

SCRIPTURE EMBLEMS
OF
GOD'S PEOPLE.

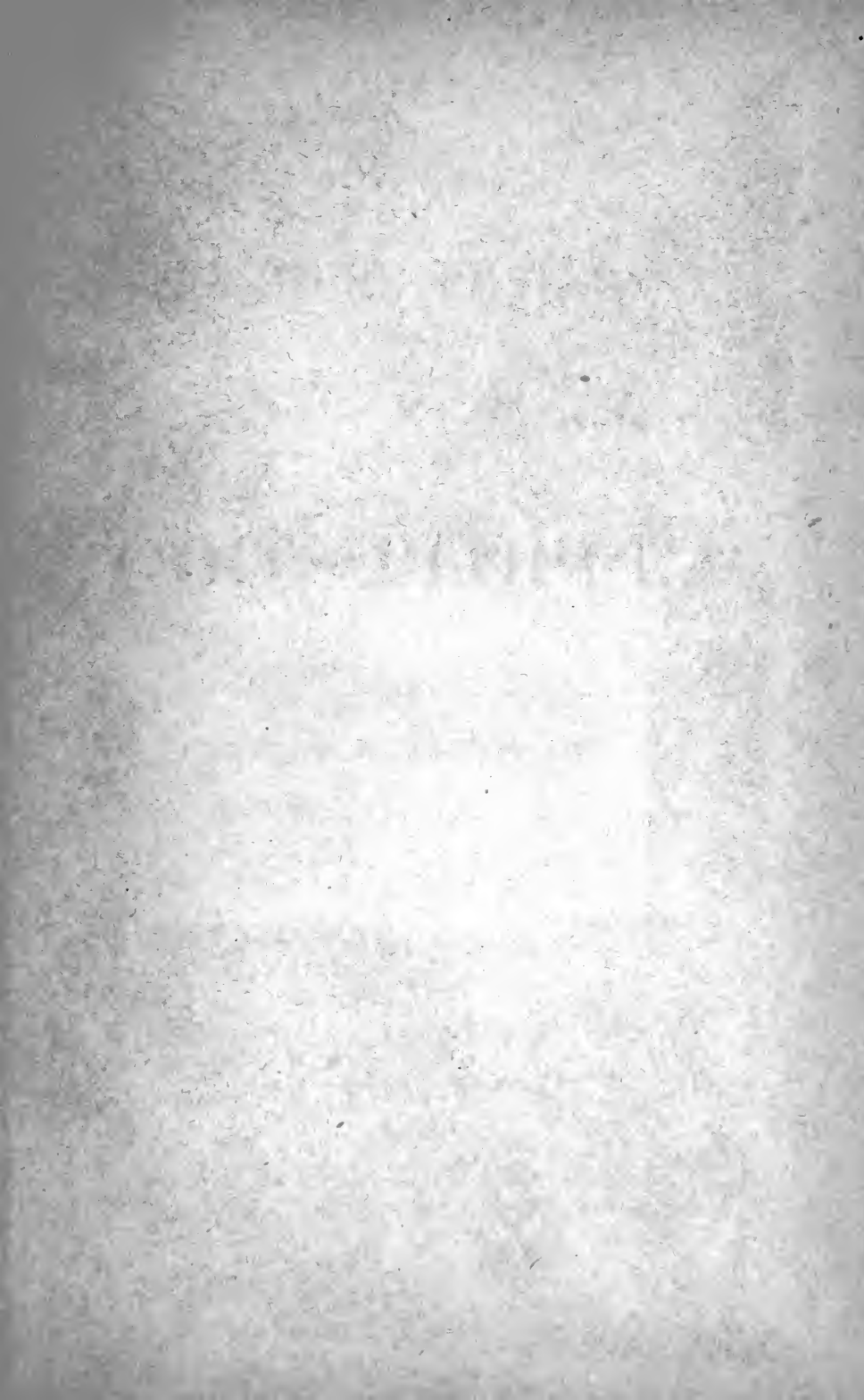
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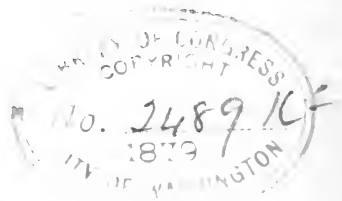
SCRIPTURE EMBLEMS

OF

GOD'S PEOPLE,

BY

REV. T. E. SPILMAN.



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PREFACE.

The Scriptures abound with illustration. Natural things are chosen to represent spiritual things. The things which are not seen are compared with things which are seen, and in this way we gain a knowledge of divine things. When God is called a "Father," we obtain some idea of his kindness and the care he exercises over his people. When Christ is called a "door," we are taught that by him we must enter into life. When man's days are said to be "as grass," we are taught the brevity of human life.

In the following pages we have endeavored to unfold and apply some of those passages in which figures of speech are used to represent GOD'S PEOPLE. These passages teach us something of the mission and the privilege of the Church of Christ. They teach us how "to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever."

That these pages may help some of God's people to see more clearly the duties of their high calling, cheer and encourage them in their work for the Master, and lead them into higher and sweeter contemplation of divine things is the prayer of their servant.

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SCRIPTURE EMBLEMS

OF

GOD'S PEOPLE.

CHAPTER I.

GOD'S PEOPLE AS SALT.

Ye are the salt of the earth. Mat. 5:13.

It is plainly taught in the word of God that a man, redeemed by the blood of Christ and made an heir of everlasting life, has something more to do than merely to take care of himself, something more to do, even, than to take care of his own soul.

It is according to the spirit of gospel religion that those who have experienced the power of pardoning blood and sanctifying grace should be interested in bringing a perishing world into the same happy experience. The Psalmist said: "O taste and see that the Lord is good."

When the apostle Paul was arrested in his mad career and brought to a saving knowledge of Christ he did not sit down the remainder of his life and shout hallelujahs of praise because

Saul of Tarsus had his name written in heaven. He sought to bring others into acquaintance with the Savior who had redeemed his own soul from death. He says: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved." The apostle John says: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth;" and when Jesus Christ would express the yearnings of his heart for the wicked city he gave utterance to his compassion in the words, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

The spirit of Christ and of his religion is a spirit that seeks to save the world. "Ye" says Christ, speaking to his disciples, "are the salt of the earth." As though he had said, "Your mission is to save the world. As salt has a preserving or saving influence upon the substances with which it comes in contact, so are you designed to exert a saving influence upon the world. As instruments in my hand you are to purify a sin-corrupted world; you are to preserve it from error, bring it to a knowledge of the truth, and point out to

it the way of salvation. What salt is to newly slain flesh, preserving it from corruption and making it savory and acceptable, you must be to a world slain by sin and under the power of moral corruption."

There are two ways in which the church is "the salt of the earth."

I. BY THE SILENT POWER OF A HOLY LIFE.

II. BY CHRISTIAN ACTIVITY.

I. THE SILENT POWER OF A HOLY LIFE.

We do not mean that a holy life is silent or inactive, for we expect such a life to abound with Christian words and works. But the influence which goes out from the *character* of a man of God, aside from the influence of his Christian activities, is not to be overlooked.

The patience, the self-control, the quiet in time of trouble, the firm and steadfast purposes, the pure and lofty motives, the self-sacrificing spirit; in short that which goes to make up the character of a faithful Christian has its influence on the world. A child of God, who is "a living epistle known and read of all men," is a power for good in a community,—a power for good even when his lips are closed and his hands are folded. The very *presence* of a man of God is a rebuke to sin.

Christ has promised to be with his people "to the end of the world," and he goes with them and gives power to their holy lives. They are to the community what salt is to food. They have a saving influence upon society. Even those who boast of their sinful acts, and "glory in their shame" among those of their own kind are apt to be awed and restrained in the presence of those whose lives have in them much of the savor of the gospel.

We enjoy having the sympathy of those about us in what we do and say, and a profane man knows that in his profanity he does not have the sympathy of the reverent. He is not sustained and encouraged in his sin by the thought that what he says is gratifying to the company. He does not catch inspiration and encouragement from their eyes and their smiles to profane the name of their God. He knows that such language puts him at a discount with these good people. If he cares for his reputation he is apt to refrain from taking God's name in vain before those whom he knows use it reverently in prayer and praise.

If a man has a circle in which he uses and enjoys obscene language there are other circles in which he puts a bridle upon his tongue. He is not apt to use vulgar and unclean dia-

lect in the presence of the pure and the chaste, though they utter no words in condemnation of the sin. Something seems to make him feel the unsuitableness of such language in the ears of those who love and practice purity. The silent presence of a consistent Christianity is a powerful preacher to the ungodly. It helps to stay the fearful tides of corruption that would overflow the world. It is salt to the society where it is found.

God's people are in danger of losing sight of the power there is in a high-toned Christian character. Wickedness flies from the presence of a high-toned, strongly marked and consistent Christianity. There is no congeniality between guilt and holiness, and grace can out-look sin.

When there is but little about one's Christianity to make it distinctive; when it has but little of the savor of Godliness, then wickedness may dwell quite comfortably by its side. Corruption might be found resting easy under the eaves of the church.

If salt should lose its savor it would be powerless to prevent corruption and decay. No matter into how close proximity it might be brought with food it could not preserve it from corruption. "It is thenceforth good for

nothing but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.”

If Christianity is to exert a saving influence upon the world by virtue of its *character*, it must *have* a character. Salt has a character. It is not an insipid, tasteless, undistinguishable substance. It is not negative in its nature. You know when you put salt into your mouth, it immediately makes its salt nature felt. Its presence is at once discoverable, and you discern too, when it is upon your tongue, that it is salt and not something else.

Christians must have this distinctiveness and positiveness in their Christianity if they desire their characters to exert a saving influence upon the world. Did the church but possess the graces of Jesus Christ,— his patience, his kindness, his love, his submission to the Father’s will, would not wickedness be put to the blush and society be saved from many a plague spot of corruption?

There is strong Christianity and there is weak Christianity. There is Christianity which permeates society with good influences by the very force of its character. Men can see in it a remedy for the evils of sin. They can see the victory it gives the brutish over their evil passions. They can see the rest and com-

fort it gives in times of sorrow and distress. They can see the victory that the grace and blood of Jesus Christ give to the dying Christian; and these things are calculated to be "a savor of life unto life" to him who beholds them in God's children.

II. BY CHRISTIAN ACTIVITY.

God's people, by the Christian *activities* which they put forth, are "the salt of the earth."

The influence which goes out from a holy living does not measure all the Christian's power for good in the world.

The *works* of God's people make them to be a savor of life to dying men. By their appeals to men and their prayers to God they are the salt of the earth.

The power of speech is a great gift. An eloquent tongue can sway an audience of thousands by the power of human speech. Thought is rapidly and impressively communicated by human voice. Words are little things, but they are fraught with mighty consequences. They kindle or allay passion, they engender love or hatred, they convey truth or falsehood, they impart pain or pleasure. At one time they are barbed arrows; at another they are balm for a wounded.

spirit. They lead souls into dangerous error and they guide souls into truth and light. They blind and mislead the unwary, and they show to the inquiring soul the way to heaven.

By means of words the church of Jesus Christ is made to be the salt of the earth. Christian words, accompanied by the Spirit of God, are in society like grains of salt upon food. They go down into men's hearts, they take hold of men's consciences, they stir up men's sleeping souls and set them to thinking about sin and salvation.

By the use of words the minister, the Sabbath-school teacher, the parent, and the Christian friend may hope to win souls to Christ and become the salt of the earth. The Bible enjoins upon us to let our "speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt." It must be such as will have a *seasoning* influence. Our words must rebuke and expose error; they must be calculated to turn the sinner away from his sins and lead him to a virtuous and holy life.

Our tongues are not our own. Their Maker claims them. And yet how prone we are to use them for our own gratification.

We are not to suppose that sermons and Sabbath-School lessons and prayer-meeting

talks etc, are the only forms of speech which God's people can use for the saving of the world. How often the earnest Christian can give a sanctifying character to the conversation in which he is engaged. If his soul is alive to divine things he can recognize the hand of God in the clouds, the winds, the sunshine and the rain. When the harvests are brought in he can speak of him who alone "giveth the increase." When providences are dark he can tell the distressed that God "doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men," and that,—

"Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face."

He can seek out opportunities to invite those who are strangers to grace to come to a compassionate Savior for a new heart and the pardon of their sins. He can tell his friends of a Savior's love, sufferings and death. He can tell them of the joys of salvation, the bright hopes of the Christian and the rest that the soul finds in Christ. He can take up the invitations of his Savior and echo them in the ears of his friends. He can tell them of the death and darkness that await the impenitent, and that 'there remaineth a rest to the people of God.'

We are not brought into the fold of Christ simply that we may be saved. We are to seek the salvation of the perishing millions of our race. "Let him that heareth say, Come." Do you know the way to heaven? Then tell others the way. Do you know what a blessed thing it is to have Christ formed in you the hope of glory? Then tell those who are strangers to the blessed hope. Do you know what joy arises from a sense of pardoned sin? Then tell others of the rest that your spirit has found.

"The Son of man," says Christ, "is come to seek and to save that which was lost." The same soul-seeking spirit should be in the hearts of those whom he has sought and saved.

The opportunities are many which we have to plead with lost men to be "reconciled to God," and God blesses such work to the salvation of souls. But when we plead with men to be reconciled to God we must plead with God to give our words success. Paul may plant and Apollos may water, but God giveth the increase. All our words, however tender and discreet will be lost to the soul if God does not by his Spirit send them home to the heart. Neither the pleadings of Paul, nor the invitations of Gabriel would lead

a sinner to forsake his sins and fly to Christ for salvation if the Spirit of God did not accompany the message. Christ says, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him."

If we would be the salt of the earth by pleading with sinners to come home to Christ we must plead with God for the only power that can move a sinner's heart. Our tears and our entreaties, our most eloquent appeals have no power to change the vile affections of the human heart. But God invites us to come to him for the power that does convert and save men. He hears our prayers, and sends the convicting and life-giving Spirit along with the word and men are saved.

Has not many a praying mother been the salt that has saved her children from moral corruption and spiritual death? Has not many a praying wife been the salt that has saved her husband from a course of sin and a world of despair? Has not many a consistent Christian who had power with God in prayer held up his hands to the Most High and brought salvation to his perishing neighbors? Has not many a praying Sabbath-school teacher been the salt that has saved a whole class from wickedness and woe?

Those who would win souls must be men and women of prayer. They must hang upon God for the blessing which God only can give.

Christian brother and sister do you know what it is, by prayer, to lay hold of the conquering right hand of God? The powers of darkness fly from the presence of God. The hard and stony heart breaks and yields at the touch of his finger. The heart, cold and dead, is brought to life and warmth by the power of his breath. Dry bones are clothed with sinews and flesh and stand up as an army for him when he breathes upon them. Corruption gives place to purity at his command. How essential then that they who would be the salt of the earth have God in his almightiness to go with them as they attempt to remove sin and pollution from the world and save their fellow-creatures from eternal death. And since his presence is so essential to success how precious the promise which he has coupled with the command to "go and teach all nations." He says, "And lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Is there any need then that God's people be savorless in the world? May they not always be to society what salt is to food?

Salt, in order to accomplish the purpose for which it is used, must be brought into contact with the substances which it is to save. It must be mingled with the food which it is designed to preserve.

God has, as it were, sprinkled his people abroad through the world. He has mingled them in with the wicked. He has not shut them up in some Jerusalem, or holy city, as in a salt box, to exclude them from the world; but their paths lie along the paths of the wicked. They live in the same town, on the same street, in the same house, in the same family. They are, in the providence of God, thrown into the midst of the society which they are to save. Sin and holiness come face to face in the world. "The salt of the earth" is thrown into the midst of the corrupt and corrupting elements of human society,—into the midst of that depravity and wickedness which are like "wounds and bruises and putrifying sores." Purity and corruption struggle to possess the same soul. Surely God has brought the purifying element into contact with that which is to be purified. He points his people to the souls about them in need of salvation and says, "Ye are the salt of the earth.

