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SERMONS

PREACHED AT

THE TEMPLE CHURCH.



I

S E R M O N S

PREACHED AT

THE TEMPLE CHURCH,

BY THE

REV. ANDREW IRVINE, B.D.,

CHAPLAIN OF THE TOWER AND LATE ASSISTANT  
PREACHER AT THE TEMPLE.

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TO THE REVEREND  
THE MASTER,  
TO THE WORSHIPFUL  
THE MASTERS OF THE BENCH,

AND

THE REST OF THE MEMBERS OF THE TWO HONOURABLE  
SOCIETIES OF THE TEMPLE,

THIS VOLUME

IS

MOST RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED,

BY

THEIR FAITHFUL

AND OBEDIENT SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.





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## SERMON I.

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SCRIPTURE MYSTERIES. DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY.

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ISAIAH xlv. 15.

*Verily, thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel,  
the Saviour.*

THIS solemn address to the Most High was uttered by a prophet, who had enjoyed the brightest vision of the glory of God that was ever vouchsafed to mortal view, when “ he saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filling the temple.” But the brighter the vision, the more deeply was he impressed with the incomprehensible nature of the object of his contemplation. For, beside the immeasurable distance between the Creator and the creature, he further felt that darkness had been added to that distance by *Sin*, and thence exclaimed with the utmost emotion, “ Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.” In terms equally forcible is

the mysterious nature of the Deity portrayed by the patriarch Job. Though he felt himself everywhere encompassed by the Almighty power, when he essayed to approach more closely to the Divine Being, he was at length compelled to confess all his reiterated efforts utterly unavailing. “Behold I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right, that I cannot see him.” Nor does the holy Psalmist depict by images less expressive the awful obscurity, in which the Sovereign of the Universe shrouds his Divinity. For when the Lord had heard the cry of his distress out of his holy temple, and “had bowed the heavens also and come down,” yet even then did he “make darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him was dark waters and thick clouds of the skies.” Such too was the terrific gloom that bespoke Jehovah’s presence, while declaring unto Israel his covenant at Mount Sinai; “when the mountain burnt with fire into the midst of heaven, with darkness, clouds, and thick darkness.”

But at the commencement of that auspicious era, when “the day-spring from on high visited



us," a fuller and clearer revelation of the nature of God was vouchsafed to us, in the abundance of his goodness and tenderness of his mercy. "For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, then shined into our hearts," saith the Apostle, "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." The infinite superiority of this *new* manifestation is thus emphatically marked by St. John. "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." For in the gospel of Christ, beyond all former precedent, were displayed the nature and attributes and operations of the Deity; "a new and living way" to the foot of the heavenly throne was consecrated for us by the blood of Jesus; "through whom," according to the emphatic language of St. Paul, "we have access by one Spirit unto the Father<sup>1</sup>."

— Such an assurance as this, of the effectual co-operation of the *three persons* of the Godhead, in giving us a nearer approach to the fountain of

<sup>1</sup> Ephes. ii. 18.

Eternal Light, ought to produce in us not only faith and conviction, but also gratitude and joy. But so perverse is the human mind, and so impatient of any restraint to its boundless curiosity, that it is too apt to undervalue the blessing, unless it can fully also, in every respect, comprehend the *mode* in which it is conferred. There are amongst us, it is to be feared, those who deem it little to know their relation to the Father as their Creator, to the Son as their Redeemer, to the Holy Ghost as their sanctifier; unless they can also explain the relation of these three persons in the Godhead to each other, or, in other words, *unravel* the *mystery* of the Holy Trinity. Some have been led to deny the doctrine itself, from the erroneous opinion, that it is not sanctioned by Scripture; while others, with all the fatal impatience of our first parents at the mystery which hung over the forbidden tree, have transgressed the legitimate bounds of human knowledge, and spurning the blessings of the gospel, because incompetent to understand its mysterious doctrines, have gone headlong to destruction, and made shipwreck of their immortal happiness.

It shall, therefore, be my endeavour, before stating the Scripture-doctrine of the Trinity and

enforcing its obligation upon our belief, to prove, that the *inexplicable mysteries* of Christianity form no valid objection against its truth, and to shew, by a selection of particular instances, that the plan of the Deity is consistent throughout; since the same *partial mystery* and *partial revelation*, the same intimate union of light and darkness, pervade the *whole* of the mighty scheme of Creation, Providence, and Redemption.

