sin is the procuring cause of all the sorrows of life. So long as man retained his primitive innocence, he retained the possession of every enjoyment; and so soon as man is made perfect in holiness, sorrow and sighing shall flee away. By transgression, we have provoked our God; we have forfeited his communion; we have incurred his anger; and have become liable to all the miseries of the present life, and to ruin, without remedy, in the invisible world. *Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you.* The guilt of sin must be punished by the Judge. The pollution of sin prevents our communion with him who is glorious in holiness: "for what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial?" So long as the guilt of sin remains on the conscience, and the power of sin reigns over the heart, man is excluded from every reasonable enjoyment. He is under the curse: and if he dreams of personal felicity, either in this world or in the world to come, while continuing in the state

\* John xiv. 18.

† Psalm xciv. 19.

of sin, he shall find his disappointment when he awakes to judgment and to endless punishment. *The Judge of all the earth shall do right; and he will in no wise clear the guilty.*

Insensibility to this condition does not alter its nature, although it suspends for a time the feelings of pain and sorrow. Stupidity is no source of enjoyment to the intelligent creature. The obduracy of the impenitent will not suffice to protect them against the wrath of heaven; nor will their neglect of warnings deliver them from the danger of eternal burnings. Go on, you thoughtless gospel-despiser! go, and prosper in your own evil ways, until that body shall become infirm with age, or it rapidly sink, by sudden death, into the dust from whence it came. Your thoughtlessness does not arrest the flight of time, nor retard the approach of old age. Your insensibility does not prevent the operations of God's power, nor suspend the administrations of his justice. Let your joyless days pass on to an end; for that end is unmingled wrath. The flames of Tophet, shining high to the glory of divine justice, will bring the most obdurate to a sense of misery without remedy. "There shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

You, who pay attention to serious subjects, will understand me when I repeat the assertion, by true religion we are delivered from the principal causes of grief,—delivered from the guilt of sin, and the dominion of sin, from doubts, and fears, and unsanctified passions.

Mental anguish is more distressing than bodily torture. *The wounded spirit who can bear?* A sense of guilt is, of course, painful in the extreme; and in proportion to the pain, is the joy resulting from a sense of pardon. When we realize our justification, then have we peace with God. Let the guilt of sin be removed; let the power of sin be destroyed, and the effect of divine grace is health and joy to the troubled spirit. *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.\**

A state of doubt is uniformly a state of uneasiness; and in proportion to the sense which we have of the urgency and the importance of the subject under deliberation, indecision of mind respecting it, becomes painful to the heart. Halting

\* Psalm li. 7, 12.

between two *opinions*, is never a desirable condition ; it is still more disagreeable to be at a loss to know what *to do* ; but, when eternal interests are at stake, and the anxious soul is uncertain of the event, it must be unhappy. True religion is the soul's relief from such perplexity. Thereby the truth is brought home with power to the heart ; light is poured out upon our path ; and our personal safety from punishment, and our acceptance with God for celestial happiness, made manifest. *The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him : and he will show them his covenant.\** Those religious men who are, at any time, in heaviness through manifold temptations, receive deliverance from their Redeemer—*whom having not seen, ye love ; in whom, though now you see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.†*

True religion does not secure, for the transgressor, exemption from future punishment, without, at the same time, communicating an influence which destroys the dominion of sin over the soul ; and which will eventually prepare the whole man for an introduction into the company of the pure in heaven. The consolations of religion are in themselves pure, and the whole tendency, as well as design of Christian comfort, is the promotion of holiness of life. Whatever mistakes men of no religion commit upon this subject ; although they are often successful, in separating, in their own fancy, devotional pleasures from growth in grace, yet they shall never have it in their power, in fact, to separate the *joys* of faith, from the *pursuits* of holiness. These are connected in the purpose of God, and in the administrations of the covenant : they are connected in the word of God, and in the experience of the saints. Though it sometimes comes to pass, in God's good providence, that pious men are disconsolate ; it is never the case, that consolation gives encouragement to continuance in sin. On the contrary, one of the chief instances in which Christian joy appears, is deliverance from temptation. "He that ruleth his spirit, is better than he that taketh a city:" and so, when a good man obtains a victory over his own passions, he has, through grace, reason to rejoice.

The troubles of life are, in a great degree, dependent, for the pain which accompanies them, upon the state of our own minds. Morbid sensibility increases every real evil, and imagines evils which never existed. Hasty passions lead to rash opinions and actions : strong and lasting passions impel

\* Ps. xxv. 14.

† 1 Pet. i. 8.



to improper conclusions in reasoning, and to persevering obstinacy in error and vice. Both these are occasions of increasing the torments of unavoidable afflictions,—of multiplying greatly the toils and sorrows of adversity. But to whom shall we go for a remedy? What power can curb the human appetites, or sanctify the passions? God our Maker is our Redeemer and our sanctifier. “Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet-smelling savour—even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish.”\*

You will, therefore, brethren, perceive, that true religion is a corrective of our doubts and our fears; that it restrains and sanctifies all our passions; that, by it we are delivered from the reigning power of sin, and from the condemnation which our transgressions merit; and you will perceive, of course, that the Christian, in receiving and reviewing these benefits, has cause of joy in the God of his salvation.

2. Religion is a source of consolation, because it affords support to the Christian under all the afflictions which he must suffer in life.

We have shown already, that it removes the principal causes of grief—the *guilt* and *dominion* of sin; and so far as it prevails over our innate corruptions, that it also corrects our doubts, fears, and unsanctified emotions and passions. There are, notwithstanding, many troubles incident to the saints, while they pass along, as pilgrims, through this vale of tears. “Many,” said the persecuted Psalmist of Israel, when driven away by Abimelech, from the place in which he sought protection, “many are the afflictions of the righteous.” “We must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God,” is the assertion of Paul and Barnabas to the primitive Christians. Nay, our Saviour himself assured his disciples, both of the unavoidable evil, and the only adequate remedy. “In the world ye shall have tribulation: be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”†

It is perfectly obvious, that no Christian has a right to expect entire exemption from the common calamities of the present world, so long as he continues to live among its in-

\* Eph. v. 2.—xxv. 27.

† Psalm xxxv. 19. Acts xiv. 22. John xvi. 33.

habitants; but we all have a right to expect divine support under our several burdens. This sentiment is unequivocally uttered by the apostle Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians. "There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."\* The writer had experience of this truth, in his own personal trials. In answer to repeated prayers, for the removal of the *thorn in the flesh* which troubled him, the reply of his God to this inspired man is remarkable. The prayer is heard, the request is refused, support is promised, and granted, and the apostle is satisfied: yea, he glories in the advantages of his religion. "For *this thing*, I besought the Lord *thrice*, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR THEE; for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."†

Afflictions of any kind, spring not from the dust: neither do they come by chance without the hand of Providence. He who numbers the hairs of our heads, and without whose permission, a sparrow cannot fall to the ground, distributes affliction around, and apportions his own share to every one of his disciples. To complain of their pains, they have of course no *right*; because, God hath inflicted the blow. He is Sovereign, and he is just: who then can find fault? Christians certainly, have no *reason* to complain of his administrations; for all things shall work together for their good, who are called according to his purpose. Although *man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upwards*, yet all these troubles are under the direction of wisdom and goodness. They are sent by the Governor of the world to communities

\* 1 Cor. x. 13.

† 2 Cor. xii. 7—9.

The "*thorn in the flesh*," *σκολοψ τῆ σαρκί*, is a subject, upon which the ingenuity of commentators has been sufficiently exercised. There is scarcely a disease, or a crime, or a temptation, to which it has not been applied. Every one, anxious to have Paul for a companion in personal infirmity, endeavours to show that his peculiar failing resembles the Apostle's thorn in the flesh. It is sufficient, however, for us to know what has been revealed. The affliction was great—It came in the providence of God—Satan gave it point—Paul repeatedly sought the removal of it—His prayer was not granted; for the affliction continued—It taught him humility—It was the occasion of his receiving more Christian strength and consolation—And in it, at last, the apostle rejoices, as the means of glorifying God his Redeemer.

or individuals, sometimes to punish, and sometimes to prevent transgressions. The man of piety enjoys Christian consolation under afflictions; because he is taught to see their use and their end. They *last but for a moment*, compared with the duration of the soul with God, and they work out for us, by the blessing of heaven, *a far more exceeding, and eternal weight of glory.*

Your sorrows, Christians, are merited; therefore, let no complaint escape your lips: they are administered by your heavenly Father; be therefore still, and know that he is God. He does not afflict willingly; be humbled on account of your sins: He is both just and merciful in what he doeth; be therefore resigned to his dispensations. The chastisements which he inflicts, are profitable for your correction, that you may become partakers of his holiness: they serve to try your graces, and so enable you to ascertain the measure of your faith and your patience, of your benevolence and perseverance: they serve to produce evangelical contrition, the broken spirit, which is to God a pleasing sacrifice: they teach us the vanity of all earthly enjoyments; they wean the affections from the things which are seen, and direct our hopes to him that is on high, where our true treasure is laid up in perfect safety: they make us to feel our dependence upon the providence and the grace of God: and they serve to display, in a remarkable manner, the glory of his power and goodness in our support and comfort. His fellowship is our joy in the midst of trouble. He strengthens the intellect for rational reflections upon our own condition. He directs the desires of the soul to other objects less mournful, but full of improvement and comfort. He increases faith to full assurance; he removes the vail, he reveals his countenance, he speaks peace, and extends his hand for help. *For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.* "I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction, and the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble. And I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. Most gladly, therefore, will I glory in mine infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."<sup>\*</sup>

3. Christianity is a source of joy and consolation, inas-

\* 2 Cor. iv. 16. Habak. iiii. 7, 19. 2 Cor. xii. 9.

much as it furnishes the best view of the most agreeable and glorious objects in the universe.