Church of Jesus Christ, redeemed by blood, do you accept of your commission? Are you willing to be brought into contact with this ungodly world as salt to save it? Christ your Redeemer came into contact with sin that he might remove the sin and save the sinner. He talked compassionately to the guilty woman brought to him by the Scribes and Pharisees. The woman that was "a sinner," in Simon's house, received cleansing at his hands.

The sin with which Christ mingled on earth did not contaminate his holy soul. He was "come to seek and to save that which was lost;" and if we will go with his spirit into the midst of sin for the good of sinners the effect upon our own hearts will be cleansing and not polluting.

How could a sinner saved by grace better employ himself than in saving souls? "He that winneth souls is wise." "They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever." "Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and shall hide a multitude of sins."

What greater privilege could the church desire than to be cast into the midst of a corrupt world for the purpose of saving it from moral pollution and spiritual death?

To rescue a friend from a watery grave is considered a noble deed. To save a helpless man from the ruins of a burning building is a brave and praise-worthy act. To snatch an unfortunate man from the clutches of a beast of prey would secure to the hero a high esteem. But watery graves and scorching fires and blood-thirsty beasts are little to be feared compared with that from which Christ would have us to save lost sinners. They are exposed to the tortures of that world in which Christ says "there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

How blessed to snatch a sinner from the jaws of eternal death,—to be the instrument of bringing one soul to the happiness of the redeemed! Think of the endlessness of eternity. Think of those whom you love being for ever with Christ in heaven, or in that "fire prepared for the devil and his angels," and then tell me, if ye have any bowels of compassion, if the 'saving of a soul from death and the hiding of a multitude of sins is not worth all the sacrifices we can make?'

If Christ, by his sufferings and death, has redeemed us from a world of woe should not gratitude to him prompt us to labor and pray that others may be led to serve and praise

him? Would we not rejoice in seeing him honored who had saved us from a bottomless pit? Do we not desire to lay a few sheaves at his feet in token of our appreciation of the blessings he has bought for us with the sorrows of Gethsemane and Golgotha?

Let us bless God for the privilege of leading souls to Christ; bless him that he has cast us as salt into the midst of the world's pollution, that, as honored instruments in his hands; we may purify it and win souls to Christ which shall shine as gems in his crown when the proudest structures of human genius shall have mouldered down to dust, and 'the heavens and the earth shall have passed away.'

CHAPTER II.

GOD'S PEOPLE A LIGHT.

Ye are the light of the world Mat. 5:14.

In considering this subject let us notice,

I. THE NEED OF NATURAL LIGHT.

II. THE NEED OF SPIRITUAL LIGHT.

III. CHRIST THE SPIRITUAL LIGHT OF THE
WORLD.

IV. GOD'S PEOPLE MAY REFLECT, OR RADI-
ATE SPIRITUAL LIGHT.

The truth taught and the duty enjoined in the words, "Ye are the light of the world" are very much the same as in the words, "Ye are the salt of the earth."

That which would qualify us to be "the salt of the earth" would also qualify us to be "the light of the world." That which one would do in order to be "the salt of the earth" he must do in order to be "the light of the world." The result of being "the salt of the

earth" is the same as the result of being "the light of the world." The object and the result in either case is *the saving of souls*.

In what then does the difference consist, and why use the two expressions?

The words "salt" and "light," as used in the passages referred to, are figures of speech, both suggestive of the influence of the disciples of Christ upon a lost world. Salt saves; sinners are lost and need to be saved. Light guides; sinners are lost and need to be guided.

The figures of speech used in these passages bring our minds to the consideration of very familiar things. We are accustomed to the names and influence of salt and light, and by this familiarity we are the better prepared to compare natural and spiritual things.

I. THE NEED OF NATURAL LIGHT.

It has been said, "If the light of the sun should be put out" "the temperature of the whole atmosphere would fall two hundred and sixty degrees below the freezing point," and that "in three days there would not be a trace of vegetable or animal life left on the face of the globe."

The plant is pale and sickly that lives in a meager light. If it grows in some dark cellar with a scanty window it leans toward the light,

it grows toward the light. In the language of plants it says, "Lift me out into the light. Give me some of that bright sunshine."

There are health and strength and cheer in the rays of the sun.

A writer speaks of the different methods employed in the arctic regions on one occasion to make the long dark nights as cheerful as possible. "Birthdays," he says, "were celebrated, a newspaper published, books, games etc., resorted to; in short, every means employed to prevent that depression of spirits which is the natural consequence of long continued darkness, and of the close confinement which the severity of the weather enjoined."

"For a time these means were successful. Every one appeared to be happy and contented. But they soon lost their novelty, and with that the power to interest and amuse. A feeling of weariness overspread the whole company. Each strove to seem cheerful, but spirits would sink, cheeks would become pale for want of God's great gift,—*light*.

What a cheerless dungeon this world would be without light. Even the brute creation seems to wake into new life when the sun comes out from behind his cloudy veil.

Darkness carries with it a loneliness and

fear which are chased away by the rosy light of the morning. Did you never lie awake in the still dark hours of the night with a feeling of loneliness, timidity and depression of spirits? Did you never "watch for the morning" with a childish anxiety? And when the light began to climb up the east, and the darkness of your silent room began to move away as something afraid of the rising morn, did not your loneliness pass off on the dark wings of the night and your spirits and your courage come back to you on the rays of the light?

"Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun." Eecl. 11: 7.

Darkness has its use; but, thank God, it is not always dark. The world needs light; and he who made the world said, "Let there be light, and there was light."

II. THE NEED OF SPIRITUAL LIGHT.

But again, the world needs *spiritual* light. The sun, moon and stars, though they may enable us to find our way up and down the walks of earth, will not light us to heaven. The heathen have sun-light and moon-light and star-light; but this light does not reveal to them the condition of their hearts, nor point them to a Savior nor guide them to heaven.

Spiritual darkness enveloped the world in a thicker gloom than the darkness of caves or cellars or pits.

Man once had a spiritual light within him ; but he sinned and lost the light, and spiritual darkness now broods over the world. Philosophy and science are not able to dispel it. Science can solve many intricate problems, it can shed light upon many dark questions, but it is powerless to reveal a plan of salvation. Philosophy holds no candles along the path that leads to heaven.

Philosophy and science can speculate about the soul, salvation, God and eternity ; but they can settle no question concerning man's future and unchanging destiny. Their beams of light are too pale and too weak to penetrate the spiritual night which has closed in upon men's souls.

Man is a sinner, and he feels himself to be a sinner, but in the native darkness of his soul he knows no remedy for sin. He gropes, he stumbles, he falls and is lost. He needs some light that is not in himself, not in nature, not in science. "The world by wisdom knew not God."

The deplorable condition of our benighted world is described in Isaiah where it says, "We

wait for light but behold obscurity ;for brightness but we walk in darkness. We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes ; we stumble at noon-day as in the night.”

This world needs spiritual light, and this is the kind of light named in the text,—spiritual light, or light in divine things. Light that will guide men’s souls and instruct them in things relating to their eternal destiny. Has the world any such light? It has ; and if any in the darkness of their souls ask, “What is that light?” we answer,

III. CHRIST IS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

In the eighth chapter of the gospel according to John we have from Christ’s own lips these plain words: “I am the light of the world.” In another chapter of the same gospel he says, “I am come a light into the world.” We read of him that he “was the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.”

Light reveals to us the objects which are about us. By means of it we discover where danger lies, and where safety is. “Whatsoever doth make manifest is light.” We are told that “Light is in all languages put for *knowledge*—for whatever enables us to dis-

cern our duty, and the path of safety, and that saves us from the evils of ignorance and error."

Christ says, "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness."

Light is associated with divine and holy things. Brightness, in the Bible, is associated with God. After Moses had been with God upon the mount "the skin of his face shone." "And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come nigh him."

When Christ was on the Mount of transfiguration with three of his disciples he had, perhaps, more than usual communion with the Father. Luke says, "And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening." Matthew says, "he was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light."

It is said of heaven, "there shall be no night there." Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, is the light of heaven. We read, "And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did

lighten it and the Lamb is the light thereof.”

Light is associated with God and divine things. Christ is the light of heaven and the light of earth. By his Spirit he gives light to the souls of men. That light which is found nowhere else is found in Christ. They that grope for the wall like the blind, and grope as if they had no eyes, and stumble at noon-day as in the night, find in Christ a light which guides them to rest and to heaven. The sweet and simple teachings of his word are a ‘lamp to their feet and a light to their path.’

When Jesus went up into the mount and was set and his disciples came unto him and he opened his mouth and taught them, what light, and wisdom there were in the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth.

When he taught Nicodemus that “except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God,” what light he shed upon the road to heaven. When he said, “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life,” what light he shed upon the way in which poor sinners might come into favor with God and be saved.

When he moved among men in the spirit of

tenderness and compassion, when "he went about doing good," when he showed submission to the Father's will, when he exhibited such a purpose to 'finish the work which his Father had given him to do,' when, with such meekness and patience he bore the reproach and contempt of those who hated him,—when, we say, he gave, in his life, such an exhibition of these virtues, how his example shone in heavenly lustre before his followers; how it shines out to-day from his gospels of love for our guidance and imitation.

Have not thousands of perplexed souls seen their duty in the light of Christ's example? Does not the church to-day set Christ up before it as the only being who ever lived on earth in the light of whose example it may safely walk? to whom as a pattern it may safely conform? He is "the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" "A light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of his people Israel."

If then the Bible is so plain and emphatic in its teachings that Christ is the light of the world, what is the meaning of the words of Christ himself to his disciples, "Ye are the light of the world?"

IV. GOD'S PEOPLE ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD BY REFLECTING, OR RADIATING THE LIGHT WHICH THEY RECEIVE FROM CHRIST.

Christ is the great source of spiritual light, and though we believe he does communicate directly with his people by his Spirit, yet he has also chosen his disciples to speak for him, to be his torch-bearers. He requires of them so to imitate him, that their characters will be suggestive of him. They are to "*put on Christ.*" They are to wear his likeness before the world. Does not a child who spends much time with its parent, who is largely instructed by its parent, so closely copy parental expressions and parental manners that it is frequently suggesting to your mind the parent from whom it learned and copied these things? It is reflecting the parent.

Thus must Christ's people carry his likeness before the world. Those holy tempers, that heavenly meekness, that spirit of love and kindness which were in Christ must be seen in his people. The same kind of light which comes to the church from Christ must go off from the church to the world. The words which Christ gave that were so luminous with heavenly wisdom must be caught up by the disciples of Christ and sounded along the lines.

Those words of his, which gave so much light to those who heard them when he spoke them on earth, must be seized by his people as torches from his hand and carried along the paths of lost sinners who grope and stumble as if they had no eyes. Thus may Christ's people become light to a dying world. Christ said of John the Baptist, "He was a burning and a shining light."

Though Christ, the great source of spiritual light be in heaven, his people, like candles upon candlesticks, may be giving out to others, in thousands of cities and hamlets throughout the world, the light which they have borrowed from him.

Would it not be correct to say that the cities, towns and country of our land are lighted up at night by the great oil wells which pour out such streams of illuminating fluid?

And yet it is not that rolling tongues of flame are issuing each night from a few great oil vats, illuminating whole towns, cities and states by their glaring streams of light. But watch! see the rail-way trains radiating from these great oil centers, carrying their great cisterns of light-giving fluid. See farther, that these great cisterns containing such possibilities for light are emptied and their

contents carried into thousands and tens of thousands of human abodes and put into little lamps with pint and half-pint capacities. Then when the curtain of night drops down on the earth, behold! these thousands, not to say millions, of little lamps set up their cheerful light in the cities and scattered dwellings of a great nation.

Surely here is a vast amount of light. The darkness of the evening is driven from many a dwelling. Many a window is made bright, many a home is made cheerful by these little bowls of burning fluid.

But for the *source* of this light we must go back to the few great oil centers from which this illuminating fluid was drawn. The lamp does not furnish its own oil. It has no power to give light except as it receives its supplies from the fountain head.

So it is with God's people. Scattered abroad through the dark corners of the earth, amid the "habitations of cruelty," in Christian lands and on heathen shores, they shine; they guide the lost home to Christ; they tell the story of a crucified and risen Savior to those who "sit in the region and shadow of death," and light breaks into their benighted souls, and they are guided into the way of life.

But as we traced the lights that shone so brightly in ten thousand homes back to the great veins of earth, so must we go back to Christ to find the source and author of the light which his people are shedding in ten thousand sin-darkened homes of earth.

It is the duty and privilege of the church of Christ to scatter the clouds of superstition and error which have so darkened the souls of men; to lift the pall of spiritual darkness which has folded so closely down upon the pathway of the sinner.

“Let your light” says Christ “so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” So live, so act, that souls by your light will be brought to serve and glorify God.

In the ages when error found its way into the churches, and darkness obscured the ordinances of God's house, how eagerly the reformers seized the gospel torch and held it up to light a straying people back to the pure worship of God.

They were not *standing* lamps simply; they moved on with their light till the darkness, like a vampire of night, fled before its heaven-empowered beams.

As the companies of Gideon carried their

lamps in their pitchers and cried "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon," and scattered the enemy; so did those Christian reformers, with the light of gospel rays, scatter the clouds of darkness and error that had settled in upon the church.

Let the same holy zeal be kindled in all our hearts and what flaming evangelists we would be for Christ. Like the light upon the lamp-posts stretched along the street, light would meet light, and we would be teaching souls the way of life.

As lamp-posts holding lighted lamps, we are set out along the highways of life, where men lost in sin are crowding by us on their way to the eternal world. Shall we not hold the light of Christian counsel and Christian example close along their pathway and strive to show them "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world?"

"Shall we whose souls are lighted
With wisdom from on high,—
Shall we to men benighted
The lamp of life deny?"

Christian friends, does the light of your life shine brightly enough to guide souls to Christ? If all other lights were put out,—if there were no means in the community where you live

by which souls could find out what they must do to be saved, but the light of your Christian life; would they be guided to the Savior, or left to wander on in darkness?

Is your life a bright illustration of Christianity? If some one who had never seen a Christian desired to be associated for a while with some professed follower of Christ that he might judge for himself whether there were any beauty, and power, and light in Christianity would you be willing that he should pitch his tent over against your door that he might watch your every-day life, listen to all your words, scan all your dealings with your neighbors, watch all your moods and tempers that he might make up his mind as to what Christianity is really worth? Would the light of your life constrain him to admire religion and lead him humbly, at the Savior's feet, to seek the pardon of his sins, and an interest in the everlasting kingdom?

“A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick: and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.” Christ did not put the light of a Christian life in our hearts to have it covered and hid. The light of an earnest, consistent Christian *can-*

not be covered. "A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid."

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

Christian friends, souls are at sea; the night is dark; the rocks upon which others have stranded stretch along the shore. Shall our friends approach the coasts of that long eternity in the darkness that hangs over their souls and we refuse to raise a light to guide them into the "desired haven?"

"Trim your feeble lamp my, brother;
Some poor sailor tempest-tost,
Trying now to make the harbor,
In the darkness may be lost."

"Let the lower lights be burning!
Send a gleam across the wave!
Some poor fainting, struggling seaman
You may rescue, you may save."



CHAPTER III.

GOD'S PEOPLE A HUSBANDRY.

Ye are God's husbandry. I. Cor. 3:9.

The thought in this figurative expression, in which God's people are called a "husbandry," seems to be this: Ye are like plants under the care of a husbandman. Ye are to bear fruit, and yield a harvest as the tillage of the field. Ye are to grow as the trees of the forest and the herbs of the garden. Ye are God's husbandry.

In considering God's people as a husbandry we will notice,

- I. THE PLANTS.
- II. THEIR CULTURE.
- III. THEIR FRUITS.

I. THE PLANTS.

God's people of every name, age, rank, condition and color throughout the world are his plants and constitute his husbandry. Wherever a division or fragment of the church

of Christ is found, there is found so much of God's husbandry.

We may observe, first, that these grace-plants, under the care of the heavenly Husbandman, will grow in every clime,

“From Greenland's icy mountains,
To India's coral strand.”

God's husbandry may flourish among icebergs or under a tropical sun,—where winter pours its cold and howling blasts or where summer's gentle breezes blow.