That there must have existed some Great First Cause is a truth that admits not a shadow of doubt. But of the *mode* of its existence we absolutely know nothing. In the very first idea connected with it—the idea of eternity, our thoughts are swallowed up and lost. We perceive at once that the throne of the Eternal is encircled with clouds and with thick darkness. Till the Ancient of Days came forth, arrayed with wisdom and with power to create the heavens and the earth, we know nothing of his operations, nor of the numberless worlds that he scattered through boundless space, nor of those high beings who then beheld the wonders of his power. “Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest?”

or who hath stretched out the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who hath laid the corner-stone thereof; when the morning-stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy<sup>1</sup>?"

Of the various beings called into existence, at the time when God created the heavens and the earth and all the host of them, how many have escaped observation for almost six thousand years? Of those more immediately within our reach, how many are there of which we understand neither the properties, nor the use, nor the end! Yet the more accurate our research and the more extensive our investigation, the more powerful and convincing are the proofs that we discover, of the goodness, the greatness, the infinite wisdom of the Almighty Creator; but *He* remains invisible, and veils himself from our view, amid the varied magnificence that his creation displays.

Nor less in the works of Providence than of creation is this principle of the Divine economy to be discerned. For if we look abroad upon the *natural world*, we behold it full of energy, and irresistibly proclaiming the inward workings of a

<sup>1</sup> Job xxxviii. 7.

supreme directing Power. As far as we can penetrate the regions of space, these proofs of the divine Omnipresence extend. But though we can calculate with precision the laws that many of the celestial orbs obey in their courses, and the periods of their respective revolutions, we can neither ascertain what they are in themselves, nor what sentient or rational beings they contain. If we survey the surface of that earth which we ourselves inhabit, we find endless indications of disturbance and of change. But the means for producing these effects are buried in darkness; and though reason and conjecture may extend for a little the circle of our vision, they give us only a more impressive conception of the immense region of obscurity that stretches beyond. The causes by which such mighty effects are produced, and the suspension of those effects, are equally unknown. “ Upon the high mountains and on the everlasting hills” is it legibly written, that the Flood hath gone over the earth; but *how* it either burst its barriers or again subsided within them, we know not, and can only point unto *Him*, “ who hath divided a water-course for the overflowings of the water, and a way for the lightning of thunder: who saith to the Deep, Be dry; and to the

Sea, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.”

If we look, still further, to the Divine economy in the *moral world*, we shall derive, from the earliest to the latest history of our race, confirmation of the same great truth. That the Governor of the world is infinite in goodness and in power, we, who behold the earth full of the riches of His bounty, gratefully confess. At the same time we cannot but perceive much misery prevail, that, as we think, might have been easily prevented; much suffering endured, that might easily be remedied; much happiness lost, that might easily have been enjoyed; much interesting knowledge denied, that might easily have been granted to the industrious investigation of man. That the human mind, so capable of high virtues and noble efforts,—its chief happiness consisting in a conformity to the divine nature,—should have become so utterly enslaved to sin, is a fact which we are unable to account for, but is at the same time incontestably true. That the human race should have been *permitted* to sink into such enormity of evil, that it was judged necessary by heaven to sweep them all, save one single family, from the face of the earth, is a truth equally certain,

however awful and unavailing the dispensation may appear to have been. That the knowledge of the true God should have been again permitted to be so nearly extinguished, as to be preserved only within the narrow bounds of Judæa, while all the rest of the world lay buried in the darkness of ignorance and guilt, is a subject also that demands our most serious reflection. That a Saviour hath come to dispel the gloom and to cheer us with the light of heavenly grace, we thankfully acknowledge as an undoubted truth, and hail it as tidings of great joy. But, that he should *not* have descended to earth till four thousand years after its creation;—that the Fathers of mankind, the wisest and the best, even the Father of the faithful himself, should only have been allowed to see his day afar off; that the doctrine of Immortality should have been at so late a period and to so limited an extent, imparted to “those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death”—that all these things should be undeniable, and surpass the utmost efforts of our reason satisfactorily to explain, *may* be mortifying to human pride, but they nevertheless form *consistent* and *harmonious* parts of the divine administration.