The exercise of our speculative powers is one of the sources of our felicity. It serves to show the wisdom and goodness of God in the constitution of human nature, that the mere contemplation of his works, without any other property in them, is capable of yielding delight. Every man, however uncultivated his taste, takes pleasure in beholding the beauty, the order, and the magnificence of the plains, and the valleys, and the streams, and the mountains, with all their several productions. Works of human art, also, furnish a rich variety of interesting objects; and our knowledge of them is of course, one of the means of enjoyment in life. The pursuits of elegant literature, the study of the fine arts, and the more severe investigations of science, are known to be sources of high delight to their respective votaries. They afford exercise and improvement to the intellectual powers of the mind. Natural scenery furnishes innocent pleasure and healthful recreation for our senses; and the resolution of a mathematical problem, has been known to communicate a joy bordering upon ecstasy.

These facts, supported by the observation and experience of ages, justify the introduction of speculative enjoyments among the ingredients of perfect felicity. It remains to show, that religion improves and satisfies this part of the moral constitution of man, and is, of course, the system of consolation, which it is said to be.

The man of piety, stands, at least, upon equally high and safe ground with others of similar natural or acquired endowments; and he has, moreover, peculiar advantages, for deriving happiness from the contemplation of the works of God. Moral beauty is confessedly more engaging, than the qualities of lifeless objects. The orator and the poet, and the very peasant, acting as the child of nature, are so sensible of this, that when they speak of rural scenery, they personify every object, and clothe with imaginary life, the plants and the hills which they describe; or at least, connect them with living beings, to enhance their value. The man of piety, like the king of Israel, in the 104th psalm, contemplates these objects as the works of God; sees in them continually a display of wisdom, of power, and of goodness supreme; and finds Jehovah constantly present in every portion of the universe.

He, besides, hath learned, in the Christian school of educa-

tion, that all parts of creation are under a constant superintending Providence; and that the whole divine government is put in the hands of the Son of man to be administered for the welfare of his redeemed. He takes an interest in the concerns of the universe, which prompts him to seek its welfare, and to join as a worker in the service of his God, for the promotion of the good order and the happiness of the creation. He is assured that the whole is in a sense his own, so far as is necessary for his welfare, both in time and through eternity. It is not the poet's fancy, but the word of God, that affirms, *all things are yours*.

He, moreover, contemplates more interesting objects than the whole world, even in this peculiar point of view. He is "come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first born, whose names are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel."\* With such objects before him and around him, he feels himself in company, to which the world yields no parallel. A corresponding elevation of thought, and of sentiments, raises up the mind itself to a sublimity of conception, and a susceptibility of enjoyment, and to an extent of delight which far surpasses the pleasures of the present evil world. His reason is improved, his faith is invigorated, his hopes are confirmed, his consolations are abundant. It is enough.

Brethren, compare the objective delights of the sanctuary with those of the men of the world under the best possible advantages, and you cannot fail, in making up the estimate, to acknowledge the vast superiority of the joys of religion. With you, who give all your attention to the things which are seen, we can occasionally dwell, until we have discovered all that is revealed to you. We pursue with you, the path of letters; we engage with you, with equal ardour, in the study of philosophy; we catch fire from the poet and the orator; we behold with awe, the revolutions of those worlds which Omnipotence hath fixed in the boundless expanse over our heads; and we feelingly trace the changes of empire on earth in all their causes and consequences: we admire the historian of ages which are gone, and listen to the story of more modern date: at the present moment, we pursue the warrior with his

\* Heb. xii. 22—24.

shining steel, and hear the stroke of battle. The schemes of the courtier, and the policy of the statesman, occupy, at times, a part of our thoughts : but we chiefly look up to that hand which directs the thunderbolt ; which tosses about the whirlwind ; which makes confusion and darkness minister to the light and the order of the moral world ; which bears up the pillars of the earth.

The Christian contemplates this world and all things that are therein, as destined to declare the glory of God, and to promote the interests of the church of Christ : by faith, he contemplates objects which are not perceived by the senses, nor explored by the reasoning faculty of man. Such is the testimony of inspiration. *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.* The vision of heaven, with all its never-ending joys—of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is enjoyed by the Christian for his comfort in this life, through faith in Jesus Christ. *We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father : and he that hath seen me, hath seen the Father.* By faith, *Moses endured as seeing him who is invisible.* These are objects which could not have been discovered, otherwise than by revelation. It is no part of the wisdom of this world ; but of the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory. “As it is written, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him : but God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit.”\*

It is moreover to be remembered, that a believing view of these glorious objects is set forth by the apostle, as our comfort in the midst of afflictions ; and therefore ought to be so described in a discourse on the consolations of the gospel. *For which cause, we faint not : while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen : for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.* I say, brethren, a *believing view* of these divine things, which are revealed to us by the Spirit, in order to distinguish *Christian perception*, from the ideas which unrenewed men are capable of forming upon the same subject. The ungodly are competent to think and to reason upon every fact and every doctrine brought to light by the sacred Scriptures ; but they see no form nor comeliness nor beauty in them which should render them desirable. They are blind to the excellency of celestial objects. *The natural*

\* 1 Cor. ii. 6—10.

*man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned; but he that is spiritual judgeth all things.\**

In the Bible we have many striking examples of men who exercised a spiritual understanding of divine things. One instance may now suffice. Paul the apostle was a man of mind, and a scholar. He was versed in the philosophy of the celebrated schools of Greece, and familiar also with their poetry. At the feet of Gamaliel he studied theology, and entered into the most minute observances of pharisaical tradition, with characteristic ardour. But he became a Christian: and gave this testimony—"Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."†

4. Religion affects the heart with sincere love.

The Christian law prescribes love as our *duty* both towards God and towards man. The Spirit of Christ sheds abroad in our hearts the love of God; and we do, in fact, under the influence of his grace, love him who first loved us. The experience of divine power on the soul, exciting benevolent affections, and regulating them in their exercise, is a source of exquisite enjoyment; and, therefore, I introduce the idea, in treating of the comforts of godliness. It is not my purpose to consider this tender passion in its general nature, or in its particular relation to the precepts of revealed religion, except so far as may be necessary to show, that, without the exercise of it, a great part of our felicity must be cut off, and that, in the very exercise of it, under evangelical influence, independently of all calculations upon its subsequent effects, the mind has great satisfaction.

Piety is, undoubtedly, much concerned with the social propensities of the human mind. An enlightened understanding is, indeed, necessary to true godliness; and, in the exercise of a spiritual understanding upon divine objects, much of our happiness consists. Christianity, nevertheless, is not a matter purely of intellection, for it extends to the whole man; and, in the renovation of our mental faculties, it is inconceivable that God the Holy Spirit should neglect entirely the finer feelings of the soul. To every man who has a heart, it is easy to prove, that love is a delightful emotion. Cold and comfortless would be all our habitations did not this sun of social life ray down its light and its joy. It is the solace of

\* 1 Cor. ii. 15.

† Phil. iii. 8.

the connubial state, and the cement of every happy family. It warms the heart of the parent when he embraces the child, and its pulsations are felt by the son when he exchanges the salutation. It is *the bond of perfectness* among the saints ; and in the sound speech of a man of God, it is as *cords* which draw out the soul towards heaven, and bind more firmly than the *bands of a man*.

Like every other passion of the human heart, love is capable of being excited, in an improper degree, and upon unsuitable objects. When thus it becomes unruly and extravagant, it is a source of pain and trouble : for it is strong as death, and jealousy is cruel as the grave, the coals thereof are coals of fire, which have a most vehement flame. This consideration does not, however, militate against the principle of my assertion. Still it is a fact, that the regular exercise of tender affection is accompanied with pleasing emotions. It is still true, that piety tends to produce and to cherish such exercise of the social affections of man. It was to have been expected, in the present depraved state of the moral constitution, that this, as well as other passions, should often prove the occasion of uneasiness : and experience proves, that sometimes it produces vexation, and sickness, and death ; but these instances, in which it becomes a tormentor, go themselves to show the necessity of placing this ardent affection under the direction of piety. Like the element of fire, when it surpasses its proper limits, it becomes a raging enemy and a merciless destroyer ; but, under due control, it not only ministers to our use, but is also essential to our comfort.

It is easy to show that personal religion includes the exercise of love to God and to man. He who made us to show forth his praise, declares both the *necessity* of loving him, to our own happiness, and the *certainty* that all the redeemed shall sincerely love him. He displays the amiableness of his own attributes to our hearts as the proper object of our affections, and his excellency to our intellects as the object of our highest esteem : and he sends his Holy Spirit to teach us and to change us, so that, destroying the aversion to his holy and glorious perfections, which is inherent in our morally depraved constitution, the desire of our souls should be effectually and habitually directed to his own name. That same moral temperament, including both a spiritual understanding and a spiritual sensibility, which is in scripture style called *spiritual-mindedness*, secures, as by the instinct of a new nature provided for this express purpose, the exercise of pure



regard for the Lord and for all his people. *Beloved, let us love one another : for love is of God ; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. And every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him.*

The love which the divine law prescribes, which the gospel of the grace of God proposes and cherishes, which the Holy Ghost communicates, and which the spiritually-minded man exercises, is a principle of action, pure, powerful, liberal, benevolent indeed, but yet, deeply interested in all its objects.