The husbandry of earth will not all grow in one zone. It lies in belts. The climate which suits one plant will destroy the life of another. But the plants of God's husbandry will grow anywhere on land or sea, at the equator or at the poles.

If you were to turn your attention to the culture of a special order of plants, you might find it necessary to change your climate. The air of your native home might be too rough and the winds too fierce for your chosen husbandry. But you need go neither north nor south in order to be a Christian.

If you are not a plant of God's husbandry, just where you are is the place, and just now is the time for you to be transplanted into the garden of the Lord.

The best atmosphere for the plants of God's husbandry is an atmosphere of prayer. Prayer brings the warming, reviving breath of God to his grace plants as sunshine and shower to the grass and the lilies of the plain.

Blessed be God, anywhere on his footstool we may be rugged plants of the heavenly husbandry.

Again, we notice that there is great *variety* in the plants of God's husbandry.

The plants of the fields and gardens of earthly tillage about us present to our eyes great variety. There are large plants and small plants; strong plants and weak plants. There are old plants and young plants, beautiful plants and plants less beautiful. But each plant that the husbandman has set out is a part of his husbandry.

So it is in God's field. There are the old and the young, the weak and the strong, the wise and the ignorant, the known and the obscure. Each one whom the breath of God has fanned into spiritual life is a part of his husbandry and is under his care.

Scattered up and down the world, called by whatever name, found in palatial mansion or in "dens and caves of the earth," honored or despised, great or small, known or unknown,

every humble follower of Christ shares the honor of a grace-plant in the garden of his God.

God is certainly pleased with variety; and as the husbandman enters his garden in the spring with various kinds of plants and sets them out, one for its leaves, another for its stems; one for its fruits, another for its roots; so with wide diversity has God set out his spiritual husbandry. His plants are not all alike. He does not desire them to be all alike.

How much more beautiful is the earth with the diversity which he has given to its plants than if it were all covered with trees just so many feet high, or grass just so many inches long, with flowers all red, or flags all green.

Though Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like a lily, God did not see fit to make all flowers lilies. Neither has he seen fit to make his people all alike. David was different from Moses. Isaiah and Jeremiah were not alike. Peter and John, though associated together, present to us very different characteristics.

It is an encouragement to God's children that their holding a place in his husbandry does not depend upon their exact likeness to any other child of God.

It may be impossible for me to be a Moses, or a David, a John, or a Paul. But if I can be a *christian* I can belong to God's husbandry.

We hold our position as plants of grace by virtue of saving faith in Christ and not by virtue of our likeness to any other plant.

The appletree and the grapevine belong alike to the husbandman. They grow from the same soil, are cultured by the same hand, and, it may be, are held in equal estimation by the husbandman. Yet they are by no means alike. The husbandman did not desire to have them alike. He purposely chose plants for his husbandry which were *not* alike. It is of his own selection that he has the orchard tree, the stalk of corn, the creeping vine and the tender shrub.

Where he set the corn he did not want a vine but corn, just corn. Where he set the shrub he did not want a tree but a shrub, just a shrub.

So in God's garden. He has of his own choice a great diversity. He has set out the plants of his own husbandry, and he has a use for the widow with her two mites as well as for the rich men who cast of their abundance into the treasury. He has a use for her who weeps tears upon his feet and wipes them with the

hairs of her head, as well as for Zaccheus with his wealth. He has a use for Lazarus with his poverty as well as for Abraham into whose bosom he has gone. He has a use for that poor, unlettered disciple, unknown to the world, who pleads God's blessing on the preached word, as well as for him whose "tongue is the pen of a ready writer" speaking to spell-bound listeners of grace and blood that saves men's souls from death.

If I be put a plant in the garden of God no insignificance, no obscurity can conceal me from his watchful eye. No disparity between myself and the great ones of earth can turn away from me his love and his care.

He whose wisdom "gave some apostles, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers" can find use for the humblest shrub which his hand has set out among the plants of his spiritual husbandry.

II. THE CULTURE OF THE PLANTS.

Let us turn now to the *culture* of these plants. God's husbandry needs and receives a great deal of culture.

What deformed plants are found in God's garden. How dwarfish their growth and how foul with the weeds of sin. How much bedewing, and nourishment, and pruning, and

sunshine and weeding they need in order to secure a healthy growth.

When care and nourishment are withheld from the plants of the field they perish. If the soil is poor the husbandman must furnish nourishment for the plants. If there are poisonous weeds among the plants he must clear them away. If the plants are crooked and deformed he must train them.

Now these things God does for his spiritual husbandry. He nourishes it and he cleanses it.

The soil of worldliness, sensual pleasure and vanity which surrounds the Christian in this world is too poor and thin to furnish any spiritual sustenance to the soul. 'This vile world is no friend to grace, to help us on to God.' But God nourishes his people with the rich promises and doctrines of his word. Faith takes root in the soil of God's promise. As the roots of the plants in the garden, running through the earth, draw nourishment from the strengthening particles with which they meet, so the souls of God's people, searching through his word, gather from its precious doctrines of a crucified and risen Lord, nourishment which makes them grow as the vintage of a fruitful field.

Do what you will for the plants of your gar-

den you cannot make them grow without a nourishing soil. The seed may fall in stony places and spring up and bid fair for a little while. But if there is not sufficient nourishment in the soil, it is in vain for them that the sun shines or the rain falls. They must be nourished or die.

So it is with God's husbandry. But abundantly does he nourish it with the fertilizing promises and doctrines of his word.

As by day and by night the gardener's plants feed on the nourishment which they find in the earth and the air, so do the healthy grace-plants of God's husbandry feed by day and by night upon the cheering, strengthening words of the divine Husbandman. God nourishes the plants of his husbandry.

But plants need something besides a rich soil and a genial air.

Not far from the gardener's blooming beds and loaded vines we see a little cluster of tools with which he has been at work. He has been over that field of waving grain with plow and harrow. He has been through that fruitful orchard with saw and pruning hook. He has been through that garden of herbs and flowers with rake and hoe. Careful, pains-taking culture has preceded the gladdening harvest.

God's husbandry is not above the necessity of a similar culture. Weeds of sin are not strangers among his plants. Deformities not a few have been discovered in his husbandry.

To rid his plants of these deformities and weeds of sin God brings his tools into his garden.

Evil passions, depraved affections, selfishness, avarice and sensuality hinder the growth and fruitfulness of God's people, and must be removed. They dishonor the Husbandman in whose garden they are found, and they must be separated from the plants.

God employs various methods to weed sin out of the hearts of his people. His word strikes at the root of sin. It is like a plowshare that runs hard by the roots of the plants and clears away the injurious and offensive growth.

Never did sluggard's garden more need cleansing than does the heart of man foul with the weeds of sin; and the Psalmist asks, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way," and then answers, saying, "By taking heed thereto according to thy word." The poet has put it thus:

"How shall the young secure their hearts,
And guard their lives from sin?
Thy word the choicest rules imparts,
To keep the conscience clean."

Christ said to his disciples, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you."

That word which is "quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword" is a good weeding instrument in the hand of the divine Gardener with which to rid his grace-plants of choking thistle and poisonous nightshade.

The processes by which God cleanses his husbandry may to us sometimes seem severe. He may, at times, run his garden tools down deep into our hearts to reach the roots of pride, or avarice, or self-love. But we need the culture, and we should ask God to spare no lurking sin however deeply it may be rooted in our hearts.

The Psalmist prays, "Cleanse thou me from secret faults." To the heavenly Husbandman who sees every foul weed in his garden, he cries, "Search me O God, and try me and see if there be any wicked way in me."

We need much culture. Our hearts are weedy, and the weeds are deep-rooted and strong, and we can better afford to have them removed, even by a severe process, than to have them poisoning and dwarfing our Christian graces.

Worldliness may be springing up in the Christian's heart, and hindering his spiritual growth; and God, as a kind husbandman may remove it at the cost of much suffering to the soul. But that soul will thrive better when it is removed, though it be a severe stroke that takes it away; and the Christian ought to thank God for the culture though for the present it seem not to be joyous but grievous.

God may send upon one of his children, for the cultivation of his graces, poverty and want; upon another, sickness and bodily pain; upon another bereavments and loneliness; upon another some secret, untold sorrow which hangs like a perpetual shadow over his pathway. Yet all these things, severe as they may seem, may be but the tools in the hand of our heavenly Husbandman with which he is answering the prayer of the soul: "Cleanse thou me from secret faults."

Child of affliction, fear not God's sharpest garden tools. It is that he may cleanse away the noxious weeds of sin from his husbandry that you feel their keen edge cutting about your heart.

God is no slovenly Husbandman, willing to see the weeds of worldliness, pride, ambition, selfishness and lust growing among his plants.

“GROW IN GRACE” is the precept of the divine Husbandman. It is written over his garden gate, upon his weeding tools and his pruning hook; and as some stubborn sin hangs about a plant in the garden, overshadowing and dwarfing it, he comes and tears it away, saying in tenderness to the disturbed and shaken plant, “Grow in grace.”

You who have been growing plants in God’s husbandry, look back over the times in your life in which God, in ways of his own choosing, has, as it were, weeded down the sins of your hearts, and see if you cannot thank him for every stroke of his garden tools with which he has been cleansing his husbandry.

But for what end is all this culture? Why must the plowshare of affliction run through and through God’s husbandry? Why must the pruning knife so often be brought into the vineyard?

These questions will be answered as we consider,

III. THE FRUITS.

The object of husbandry is fruit.

The husbandman plants and plows for a harvest. The breaking up of the fallow ground and the scattering of seed; the work of the hoe and the rake all have reference to an ingathering.

So does God set out his spiritual husbandry and culture it with his own hand that it may bear fruit. "Herein is my Father glorified" says Christ, "that ye bear much fruit." "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit."

God's Spirit moves upon his husbandry as the warm winds of spring on earthly vintage, and it bears fruit.

In natural husbandry there are divers kinds of fruits to be found. The apple, the peach, the plum, the cherry and the grape may all be found in the same garden.

So is there a variety in spiritual products. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."

This is blessed fruit to grow in such hearts as ours, and only grows there when the Spirit of God breathes upon them.

God's people have a deep interest in this fruit. It is that which makes the difference between them and unrenewed sinners. Unless the fruit of the Spirit be found in our hearts we are not the children of God; we do not belong to his husbandry.

The love of God, the joy of pardoned sin, the peace which comes to the soul sweetly reconciled to God are fruits that do not grow in the native soil of the human heart. It is when God, in ways of his own choosing, prepares our hearts, breaks up the fallow ground amid repentance and tears, sows the seeds of divine truth, nourishes them with his word and cultures them by his Spirit that they bring forth this fruit.

It is when the soul is in union with Christ, when there is life going out from Christ to his plants that they bear fruit. "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself," says Christ, "except it abide in the vine; no more can ye except ye abide in me." "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing."

What child of God does not long to have the fruit of the Spirit abounding in his heart? As the work of the Spirit advances in the heart there is less of the power and dominion of sin; there is more weanedness from the world; there is more resemblance to God.

In proportion as the soul bears the fruit of the Spirit it grows in the experience of divine things.

Some souls have a much richer Christian experience than others. The love, and joy, and peace which are the fruit of the Spirit are distinct realities with them. When they speak of these things they speak out of a fruitful experience. Have you not sometimes conversed with those whose language convinced you that they had a rich Christian experience, a deep experimental knowledge of divine things?

Those who have very little of the fruit of the Spirit in their hearts can talk about religious things,—about the church, God's ministers and the imperfections of Christians, and may think their conversation very religious. But those who have a deep and rich experience in divine things, a large measure of the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, delight to think and talk of Christ, of his love, his sufferings and his death. The sweet, deep themes of atoning blood and sanctifying grace engage their thoughts and their tongues.

The joy and interest which advanced Christians feel in these things are the fruits of the Spirit, and "by their fruits ye shall know them."

Christian friends, have you this rich and full experience in divine things? Is the fruit

of the Spirit abounding in your hearts? Have you that love and joy and peace which lift the soul above the world? Do your hopes of heaven brighten day by day? Does your faith grasp the promises of God with a stronger confidence than it once did? Can you curb and control your evil propensities better than you once could? Has prayer a joy and an unction about it that makes it a delight to your soul? Is the word of God to you a book of increasing interest, giving daily comfort and strength for the duties of life? Do you get clearer and more precious views of Christ and his atoning work? Does death lose some of its terrors and seem more like a messenger of mercy to release you from a world of sin? Is heaven a desirable place to you because there the soul will be with Christ and see him as he is? These things are the fruits of the Spirit, and he that possesses them is "like a tree planted by the rivers of water that bringeth forth his fruit in his season."

If we would have that life which is "neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ," we must seek it by abiding in Christ and keeping his commandments.

CHAPTER IV.

GOD'S PEOPLE A BUILDING.

Ye are God's building. I. Cor. 3:9.

When some object, as salt, or light, or husbandry, or a building is used to denote God's people, there must be some reason for using that object; there must be some point, or points of resemblance between God's people and the object chosen to represent them. These objects are not fixed upon arbitrarily but on account of their fitness. There is something which is common to the people of God and the object chosen to represent them.

What is there then that is common to God's people and a building?

A building is erected for a dwelling place, and God is spoken of in his word as dwelling in his people. "I will dwell in them" says God, "and walk in them." Again, "That

Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.”

“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God: and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit.”

The reason, then, why God has chosen a building to represent his people appears to be the fact that he dwells in them. A building is a dwelling place.

In connection with an ordinary building at least four things are to be considered, viz;—

I. THE FOUNDATION.

II. THE BUILDING MATERIAL.

III. THE BUILDER.

IV. THE OWNER OF THE BUILDING.

I. THE FOUNDATION.

If I were aiming to pitch a tent where I expected to spend but a single night under a fair sky, I should not be very particular whether I set up the poles and stretched the canvas on the sand, the pebbles or the solid rock, for I should expect the next morning to take

down my poles, fold up my canvas and start again on my way.

But if I were about to erect a building of strong material, in which I expected to pass the remainder of my days, and upon which I expected rains to fall and storms to beat, I should want it set upon a foundation which no storms would move, and which no rains would dissolve. Christ said that the *wise* man built his house upon a rock.

The building named in the text, constituted of Christ's redeemed people, and called God's building, has for its foundation the Lord Jesus Christ. "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation." "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid which is Jesus Christ."

Christ is a "tried" foundation. He was tried when "he came to his own and his own received him not." When his mission was misunderstood, when he was hated by his countrymen, when he was accused of allegiance with Beelzebub, he was tried and stood the test. He did not forsake the cause he had undertaken, nor leave men to perish in their blindness and sin.

When one of the twelve betrayed him he was tried. When he drank the bitter cup in Gethsemane, bowed to the earth, his "soul exceeding sorrowful even unto death" he was tried.

When they came out to him "as against a thief with swords and staves," carried him off in the night, held a hasty, unlawful council concerning him and pronounced him worthy of death he was tried; but he stood the test. He did not "command more than twelve legions of angels" to come and rescue him. He did not refuse any longer to be the foundation upon which a wicked world might rest for pardon and salvation.

When he was led away to be crucified, nailed upon the cross between two thieves, mocked and jeered in his agony and forsaken of his Father he was tried. Our sins were laid upon him, and though they were heavy, very heavy, he bore them. He did not shrink even in his bitter hour. He did not cry out, "I cannot bear this weight; I cannot be the foundation of the church with all its weight of guilt. Let it sink and bear its own iniquity." No, the Father "laid upon him the iniquity of us all," and he bore it, bore it till Justice was satisfied, bore it till salvation was purchased

for the believer, bore it till he was ready to lift to the church the triumphant shout "*It is finished!*"

Ah! Christ is a "tried" stone. If there is anything precious at stake it may be safely committed to him. If there is anything precious to be built it may safely be built upon him. "God's building" needs no "other foundation."

Christ's people have tried him and found him a "sure foundation." They have tried him when sins awaked their fears, and he has calmed their troubled souls, and they have found that the blood which "cleanseth from all sin" was a sufficient foundation for their hopes.

They have tried him when storms of affliction beat about them, and they found his grace all sufficient. They "were perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed."