It is *pure* ; for it is both without guile, and unmingled with sensuality. It is neither self-deception, nor deceit practised upon others. It is a reality. It is not the result of an excitement of mere animal nature, or of fancy, associating detached fragments of religion with the love of pleasure, or the love of party, or with the mere natural sympathies of the unsanctified heart : for however common it may be to stir up a passion for religious concerns, by having them artfully commingled with the ordinary feelings of a volatile and ignorant mind, in order to swell the list of ecclesiastical proselytes, the holy affections of a renewed soul are of a different character. The man that loves divine things perceives, with his illuminated intellect, their peculiar excellency, and is affected towards them for their intrinsic worth. The spiritual affection of the saints refuses association with envy, and pride, and vanity, and malevolence, and falsehood—*rejoicing not in iniquity, but rejoicing in the truth.*

It is a *powerful* principle of action. It is *by love* the faith of God's elect *worketh* to the purifying the heart. God's love to his people is effectual in changing them to his own image ; and our love to him when produced, co-operates in assimilating us to the object of our regard. It is not an insignificant notion which exists in the mind only as a matter of cold speculation, or the creature of a phrenzied imagination, occasioning zeal without knowledge : but a moral sentiment instinctively propelling the disciples of the Son of God to rejoice in the true doctrine, to seek his own communion, and to do his commandments.

Christian love is *liberal* : for wheresoever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. It is a generous emotion which dilates the heart towards every object worthy of regard, and which produces a communicative or charitable disposition. It makes a man to think and to act towards all others in proportion to their worth, with true liberality. *O ye Corinthi-*

ans! our mouth is open to you, our heart is enlarged—be ye also enlarged. *Charity suffereth long, and is kind.\**

Love is deeply interested in its proper object. It is a propensity of the heart to that in which we take complacency; and it induces, of course, a desire to enjoy it, as well as goodwill for its welfare. We seek the company of the friend we hold in high regard, while we wish him well wheresoever he is. Of Jehovah the believer says, *My soul followeth hard after thee. My heart said unto thee, thy face, Lord, will I seek.* This is a predominant feature of Christian character. "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple." Psalm xxvii. 4.

Mere benevolence is indeed *disinterested*: for *charity seeketh not her own.*† It is not in the nature of true religion to

\* 2 Cor. vi. 11, 13. and 1 Cor. xiii. 4. Few words in any language have been more egregiously misapplied than the words "charity and liberality." In the scriptural use of the word *Αγαπη*, charity, or more properly love, it is opposed to all unkindness to friend or foe. Its expressions of tenderness beflow, of course, to correspond with prudence and with equity. Liberality is opposed to all contractedness of spirit, particularly meanness, avarice, and envy, and partiality. The man who, because he belongs to a great empire, prides himself for his partiality, and abuses another as *illiberal* who is attached to a commonwealth of smaller dimensions, is himself uncharitable. It is not the man that pleases the multitude for gain, but he who is kind to all according to his power, and values others in proportion to their worth, that is truly liberal. It is not he that flatters the profane, the ignorant, and the immoral, but he that understands and applies the word of God, without respect to rank, to numbers, or to names; and with a regard to the good of others, irrespectively of his own immediate advantage, that practises Christian charity.

It is not charity to be *indifferent* to divine truth. To alter or relinquish any ordinance of God, for the sake of *pleasing men*, can never be dictated by the love of God. Let us be *liberal* with that which is our own; but *faithful*, in what we have in trust from others, especially from the Lord. We owe God obedience in all things. Christian *enlargement of heart* prompts a man to relinquish his own ease and interest, for the sake of doing good to others; but never induces any one to promote his own interest by accommodating himself to all systems of religion, as alike in worth, because they may happen to be alike in popularity. I may desire and promote the welfare of every one, without tolerating error or vice in any one. "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be *Anathema Maranatha.*"

† In applying to *social* affection the term *disinterested*, I am anxious not to be misunderstood. I do not affirm, that a regard to our own happiness, is not a proper principle of action: for I know such an affirmation would not be true. There is in fact no opposition between the principle of benevolence to others, and a regard for our own best interests. In serving God, the saints ever have respect to the recompense of the reward. Total

produce a deterioration of moral character. Its object is to reform and perfect the original faculties of our constitution. Seeing, therefore, that good-will is a *social*, and not a *selfish* affection, it cannot be doubted that Christian charity respects the happiness of others rather than our own. I am ready to admit, indeed, that much of our own felicity depends upon the exercise of our kind affections towards others; and even, that the pleasures of benevolence are not confined to the virtuous, but are often mingled with criminal indulgence: so far, however, is this fact from implying that our kindness of disposition originates in selfishness, that it proves the very reverse. The agreeable emotions connected with the exercise of social affections, before they can be a motive to such exercise, must necessarily imply the existence of the *principle* of benevolence as an ultimate fact in the constitution of man. None can take pleasure in doing a kindness to another if he have not in some degree a benevolent disposition of his own. The gratification resulting from the exercise is evidence that the principle exercised exists. The gratification arising from eating and drinking to satisfaction, is proof of the existence of the appetites of hunger and thirst, as much as the pleasures of music prove the existence of the *sense* of hearing, and of a taste for that fine art.

Those philosophers have laboured under a mistake, who have formed their system of ethics upon the notion of referring all moral action to a principle of self-love; and they are as far from the truth, who exclude from their morality alto-

indifference to one's own true interest, is both unnatural and impious. Yet benevolence is a social affection: I am bound, it is true, to calculate, as a rational creature, what is for my own interest; but in *good-will* to others, the object is not my own interest, but their good, even although I, at the time, should both desire and expect their favour. God is worthy of love, for what he is in himself, and for what he has done for my soul. In loving him, I seek his glory, and the enjoyment of him for ever.

"The similarity between the words, *self-love* and *selfishness*, has introduced much confusion into ethical disquisitions. The word *selfishness* is always used in an unfavourable sense; and hence, some authors have been led to suppose, that vice consists in an excessive regard to our own happiness. It is remarkable, however, that, although we apply the epithet *selfish*, to avarice, and to low and private sensuality, we never apply it to the desire of knowledge, or to the pursuits of virtue, which are certainly sources of more exquisite pleasure than riches or sensuality can bestow. That the word *selfishness* is by no means synonymous with a *regard to our own happiness*, appears, farther, from this, that the blame we bestow on those pursuits which are commonly called *selfish*, is founded, *partly*, on the sacrifice they imply of our true interest to the inferior principles of our nature."—*Stewart's Outlines of Moral Philosophy.*

gether, the principle of regard for our own personal enjoyment. Man is by the constitution of his rational nature, both desirous of personal happiness, and disposed to take pleasure in the happiness of others.\* It is in the immoral or irregular exercise of these distinct principles of action that the evil consists; and true religion corrects the evil. It neither communicates the social affection, nor destroys a regard for personal enjoyment: It finds both existing as active principles in our nature, depraved indeed by sin; and it cultivates and sanctifies them together with all our other active powers, directing their exercise for our own ultimate advantage, and the glory of the Lord our God. *Good-will* to others, as well as *desire of happiness*, is a natural principle of action in man; and when influenced by the power of godliness, it is directed, in its exercise, to all the objects connected with the Christian on earth or in heaven, according to the relation which, in the scheme of providence, he bears to each of them. *Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy strength; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

When any social affection, whether of love or hatred, predominates over self-regard, a man is said to be disinterested. The *passion of resentment* is frequently indulged without regard to one's own private good, and sometimes even when it is obvious that the consequences must be injurious to self-interest. There is in such cases an exercise of DISINTERESTED MALEVOLENCE. Malice is painful: but virtuous disinterestedness is a source of great enjoyment.

The exercise of generous feeling is ever accompanied with

\* "Our benevolent affections are various; and it would not, perhaps, be easy to enumerate them completely. The parental and the filial affections—the affections of kindred—love, or (the attachment of sexes)—friendship—patriotism—universal benevolence—gratitude—pity—are some of the most important."

"Now, as men were plainly intended to live in society, and as the social union could not subsist, without a mutual interchange of good offices; would it not be reasonable to expect, agreeably to the analogy of our nature, that so important an end would not be entrusted solely to the slow deductions of reason, or to the metaphysical refinements of self-love; but that some provision would be made for it in a particular class of active principles, which might operate like our appetites and desires independently of our reflection? To say this of *parental affection*, or of *pity*, is saying nothing more in their favour, than what was affirmed of *hunger* and *thirst*; that they prompt us to particular objects without any reference to our own enjoyment."—*Stewart's Mor. Phil.*

agreeable emotions. And in this constitution, divine wisdom and goodness appear. Kindness to an enemy—pity for the distressed—benevolence to all around you—*supreme love* to God, for what he is in himself; for each of his attributes; for his works of goodness and of grace; and especially for the redemption of our souls by the blood of Jesus—and love to all in whom the Lord delights—these affections, brethren, greatly minister to christian consolation. Let me urge it upon you, therefore, to love, with supreme regard, the Lord your God. He is worthy of infinite love; for every amiable quality belongs to him in an infinite degree. He is the head of the family into which you are adopted. The image of the parent is seen, too, upon every son and daughter. Within the gates of our house in heaven no unclean thing can enter. Oh what delight is contained in the first impressions of a soul upon his introduction into those mansions! The ransomed society to which you belong, dwell in that holy place in the continual exercise of love and praise. *If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels of mercies; fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like minded, having the same love.*

5. The assurance of God's love is to the pious mind a source of great consolation.

The man of feeling cannot be happy without partaking of the regard of him whom he supremely loves. But when there is evidence sufficient, to show that love is reciprocal, the heart is at ease. Jealousy is always *cruel as the grave; and the coals thereof are coals of fire which have a most vehement flame: for many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.*

Assurance of God's love is the highest Christian comfort. It supports the mind under all our sufferings, and it inspires confidence under the most discouraging circumstances. The truth of this remark will be felt by all who enjoy that assurance. We have many fine expressions of such Christian joy as arises from a sense of being interested in the love of God, in the Song of Solomon. "The king hath brought me in to his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee; we will remember thy love more than wine: the upright love thee—I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love."\*

By the Spirit of adoption we are enabled to enjoy the cer-

\* Chap. i. 4. and ii. 3, 4.

tainty of being beloved of the Lord ; and when we find our love to him sincere, we are convinced of *his* love to us. From the effect, we reason conclusively to the cause : and no other cause can account for our attachment to divine things than God's eternal love in Jesus Christ our Lord. We pursue with pleasure the stream to the fountain : and are satisfied with a view of him who first loved us. " That ye, *being rooted and grounded in love*, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height ; and to *know the love of Christ*, which passeth knowledge, that ye may be *filled with all the fulness of God*."\*

The love of God to man is from everlasting to everlasting ; sovereign and effectual for our redemption and salvation. It is not the consequence, but the cause of our regard for him. He loves his people even in their sins : he hates the sin and redeems Israel. *God commendeth his love to us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*. True, our Father in heaven takes complacency in the piety of his saints. His own image in their hearts is not to be viewed with indifference. This is the effect of his grace ; and the divine complacency is in proportion to the extent of its object : he sees and approves what is good according to its measure of goodness. In this sense, indeed, God loves his children in proportion to their attainments in holiness. His complacency is on account of our subjective piety ; but that very piety, is the gift of his sanctifying Spirit, and the effect of his eternal and unchangeable love. This, brethren, is the source of all our joys. " He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love : "† and no subsequent transgression can make the elect of God more vile and unworthy than they were before their second birth. Moreover, all their transgressions were foreknown when he so loved them as to send his Son for their redemption ; and therefore are we taught by an inspired instructor to reason for the perpetuity of his regard, our corruptions notwithstanding. We are assured that his love will effectually destroy at last all these corruptions. " If he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up to the death for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things ? " And is not this a source of consolation ? Is not *he* comforted of God, who sings, in the face of danger, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me ? Has *he* not abundant conso-

\* Eph. iii. 17—19.

† Eph. i. 4.

tion who hurls defiance at every creature in the universe, when personally assured of the Father's love: *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. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?—Neither death, nor life, nor angels—*NOR ANY OTHER CREATURE, SHALL BE ABLE TO SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD *which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.\**

6. Finally, brethren, true religion is a source of consolation, because it inspires us with the hope of salvation in heaven.

*If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.* It is not the expectation of temporary good that supports the benevolent labours of the saints, or fills their souls with abundant joy. The toils and the sorrows of life would be sufficient to reduce them to the lowest state of wretchedness, did they not look forward to the rest which remains for the people of God. In the grave, it is true, *the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest* from bodily sufferings; but religion sheds down her light upon the tomb, and reveals her everlasting abodes, where we hope, not only to be released from our troubles, but to be admitted to pleasures pure, and abundant and perpetual. It is not for the gloom of ceaseless oblivion—for the hope of having his life utterly extinguished, that the Christian endures with patience the ills of life: it is the assurance of permanent existence in the possession of perpetual enjoyment, that satisfies his anxious heart, and animates his pious exertions. Thus, he foregoes the amusement of an hour for the purpose of realizing the perfection of blessedness in heaven—*looking for that BLESSED HOPE, and the glorious appearing of the great God, even our Saviour Jesus Christ.†*

\* Rom. v. 10. and viii. 38, 39.

† I have rendered, in this quotation, the copulative *καί*, *even* instead of *and*, as it is in the common version. It is evident, independently of criticism upon *καί*, that the *glorious appearing*, for which Christians hope, is not that the Father should become visible to our eyes; but that Jesus Christ should come in his glory according to the promise of his reappearance *without sin unto salvation*. He of course, is *the GREAT GOD*, spoken of, in this case, as the object for whom we hope and look.

*Granville Sharp* in his excellent remarks on the use of the definitive article, quotes this text in illustration of his first rule. That rule is, "when the copulative *καί* connects two nouns of the same case, if the article *ὁ* precedes the first and is not repeated before the second, if nouns of personal description, they both refer to the same person." Dr. Whitby, as well as Beza, Broughton, and Hammond, render this text so as to un-

I shall not now anticipate the subject of my last sermon in this series, by describing the perfection of blessedness for which we look to God. You know that hope is a pleasing expectation of some future good in all cases; and that this expectation is exhilarating to your spirits. You know, that in times of dejection and melancholy, from whatever cause, in times of trial and suffering, of whatever kind or degree, celestial hope soothes and comforts the soul. It preserves us from sinking under adversity: It renders our Christian journey under ordinary circumstances, cheerful and rapid; and, when all the other graces are in proper exercise, hope transports us beyond the limits of time to the heavenly city which we desire to see.

This, brethren, is not like the gay and playful fancy of a frivolous and volatile mind. Our hope is a glorious reality—a well-founded expectation of the greatest good—a full certainty of the heavenly inheritance. It is an anchor to the soul—a hope that shall not make ashamed. Resting on the promise of God, which he confirmed by an oath, sworn in his everlasting covenant, by his own unchangeable name, we have an infallible foundation for the *full assurance of hope unto the end*. “God willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have *strong consolation*, who have fled for refuge, to lay hold of the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast.” Why then should we be cast down by the sorrows of the present life? Let us wait patiently until the time of deliverance arrive: or rather, let us pursue our journey through the wilderness, undismayed by the frowns and the threatenings of the enemy. The prize is before us, the High-Priest of our profession is entered, once for all, into the holy place. Thence he shall come once more without sin unto salvation. In the mean time, he is Lord of the universe, he preserves and protects all that trust in him; and we understand the same person by “the Great God” and the “Saviour.” Jesus Christ is here styled the great God. In the original the article is prefixed only before Μεγαλὸς Θεὸς. God the Father is not properly said to appear. The word *Επιφάνεια* never occurs in the New Testament but in application to Christ. Christ is, moreover, emphatically the hope of Israel, the hope of glory. Col. i. 27. and 1 Tim. i. 1. And if authority have any weight in criticism, this is supported by almost all commentators, ancient and modern.



can, by his grace, without becoming liable to the charge of presumption, join in the soul-refreshing song, of the wanderer in the forest of Hareth, "My soul shall be filled with marrow and with fatness. Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice." AMEN.

## THE STABILITY AND PERFECTION OF TRUE RELIGION.

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### SERMON X.

JUDE 24, 25.—*Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.*

ARISE, ye children of Zion, for this is not your rest. On earth you have no continuing city. It is in heaven, the Lord whom ye seek and serve hath prepared his throne, and there he sitteth on the right hand of God, until the time of the restitution of all things. From unbodied spirits he receives celestial homage, and upon them he confers undescribable beatitude. Behold! he is before you, entered upon the possession of your inheritance. It is he, who said, before he left the world, "I go to prepare a place for you—and I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am there ye may be also." Your fathers too, and your elder brethren, are, agreeably to this promise, before the throne, and serve him day and night in his temple—"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more: for the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands, they raise their voices in loud and harmonious strains, saying, "Salvation to our God, which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

He is worthy, too, of our regard. Let us imitate their example, while we pursue our journey to the paradise in which they dwell; and looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life, let us unhesitatingly and joyfully

ascribe to him glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. The only wise God our Saviour is the object of our adoration and the fountain of our happiness: He alone is *able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.*

With these words I intend to conclude this series of discourses on personal godliness. They convey, in one short sentence, an idea of the perfection of the heavenly state—an idea of the period of your transition from grace to glory—an idea of the power by which your spiritual life is preserved unto perfection.

1. All the saints are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation—*He is able to keep you from falling.*  
 2. All the saints, at their death, become absent from the body, and present with the Lord—to *present you before the presence of his glory.* 3. All the saints shall be introduced to their God in heaven, in a glorious state, holy and without blemish—*To present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.*

I shall illustrate each of these assertions; and give you, from the sacred scriptures, additional confirmation of their truth. I have taken care, indeed, to state each proposition in the sound speech of inspiration, which cannot be condemned; and the words of the text itself, so clearly affirm their truth, that you will not be disposed to deny it. With respect to them all, I intend no more than a brief statement of the argument in their support; and I shall then close the discussion with an address to both saints and sinners.

I. All the saints are “kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation.” 1 Pet. i. 5.

The apostle Peter addressed his epistle to those pious people who were scattered abroad over that part of Asia, which lay to the north and west of Syria and Palestine, situated between the head of the Mediterranean and the Euxine seas. In writing to them, *that are in Christ Jesus*, he assumed the principle of their personal piety, and of course addressed them as elected, regenerated, justified, and sanctified men. Speaking of them and of himself, as *saints*, he made use of the expression quoted above, in order to animate their already “lively hope,” assuring them of the nature and certainty of their preservation in holiness. The words are well calculated to exclude as inapplicable all the usual objections urged against the doctrine of the saints’ perseverance.

It has never been asserted, by any one of the judicious

friends of evangelical doctrine, that a man should enjoy salvation in heaven, who was not a saint, at the very time of his departure from the world: and it is likely that no man, whatever his religious creed, would assert, that any person should be excluded from heaven, who was at the moment of his death personally and sincerely pious. This consideration reduces within narrow limits the field of controversy, occupied by the parties who appear in opposition, upon the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. If it is admitted by all, that none but those who are pious at death shall enter into life eternal, and that all who are pious at death shall enter that state, then, the only question worthy of examination is, "have we reason to believe, that those who are, at any time, pious, will certainly be so when they leave the world?" There is no need of debate upon other questions. They may divert attention, and produce confusion of thought; and they may lead to the regions of prejudice and passion, or to implicit faith in the opinions of men; but they cannot afford aid to the candid inquirer for truth. It answers no purpose whatever upon this subject, to say, if we are found doing good and loving God, we shall be safe, and if we are found negligent and in apostacy, we shall be lost. All this is true; but it is in this case irrelevant. The only question is, Have we reason to believe, that they who once loved God, shall always love him?—shall always be preserved from total apostacy?