They have tried him in the waters of death. When every other foundation was being washed away, when no human arm could sustain, when hope needed a "sure foundation," his people have rested their souls on him and have felt secure amid the waters of death.

Christ is a tried stone. If you have any-

thing which you wish to make secure build it upon Christ, for he is a "tried stone."

II. THE BUILDING MATERIAL.

Where shall building material be found elegant enough to be reared upon this foundation, this tried stone? If we were permitted to ascend the skies, and enter the plains of light would we behold the Architect of this building gathering the pure, unfallen angels and constructing them into a spiritual house? Would Gabriel be placed as a shining pillar of this building? Would that heavenly host which sang the natal song of the world's newborn Redeemer be the material first built upon him whose praises they chanted at his birth?

No, the building named in the text is composed of humbler material than angel hosts.

From the ranks of the lost, sin-sunken and degraded of earth are gathered the material for this building. All who are saved by the sacrifice and merits of Christ are built upon him as "a spiritual house." Every lost sinner since the days of Adam who has become a subject of renewing grace has become a part of God's building.

It was not every kind of material that was wrought into Solomon's Temple. Solomon did not issue a proclamation to the people of

his kingdom saying that he would gladly receive all sorts of sticks and stones as the building material of Jerusalem's gorgeous Temple. He says, Command thou that they hew me cedar trees out of Lebanon."

But when the building which is to be the "habitation of God" is to be erected, and to be built upon Christ as the foundation stone, the call is to sinners of every dye who are willing to become a part of that spiritual house.

Christ issues the call himself. He says, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

It is for this building material that he calls when he says, "Him that cometh unto me I will in nowise cast out."

All who will accept of Christ as the foundation stone, though they be quarried from the depths of sin, are "builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit."

Behold his messengers out in search of material for this building. What do they find? Human souls all polished, nicely fitted and made meet for a habitation of God? Nay, verily! Crooked sticks and shapeless stones are gathered for this work. Prominent in the

gospel we find a sorry subject. She stands in the house of one Simon, and he calls her "a sinner." But she manifests an interest in Christ, at whose feet she weeps, and she is received and made a memorable stone in God's building.

Another is found; but what a sad and hopeless prospect. Already there dwell within her seven devils. Will this wretched specimen of human depravity, the abode of devils, be allowed to fill a niche in the wall of that house which is builded for a habitation of God? Yes, the master workman takes even this forlorn hope, casts out the evil spirits, and "Mary Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils," becomes a polished and prominent stone in God's house.

It is not simply, nor chiefly, kings and princes that God chooses for his habitation. "Not many mighty, not many noble, are called."

In a building there are more small pieces of material than large ones; more weak pieces than strong ones. There are a few large beams and pillars; but there are more thin boards than thick beams. There are more small nails than strong spikes; more pins than pillars; more light shingles than heavy sills.

So is it with God's building. Comparatively few of earth's "mighty" and "noble" ever get builded into the spiritual house. Those from the lowly walks of earth,— the "common people," such as, when Christ was on earth, "heard him gladly," compose the greater part of the people of God.

The poorest and the worst of mankind may come,—the drunkard from his cups and the felon from his cell, and by faith in the atonement of Christ, be received as building material for this spiritual house.

In an ordinary building part of the material is visible and part is hidden. Part can be seen at a distance and part only upon closer inspection.

So it is with God's building. There are some in it who, by virtue of office or gifts, are very prominent; they are placed by the builder where, like pillars and door-posts, they are readily seen. Their uses are easily discovered. Their offices are apparent. They are like a door that is shut to keep out the cold, or opened to let in the air, so easily is it seen for what purpose they are set in the building.

It is not difficult to see that Joseph, and Moses, and the apostles were useful material in God's building. But there are many of

God's people who are very obscure. They are very much like those parts of a building which are hidden from sight,—obscured by other parts.

Yet those Christians who are not much seen or much heard may fill a very important position in God's building.

In a house many of the supporting beams and posts are hidden entirely from sight. One might enter the house and dwell there for a month without seeing or thinking of the strong beams that upheld the building in which he so comfortably dwelt, though it depended upon them all the while for its strength and support.

In that house which is built of God's redeemed people for his habitation may be many an obscure one who is nevertheless a very pillar of the building.

That feeble, bed-ridden child of God, whose voice is never heard outside of the room in which she suffers, may be a strong pillar in God's house. The prayers of faith that go up from her couch of suffering,—the words of exhortation and comfort which she utters to her friends, from a heart filled with the ripened fruits of the Spirit, may make her as useful in the service of God, as acceptable in his

building, as some whose gifts and offices bring them more into view.

Though the material of which God's building is composed is very poor, and in most respects unworthy the foundation upon which it rests, there are two things which make it very precious, and these are its *capacity* and its *durability*.

Under the fashioning hand of the master builder this material improves. It becomes more like the foundation.

The bodies of God's people are one day to be "fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body," and their souls freed from every blemish and imperfection. The apostle John says, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as he is pure."

Poor as the material may seem when God takes it to build it into the walls of his dwelling, it has capacity for improvement; and as God dwells in this abode of his redeemed ones and they have intercourse with him and look upon him, they "are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

Poor and unsightly as the sinner is when God calls him he is not utterly valueless as building material, for he is capable, in the hands of the master builder, of great transformation,—of being changed in some measure into the image of Christ. He becomes a “lively stone” in a “spiritual house.”

The material of which God’s building is erected is valuable because of its durability. All ordinary dwelling houses moulder down to dust. Time or accident demolishes the most durable dwelling places which men ever erect. Where are the palaces of the kings? Gone. Where is Jerusalem’s gorgeous temple? Gone. Houses built of the hardest stone, and sheeted with the finest brass would eventually crumble down under the wasting power of time. But the “spiritual house,” made of such material as you and I, will last forever. “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” The houses which we dwell in waste away. But the house God dwells in, wrought of sinners bought by the blood of his Son, shall stand world without end.

Call no sinner then worthless, however lost and wretched he may be, as long as there is a shadow of hope that he may be saved by redeeming blood and made a lively stone in

God's building. Though seven devils dwell in his bosom, the builder of this spiritual house can cast them all out and fit him to shine amid garnished stones in the walls of his own building.

III. THE BUILDER.

When we see anything which has striking characteristics about it, it is natural for us to ask, Who made this?

We see a church in the world, a church called God's building. We find that it was in existence long ages ago, that it has been in existence ever since; that it has stood, and grown strong in the midst of adverse circumstances. We find that dissolving time, and consuming fire have no power to destroy it. Does the question then arise, Who made this marvelous, this indestructible building? Then we answer, God is its maker and builder. Christ said, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock will *I build my church.*"

None but God can build God's house. Others may pray for you, may invite you, may instruct you; but no one except God can make you a Christian and build you into the walls of a spiritual house.

The minister may baptize you, the officers of the church may receive you to its member-

ship, and the clerk may write your name on the roll, and you will be a member of the visible church; but this will not make you a Christian, nor a part of God's building.

Unless God, by his Spirit, renew your heart you are no Christian. Unless God build you into the walls of his spiritual house you have no place in it.

Nothing that you can do yourself will build you into this wall. If you have no place in this building you can pray, and you ought to pray, that God would build you in, that he would renew your heart by his grace and fit you to fill some place in his spiritual house. This much you can do; but the *building* is all done by God himself.

None will ever be able in the eternal world to point God to a stone in the wall of his building and say "There is some of my setting." Neither Peter, nor Paul, nor any other apostle ever set a stone in that wall. Paul was connected with the salvation of Onesimus. He said he had begotten him in his bonds. But all that Paul did for Onesimus would have left him forever out of the building had not God undertaken for him.

God's people are used as instruments in erecting this spiritual house; but they are ut-

terly powerless to set souls into its walls. To God shall be all the praise for the salvation of saved souls. His seal and the mark of his tools will be found on every stone in his building from turret to foundation.

IV. THE OWNER OF THE BUILDING.

It is not always the case that the builder is the owner of the building. Frequently one person builds a house for another, and when it is completed there is not a nail or a stone in it that belongs to the builder. He must retire from the work of his hands and leave it to its proper owner.

But this is not the case in the building under consideration. The Scripture before us explicitly says, "Ye are God's building." In another place it is said to God's people, "Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price."

There is nothing in this building from capstone to foundation but that belongs to God. Every thing in it from pin to pillar has been bought and paid for with the precious blood of Christ. Prophets, apostles, pastors, teachers, disciples have all been purchased for this building. Not purchased with the coin of this world, such as that with which Abraham purchased a burying place, "current money with the merchant." Not such as the "thirty

pieces" for which Judas betrayed his Master. No they "were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold," "but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."

All who have been "builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit" may sing:

"Lord I am thine, entirely thine,
Purchased and saved by blood divine."

Let us rejoice, dearly beloved, that God is willing to build us together for a habitation of himself; that he is willing to dwell with us.

Let us open wide the doors of the spiritual house and invite him in, that the sunshine of his countenance may fall upon us, that dark and lonely hours may be cheered by his presence, and sin be subdued by his power.

Jesus has said "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."



CHAPTER V.

GOD'S PEOPLE A TEMPLE.

*Know ye not that ye are the temple of God,
and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?*

I Cor. 3: 16.

It has been said that "The distinctive idea of a temple, contrasted with all other buildings, is that it is the dwellingplace of a deity; and every heathen temple had its idol, but the true and living God dwelt "between the cherubim" in the Holy of Holies at Jerusalem. Hence, figuratively applied, a temple denotes the church of Christ."

We have supposed that God calls his people a building because he dwells in them. In the figure of a temple, used to represent God's people, we still have the idea of a building, but there is an advance in the thought. The idea of a temple carries us into the realm of religion. Ordinary buildings are the abodes of men,— bad men as well as good men. The building which we have just

had under consideration in the previous chapter is one in which God dwells; but a building is not necessarily the dwelling place of God. An ordinary building is not itself suggestive of any thing sacred or religious. But a temple is at once suggestive of religion and a deity; and since God dwells in his people, and the place where God dwells is, by virtue of his presence, a sacred place, God's people are a sacred building, or a temple.

Let us notice,

I. THAT A TEMPLE SUGGESTS AN INDWELLING DEITY.

II. THAT A TEMPLE MUST BE KEPT HOLY.

I. A TEMPLE SUGGESTS AN INDWELLING DEITY.

When God honors his people with the name of a temple, they should remember that the expression suggests his presence with them.

In the temple of old, God gave to the people an evidence of his presence. The shekinah between the cherubim was some kind of manifestation which gave evidence of the presence of God in the temple. The Psalmist says, "He sitteth between the cherubim." And again, "The Lord is in his holy temple."

At the dedication of the temple, when the ark of the covenant and the overshadowing cherubim were brought into the most holy

place, "the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord. Then spake Solomon, The Lord said that he would dwell in the thick darkness. I have surely built thee a house to dwell in, a settled place for thee to abide in forever."

At the time of the dedication of the temple at Jerusalem, the central place of Jewish worship, the Lord said concerning the temple, "Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place. For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there forever: and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually."

"In my distress," says one, "I called upon the Lord, and cried to my God: and he did hear my voice *out of his temple*, and my cry did enter into his ears." The Psalmist says, "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."

Thus, in the Scriptures, the temple is associated with God. It is said to be built un-

to him. It is spoken of as the place where he has put his name. It is spoken of as a place from which he is heard. God says he has chosen it that his name and his eyes, and his heart may be there.

When, then, God calls his people his temple we are at once reminded of his presence. The name suggests to us an indwelling deity.

The idea of a deity in the temple is not confined to the Christian religion. The heathen have their temples with their deities. But the deity which dwells in the temple named in the passage of Scripture before us is the "King of kings and Lord of lords." A building suggests an inhabitant; but a temple suggests an *indwelling God*.

II. A TEMPLE MUST BE KEPT HOLY.

When Moses saw the bush that burned with fire and was not consumed, he said "I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." And the Lord said to him "Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." The Lord was in the burning bush; it was a hallowed place, and Moses must unsandal his feet. "The place whereon thou standest," says the voice of God, "is holy ground."

“Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.” Men seem to feel that the place where God makes an especial manifestation of himself is a sacred place. Witness the feeling of Jacob when he had a dream, and saw, as it were, a ladder, and the angels ascending and descending, and the Lord standing above the ladder speaking to him. When he awaked out of his sleep he said, “Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”

Awe seems to strike through the hearts of men when they stand where God makes especial manifestations of his presence. If they are conscious of unforgiven sin how fearful to be where God makes his presence and his power visible to the eyes of men. They seem to feel at once that their sin has incurred the wrath of God,—that only holiness becomes his presence. Was it not a sense of a divine interposition that smote king Belshazzar with such fear when the handwriting appeared on the wall and he “saw the part of the hand that wrote?”

The belief in the hearts of men that God

has a controversy with sin is correct. The Psalmist says, "Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness; neither shall evil dwell with thee." The prophet says, "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity." The language of the New Testament is: "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God: as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

The church of Jesus Christ, is the temple of the Holy Ghost, and must be made and kept holy. It is said of the church, that "all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an *holy temple* in the Lord."

The church of Christ is not simply a "build-

ing fitly framed together," but it is a "holy temple." It is the sacred dwelling place of God.

If we should come to a clear and deep consciousness of the fact that we are indeed the temple of the Holy Ghost, that God, the great God, the holy God, is dwelling and walking in the church of which we are members, would we not cry out with Jacob waking from his dream, "surely God was in this place and I knew it not. How dreadful is this place! It is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven?"

Since God has condescended to build his people up into a holy temple and dwell in them, how vigilant ought they be to purify the temple.

If you should undertake to fit up for yourself a dwelling which had been the abode of careless and filthy tenants, two things would be required before the house would be ready for your occupation. In the first place it would need to be *cleansed*. You would not be willing to enter it and dwell in it until it had undergone a thorough renovation. But simply a renovation would not make it a desirable or convenient dwelling place. It must, in the second place, be *furnished*. It might

be never so clean and yet be very desolate. It must have certain things put into it as well as certain things taken out of it before it can be a desirable dwelling place.

This double preparation does the church of Christ need in order to be a "holy temple" unto the Lord. The absence of sin is not holiness. Holiness is something real and positive, and does not consist simply in the absence of sin. Not only must the "works of the flesh" be removed from the temple, but "the fruit of the Spirit" must be brought into it.

1. This temple must be *cleansed*.

God dwells in those who cry out with the Psalmist, "Cleanse thou me from secret faults;" "Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow;" and with the apostle, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Such souls constitute the temple of the Holy Ghost. God dwells in them, and he hears the cry of their sin burdened hearts, and cleanses them from their defilement.

When we entertain friends in our dwellings we are careful not to grieve or offend them. We avoid unpleasant topics in conversation. If there were a picture or a statue upon the

wall which we knew would recall painful recollections we would take it down. Our interest in our friends, our regard for their feelings, would constrain us to remove those things from their presence which would mar their enjoyment and tempt them to cut short their stay with us. We would try to have our dwellings at least free from offensive things.

Shall we have more regard for our friends, who are sinful mortals like ourselves, than for our God and Heavenly Father? It is a condescension for the Holy Ghost to dwell in the cleanest and best kept heart on earth; and as he hates sin with a perfect hatred it is no wonder if he makes but few cheering displays of himself in the hearts of those who strive but little to be free from moral pollution.

When the Christian believes himself to be the temple of God, believes that the Holy Ghost dwells in him, what pains he ought to take to keep the temple clean. The heart has in it, naturally, many things which are very offensive to the Spirit of God. There are thoughts which are unclean and unholy. The vile and polluted imaginings of the human heart are loathsome things to God. The Holy Ghost is grieved to meet with sordid and sensual passions in our hearts. Pride,

and worldliness, and hatred are things to be driven from our hearts as Christ drove the profane traders and money changers out of Jerusalem's holy temple. Every unholy thought or passion or imagination that enters the Christian's heart is a profane intruder in the temple of God.

Do we in our prayers, ask God to come into his temple and dwell there, and then walk before him arm in arm with his enemies,—evil thoughts, evil desires, evil feelings, worldliness, pride, selfishness and a host of other children of darkness? Is this the way to entertain the Holy Spirit? Is this the way to secure his presence and constrain him to abide with us forever?