In order to answer correctly this question, it is necessary to settle certain truths in our minds:—God is the author of piety in every heart—God is able to preserve our piety. If it be at all admitted, that the scripture speaks truly when it affirms that Jesus Christ is *the author and finisher of our faith*, and that *he is able to save to the uttermost*, then there is no longer any doubt, that God is the author of piety, and that he is able to continue, even unto the time of death, the piety which he himself, in his mercy, once produced. The field of controversy now becomes narrower still. Indeed it is reduced to a point. Hath God said, that he will himself preserve piety in every heart in which he hath produced it? If he hath said it, will he not do it? If he promised, will he not perform? If God hath said, that every saint shall continue to be a saint even unto death, the doctrine of perseverance is true; and it is an article of the Christian faith. All will admit, that apostacy is a man's own fault—that they who are wearied of the service of God, are not meet for heaven—that

we are bound always to seek, and to ask, and to knock, and to abstain from all appearance of evil. But still the inquiry is, shall God preserve in a state of grace all whom he hath brought into that state? We know that *he is able to keep us from falling*, if he choose to do so: and the apostle Peter assures us that it is by him we are *kept*—that we are kept, not in unbelief and negligence, but *through faith*—that we are kept, through faith, unto salvation, not by our own power, but *by the power of God*.

Allow me, then, Christians, to put the question to yourselves. It is certainly worthy of your attention. It cannot be the interest of any of you to remain in error with respect to the doctrines of revealed religion. Do you doubt the power of God either to bestow his grace upon the sinner, or to preserve the saints from falling away? I know you do not. It is not asserted by me, that let a man do what he will to oppose God and godliness—that a wicked man shall be saved. I only contend for the salvation of believers: for the salvation of those who live a life of faith and holiness: for the salvation of those who die the death of the righteous. The impenitent and the unbelieving shall certainly perish: but if God hath indeed given us reason to believe that he shall employ his own power in preserving our faith, our piety, our obedience, and our love, against the power of temptation and personal corruption, will you not then permit us to believe in the perseverance of the saints? However diffident of our own strength, will you not allow us to put our trust in the Lord? *Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*

It is a fact, which I have no inclination to deny, that many professors of religion, *who for a while believed*, fall away in time of trial. This consideration may have induced many to deny the certain stability of any professor; but it is more safe to speak of such persons in the style of John the apostle, in perfect consistency with the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. 1 John ii. 19. *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.* Apostacy from a profession of religion is not apostacy from the grace of God; but is rather a full manifestation of the absence of the grace which was supposed to exist in such professor. The views, moreover, which some men take of the nature of true religion, make it very consistent for themselves to fall away from

it: but it is not the grace of God which bringeth salvation that renders itself consistent with the damnation of its subjects. Far be it from me to controvert the opinions of those, who affirm the possibility of *their own* final failure. They, perhaps, may fall and rise repeatedly; and fall away finally, from the imaginary grace, and the erroneous faith, and the spurious devotion, in which they gloried. That kind of grace, which depends upon the will of man, can preserve no man. We contend not for perseverance in any thing except the grace of God, concerning which the apostle Paul expressed the truth, Rom. v. 2. *We have access by faith into THE GRACE WHEREIN WE STAND, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*

Is it then a truth, that the God of heaven hath promised, that all the saints shall persevere in holiness through faith unto eternal life? It is a truth. He hath promised, and he will perform.

EVERY TRUE CHRISTIAN SHALL BE ESTABLISHED IN FAITH AND HOLINESS.

Those persons who are well acquainted with evangelical doctrine, know the truth of this assertion from the other principles of revealed religion. They have ample proof of the doctrine of perseverance, in the doctrine of predestination—of redemption by the blood of the everlasting covenant—of justification by faith in the Surety—and of the covenant of grace itself, ordered in all things and sure. All these doctrines assure us, that God loves his people, and that he will save them from all their sins. But it is my design to give you, from the word of God, more direct proof of my assertion, that it is his will to save every believer. Scriptural declarations—the precious promises—and the description, which the bible gives of personal godliness, prove this doctrine.

1. Scriptural declarations.

John vi. 40. “This is the *will* of him that sent me, that *every one* which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.” Thus spoke the Interpreter of the Father’s will. Thus did he declare his own purpose. It is the will of the Father and the will of the Son to save *every one that believeth*. Yes. This is asserted in positive terms. And will you avoid the conclusion by saying, ‘If one cease to be a believer, the faith which he lost is unavailing?’ I admit the truth of your argument. The conclusion flows from the premises. Upon the

supposition, that faith should be extinguished for ever, and the believer become an unbeliever, no doubt he must perish. Your affirmation is hypothetical; and it is true; but it is inapplicable to the case in hand: the hypothesis is false. Faith is an abiding principle. It is given in the behalf of Christ. It is of grace. It is not of ourselves. And will you allege, that this gift of grace is bestowed upon us, by its Author, without any design to save our souls—with a design to take it away? Read the assertion, Rom. viii. 30. “Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified.” Read these words, and then charge God with unsteadiness, in giving us faith in Christ, with the promise of salvation, when we were sinners, and then depriving us both of the gift and the promise after having become saints: and when you have made this charge, compare your own argument with that of the apostle Paul; Rom. v. 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:” having made the comparison, ask yourself the question, “Is it thus I express my confidence, that he which began the good work will carry it on?”

## 2. Scripture promises.

Psalm xxxvii. 28. *The Lord loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints.* These words are plain and positive. They teach the doctrine of perseverance. They promise that God will preserve the piety which he has communicated. You will not question his veracity. You will not deny his power to fulfil. You must admit the truth; or, for the sake of maintaining your own consistency, have recourse to your former expedient—and call this a conditional promise. You would expound it thus, “the Lord will *not* forsake his saints unless they forsake him: They are preserved for ever by him, unless they turn away from him.” This is another hypothetical affirmation: *He* will not forsake *them*, if *they* do not forsake *him*. This is true; but it is not the whole truth: It is not the doctrine of this text: and it is not relevant against the doctrine of perseverance; for although the *affirmation* is true, the *hypothesis*, upon which it is founded, is false. God promises not only to abide with his people while they abide with him; but he moreover promises to *preserve them with him for ever*. Read another promise, Isa. liv. 10. “For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the cove-

nant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath mercy on thee."

I am utterly at a loss to know what words can satisfy any one who inquires after proof of this doctrine, if such words are not esteemed sufficient to indicate the truth for which they are quoted. They clearly promise unchangeable covenant protection to the children of God. I would ask any unprejudiced man, I would ask every man, who knows the use of language, to point out such a mode of expression as would satisfy him. Tell me what is that promise, which, if it were used in the bible, would convince you that God intended to convey thereby the idea of certain protection to the saints: and I engage to find such promises in the book of God. Tell me what would convince you that God hath promised to preserve the piety of the saints even unto death? What words could be used sufficient to persuade you of his grace and goodness in preserving his people for ever? He hath furnished various forms of expression in order to convey this interesting idea to them who depend upon him. Heb. xiii. 5. *For he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.* Unless you think it impossible even for God to preserve our piety, listen to the following

### 3. Descriptions of Christian stability.

Prov. x. 25. The righteous is an everlasting foundation. Mal. iii. 17. They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels. Jer. xvii. 7, 8. Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is: for he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh; but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.

Upon such declarations, Christians, you may rest in confidence. The saints shall be safe, and we are bound to proclaim it in their hearing, for the glory of him who is able to keep them from falling. It is not, however, to be denied, that imperfections abound in the church, and that all the saints are liable to fall into temptations and transgressions and sorrows. This was foreseen by the Lord, and the case was provided for in his covenant. To express displeasure at sin by suitable chastisement, and, at the same time, to effect the reformation of the sinner, while the love of God remains unaltered and his covenant sure, is the course of treatment determined upon in relation to the transgressions of men of



piety. Psalm lxxxix. 30—34. "If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments: then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips." I take my leave of this subject with stating, that our covenant-head knoweth them that are his. The Lord that bought the church, will not permit the gates of hell to prevail: and the Shepherd of Israel will give an account of all that have been committed to his care. *And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.*

II. The saints are, at death, presented before the Lord in never-ending glory.

Accustomed to disappointment, in our best-laid plans, and vexed, both at our own weakness and at the vanity of our schemes, we are apt to conclude that uncertainty everywhere reigns with her dark and malignant sceptre. Too confident in the day of prosperity, while flattered by success, man, frail, changing man, the child of circumstances, becomes gloomy, fearful, peevish, and desponding in the day of adversity. The painful apprehensions of despairing minds frequently intermingle with the secret exercises of the religious heart; and we are tempted to invest revealed truths with the mantle of uncertainty. When, moreover, we see instances of instability, among those who once made a respectable profession of godliness, we are prone to think that there is no safety for ourselves; our strength decays, and we, for the time, relinquish exertion. Such, however, is the time to try the faith of God's elect. *Let God be true, and every man a liar.* Promises, and resolutions, and exertions of man may fail: Nevertheless, "the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, *the Lord knoweth them that are his.*" The divine omniscience marks every believer; and, like the seal of the ancient architect applied to the foundation of an edifice, designates its object to the use to which it is predestinated. "The only wise God is able to keep from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory."

Death, it is true, stands in our way to the city of rest. He is an *enemy* to fallen men. He is "the king of terrors," who

sends before him diseases of endless variety to subdue the body, and pains and forebodings full of horror to subdue the mind ; who is followed with the winding-sheet and the coffin, with the mattock and the spade, and with the dark and lonesome grave ; who rudely seizes upon his victim, shakes the animated frame until every organ of life is destroyed, and every chord is ruptured, tramples the ghastly corpse in the dust, and expels the spirit from the abodes of men. And whither, O whither is that spirit gone ? It is gone to the righteous judgment of God. *It is appointed unto men once to die ; but after this the judgment.*

Death is, however, the *last* enemy with which the saints contend : and, even *he* is already a vanquished foe. He shall not only be certainly overcome by every believer, but he is already overcome by the believer's Lord, *who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.* The righteous, therefore, *hath hope in his death* : forasmuch as Christ by death *destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and delivered them who through fear of death were subject to bondage.* Having already described the importance and stability of religion in the living, let us now consider its advantages to the dying. He, who supported the pilgrim in the wilderness, will also carry him safely through the swellings of Jordan.