That moral pollution represented in the Bible by 'sepulchres full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness,' is a loathsome thing in the sight of God to have brought into his temple.

Would a drunkard, scented with the fumes of rum, be a defilement to your best room? Would you feel that the atmosphere of your parlor would be contaminated by the presence of a base libertine?

These polluting beings would better grace your most tasty rooms than do the sins

that lurk in our hearts the temple of God in which the Holy Spirit has taken up his abode.

The practice of any known sin, the omission of any known duty will defile the temple of God.

How much mortified we would be to have our best friends come into our homes and find them all filled with things which were offensive and loathsome to them. We are careful of the feelings of our friends. We study to please them.

Then when the Spirit of God dwells in us as his temple, that Spirit which is as pure as holiness itself, how careful ought we be to put out of the temple and to *keep* out of the temple every polluted and polluting thing, and to write upon the door-posts of our hearts, once for all, "HOLINESS TO THE LORD."

If you were to invite a dear friend, who had had a son murdered, to come to your house for a visit, would you have upon the wall of the room in which you entertained that friend a picture of the murderer, and upon your center table, among your choicest relics, the blood-stained weapon with which the guilty deed was done? Would this be the arrangement you would make for the entertainment of your friend? Would it not be downright disrespect,

and an outrage upon his feelings to keep these mournful things before his eyes? Would you not grieve his heart, wound his feelings and tempt him to take an early departure with a fixed purpose never to return? Would he not be likely to think that you had some sympathy with the foul deed which bereaved him of a beloved son? Why else give these relics a place among your choice treasures?

It might seem as if such crime were too dark and too gross to be laid to the charge of any respectable man in a Christian land. But how much better is it to invite God to come and make his abode in your heart, when, behold! there are in your heart the murderers of his only-begotten Son,—the sins that nailed his well beloved to the cross?

It was sin that slew our Lord; and not the sin alone of those who lived eighteen hundred years ago, but your sin and mine. These sins with which you and I are so familiar, helped to lift up that cruel crown of thorns and place it on the Savior's head; helped to clench the hammer and drive the nails which murdered God's well-beloved Son. Away from our hearts with these polluting sins! Away with the murderers of our Lord!

Suppose that living near you, there should

be half a dozen persons of low character, and all of them your bitter enemies; and that some neighbor should invite you to spend the day with him, and after he had politely received and seated you, these enemies of yours should present themselves at the door, and your neighbor should receive them with just as much cordiality as he had received you, and should spend the day walking up and down the room before you, arm in arm with them, seeming to enjoy their low mirth and profanity, and to be just as much at home with them as he had been with you. Would you not soon suspect him of insincerity and of disloyalty to yourself? Would you not conclude at once that the order of things in that house was not intended for your pleasure? Would you not soon retire from that uncongenial place?

Wonder not then if the Holy Ghost retires in a large measure from your heart, leaving it without much comfort, without much hope, without much joy, if you are knowingly entertaining any sin.

Do not ask God in the morning to come and dwell in your heart by his Spirit, imparting strength and consolation and hope, and then, one by one, let in anger and pride and

selfishness, and worldliness and discontent to occupy the temple of the Holy Ghost.

Put God's temple in better order than this. Suppress every unholy feeling; banish every unchaste and impure desire. Give place to nothing in the temple of God upon which he cannot look with pleasure.

Day by day, through watchfulness and prayer, we ought to be cleansing the sacred edifice. There must be no reserved seats, no secret corner for any favorite sin. Though that sin be as dear as a right hand or a right eye, we must part company with it, if we desire the cheering presence of the Savior in the temple. "What agreement hath the temple of God with idols?"

We cannot live in Egypt and in Canaan at the same time. If we expect to go to heaven we must break truce with hell. If we prefer the "pleasures of sin" to the society of God the choice is before us; but let us not impiously attempt to bring sin and the Holy Ghost into partnership. There is no fellowship between them. We might as successfully attempt to unite heaven and hell in marriage as to compromise sin and the Holy Ghost in our hearts. Sin is the one thing which God hates. Then "grieve not the

Spirit of God whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption," by allowing sin in his temple.

2. But we have said that it is not enough that the temple be cleansed; it must be *furnished*.

Of all the furniture which we set up, that which we bring into the temple of God should be the most select. Of all the adornments which we attempt let those which we bring into the temple of God be the brightest. "The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit" "is in the sight of God of great price." The graces, or fruits of the Spirit, will adorn the temple and be pleasing to God.

A *praying spirit* is an acceptable furnishing for the temple of the Holy Ghost,— a spirit which delights in supplication and praise,— in communion with God. That would be a cold room, into which our friends should invite us, and then leave us to ourselves. When we enter the homes of our friends it is that we may have intercourse with them. We desire their society. When we meet God in his temple he desires that we hold communion with him. His Son spent the whole night in prayer unto him; and he calls upon us to bring into his temple a spirit of prayer.

Faith is another grace with which we must furnish the temple of the Holy Ghost. without faith it is impossible to please God. "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Faith must be found in his temple.

Love to God is another grace with which to furnish the temple. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart."

Love to the children of God is a grace to be kept in the temple of the Holy Ghost. "Beloved if God so loved us we ought also to love one another."

Humility is a grace which adorns the temple of God. "Be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time."

Brethren and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ, are we, by the grace of God, purifying the temple of the Holy Ghost, and furnishing it with the graces of the Spirit?



CHAPTER VI.

GOD'S PEOPLE AS BRANCHES OF A VINE.

I am the vine, ye are the branches.

John 15 : 5.

This passage, taken in connection with the context, suggests to us,

I. THAT THE CHRISTIAN RECEIVES HIS SPIRITUAL LIFE FROM CHRIST.

II. THAT THE CHRISTIAN PARTAKES OF THE NATURE OF CHRIST.

I. THE CHRISTIAN RECEIVES HIS SPIRITUAL LIFE FROM CHRIST.

It is not difficult to understand that the branch derives its life from the vine upon which and out of which it grows. The fluids which are drawn up from the earth by the vine and which run through it, giving it life and leaves, run outward through the branches also and give them their life and leaves. "The branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine." It cannot bear even leaves except it abide in the vine. It cannot even live

except it abide in the vine. The branch that has been severed from the vine is a dead branch. The leaves wither, the fruit shrivels, the fluids dry out of the branch and it is dead.

The soul that is not united to Christ by faith, is a dead soul,—“dead in trespasses and sins,” and except it receives life from Christ it remains dead. “He that abideth not in me,” says Christ, “is cast forth as a branch and is withered.” He is the source of the soul’s spiritual life. He is “the way, the truth and the life.”

In spiritual things the soul is by nature dead, and unless Christ imparts life to it it will remain dead. No branch severed from the vine and lying in the withering sun was ever more dead than is the soul to divine things until Christ sends into it a vital energy which is life from the dead.

The bleak, bald rock, washed for ages by the waters of old ocean; the girdled tree with its bare, leafless limbs reaching out into the pelting, blasting storms is not more destitute of vegetable life than is the soul of spiritual life until it is united by faith to Christ. No power but the power of Christ can give it life.

What is there other than the vine that can give life to the branches? Can you take the

branch away from the vine and preserve its life? Can you feed it with the juices of the apple-tree? Can you nourish it with milk? Separation from the vine means death to the branch. So does separation from Christ mean death to the soul. No signs of spiritual life can be found in a Christless soul. There is no true love to God. There is no joy in spiritual things. There is no delight in the service of God. There is no communion of the soul with God. These things can no more exist in the soul until there is a connection established between it and Christ than life can exist in the branch separated from the vine. Until there be this union of the soul with Christ there is in it not a particle of true faith, not one moment of Godly sorrow for sin, not a ray of Christian hope. It is when life goes from him to the soul, as from the vine to the branch, that spirituality has its beginning.

Spiritual life is not transmitted from parent to child. No matter how much grace parents may have in their hearts none is ever inherited by their offspring. We have great reason to hope that the children of faithful, pious parents will become Christians, through the surrounding of pious influences and the prayer of faith. "The promise," says the word

of God, "is to you and to your children." But when the children of pious parents become Christians, the grace which makes them such comes not from the parents, but directly from Christ, as the life of the branch from the vine.

Of the "sons of God" it is said that they "were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Christ says to Nicodemus, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

Nothing that is spiritual over comes through natural generation. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." No grace descends through blood. Christianity is not hereditary. The apostle Paul, while in the flesh, was assured that his spiritual life was from Christ. He says, "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."

Again, grace cannot be handed down from father to son, as other treasures are bequeathed. When a Christian man writes out his last will and testament, and apporitions his goods among his heirs, there is not a syllable in the document about the interest in Christ which that Christian father possesses. That which is of

the most value, that which is worth ten thousand times more than all his other treasures, he cannot leave to his children. As good and as great a man as was David he could bequeath no grace to Absalom. Eli, though a prophet of the Lord, could not transfer his piety to his wicked sons. All grace must come directly from Christ. "I am the vine" says he, "ye are the branches." From what source can the branches draw their life other than the vine? Some wealthy relative may make you independently rich by transferring to you the titles of his estate; but "grace, mercy and peace" you will find only in the will and testament of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Spiritual gifts cannot be bought with the precious things of earth. Simon Magus, who probably could have bought out all the earthly store of a great many of God's poor people, made a sad mistake when he offered the apostles "money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost." "Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money."

Many precious things can be bought with

money. The life of a captive, or the liberty of a prisoner may sometimes be put in the balances with money, and an equivalent be weighed out for them. But once more we repeat it, for spiritual life, we must go to Christ. The branch must draw its life from the vine.

Blessed be God for this abundant source; that he from whom we draw our spiritual life is a vine, the virtue of which, we never can exhaust. With him giving doth not impoverish nor withholding make rich. The branches never over-draw the strength of this vine. The more spiritual life and spiritual strength we draw from Christ the better is he pleased. He desires the branches to abide in him, to be strong, vigorous and fruitful. We are invited to come to Christ boldly. God said to his ancient people, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it."

There is but one way to obtain spiritual life; but that one way is enough. There is but one source of spiritual life; but all the world cannot exhaust that source. If all the world should at this hour lift up a cry to Christ for spiritual life there would be a full supply for all. He who said to his disciples, "I am the vine and ye are the branches" is able to make

all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work."

II. THE CHRISTIAN PARTAKES OF THE NATURE OF CHRIST.

Peter, in his second Epistle, says, "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be *partakers of the divine nature*, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

The branch is certainly partaker of the nature of the vine. There is no reason why it should not be. It could not be otherwise. It never had an existence until it grew out of the vine. It had its origin in the vine. The vine put it forth, the vine fed it, and fed it with the same nourishment with which it was itself fed. It is, as it were, begotten of the vine, and begotten in the same likeness. Some of the characteristics of the vine are to be found in the branches. Do you find upon the vine a peculiar kind of bark? You find the

same on the branches. Is there a peculiar taste in the wood of the vine? The same taste is in the branches. Does the wood of the vine have a peculiar color and texture? The same peculiar color and texture are found in the branches. Is there a peculiar kind of leaf on the vine? The same kind of leaf is on the branches. Is there a peculiar kind of fluid running through the vine? The same kind of fluid runs through the branches.

All these peculiar characteristics which distinguish these branches from the oak, or the cherry, are given to it by the vine. It is emphatically a partaker of the nature of the vine. When the vine gives to the branch its own life it gives also its own characteristics. This is in accordance with the law impressed upon Nature, when God said, "Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth." How astonished we would be to see the vine shooting forth branches of a dozen kinds,—a branch of elm, a branch of hickory, a branch of locust, etc., as if the principle of *like producing like* did not exist in the vine. Such monstrosities do not occur in nature. The branch has the same nature as the vine.

Christ is the "true vine," and his disciples are the branches, and the branches partake of the nature of the vine. Christ's people are Christ-like. They do not simply imitate Christ, but they have a nature which, in its measure, is like the nature of Christ.

When Christ gives a new, spiritual life to the soul he gives to it his own characteristics, just as the parent gives his own characteristics to his child, or as the vine gives its characteristics to the branches. The parent cannot transmit grace to the souls of his children; but his own natural characteristics he does transmit, and they have his nature. So when a soul is born of God it takes some of the nature of God.

The life which Christ gives to the soul is the awakening and kindling of new desires. New springs of action operate in the soul. New tastes and desires are kindled in the soul, and these things are feeble reflections of the nature of Christ. Is there in Christ a delight in holiness? So is there in the Christian. Is there in Christ a spirit of meekness? So is there in the Christian. Is there in Christ a spirit of love? So is there in the Christian. Is there in Christ a desire for the salvation of souls? So is there in the Christian. Is

there in Christ a desire for communion with the Father? So is there in the Christian. Is there in Christ a hatred of sin? So is there in the Christian. Is there in Christ a spirit of compassion for the suffering? So is there in the Christian. That new life which is in him, and which constitutes him a Christian, is a life begotten of the Spirit of Christ, and must of necessity have the nature of Christ. God begets children in his own likeness. Dear friend, if you have not the nature of Christ, if you are not Christ-like, you are not a branch of the true vine.

We would not be understood to mean that when a soul is born of God there is communicated to it the omnipotence of God, or the omniscience of God, or the omnipresence of God; or that the soul, in any sense, becomes God. There are certain attributes of God which are incommunicable. No amount of grace would make a Christian omnipotent or omniscient; yet grace will, nevertheless, make him like Christ. The soul that abides in Christ, that draws its life from Christ, as the branch from the vine, will have a Christ-like love, a Christ-like patience, a Christ-like meekness, a Christ-like compassion, a Christ-like resignation to the will of the Father, &

Christ-like desire for doing good and a Christ-like holiness. In fact he will be a partaker of the divine nature. He will be a branch of the true vine; he will resemble Christ.

The more the soul feeds upon Christ the more of his nature will it possess. In a certain sense the branch feeds upon the vine. It takes its nourishment out of the vine. In a sense, and an important sense, the soul of the Christian feeds on Christ. Christ says to his disciples, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily verily I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood ye have no life in you.

Whosoever eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

For my flesh is meat indeed and my blood is drink indeed.

He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me and I in him.

As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me."

Surely the branch no more feeds upon the vine, than does the soul upon Christ. The doctrines of the cross are food to the Christian who is alive to spiritual things. He has 'meat to eat that the world knows not of,'— "a feast of fat things; wine on the lees and well refined."

We may feed upon Christ in his word. The doctrines and promises of the word of God cheer and strengthen the Christian's soul.

Had not the Psalmist been feeding his soul upon the word of God when he said, "O how love I thy law; it is my meditation all the day?" Had not he been feeding his soul on Christ in his word who wrote for the churches to sing:

"How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in his excellent word?"

Have not Christians in all ages, when their faith needed to be nourished and strengthened, turned to the cheering, strengthening words of their Savior and found in them the food that their hungering spirits needed? "Man shall not live by bread alone; but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." As the fluids of the vine feed the branch, so

do the words of Christ the hungering soul of the Christian.

The soul feeds upon Christ at a throne of grace. When the Christian, ransomed by the blood of Christ, comes into communion with his Savior; rises above the world into the realm of that which is pure and holy, and holds converse with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ, he draws from the true vine spiritual food for his spiritual nature.

The soul of the Christian draws spiritual nourishment from Christ in the ordinance of the Lord's supper. When he takes into his hands the emblems of a suffering Savior, Gethsemane and Calvary are brought to his view. The compassion of his dying Lord is well calculated to excite his love and gratitude, and to awaken in his heart resolutions to live a life consecrated to the service of him who poured out his soul unto death for his salvation. The scenes of agony which bought his soul from the death that never dies are calculated to rein in a spirit of worldliness, and to strengthen the soul for duty and conflict.

In all these things the soul feeds upon Christ. And as it thus feeds upon him, it partakes more and more of his nature, reflects more and more of his image, and presents

to the world more and more of his likeness.