The use of religion to the saints at their death, consists in the support which it yields under mortal disease—the comfort which it affords in the agonies of dissolution—and the hope which it inspires of enjoyments beyond the grave.

The power of godliness is called into action, in an eminent degree, when disease assumes a deadly character. We are, it is true, always sure that death will some day overtake us : but this general conviction does not immediately affect us with apprehensions that the event is at hand. Disorders, in some part of the body, are also so various and frequent, that the hope of recovery is not easily extinguished ; and the saints, while labouring under those diseases which are of *doubtful* character, are not uncommonly agitated with alternate hopes and fears, increased or diminished as they may be affected by the business, and connexions, the duties and expectations of the present life. When, however, the character of their malady has become *unequivocal*, and their speedy departure from the world certain, the anxieties of dubiety are at an end ; and the soul usually attains to more composure. Whether by a sudden certain stroke, or by the total debility

incident to long protracted and incurable malady, the believer is admonished of his approach to the great rendezvous of the sons of men, he is made familiar with the sentence, "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return." I have seen a Christian, who, in the first apprehension of danger from the disease under which he laboured, was gloomy and despondent, become, so soon as his doom appeared inevitable, serene and happy; and giving up his dearest and dependent relatives to the protection of that God in whom he had himself trusted, and whom he now longed to see in the upper sanctuary; his remaining days were devoted to holy meditations and a cheerful hope. Religion had triumphed over the two principal causes of uneasiness under bodily sickness—attachment to the things of this world, and impatience under sufferings.

Piety never appears more affecting or attractive than it does in the dying man, who is supported with the hope of heaven, if God in his providence so orders the case as to leave his judgment uninjured to the last.\* Frequently when bodily strength is rapidly declining, there is a display of extraordinary mental vivacity. There is more patience and resignation, there is more serenity and solemnity, than during the active employments of healthful years. Nor is it only in the quiet and placid endowments of religion, that an improvement has taken place. We often find in the hour of death, a discovery of more intellect, and more ardour than at any former period. Then the light of heaven shines on the soul with greater splendour, and the dying saint reasons more distinctly from the principles of revealed religion—enjoys a more unclouded assurance of faith in the blood of the everlasting covenant—and a more eager desire to enjoy God without intermission. May we not also conclude, from the manner in which some believers undergo a dissolution of the earthly tabernacle, that celestial enjoyment commences before the attendants have pronounced the change from life to death completed? Behold that smile of heavenly resignation and of heavenly hope, blended together on the pallid cheek.

\* God is a Sovereign. He inflicts and controls diseases at pleasure. By sudden death, by disorders which impair the powers of intellect or of speech, and by those alarming epidemics which expel visitants from the bed-side, he may call his redeemed to glory without permitting them to leave behind any peculiar dying testimony to the value of religion, for the instruction and comfort of them who survive. This is an expression of displeasure more against the living than the dead. It indicates unfavourably to those that remain.

The impression remains after the spirit has taken its flight to distant abodes. Perhaps while the bands of life are untying, and the soul is drawing back her energies from organs which she is no longer to employ as instruments of feeling or of action, the Holy Ghost is perfecting the work of sanctification, the Redeemer is revealed from afar, and the angels are in waiting to accompany into his presence within the city of God, the disembodied spirit. Now the soul is gone, having left *the earthly house*, with the vital fire scarcely yet extinguished. Perhaps, too, that shriek, uttered in the midst of dying agony, by another disciple, whose struggle with the destroyer has been more violent, is the last effort of the body, feeling itself forsaken by its immortal occupant, gone to return no more until the morning of the general resurrection. Gone from earth with him who is able to present us faultless before the presence of his glory.

Brethren, it is the hope of happiness and glory at death, that animates our exertions on this side the gloomy valley which we are hourly approaching. Let us inquire whether there is a prospect of enjoying the heavenly felicity immediately after our departure from the world, or whether we are, according to the opinion of some professed Christians, either to sleep in a state of total insensibility, or to spend ages succeeding ages, in some *intermediate place*, after having been removed from this world, before we shall be admitted to the presence of his glory, in whom we have believed. I am aware of what is already your hope, what has been at all times the hope of the saints in respect to this inquiry. I know you expect, so soon as you are absent from the body, to be present with the Lord; but it will be no injury to your peace to examine the foundation of that hope, and to assure yourselves, from the revelation of God, that you have a warrant for your holy expectation. Some men, as if they were themselves anxious to remain as long a time as possible at a distance from heaven, and as if they were fearful, that the saints should be too eager in their desire to be with Christ in his glory, have laboured to unsettle our faith in the doctrine of an immediate admission into the faultless condition of glorified spirits before the throne of the Lamb. Their objections, indeed, cannot be of great weight in the Christian balance, opposed as they are by the word of the living God: but it may be useful, notwithstanding, to lay before you, in a few succinct remarks, the reason of the hopes that we indulge, both as it regards the soul's immortality, and its im-

mediate admission, at the death of the body, into the presence of God.

1. The human soul does not die. It is immortal, and remains in a state of separation from the body, during the whole intermediate time between death and the general resurrection.

I give the proof in six distinct references to the testimony of divine revelation.

*First.* There is an essential *difference* between mind and matter: and the Scriptures assert, positively, the *immortality* of the one, and the *mortality* of the other. Matt. x. 28. *And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul.* These are the words of him who made us, and who redeemed us, and sanctifies and saves us. He knows perfectly the constituent parts which he himself created. He cannot be suspected of a design to mislead our sentiments: and he affirms, not only that the soul is distinct from the body, not only that it does not, in fact, die with the body; but that it is impossible to kill the soul by any created power. So surely, therefore, as the body is capable of death, the soul is immortal.

*Second.* The Scriptures declare that a separation between soul and body takes place at death; and that the body descends lifeless to the tomb, while the spirit ascends to a different place to meet its God. Eccles. xii. 7. *Then shall the dust return to earth as it was; and the spirit shall return to God who gave it.* Compare this text, Chap. iii. 21. *Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward?* The time to which both these expressions refer, is one; the time when "one dieth;" "when man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets." At that time, the body, made of the dust of the earth, returns to its kindred element, and the spirit, distinct in its origin, returns to him from whom it immediately proceeded to animate its body. The soul, of course, goeth *upward*, and appears in the consciousness of its existence in the presence of Jehovah, to *give an account for the deeds done in the body.*

*Third.* The Redeemer, by parable, conveys instruction concerning the relation which our conduct in life bears to our condition immediately after death, and so declares the immortality of the soul.

Luke xvi. 22, 23. *And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lifted up his*

*eyes, being in torments.* The only use which I will now make of this part of the word of God, (for afterwards it must be considered for another purpose) is as a witness against those who maintain that soul and body die together, and that there is no consciousness upon the part of man from the time of death until the general resurrection. The parable conveys very different sentiments. Lazarus the beggar, is carried immediately after death to the place of happiness, *Abraham's bosom*. Whatever may have been done with his body by survivors, angels conducted his spirit to their own happy residence. The body of the rich man *was buried* in due style; but into HELL his spirit was instantly dismissed from the body; and there, he was "in torments." Both the beggar and the man of wealth died: both left their bodies in the dust: both retained their existence, their consciousness, their feelings, and their recollections after their departure from the world: and all this was the case, immediately, while the rich man could say with truth, that his father's house still stood, and that his five brethren were yet on the earth, from which he had been removed.

*Fourth.* The specimen of reasoning which our Saviour gives for the imitation of his followers, settles the question of the soul's immortality.

Matt. xxii. 32. *I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.* This argument was employed by infallible wisdom in opposition to the doctrine of the *Sadducees*, and in support of the doctrine of a future state, and the resurrection, which that sect denied. Indeed, the fundamental principle of the *Sadducees* was, that there is no spirit distinct from matter, and that, of course, the death of the body is the destruction of the living principle in man. The declaration of our Lord is aimed directly at this heresy, and can apply only consequentially to the doctrine of a reunion of the soul and body. "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living:" therefore as God is the God of all the patriarchs, and all the departed saints, although as to us they are dead, and we have no fellowship with them, they are all still living in the enjoyment of God, and their souls are of course immortal.\*

\* It is notorious, not only from Josephus, and other Jewish writers, but from what is said, Acts xxiii. 8. that the *Sadducees* denied the existence of angels and all separate spirits. The words in Luke xx. 38. *For all live unto him*, make it still more evident, that our Lord considered

*Fifth.* The promise of our Redeemer to the penitent criminal, who was crucified at his side, is evidence of the soul's immortality. Luke xxii. 43. *And Jesus said unto him, To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.* This promise secured the salvation of him to whom it was addressed. No time intervened from his death until he entered upon the scene of his enjoyment. To-day, said the Saviour, thou shalt be with me. Was he then annihilated? was the principle of life extinct with his bodily vitality? or did he not rather retain his life and his consciousness while he accompanied the Son of man to the Paradise of God?

*Sixth.* The hopes of inspired men are an infallible guide to our hopes. They rested not upon a peradventure, like the visions of false philosophy, but upon the word of the living God. These hopes did not contemplate the destruction of their spirits by death, or their descent to the grave, to arise no more until ages after ages had rolled over their inanimate souls. They looked at death only as a valley through which they were to pass to immediate glory and immortality. The Apostle Paul will serve as an example. 2 Cor. v. 1. *For we know that, if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*

Thus have we ample evidence, that the dissolution of our earthly tabernacle does not terminate our existence. We shall outlive the body; for we pass through the gates of death to the celestial edifice where we shall abide for ever.