Being made partakers of the divine nature by a spiritual birth, and having an ever present Savior upon whom our souls may constantly feed their spiritual life, how much of the nature of Christ we ought to possess. How much likeness we ought to bear to the vine of which we are the branches. Certainly we ought to possess enough of the likeness of Christ to make it plain to the world that we are his disciples.

If some one should hand you a branch taken from a grape-vine and ask you from what he had plucked that branch, you would have no difficulty in deciding upon the parent stock. There would be the leaves, the bark, the wood, and perchance the fruit, all of which would remind you at once of the vine from which it had been taken. So the lives of Christians should remind the world of Christ; for he is the vine and they are the branches.

If we desire to draw the world to Christ we must show to the world the attractions of Christ. If we are his followers we are partakers of his nature and we ought to let the world see in us something of the nature of Christ. Our own sinful nature must be repressed, and the character of Christ exhibited in our lives:

We must be like the vine of which we are the branches. In the midst of persecutions did Christ show to the world a spirit of forbearance and love? So must we. When his soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death, did he say to the Father, "Not my will but thine be done?" So we, being made partakers of his nature, must show to the world a spirit of submission to the Father's will in the hour of suffering. Did he pray for his enemies? So must we pray for our enemies. Did he love those who hated him? So must we love those who hate us.

Being the professed and acknowledged followers of Christ, we can in this way show to the world something of the love and beauty of our adorable Redeemer.

It is an exalted privilege for sinners as unworthy and imperfect as we are to be allowed to represent Christ by our lives. Poor imitations are we, indeed, of Christ. It is to be feared that sometimes the world would scarcely suspect us of being branches of "the true vine," and "partakers of the divine nature." Unworthy and imperfect creatures are we, to be chosen to represent the beauties of Immanuel.

If we desire to show to the world the nature and character of Christ we must abide in him.

“As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine; no more can ye,” says Christ, “except ye abide in me.”

By abiding in Christ, and drawing from him large supplies of spiritual life, we will increase in those graces of which he is the source, increase in our resemblance to him, will exhibit more of his nature to the world. “He that abideth in me and I in him,” says he, “bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing.”

CHAPTER VII.

GOD'S PEOPLE AS SHEEP.

We are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Psalm 95:7.

When God's people are represented to us under the figure of sheep, there seem to come naturally to our minds thoughts of,

- I. A FLOCK.
- II. A SHEPHERD.
- III. A MEEK AND GENTLE DISPOSITION.
- IV. A FOLD.
- V. A PASTURE.

I. A FLOCK.

It is with the idea of sheep before his mind, I suppose, that Christ calls his people a "flock." He says to his disciples, "Fear not little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

In the thirty-fourth chapter of Ezekiel, in speaking of his people, God says: "I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God."

And again, "And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord God."

It is the disposition of sheep to live in flocks. There are some birds and beasts which we do not generally find in flocks or herds. The hawk or the owl you may see flying alone through the air, or sitting solitary on his perch.

The lion and the fox prowl in solitude through the forests. This solitude of habit is said to be a general characteristic of rapacious animals. It is not a characteristic of sheep. We find them in flocks. They do not live so much alone as some other animals. Each sheep does not live as if it were the only sheep in the world. When we speak of sheep it is customary to say, "A flock of sheep."

Now how can the term "flock" be appropriately applied to Christians? Is it true that they resemble sheep in this respect? It is. But we do not mean that Christians separate themselves from the world and live in communities or cities set apart especially for the saints. Christians and unbelievers are mingled in the same cities, towns and families. Around the same family hearth and board are

mingled the sheep and goats, the people of God and the children of darkness.

But though Christians must, and do, mingle more or less with unbelievers, there is a tendency in them to draw near to each other; a tendency in them to locate near each other. As there is something in the nature of sheep which draws them together, so is there in Christians. For purposes of Christian intercourse, and Christian worship, and Christian sympathy they desire to be near to each other. The Christians of a community come together and organize themselves into an association, have their names enrolled together, build a house of worship where they may meet together, appoint seasons for these meetings and habitually assemble together as a flock. They do not assemble as human beings simply, but as Christians, drawn by ties that bind their hearts in Christian love. The gathering together is in the name of Christ; they come together because drawn by some principle within them, as sheep gather themselves into a flock.

In the shepherd's flock the interests of the sheep are very much the same. The same pasture, the same water, the same atmosphere suits all the sheep of the flock, and as they

are peaceful among themselves it is very suitable that they go in flocks.

The sheep of Christ's fold have common interests which draw them together. They all have the same spiritual nature, enjoy the same spiritual food and receive it at the hand of the same Shepherd. God's people may then be called sheep because they are a flock. By the nature of their new birth they are drawn toward each other.

As sheep prefer to be with sheep rather than with cattle or swine or dogs, so God's people prefer to be with God's people rather than with unbelieving, unrenewed sinners. They are like "birds of a feather," like sheep of the pasture; they are a flock.

II. THE SHEPHERD.

Where there are sheep we suppose there to be a shepherd. Sheep are dependent and need to be cared for. They need some one to lead them into green pastures and beside still waters. They need some one to stand by them in danger and protect them. Not one, who, as a hireling when he seeth the wolf coming leaveth the sheep and fleeth, but one who careth for the sheep and will protect them in their hour of need and danger.

Sheep do not lay up food for themselves;

neither have they much disposition to defend themselves against the attacks of their enemies.

Birds are smaller and feebler than sheep, but they will live whether we take care of them or not. The bee is very small, but it does not need our aid in order to find the flowers and gather its winter store. The ants are smaller still than the bees, but they build their own houses and lay up their own provision. They are their own carpenters and quartermasters.

The spider sets its own trap and catches its own game; and the wasp fights its own battles. But the sheep we must take care of. They are dependent and defenceless. If the shepherd leaves them they are likely to come to want, or be caught and scattered by the wolf.

So it is with Christ's flock,—the bravest of them, the best of them and all of them. When the Shepherd was smitten the sheep were scattered. "They all forsook him and fled."

The sheep of Christ's fold would not be safe for a single hour did not he, as a kind Shepherd, watch over them.

In temporal affairs we defend ourselves. We are enough like bears and lions in carnal things; but when it comes to fighting spiritual battles we are at once shorn of our teeth and claws. We need a kind and watchful

Shepherd, one who "careth for the sheep."

Such a Shepherd have God's people. The Psalmist says, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want: he maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters."

Christ says, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." And again, I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep and am known of mine."

Christ is not only the Shepherd of his sheep, but he is the *good* Shepherd. He is the kind Shepherd. The prophet Isaiah, in speaking of the Lord says: "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young."

What a tender and merciful Shepherd: "He shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom."

The Lord, through his prophet, says, "Behold I even I will both search my sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered: so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them out from

the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel, by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be; there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel. I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God. And I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick."

How many feeble ones there are in the fold of Christ; how many that need to be gathered in the Shepherd's arm and carried in his bosom. How many that go astray and need a kind and patient Shepherd to seek them and bring them home. The Psalmist says: "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.

Who of us does not have occasion to say, with shame and sorrow, and that over and over again, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep?"

We need a "good Shepherd," a faithful, a loving, and a patient Shepherd, and such a Shepherd is Christ. He has said "The good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep;" and for his sheep he did lay down his life.

Justice, like a hungry wolf, was pursuing the flock, and our Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, gave himself up, to satisfy its demands, just as a shepherd would allow the hungry wolves to satisfy their appetites upon his own flesh and blood that the sheep of his fold might not be torn in pieces and devoured.

Christ was no hireling Shepherd, who, when he saw the wolf coming, would leave the sheep to be caught and destroyed. He stood between us and danger. "He was bruised for our iniquities and by his stripes we were healed." Blessed souls are they who can say with God's servant of old, "The Lord is my Shepherd."

We need to be protected from the power of the evil one who, "as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." There are none of us able to cope with the adversaries of our souls alone. How many have been swept away into everlasting darkness who would not be led and protected by Christ as a Shepherd. He would have gathered them in

his arm and carried them in his bosom, but they "would not." He would have made them to lie down in green pastures and have led them beside still waters, but they "would not."

How they sin against their own souls, and "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath," who refuse to be gathered in the arm, and carried in the bosom of so kind, so good a Shepherd as the Lord Jesus Christ!

III. A MEEK AND GENTLE DISPOSITION.

A meek and gentle disposition is a characteristic of sheep. Not that every sheep at all times exhibits these amiable traits, but, in the main they are characteristic of sheep.

These dispositions are characteristic of God's people. Not that every Christian at all times exhibits these amiable traits, but, in the main they are characteristic of God's people.

God's people are followers of a meek and lowly Savior. He says: "Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart." It is said of him in Isaiah: "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth."

~ Peter speaking of him says, "Who when he

was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.’

Christ was meek and gentle in his disposition; and, as his people are made partakers of his nature, they partake of his meekness and gentleness.

Christ’s religion transforms his followers into his own likeness. It subdues unholy and turbulent passions and tames the wild nature.

There are some wild and unruly sheep in God’s flock; but it is the nature of the grace of God to tame and subdue. It changes the lion-like spirit into that of the lamb.

The prophet, in speaking of a time when the subduing power of the gospel should be mightily felt in the world, says: “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play upon the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’ den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the world shall be full of

the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”

Such is the tendency of the gospel among those who embrace it. It makes them dwell together in harmony, quieting and subduing the ferocities of a turbulent nature.

Men of strong passions and quarrelsome habits may, by the subduing grace of God, be made as quiet and peaceable as a flock of sheep, or the sportive lambs gamboling on the green.

Saul of Tarsus is an example of one subdued by the grace of God. He was a sworn enemy of the disciples of Christ. We find him on the road to Damascus for the purpose of entering the fold, and worrying the sheep,—intending to catch them and carry them to some wolf's den. But Christ met him on the way, converted him and put him into the sheep-fold; and though some of the sheep, as we might expect, were afraid of him at first, we soon read that he is “with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.”

Paul the apostle is a very different man from Saul of Tarsus. In the service of sin he was a prowling beast of prey. In the service of Christ he was a peaceable sheep.

If you will let your mind run back over the

histories of some of God's people of your own acquaintance you will probably find instances of persons who were rude, coarse, disagreeable sinners; persons who, on account of their fiery dispositions, and reckless, unguarded ways, you almost dreaded to meet; but who, since they have become Christ's sheep, are subdued and quiet in their ways, and lamb-like in their dispositions?

This spirit, which it is the nature of the gospel to produce, is well pleasing to God, and brings a blessing to his people. "Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth."

IV. A FOLD.

Christ says, "And other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice: and there shall be one fold and one Shepherd." There is then a "fold" as well as a "flock."

A fold is an enclosure for the protection of the sheep. It has walls round about the sheep to prevent the wolf from breaking in upon them.

The people of God's pasture and the sheep of his hand have, as it were, walls round about them for their protection. "As the mountains," says the Psalmist, "are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about them

that fear him, and delivereth them." And again, "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them."

The following words of the Psalmist are full of comfort to God's people, and suggestive of the protection which he throws around them: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noon day. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. 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; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.

Does not the Lord furnish a fold of protection for the sheep of his flock? His watchful eye is ever upon them and his arms are ever around them. "He that keepeth thee," says the Psalmist, "will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth and even for evermore."

This love, and watchfulness; this sleepless care and protection which God exercises, are like the walls of a strong fold built around the sheep of his hand and the people of his pasture. Blessed are they who are in it. No beast of prey, no roaring lion, can break through upon the flock when folded in the protecting arms of him who never slumbers nor sleeps. The arms of the Shepherd make a strong and sufficient fold for all the sheep of his defenceless flock.

And will he permit his fearful, trembling ones to lie in his arms for protection? Hear this ye trembling sheep, panting with fear or

distress: "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

David never led his sheep into a better, safer fold at night than this.

No shepherd ever built a fold that furnished such blessed rest and sure protection as the arms, the strong arms, "the *everlasting* arms" of the good Shepherd. He says "I give unto them eternal life: and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." Thrice blessed are they who are folded in "the everlasting arms."

V. A PASTURE.

The Psalmist, in speaking of the Lord as his Shepherd, says, "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters."

He who undertakes to keep sheep, has for them, not only a fold, but a pasture. The sheep must not only be protected, but fed.

Is there pasture for God's sheep? Some stay out of the fold of Christ as if they thought there were no provision made to meet the hunger and thirst of the flock.

Not only is there pasture for Christ's sheep but there is good pasture. The paths of the Shepherd "drop fatness."

God makes his sheep to lie down in green pastures. They are not brown, withered and barren pastures. The provision which the good Shepherd makes for his sheep, is a rich and satisfying provision. The poet says:

“Blest Jesus, what delicious fare,
How sweet thy entertainments are.”

There is no provision other than that found in the gospel which can satisfy the souls of God's people.

The song of those who have tried the pastures of this world is,

“People of the living God,
I have sought the world around,
Paths of sin and sorrow trod,
Peace and comfort nowhere found;
Now my spirit turns to you,
Turns a fugitive unblest,
Brethren, where your altar burns,
O receive me into rest.”

Only in the provisions of the gospel dear friend, can you find any thing to satisfy the hunger and thirst of your immortal soul.



CHAPTER VIII.

GOD'S PEOPLE A FAMILY.

Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named. Eph. 3:15.

In comparing the people of God with a family let us notice,

- I. FAMILY TIES.
- II. THE FAMILY NAME.
- III. FAMILY POSSESSIONS.
- IV. FAMILY JOYS AND SORROWS.

The word "family" is a word fraught with great and precious interests. The family is a little private community. It has interests which are peculiar to itself,—pleasures with which "a stranger doth not intermeddle."

It is a little circle where confidence is enjoyed; where "charity suffereth long and is kind;" where weakness and imperfection are covered up from the world.

In the family, affection may exercise itself

without being afraid of the proprieties of society, or the cold and unsympathizing gaze of the world without.

Let us notice some of the resemblances existing between God's people and the family circle.

I. FAMILY TIES.

There are ties which bind the members of one family into close confederation. The four walls that enclose that little group shut out the world's cold and curious stare; and though the passers by may see the mellow light that streams out upon the pavement, and hear the melody of voices within, they are not conscious of the strong and tender bonds that make all the inmates of that room one.

The members of this little group are bone of each other's bone and flesh of each other's flesh, and by natural ties are drawn towards each other and bound to each other as to no one else in the world.

Now the church of God, both in heaven and on earth, is called by this precious and significant name, *family*.

This name at once throws a charm into the thought of being a child of God. To be one of the people of God is to belong to the most blessed family that ever had an ex-

istence. The family of God has in it the best people on earth, and the saints already in glory. The text says: "Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named."

It is the nature of the religion of Christ's family to bind its members together in close relation, to unite them in bonds of affection, as the members of one household. They have a common parentage,—one God and Father, and children of the same Father must be brothers and sisters.

We do not find children, as soon as they arrive at years of understanding, straying off into strange families, having no attachment for each other, no regard for the family relation. They cling together, they protect each other, they take comfort in each other. Night falls and finds them around one hearth stone. They are drawn together and bound together by family ties. They are careful of each other's comfort and jealous of each other's good name. How quickly and keenly would a brother's heart be stung should a sister become the object of some villain's scandal. How a husband's heart would be pierced should he hear the good name of his wife reproached. Would he not say to the offender, 'He that toucheth her toucheth the

apple of mine eye?' There are strong ties which bind the members of an earthly household into a little community of its own.

Now by the nature of the Christian religion the members of the household of God are bound into one family. They are brothers and sisters in Christ. As children under one roof, they have similar experiences; they are interested in the same things; they mingle together and talk of the same Savior; their Christian life is nourished by the same spiritual food. They have a family dialect, and speak a language which the world can neither speak nor understand. The world cannot pronounce the "shibboleth" of the family of God. It is only those who have been born again, and born into the family of God who can speak the Christian's language; and as nations or tribes are bound together by the peculiarities of their own dialects, so are the people of God bound together by that peculiarity of their dialect which distinguishes them from all the world besides. Christ reveals himself to them as he does not to the world; he speaks to them as he does not to the world, and hence they know things of which the world cannot speak, because it knows nothing of them.

What do they know of the meaning of the hymn:

“Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love?”