You perceive, brethren, that, in this argument, I have confined myself to the Scriptures for proof satisfactory to the enlightened mind. If I have avoided the controversial ground, which vain philosophy prefers, it is not because I feared to meet a host too powerful in combat. If I do not rest the proof of my doctrine upon the decisions of human reason, I am not unwilling to meet and to expose, when it is requisite,

this as all that was incumbent on one, who would confute the Sadduces, to prove, namely, that the soul continued to live after the person's natural death. If we should overhear one man say to another, "I wish to have you in my service, and to be your master, as I am your father's master," should we not conclude that the person spoken of is alive, and his servant at this moment? What seems to have occasioned the many unnatural turns that have been given to this argument, by later commentators, is solely the misunderstanding of the word *αναστεις*, through not attending to the latitude of signification wherein it was often used in the days of the Apostles.

I have selected these remarks from an excellent and learned note upon this text, in *Campbell on the Gospels.*

the objections of the Materialist, who treads in the steps of the Sadducees, in denying the existence of spirits. But we must, at present, leave the disciples of that school to go on in their attempts to make matter conscious of its own existence; to render it an intelligent and sensible being, capable of feeling, of reasoning, and of voluntary action: we must leave them to confound the distinction between body and mind, in their own visionary schemes of reform, and turn your attention to another doctrine, equally unscriptural, and alike opposed to the hope of the saints—that which represents the soul as excluded from heavenly felicity until the resurrection. We must illustrate and defend the sacred truth, that,

2. “At their death, the souls of believers are made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory.” There is no doubt that *God is able to present his saints faultless before the presence of his glory*, immediately on their departure from the world; and, of course, our only inquiry is, has he said that it shall be done? The following passages of Scripture will show that our faith rests upon sufficient testimony.

*First.* Phil. i. 21. *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* This inspired writer cannot be charged with miscalculation with respect to futurity. His religion was sincere, and of his salvation he was long assured. He lived by the faith of the Son of God; and enjoyed in the knowledge of Christ, a degree of felicity, compared with which, he esteemed all other enjoyments as loss; but he affirms that death would be to him a *gain*. He declares, verse 23. He had a *desire to depart*. Most assuredly, therefore, the place into which he expected to go, must be a place of great happiness. What that place is, he leaves the pious to find out, from the company which is to be enjoyed, and from its superior excellency—*having a desire to depart, and to BE WITH CHRIST, which is far better*. Now it is obvious, that the advantage of death consists in the soul's immediate admission to the *place* in which the Lord our Redeemer dwells, and of which, he says himself in his intercession, *Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, BE WITH ME WHERE I AM; that they may behold my glory*. Of it he said, too, *I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am THERE YE MAY BE also*. Is it necessary to tell to any Christian that this place is heaven? Or may we not apply to all the saints the words of our Saviour, “Whither I go, ye know, and the way ye know:” whatever ignorance of that place may have



been plead by Thomas, before Christ's departure, none can be ascribed to the Apostle Paul after his own descent from that very place where he saw his glorified Lord. Is it conceivable then, that, after having said, "for to me to live is Christ," he would have added "to die is gain," had he not expected to pass through death forthwith into the presence of his Redeemer in glory? If you have any doubt of the Apostle's meaning, read another of his declarations in the name of the saints.

*Second.* 2 Cor. v. 8. *We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.* These are the words of a man of sense, and a man of piety. He had no idea of an intermediate place, neither earth nor heaven, where, after having lost his body, he should also, for thousands of years, lose the company of his Lord. He was willing for no such exchange: but he was willing to be absent from the body in order to be present with the Lord. For this inclination he had given, in the first verse, a very satisfactory reason: *we know*, said he, whatever others may dream of *different* places, *that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, ETERNAL IN THE HEAVENS.* Yes, in the heavens. There, he desired, and he hoped to enter.

*Third.* The promise of our Saviour to the thief on the cross, already quoted for another purpose; and, indeed, all the passages, referred to in support of the soul's immortality, furnish an evidence of the immediate admission of the departed spirits of believers into those mansions in their Father's house which the Redeemer hath prepared for them. Luke xxiii. 43. *To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.* This promise indicates mercy to the penitent. It is an answer to the prayer, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." Whither the Redeemer of course was himself to go, thither this convert was to accompany him, and that *instantly* upon leaving the body. Many learned critics, well skilled in heathen mythology, better, perhaps, than in the Christian theology, might still use with great propriety the words of Thomas, "we know not, Lord, whither thou goest:" for they deny that the soul of Jesus departed into heaven, although he so frequently informed his disciples that he was going to their Father's house. In vain an attempt has been made, by referring to the opinions of the heathen, or to the popular errors of ignorant Jews, to identify the promise of Christ, relative to a future state, with the Elysian

Fields of the ancient poets. The Scriptures teach us where to look for the Paradise of God. There the Apostle Paul had visions and revelations of the Lord, when he was caught up to *the third heaven*; for he gives to the same place the name also of Paradise. 2 Cor. xii. 4. Our Lord himself clearly explains, what he intended by Paradise, in the Revelation given to John the Divine. Rev. ii. 7. *To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the PARADISE OF GOD.* Heaven is the reward of the Christian conqueror. It is the promise which the Redeemer proposes and fulfils. It is that place of purity, of rest, and of enjoyment, of which the garden of Eden was a remarkable type. And there stands, on either side of "the river of the water of life, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb," the true TREE OF LIFE, yielding its fruit, and bearing leaves for the healing of the nations. Into this Paradise\* the Redeemer admits his redeemed sons and daughters: there he now dwells, and ever shall continue to dwell: thither he entered, on the day of his death, taking the penitent thief along with him into his kingdom.

*Fourth.* The parable of Lazarus and the rich man excludes the doctrine of an *intermediate place* for departed spirits, between earth and heaven, or hell. The rich man, immediately after death, Luke xvi. 23. *in hell lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and said,* 24. *I am tormented in this flame.* Here was punishment, and of course, a previous judgment: the soul must, therefore, after death, according to the Scriptures, have appeared before the judgment-seat of Christ to receive according to the deeds done in the body. †

\* Παράδεισος, Paradise, is from the Hebrew פֶּרֶדֶס, and signifies a "garden enclosed." It is used in the *Septuagint* for the garden of Eden. Considering the evident allusion to this garden, wherever the word occurs in Scripture, it is astonishing that Christian commentators should prefer taking their ideas respecting it, rather from the Pagan *Elysium*, than from that distinguished type of the heavenly beatitude.

† Ἄδης, or Αἰδης, as the word is spelt in *Homer* and *Hesiod*, signifies *invisible*, from a neg. ἰδεν to see. It is a general term for the place of departed spirits: as if we should say, such a one is gone to the invisible world: he is dead: he is gone to the world of spirits. This expression leaves it undecided whether the soul is gone to heaven or hell: but, if this indefinite term be connected with other terms, which limit the sense to the place of future punishment, then hell is of course pointed out. *Dives* was sent to Ἄδης, certifies, that he is gone to the world of spirits—the *invisible* world: but, when it is added *being in torments*, we know that he is in the *place of misery* beyond the grave; and is punished for his sins in hell fire. The Greek word, Γέννα, *immediately* denotes this place: Ἄδης denotes it only in certain connexions. This is all the difference

The *Beggar*, also, immediately after death, is carried by angels to *Abraham's bosom*: And of course, if the Father of the faithful be in heaven, all his children enter the same place upon their departure from the earth. But if Abraham be not yet admitted to the place of happiness, he has been exceedingly mistaken, for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God: His faith has not been, "the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen." The Apostle Paul, too, must have misunderstood the nature of the case, for he describes the patriarchs as expecting and receiving heaven. Heb. xi. 16. *They desire a better country, that is, an heavenly*: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for he hath *prepared for them a city*. Surely, the city which he hath prepared, is the one they desired to see—the heavenly Jerusalem. This is the promise of the covenant, even the heavenly inheritance; and although Abraham and the other patriarchs did not live on earth to *receive the promise of Christ's advent* in the flesh, they were persuaded of its truth, and died in the faith of its accomplishment. They are, therefore, members of the general assembly, whose names are written in heaven. It was in the faith of such enjoyment after death, that the Old Testament saints served their heavenly Father, and sang his praises. *Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory*. It was in the hope of admission, immediately into heaven, they breathed their last, and surrendered their spirits to God. Psalm xxxi. 5. *Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth*.

*Fifth.* I conclude my argument with facts. When the Scriptures assure us that certain persons are departed from this life to suffer punishment in the world to come, they of course assure us, that immediately after death, the soul is judged, and sentenced for the sins committed in the body, to the place of perdition, which we call *hell*: We are accordingly certain, that there is no receptacle for the departed sinner, different from that pit of perdition. When, too, the Scriptures represent any who have departed from this world as admitted into everlasting happiness, we know that they are in heaven; because heaven is nothing else than the place in

*Hell* is the place, in which damned spirits suffer punishment for their sins, according to the righteous judgment of God. It is no purgatory; and there is no escape from its burning torments. The rich man in the parable, found himself in that place after death. He was judged: he was punished for his sins: he was in torments: he was without remedy.

which God and Christ dwell in glory; and in which the saints are rewarded according to their works, through the grace of God. Now it is a fact, that certain persons do enjoy that happiness: and we know, certainly, that some suffer punishment in hell.

*Judas Iscariot is "gone to his own place," to suffer for his transgression; and that place was specified by the spirit of prophecy. When he is judged, let him be condemned—as he loved cursing, so let it come unto him; as he delighted not in blessing, so let it be far from him. Pour out thine indignation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them. Let their habitation be desolate. Let death seize upon them, and let them go down quick into hell.\** Judas is gone to HIS OWN PLACE: he is dead, judged, condemned, and cursed, with wrath to the uttermost: and what is that place? if this description suits any other place than the place of future punishment, then words have no meaning. Observe, that it is not upon the meaning of any one word, that I rest the argument; it is upon the description of the place from several Scripture passages: it is from the account given of the condition of the traitor, that I assert the fact, the soul of that man is now in hell. *All the wicked shall be turned into hell.* Psalm ix. 17.