What meaning is there to them in the expressions, “communion of believers,” “union with Christ,” “indwelling of the Spirit,” and “joy in the Holy Ghost?”

These expressions are suggestive of Christian experience. They are peculiarities of the dialect of the family of God.

There is a oneness of parentage, of dialect, of understanding, of feeling and of interests which makes the people of God one family.

The ties of this family are not severed by death. The text says: “Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.”

“Part of the host have crossed the flood,
And part are crossing now;
And we are to the margin come
And soon expect to go.”

The members of God's family are on both sides of Jordan. The narrow stream which lies between them cannot sever the ties which make them one.

We do not erase from our family records the names of those who pass before us to the spirit land. We mark the spot where their bodies lie. The marble slab, the green turf

and the modest flower all show that we still cherish in the family circle of earth, the names of those who have passed away.

We sympathize with the "little cottage girl" who insisted that of brothers and sisters there were seven. Though two of them in Conway dwelt, and two were gone to sea, and two were in the church yard laid,

"The little maid would have her way,
And said, 'Nay, master we are seven.'"

Thus do we feel about our divided families. Though some of them "in the church yard lie," we do not strike their names from the family record.

So also is it with the people of God;

"One family we dwell in him,
Above, on earth, beneath,
Though now divided by the stream,
The narrow stream of death."

Whenever you take a Christian by the hand do you recognize the fact that you grasp the hand of a member of your own family? There are ties which make every Christian one with every other Christian on earth and in heaven.

II. THE FAMILY NAME.

Every family among us has a name, a family name. These little groups into which the human race is divided are distinguished from each other by their name.

The people of God have a family name. The various branches of the family have various names; but *Christian* is the name of the whole household. "The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch."

Christian is the name of every child of God, and it is an honorable name. It certainly is an honor to be called for Christ, to be named after him. Is it an honor to bear the name of some one who has had an illustrious career? Who has done great deeds and won bright laurels? The Christian is named after him whose natal song was sung by angels, who went up and down Palestine attended by admiring and astonished crowds; who turned the water into wine, healed the leper, opened blind eyes, multiplied the bread and fish, stilled the stormy sea, raised the dead to life and died to save mankind.

Child of God, are you ashamed of your name? ashamed to be called for Christ? Is it any reproach to be called a Christian?

Sometimes the family name may fall into reproach. Ancestors may have been guilty of such deeds of shame that their descendants would fain change their name, because it has become a hissing and a by-word. But, disciples of Christ, do you ever need to blush at

any of the deeds of him whose name you bear? If Christ is not ashamed to call us brethren we need not be ashamed to be called Christians. Blessed are they who bear the family name of the people of God. They are named after him whose "name," we are told, "is above every name."

III. FAMILY POSSESSIONS.

A family has possessions. Farms and lots and houses and money are not owned by people generally. They mostly belong to particular families.

There are not many families so poor but that they have some family possessions, something that does not belong to the community at large. It may be much or little, but it is a *family possession*.

It is thus with the family of God. They have possessions which do not belong to the people of the world,—possessions such as the people of the world do not have.

The peace of conscience which God's people enjoy is a treasure which the man of the world does not find among his earthly goods. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." Whatever else the man of

the world may have, surely peace of conscience is not among his possessions. Peace is a blessed legacy left by Christ to the family of God, and to none others. Christ was speaking to the family of God when he said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you."

Men of the world may own broad fields and have much gold in bank. They may add house to house and farm to farm, they may wear soft clothing and live in king's houses, they may pull down their barns and build greater and store them with harvests of golden grain and fare sumptuously every day; but that blessed possession, peace, which Christ bequeathed to his disciples, cannot be found among their treasures. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." Peace, we say again, is a possession of the Christian household. "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God." "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee."

There is a "peace which passeth understanding; but it is not kept on merchant's shelves, it is not dug out of the earth, it is not found in the hoary deep, it does not grow on plain or mountain, it is not found in the coffers of

the rich. It is the gift of God to his family. "Peace I leave with you," says Christ; "my peace I give unto you."

Another valuable possession of the family of God is their *Christian hope*. That hope which maketh not ashamed. That hope which is "as an anchor to the soul both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil."

This hope is no worldly possession. The people of the world may turn their goods over and over; but among them all they will find no Christian hope. The word of God declares that they are "strangers to the covenant of promise, having no hope and without God in the world."

In order to have this hope we must belong to the family of God. We must be begotten of God to this blessedness. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

The hope of an inheritance that is "incorruptible, undefiled and that fadeth not away," is a glorious possession; but it belongs only to those who have been begotten unto it. It is found nowhere except in the household of God.

The most of the land which the children of Israel were to possess lay on "the other side of Jordan." So it is with most of the Christian's possessions. God's family have some good things in the wilderness; but beyond the river is a "land flowing with milk and honey," and his people will soon exchange the wilderness manna for the corn of Canaan. But while Canaan's good things are in waiting hope looks over the river upon the

"Sweet fields arrayed in living green
And rivers of delight,"

and rests happy in the prospect.

Dear friend, look through your estate and see whether there is in it a "good hope through grace," a hope that entereth into that within the veil.

Again, we have said that the most of the Christian's treasure lies over the river. He has "a home over there." Our Elder Brother once said, "In my Father's house are many mansions," and in reading the will which has

been left to the heirs of God, we have seen among other things this sentence: "For we know that if this earthly house of our tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

We can assure the people of the world that God's family is not a poor family.

Man of the world, what are your perishable possessions worth which you can drag no farther with you than to your death-bed? What are they worth compared with the Christian's peace "which passeth understanding," his "hope which maketh not ashamed," and his home in heaven which is better than any you possess on earth?

There may be men who have not much change in their pockets, who yet have great wealth in lands and stock. Such men can afford to be found with out much change about them. Their lands and their stock are a security against bankruptcy and poverty.

Some of God's people do not have much change about them; but they can afford to be found with out much tinkling coin in their pockets when they have a fortune laid up "where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal."

Dives could clothe himself in purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day; but over the river God's Lazarus had better clothes and better food. God's children are all rich.

IV. FAMILY JOYS AND SORROWS.

There are joys and sorrows among the members of the same family which might be called *family joys and sorrows*. There are joys with which "a stranger doth not intermeddle," and there are sorrows which do not much affect the outside world.

The confidence which the members of one family have in each other, and the sympathy which exists between them, lay the foundation for joy which can only be experienced where this confidence and sympathy are found.

Do not families engage in conversation about things which deeply interest them and give them great joy as a family, when if a stranger should suddenly enter the room, these themes which gave so much household joy would at once be dropped? And why? Because the stranger is not supposed to be in full sympathy with that household, and does not enjoy the confidence of a member of the family. The interests of that family may be nothing more to him, and no more sacred to

him, than those of a thousand other families. But this household has joys which are peculiarly its own.

If an erring and wandering son returns to his father's home and the bosom of an affectionate family, we expect a deeper joy in that household than in the surrounding homes.

We expect the family's misfortunes and grievances to send sorrow and sleepless nights into the household where they occur, while often they are but little felt in other homes of the city or hamlet.

So in the family of God there are seasons of joy and of grief which affect the Christian household as they do not affect the outside world.

When a child of God falls into sin what an occasion of grief to the brothers and sisters in the church who love the Christian household and are jealous of the honor of their heavenly Father.

And when one has wandered off into sin and lukewarmness in the service of the Master, and, like the prodigal, comes home again and returns to the duties of a member of the "household of faith," what joy there is, not only "in the presence of the angels of God" but in the family of God's redeemed.

Enclosed by the walls and curtains of earthly homes, there are seasons of joy, and festive occasions, which have a peculiar interest to that one household.

As, by one after another, the number of those who come as angels of mercy to gladden the household with their sunshiny presence are increased, the mother "remembereth no more the anguish for joy that a man is born into the world." There is joy in that circle when a new spirit enters it to share the fortunes of the family, and to be both a care and a comfort.

So when a child is born into the family of God there is joy in the Christian household. There is one more to share the joys and bear the burdens of a Christian life. One more to share the family possessions. One more to be a care and a comfort in the household of faith.

When the circles of earthly homes are broken by death, and the loved ones are laid away in the silent tomb, there is a pall of sorrow spread over the household thus stricken with death. There is now within these walls a deep family sorrow. One who bore the family burdens and shared the family joys now lies where there "is no work nor device."

The voice that cheered and counseled is still in death. The noisy world may drive the hearse to the grave-yard and back again, and in an hour forget that another one has gone to the city of the dead. Not so in the stricken household. Long do the stricken members mourn their loss. It is a family sorrow.

So when a loved and useful member of the household of faith is called away, the family of God mourns. The world may mourn a neighbor and a friend; but the family of God mourns a brother or a sister, a father or a mother in Israel, one who could share the burdens of the Christian household and help to fight the battles of the Christian warfare. One whose voice in prayer and praise had stirred the church to nobler work and fuller consecration. This one is missed from the family of God and there is family sorrow.

But by and by the family of God will all be gathered home. Then no river of death will divide it, then no sorrows will disturb it. Its joys will be the joys of the redeemed. How blessed it will be, then, to belong to the family of God.

CHAPTER IX.

GOD'S PEOPLE THE BODY OF CHRIST.

Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. I Cor. 12:27.

In considering this passage which represents believers as "the body of Christ" we ask you to consider four things:

- I. THE BELIEVER'S CONNECTION WITH CHRIST.
- II. THE BELIEVER'S SUBJECTION TO CHRIST.
- III. THE UNITY OF GOD'S PEOPLE.
- IV. THE DUTY OF GOD'S PEOPLE TO EACH OTHER.

The redeemed of the Lord, of all ages and nations constitute a body of which the head is Christ. "Ye are the body of Christ," says the apostle, writing to the Corinthians. He has just been comparing the church or the body of believers, to the human body with its various members. He speaks of the duties which grow out of their natural connection one with another. He shows the sympathy which ex-

ists between the members of the human body, and, after speaking of them under this figure, and showing them their relations to each other by the relation which the members of the human body sustain to each other, he then apparently with a view to show them the relation which they all sustain to their great Head, says, "Ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."

Let us then notice,

I. THE CONNECTION OF THE BELIEVER WITH CHRIST.

The connection between the head and the members of the body is a vital connection. To behead is to put to death. The church could not live without its Head. Church life depends upon connection with Christ. The apostle says, "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."

The unrenewed soul is separated from Christ, and as a consequence is "dead in trespasses and sins." There can be no more spiritual life in a body separated from Christ than natural life in a body separated from its head.

The human body and head constitute one organism. Neither one is complete without the other. What would the head be without

the body? and what would the body be without the head?

We dare not say that Christ would not be complete without a church; yet he has a completeness as the Head of the church which depends upon the existence of a church, and surely the church has a completeness which is dependent upon Christ.

Christ assumed a human nature, and thus brought himself into closer relationship with the human race. "He took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." By virtue of his human nature Christ sustains a relation to the church which the Father does not. In the passage just referred to his people are called his "brethren."

The church sustains a connection then with Christ by virtue of faith which unites them with him, and by virtue of the human nature which he has assumed in common with them.

In the human organism the life is in the blood, and the blood that flows through the head flows through the body and all its mem-

bers. And in the spiritual economy where Christ is the Head and his people the body and the members, the same life that is in Christ flows through every believer, or member of the spiritual body.

How blessed is this thought of oneness with Christ; how near it makes him seem to us. Beloved, "ye are the body of Christ." Will not Christ care for his own body? Is not every member under his especial keeping?

A consciousness of this close and intimate connection with Christ brings great consolation to the members of his body. What a pledge of good things it is to the soul of the believer to be *one with Christ*.

II. THE BELIEVER'S SUBJECTION TO CHRIST.

The body and its members are supposed to be under the control of the head. The will is lawgiver to the body and its members. It is my will that directs my hand to rise, my foot move, my eye to open or my tongue to speak.

As the laws of the human system are understood, these members are all in subjection to the head.

So the members of the church are in subjection to Christ their Head. He is Lawgiver and "Head over all things" to the church.

God's people do not make the laws which govern the conscience. Christ is their Head and their Ruler. His laws take precedence of all other laws. He has redeemed his people with his own precious blood, and has a right to them and their services. When he demands of his people benevolence, or patience, or love, he is only acting in his capacity as Head of the church, having a right to direct and control it according to his will. Our time, our means, our influence and our affections are rightfully his, and he acts in perfect harmony with his character as Lawgiver to the church when he specifies how our time shall be used, what disposition shall be made of our means, where and in what way our influence shall be exerted and upon whom our strongest affections must be placed.

But is it not a blessed thing for the church that their Head and Lawgiver makes laws that have for their end the good of his subjects? What law did Christ ever make for the church that was unfavorable to its comfort and prosperity? Is there any thing in the sermon on the Mount, which when reduced to practice works disaster to the church? No, "the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good," "His commandments are not grievous."

In human ignorance and blindness the head may sometimes issue orders which would run the body and its members into danger and perplexity. Absalom's will hanged him on an oak. Haman's will brought him to a similar end. Judas forsook the Lawgiver of the church, and following the dictates of a depraved will, ended his career in disgraceful suicide.

Blessed be his name, the Head of the church, Jesus Christ, gives laws which secure the comfort and peace of the members of the body,—commandments which are not grievous; and they are wise who yield themselves to his kind control.

III. UNITY OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

The human system is composed of many members, but these many members constitute one body. The apostle says, "Now are they many members, yet but one body." He specifies the eye and the ear and the hand and the foot, and speaks of their different offices, but tells us that these all constitute but one body; and in this unity in diversity he shows that believers,—the members of Christ's body,—though they have different offices to fill, constitute but one body. He says, "To one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to

another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues; but all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. "For the body is not one member, but many."

Now the teaching of this passage is plain. It shows that though there are diversities of gifts among God's people,— though one is qualified to fill one office in the church, and another to fill another,—though their work may be different, yet are they all one body, as the members of the human system all constitute but one body. Difference of age in which they live, difference of zone in which they were born, difference of nationality to which they belong, difference of gifts which

they are called and empowered to exercise,—none of these can prevent the church of Christ from being one body. This agrees, we think, with the prayer of Christ in which he says, “Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.” “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one.” Believers, then, are not only one with Christ their common Head, but they are one with each other in a common body. “Christ is the Head of the church” and “we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones.”

How beautifully does the figure of a human body set forth this truth. All its members, large or small, weak or strong, enter into and compose a part of one body. No member of the human body separates itself from its fellow members and sets up for itself. This would not only be fatal to the schismatic mem-

ber, but it would be an injury to the body. No member can be taken away without a loss to the body. Could the body spare a hand, a foot, an eye, an ear or a tongue and not suffer loss? It requires all these members to make up the body. Each one is a part of it. "If the foot should say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?" Each one of these members *is* of the body, and taken together they constitute one, and but one body. It would not be possible for the members to divide into two bodies. The hands and the feet could not withdraw from the body and set up a body of their own. They would be separated from the head, and this separation would be death to the revolting members. There cannot be two separate bodies for one head. The members *must* constitute but one body.

So is it with the church. It *cannot* be divided. It only has an existence as it is connected with Christ its Head. The soul separated from Christ is of the synagogue of Satan. None but those who constitute the body of Christ have their names in the book of life.

Having Christ for the *Head* of the church makes him very near to the believer; and having all believers one, constituting the *body* of the church makes them very near to each other. "I in them," says Christ to the Father,— "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one."

IV. THE DUTY OF GOD'S PEOPLE TO EACH OTHER.

The sympathy, and harmony, and mutual helpfulness which exist among the members of the human body are suggestive of the duties which the members of Christ's body owe to each other. There is "no schism in the body." The members have the same care one for another. The hand works for the good of all the members. The feet stand ready to run on errands for the whole body. The eye does not see for itself simply; it guides the hands and feet, and keeps watch for the whole body. The ear does not hear for itself alone, but for all the members. The tongue is spokesman for them all. The eye cannot hear, the ear cannot see, neither can the tongue walk. But each of these members has an appointed work needful for the body, and each one performs its own helpful part of the work.

A great many functions must be performed by the members of the human body in order to maintain its existence and secure its highest good. Food must be prepared and administered by some of the members. Others must then come to the aid and prepare the food for digestion. Others still must then take it up and prepare it to nourish the body. Carriers must then be employed to convey it to every organ and fiber of the human system. Other organs must then convert it into bone and muscle. Still other members must be ready to move off with the waste particles of matter which have filled their office in the system and are now of no more service. The lungs must be on duty day and night, receiving and expelling the air needed to impart vital energy to the members and carry off the impurities handed over to it by the blood.

Thus stand the members of the human body related to each other, each one in its place doing just that thing needed for the good of all the others. Is there not here a beautiful lesson to the church, the members of Christ's body? There is no schism taught us by the members of the human body. There is no lesson of selfishness to be learned here. Backbiting, division of interest, hatred and envy

are not copied from the members of the human body. Look at your hand, composed of five little members, and see how they all work together for each other and for the good of the whole body. Look at your feet,—humble and obedient servants,—and learn how you should be ready to go any where for the good of the body of Christ. Listen to your tongue when it speaks out the wants of the body and eloquently pleads for aid, and learn how you should talk for the edification of the church, and plead with God to supply its wants. Think how one member of the body supplements the work of another, how one stands ready to take up the work where another one lays it down, all working in harmony for the general comfort and good of the body, and learn how the members of the church, the members of Christ's body, should be interested in each other, and work for the mutual good of the whole body.

When danger threatens one member of the human body how the other members conspire in their efforts for its protection. If any thing threatens the eye how quickly the generous lid darts in between the more sensitive member and the impending danger. If dangerous missiles are flying about the head,—a

vital organ,—how speedily do the hands go up to ward off the foe; and as the body can better afford a wound in the hand than in the head, the hand will even receive the injury in order to save the head. And then while one hand suffers from the wound the other hand will endeavor to do the work of both.

Surely there is no schism in the body; all the members have the same care one for another.

If this example were faithfully followed in the church, the body of Christ, would there not be a harmony and a prosperity among its members never yet experienced? It would be the end of backbiting, envy, hatred, jealousy, and selfishness. If each member should recognize the fact that when one member suffers all the members suffer with it, and would be as jealous of each other's welfare as are the members of our bodies, many a homely broil would be put away, many a deep wound would be healed, many an unkind word would be recalled, and many a bitter feeling would be turned into love.

Suppose for a moment a schism among the members of your body. Your feet some morning declare that they have been imposed upon, and refuse to carry the body. The

hands complain of over-work and fold themselves up for rest. The eye refuses any longer to watch and the ear any longer to be sentinel. The lungs declare that they will no longer puff and pant for these indolent members, and the heart says, "I will not work alone," and lies down to rest. This would be death to the body and all its members.

The highest prosperity of the human body demands the co-operation of all the members. Their interests are not separate. "The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay much more, those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary." The eye does have need of the hand, and the head does have need of the feet, and those members which seem to be feeble are necessary to the life of the body.

So Christian friends, we have need of each other. We are members of one and the same body, the body of Christ, and when we "bite and devour one another" we bite and devour ourselves. When we build up and strengthen each other we build up and strengthen ourselves.

When my hand is working for the good of my feet it is working for its own good, and

when my feet are working for the good of my hands they are working for their own good.

“Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular.”

We were not created for selfish ends. We are taught by the word of God and by the example of the members of our own bodies to “look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” Being members of one body it becomes us to “follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.”

The apostles says, “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself.”

The same lesson is taught us in the silent example of the members of our bodies. How plain is the truth that one member works for the good of all the others,—will even expose itself to danger, bear burdens and undergo suffering for its fellow members.

Let us sit down then before ourselves and learn lessons of divine truth from the workings and relations of the members of our

own bodies. Let us learn what a blessed oneness exists between the church and its Head, Jesus Christ. Let us learn, that as members of Christ's body, we must be in subjection to its Head. Let us study the unity which exists in the church making all believers one in the body of Christ. In the example which the members of the human body give in working together for each other's good, let us learn to love one another, to help each other, to comfort each other, to guard, not only each other's persons, but characters, and to build each other up in the faith of our great Head, our Lord and our Savior Jesus Christ.



CHAPTER X.

GOD'S PEOPLE THE BRIDE OF CHRIST.

Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him : for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white : for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Rev. 19 : 7-9.

No other earthly relation, it is believed, is so tender, so binding and so full of comfort as the relation of marriage. It is a relation which supposes love,—strong, mutual love. Love grows out of some relations, but this relation grows out of love. The mother loves her child because it *is* her child ; a brother loves his sister because she *is* his sister. But the bride and bridegroom enter into life-long

covenant through a love which springs from no natural relations. It is free and unconstrained. The brother does not select his sisters nor the child its parents. The love which grows up between them is that which arises, from natural relation and association. But the union of the bride and the bridegroom is that which arises from simple love and choice. Of earthly beings the one is to the other "the chiefest among ten thousand" and "altogether lovely." What sacrifices can be made, what trials borne and what dangers faced for the object of such love. They twain are one,—one in interest and one in heart.

Now Christ has condescended to assume the relation to the church of a bridegroom. The passage before us says, "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they who are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb."

In considering the church as the bride of Christ let us notice,

I. THE WOOING.

II. THE ESPOUSAL.

III. THE MARRIAGE SUPPER.

IV. THE NEW HOME.

I. THE WOOING.

The love of Christ to those lost in sin is set forth in many tender expressions, and pathetic appeals in the word of God. When he would woo them and persuade them to become his he says, "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He tells them that "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." He says, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." When he came to his own and his own received him not he said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not."

Christ went up and down the land offering his love and his protection to the lost ones of earth, seeking to win them away from vice, and to espouse them unto himself. The love with which he sought them was an everlasting love. His voice to his bride is, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." The arms with

which he would fold his beloved to his bosom are "everlasting arms."

Christ has sent his Spirit into the world and into the hearts of sinners to persuade them to accept of his offers of love, and that Spirit woos many a heart to Christ. Love begets love, and the love of Christ, manifested in his words, his life, his sufferings and death, the Spirit uses to influence the soul to yield itself to the heavenly Bridegroom. That Spirit presses home upon the soul the desirableness of Christ, his love, his sufferings in behalf of it, the blessings which he has in store for it. That Spirit shows, through the word of Christ, what a blessed lot theirs will be who accept the offers of peace and pardon and eternal life and heavenly joy, made to them by the Bridegroom. And thus, under the presentations and persuasion of the Holy Spirit, the soul consents to Christ's proposals of love, to love him and to be loved by him, and to be his for evermore.

II. THE ESPOUSAL.

In faithful wedlock the spouse forsakes all other loves. Let her have never so many suitors she turns from them all to keep herself "to him and him only" with whom she has covenanted till death.

So when the soul is espoused to Christ it must turn away from all other suitors that it may be presented to Christ "as a chaste virgin." As the bridegroom expects, when he receives his bride, that no man shall ever hold so high a place in her affections as himself, so Christ requires the soul espoused to him to give to him the best and strongest affections of the heart. "He that loveth father or mother more than me" says he, "is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." And what bridegroom would not say the same? Is the bridegroom satisfied that any one on earth should be before him in the affections of his spouse? Christ is exceedingly jealous of the love of the church. He says, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."

Would it be unreasonable for the bridegroom, when making proposals to one for whom his love was so great that he could lay down his life for her, to say to her, "Unless you love me more than father or mother or brother or sister or any other friend, or anything else on earth you cannot be my bride?"

Would he assume the place of bridegroom, and bind himself with solemn and life-long vows to one who acknowledged that there was another on earth whom she loved more? And will Christ espouse to himself a church which loves another better than himself?

When the soul is ready to say to Christ, "Thou art to me the chiefest among ten thousand;" "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee," Christ is ready to enter into covenant with that soul and espouse it to himself, and that soul can say, "I am my Beloved's and he is mine."

Now the soul enters into rest. Its longings are met. As one who longs for love feels a satisfaction and rest when that longing is met in the strong affection of a warm heart, so a soul assured of the love of Christ, assured of peace and friendship with him, settles down into quiet rest and satisfaction. There is no more of that restless yearning that characterises the soul out of Christ.

Does the young bride, wedded to the object of her soul's fullest choice yearn after other lovers? No more would it become the soul espoused to Christ to long after the world, or honor, or power. To the soul that has cor-

dially received Christ he is "all and in all." Nothing earthly is so lovely as Christ, no other name so dear as his. Should you say to that soul, "What is thy beloved more than another beloved?" the prompt reply would be, "He is the chiefest among ten thousand." And so dear is the church to Christ that her name is represented as being "engraven upon the palms of his hands," and his voice to her is, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love;" and the prophet says, "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye."

Thus in holier wedlock than is ever celebrated amid the festivities of earth, does Christ receive as his bride, the church, which he has redeemed with his own precious blood.

III. THE MARRIAGE SUPPER.

"The marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he said unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb."

The time referred to in this passage appears to be the close of the gospel dispensation,—the time, after which, no more offers of salvation will be made, no more sinners saved,—

that time when it may be said "He which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still."

All who are to constitute the church, will then have been gathered into the fold. The wife will not have made herself ready until the number is made up of which the glorified church is to be composed. As long as there is one more offer to be made and accepted, one more sinner to be saved and purified, it cannot be said that "the wife hath made herself ready," for the Lamb's wife is to be the entire, redeemed and glorified church. Then, with all the defilements of sin removed, with all her holy adornments on, with her "linen clean and white," she will be ready to be presented to Christ as the reward of his humiliation, sufferings and death in her behalf.

"Hath made herself ready." How careful is the bride to make herself ready for the time when, with all that she is and all that she has, she is formally and publicly to present herself to the bridegroom. If ever her person is to be arrayed in tasty apparel, if ever adornments are to be worn, if ever the merchant and the fuller and seamstress are to do their utmost to provide a faultless attire, if ever ingenious hands are wanted to do cunning work in fine

twined linen, is it not when the wife elect is making herself ready for the occasion of the marriage supper?

The church, as the bride of Christ, is preparing for the marriage supper of the Lamb. More than eighteen hundred years ago Christ redeemed a church with his own blood, and has been gathering it out from a world of sin and purifying it unto himself. It is to be composed of all the children of God of all ages and nations; those as well who trusted in a Redeemer to come, as those who trust in a Savior crucified and risen. All these Christ will claim in the last great day as his own chosen bride. To them it will be granted to be arrayed in "fine linen, clean and white," and to sit down to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

"He saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." It is considered a favor and a privilege to be invited to a marriage supper, and even "the friend of the bridegroom standeth and rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice," though he have no personal interest in the nuptials of the occasion. What then must be the joy of the church, the bride itself, when called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!

It will be a grand occasion when the Father gives this marriage supper to his only begotten Son. The bride has been thousands of years in preparing for its celebration. The feast will be honored with the patriarchs and prophets. David, the sweet singer of Israel, will, perhaps, lead off in anthems and halleluiahs of praise, followed by "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing."

This will be an hour of joy and triumph with the church. The last enemy will have been subdued. Death will have been swallowed up in victory. All struggles with temptation and sin will be over. Fears and pains, sickness and sorrow will all be things of the past. Even these vile bodies shall have been fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body, and the church, redeemed, saved and glorified, will stand in her fine linen, clean and white, which is "the righteousness of saints."

Will not heaven ring with glad anthems when Christ the only begotten Son of God, who descended to this world of sin, toiled, suffered and died to redeem a church to him-

self, receives that church, washed and made white in his own blood? receives her, "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband?" Will not Christ himself 'see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied?'

Will not every angel be an interested spectator when their Lord receives, as a wife made ready for the marriage, that church which has cost him tears and groans and life itself?

Will it not be an interesting scene when the redemptive work is done,—when the heralds of salvation shall all be called in, their work as ambassadors to a lost world finished, the righteous separated from the wicked, decked as a bride and given to Christ for his eternal possession and reward?

If this would be a glorious scene to witness, if it would be enrapturing to hear the mighty throng saying, "Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever,"—if it would be a joy to be a spectator at the marriage supper of the Lamb, what would it be to be one in that church which shall constitute the bride of Christ,—to be one of those saved by his death, washed in his blood, sanctified by his Spirit, leaning upon his arm as upon the arm of a strong and lov-

ing bridegroom and hear him say as to a bride, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love?" Truly "Blessed are they who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb."

It becomes the church to be making herself ready for the celebration of the marriage supper. The Bridegroom has not yet come, neither hath the wife yet made herself ready. The work of winning souls to Christ is not yet done. The work of the renewing and sanctifying Spirit is needed in the church to purify it and better fit it for the society of the Bridegroom. Purity of soul should be the end for which the church should continually strive and pray. The voice of the Bridegroom to the bride while she is waiting for his coming is, "Occupy till I come;" and his admonition is to "watch," for the church does not know the day nor the hour when her Lord shall come. At midnight there may be a cry made, "Behold the Bridegroom cometh,"—cometh to call for his bride, cometh to gather to himself his ransomed church. Who will then be ready to go in to the marriage supper of the Lamb?

IV. THE NEW HOME.

After the celebration of the marriage the bridegroom takes his bride to her new home. He usually prepares a place for her before the

marriage supper takes place. The bride expects, not only to leave her father and her mother, and the associates of her maiden life, but she expects to leave her former home for the new one prepared for her by her bridegroom. When Abraham sent his servant to take a wife for Isaac, and that servant found Rebekah, she left her old home for a new one with Isaac whose wife she became.

So while the church, the bride of Christ, makes herself ready for the marriage supper, Christ, the Bridegroom, prepares a place for her. When he was on earth making offers of love to his future bride, he said, "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." And in his intercessory prayer he says, "Father I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am."

No husband ever ushered his beloved into such a home as Christ will give on the bridal day to his espoused church. The best and happiest homes of earth are subject to sickness and pain. But heaven, the home of the ransomed church will never echo with the

wails of distress. On earth the bridegroom may love his bride with all the ardor she could ask, and lead her into palatial rooms, provided with all the comforts and luxuries that love and wealth could procure; but the best home that he can furnish her will not secure her against sorrow, disease and death. But when the heavenly Bridegroom shall lead his bride into the mansions above,—into his own glorious home, it will be a home where

“Sickness and sorrow pain and death,
Are felt and feared no more.”

“There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary be at rest.”

“Here have we no continuing city;” but when the bride of Christ shall have “made herself ready” she will be led into “a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

Dear friend out of Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom is still, with wooing voice inviting the lost ones of this world to come unto him, and he promises them that he will cast out none that come. The foulest and vilest that will take refuge in him shall be washed and made white in his blood,—shall be added to that church which is his bride. He offers thee the love of his heart and the protection of his arm, he offers thee love bet-

ter than a mother's love, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." Is this a love strong enough to secure your comfort and safety? When the redeemed church is made up and all Christ's people are gathered together at the marriage supper of the Lamb, would you be left out? Would you hear him, while he is extending his protection to his redeemed church, say to you, "I know you not whence ye are; depart from me?"

Rather accept of his mercy and his pardoning love, and become a part of his blood-bought church so that in that great day, when the invitation is given to come to the marriage supper of the Lamb, you shall be one of the happy number invited to the feast,—one of the number who shall share forever the love of the heavenly Bridegroom, and walk with him in white.

Redeemed of the Lord, how exalted are your privileges. Great things have already been done for you. You have been ransomed from the pit, you have been made brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus Christ, you have been made sons and daughters unto God, yea, more; Christ hath espoused you unto himself

as his bride. Thou art the spouse of the only begotten Son of God. Surely the Father will look sweetly down upon the wife of his only begotten Son. Surely the Son of God, thy spiritual husband, will never fail in his covenant vows with thee. The new home to which the Bridegroom will lead thee will be all for beauty and comfort that thou shalt ever need. No widows tears shall fall, no weeds of woe be worn in thy new home.

It is a blessed thing to have Jesus for a Shepherd, for a Friend, for a Brother; but how is this blessedness increased when he becomes the Bridegroom and the church his bride.

Prepare thyself then for the festal hour. Put on the beautiful garments of salvation. Adorn thyself with the graces of the upper world. By the grace of God, prepare thyself as a bride adorned for her husband, for the Bridegroom will come, and blessed shall they be which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.







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