Contrast his case with that of Stephen, one of the first deacons, and you will be ready to say, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." We may assert as a fact, what Stephen expressed as a prayer under immediate inspiration. *But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God—and they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.†* This prayer is the same with that employed by the saints of old. Psalm xxxi. 5. *Into thine hand I commit my spirit: for thou hast redeemed me.* Indeed, the same words were used by our Lord himself on the cross, when he dismissed his own soul to the Paradise of God. These several cases mutually illustrate each other.

Behold then, my brethren, the first martyr to the resurrection of the Son of man, suffering a cruel death for the testimony which he held. His eyes are directed, not to a prison in the bowels of the earth, where some men, as if reluctant

\* Acts i. 20. Psalm cix. 6—17. and lxi. 24. and lv. 15.

† Acts vii. 59.

to think of heaven, expect to go at their own death: not to Purgatory, or an earthly or a sensual paradise; not to the Elysium of heathen romance; not to some probationary intermediate place, in which he was to dwell in separation from his God through revolving ages: no, Stephen "looked up steadfastly into heaven," expecting to be present with the Lord instantly when absent from the body; and in the full assurance of hope, he said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit"—and *he fell asleep*. His body is long since mouldered into dust; but there, his immortal spirit dwells on high in the company of the Son of man in heaven.

The Revelation, made by the Apostle John, while he spent his solitary days upon a desert island, introduced him to a more familiar acquaintance with the celestial regions than falls to the lot of other men on the earth. Heaven did not appear to him as an empty place, in which the glorified Redeemer displayed his majesty and beauty, without any of his redeemed sons and daughters being present with him to behold his glory. It did not occur to that venerable divine, neither was it shown to him by the visions of God, that the spirits of just men separated from the body, from sin, and from all infirmity, purchased as they are by the precious blood of Christ, in order to enjoy the kingdom of heaven, should have been limited to privileges inferior to those of the angels, and be excluded from a sight of heaven where their covenant-head rules with boundless power. Upon the very contrary, he repeatedly beholds the souls of departed saints in heaven; in the high fellowship of angels; in the immediate presence of God, in the fruition of undescribable felicity; and very near to their Lord, who combines the sensibilities of an immortal man, with the official dignity to which he is exalted—who is at once their God and their brother. Repeatedly he sees them before the throne: repeatedly he hears their song; repeatedly he witnesses their happiness. He is given to understand, that they feel an interest in the condition of their brethren in this world; that they pray for vengeance upon the enemies of righteousness; that while they are themselves clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands, they rejoice in the progress of religion among the inhabitants of this world, under the administration of Messiah their Prince.

Not only are Enoch, and Elijah who *ascended up into heaven* in a whirlwind, and those saints which arose from the grave, at the same time with Christ himself, soul and body

already in the New Jerusalem, the holy city; but lo! a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne and before the Lamb. And he that sitteth on the throne, shall dwell among<sup>o</sup> them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. But I must stop.

Here, brethren, I rest the cause for which I have been pleading: and I trust that your hope of heaven, immediately upon the dissolution of your tents of clay, shall stand secure upon the foundation of God. Already I have been imperceptibly led by the discussion to ground which more properly belongs to the last head of my discourse. I lay it now before you.

III. All the saints shall be introduced to their God in heaven, in a glorious state, holy and without blemish. They shall be presented "faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy."

Arranging our ideas of the heavenly felicity under the expressions of the text, it is necessary for us to turn your attention to the *place*, the *character*, and the *enjoyment* of the saints through eternity.

1. The *place*, in which the saints find final repose, is HEAVEN.

It is very evident that the earth never was intended by the Creator for the permanent residence of man. Under no conceivable economy could it afford a place of everlasting habitation, much less could it yield adequate support to all the generations of the sons of Adam. If all who had ever lived in the world were alive at the present moment, seeking rest and nourishment, they would seek in vain: And upon the supposition that the first man had stood his probation, and had obtained his reward—confirmation in innocence, both for himself and all his posterity, neither the bowers of Eden,\* nor the boundaries of the world, would have been sufficient to furnish for them either food or dwelling-place. It must therefore have been intended in the creation of man, that whether mortal or immortal, he must change

\* The Garden of Eden, or the PARADISE, as it is rendered in the Greek, by the Seventy, Gen. ii. 8. was itself a *symbol* of Heaven—a seal of the first covenant—the covenant of works.

his residence. Creative power, exerted in boundless space, is sufficient to assure us, that a suitable abode would not in any case be wanting.

We are not left, however, to inference upon a subject of so much importance. He who brought to light life and immortality, has revealed to the faith of redeemed men an ample inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. Unprofitable speculation, about the *part of space* which is named *heaven*, is neither cherished nor gratified; but we have abundant information to cherish our hopes, and encourage our exertions. The wisdom and the might displayed in the arrangements of the terraqueous globe, as to its own several parts, and its relation to other parts of the visible system, give reason to believe that the place of final rest will abundantly accommodate its numerous occupants. The beauty and the grandeur appertaining to the works of nature, and which are already exhibited to observation in a world constructed for subordinate and temporary use, leave no ground to doubt, of the transcendent glory of those holy regions which are brought into existence for the highest possible purpose, and for duration without end. Whatever may be the distance of the heavens from the earth, whatever may be the direction in which these mansions of God lie from the present abode of mortals, we know there is a place in the universe more excellent than all others, in which Jehovah hath prepared his throne; where the Son of God now dwells with his glorified humanity; where the angels of light, and the spirits of just men made perfect, already reside; and to which, brethren, your hopes piously and warrantably aspire. That place is heaven. A thousand holy ideas rush upon the mind at the sound of its name; ten thousand unanswered questions suggest themselves respecting it; *for we know but in part, and we prophesy in part: but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.*

2. The character of the saints in heaven is *faultless*. We shall never fully understand the extent of the evil consequent upon the transgression of the first covenant, until we are completely delivered from its effects. When we enter the building of God eternal in the heavens, sin and sorrow are for ever done away. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: We walk by faith, not by sight. When, however, we become absent from the body, all the pains and the perplexities, all the labour and the toil of this state are

at an end. Time, too, shall be redeemed from sleep, from vain amusement, from the industry necessary to the preservation of the body, and from sickness, and indolence; and that time devoted to the intellectual and moral employments, suited to a glorified state. All error of judgment, all uncertainty of recollection, all immorality of inclination, all impurity of thought, and misapplication of affection, shall be at an end. We shall see as we are seen, we shall know as we are known; the image of God on the soul is complete.

PERSONAL RELIGION IS PERFECT. *And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.*

3. The *enjoyment* of the saints in heaven, is *complete*. They enter into the presence of his glory *with exceeding joy*.

Here is the *rest* which they expected, the *haven* which they desired to see. It is the termination of every evil; the consummation of all their hopes; the *end of their faith*, even "*the salvation* which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." The *place* furnishes ample enjoyment. Their own *state* prepares them for enjoyment. The *constant communications* made to them personally by their God, through Jesus Christ the head of heavenly influence, in knowledge, in love, and in glory, are a never-failing supply of every thing which is desirable. The *company* into which they are introduced, gives to their social nature its proper enjoyment; and in every conceivable point of view, and in many respects at present inconceivable, their bliss is perfect. The recollection of their earthly journey, now that they are at rest, is a source of high satisfaction. Their very transgressions, now, that they are blotted out, compared with their sealed pardon in eternal friendship with God in their own nature, appear at once as the occasion of brighter discoveries of the perfections of God, and of a nearer approximation, upon their part, to him who loved them, and still loveth them with an everlasting love. To meet, in heaven, their fellow-pilgrims; to recognize the friends, the fellow-worshippers, the fathers or the children for whose loss they mourned, and who mourned for their loss, when separated by death on the earth, is an idea replete with tender delight. Yes! brethren, there shall your Pastor have you as a never-fading crown: there shall you rejoice in us, who aided you in your journey towards your home. "Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the



living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly, and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.”

## CONCLUSION.

Allow me then, brethren, whether saints or sinners, to address you as men of understanding, and of feeling. I shall make no remarks, the truth of which you will not immediately acknowledge: and I shall leave you to draw from these remarks your own inferences. To yourselves, to each of you, the course of conduct which shall be pursued, is infinitely important. The mind is distinct from body. The soul outlives the outward man. It shall live for ever. Capable of progressive improvement, and of enduring enjoyment, it is reasonable to be concerned for its future destiny. The expansion of its faculties, the invigoration of its powers, the augmentation of its felicity, are objects worthy of regard. The happiness of a day is more important than the pleasure of an hour—the felicity which is without end, is more to be desired than transitory delight. What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man either give or take in exchange for his soul? there is no admissible comparison. He is less to be detested, himself and his condition is less to be deplored, who stakes in the desperate game, his whole inheritance upon a throw, than he who foregoes the perfection and the enjoyment of everlasting life for the delusory pleasures of a transitory world.

The fashion of this world passeth away. See the index which marks the passing time; it is never at rest. Eternity is approaching. Grey hairs indicate decline; wrinkles betoken debility: even youthful life is suspended over the tomb by cords of slender texture. Beneath that tomb there is a deeper abyss, a bottomless pit: and what prevents your fall into irremediable wo? I hear the voice of Mercy, that voice which said, “let there be light.” It speaks of the soul that sinned, and deserves to suffer, “Deliver him from going down to the pit, for I have found a ransom.” It calls upon the wanderer to return, upon the labourer to repose, upon

the dying to live. It is the voice of my beloved. Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly! "Now, unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory, and majesty, dominion, and power, both now and ever. AMEN."

THE END.

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