Since then it appears beyond a doubt to be the plan of the Deity, that partial mystery and partial revelation should pervade the whole of his works, both of creation and providence, is it not naturally to be expected, that they will equally prevail in the *remainder* of that system—in the *completion* of that mighty scheme—in the work of *man's redemption*? Such is unquestionably the fact. The Scriptures of truth, in which that plan of mercy is revealed, do indeed contain many and unfathomable mysteries—mysteries, into which even the angels are desirous to look, and which to the eye of man are dark and inscrutable. And what is the natural, the necessary inference, but this,—that they proceed from the same great source, and that the *mystical* characters, impressed upon the sacred volume, are the very *stamp* of its *divinity*? Had the case been otherwise—had everything therein contained been clear, and simple, and perspicuous, we should then indeed have had strong reason to doubt; being no longer able to recognize the traces of Him, whose plan of operations is one and unchangeable; who “is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working;” whose “ways are not as our ways, nor his



thoughts as our thoughts;" who is "verily a God that *hideth* himself," and "whose throne is encompassed with clouds and with thick darkness."

It is with such sentiments deeply impressed upon our minds, that we should ever proceed to the contemplation of the mysteries of our holy religion. Of these there is none more awfully important, than that which this day<sup>1</sup> peculiarly demands our serious consideration—the doctrine of the *ever-blessed Trinity*. Since all that we know of that doctrine is contained in the Scriptures alone, let us now inquire in what it actually consists; marking accurately concerning it what *has* and what *has not* been revealed.

First then we may remark, that it has been placed by our Saviour himself, as the *very foundation* of Christianity. For, at the institution of that sacred ordinance, by which we are taken into covenant with God, we are commanded to be "baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost<sup>2</sup>." The *equality* of these three persons is thence fairly deducible, since there is no distinction stated. And if the Father be God (a truth that is fully acknowledged

<sup>1</sup> Trinity Sunday.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xxviii. 19.

by all who hold the Scriptures to be inspired), so also must the Son and Holy Ghost be God ; unless we most unreasonably and gratuitously suppose, that, in the admission of men to a religion which was, in principle, directly opposed to all *creature-worship*, we conjoin as objects of the same homage *two created beings* with the *Creator himself*. That we are not to infer, from the position of the word *Father* in the sentence of baptismal institution, his superiority over the other two persons of the God-head, is evident from the inspired words of the Apostolical Benediction, in which this different order of expression is observed—“ the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost <sup>1</sup>.”

It is not, however, merely this *conjunction* that marks their equality, but *separately* also we find both the second and third persons of the blessed Trinity expressly called *God*, no less than the Father himself. Of that *Word* who was made flesh, and whose “ glory (as is stated in the first chapter of St. John’s Gospel) was the glory of the only begotten of the Father <sup>2</sup>,” it is expressly declared in the same chapter, that He was in the

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

<sup>2</sup> John i. 14.

beginning with God, and that he was God<sup>1</sup>. The prediction of his coming announced him as “Emmanuel, God with us<sup>2</sup>;” as Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God<sup>3</sup>. While he sojourned on earth, he was “God manifest in the flesh<sup>4</sup>,” saith St. Paul; “the true God and eternal life<sup>5</sup>,” saith St. John: and we are solemnly assured, that, at his final coming to judge the world, he will appear as “our Great God and Saviour<sup>6</sup> Jesus Christ, God over all, blessed for evermore.”

Nor was the Comforter, whom he sent, inferior either to himself or to the Father from whom he equally proceeded. To that mighty Being, who, in the beginning, moved upon the face of the waters<sup>7</sup>, diffusing life and order over the creation of God, to that Inspirer of the Prophets and Apostles, who by his omniscience “revealeth all things, because he knoweth all things and searcheth all things, even the deep things of God<sup>8</sup>,” are ascribed those manifold and stupendous miracles, by which the world was converted to Christianity. St. Paul, in treating of those heavenly gifts, states, that “there are diversities

<sup>1</sup> John i. 1, 2.<sup>2</sup> Is. vii. 14, and Matt. i. 23.<sup>3</sup> Is ix. 6.<sup>4</sup> 1 Tim. iii. 16.<sup>5</sup> 1 John v. 20.<sup>6</sup> Titus ii. 13, and Rom. ix. 5.<sup>7</sup> Genesis i. 2.<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 10.

of operations, but it is the *same God* who worketh all in all ;” and after an enumeration of such miraculous powers, conferred by the Holy Ghost, as could proceed only from the Supreme Being himself, he then summarily adds, “ all these worketh that one and the *same Spirit*, dividing them to every man severally as he will<sup>1</sup>.” The denial of this power, and the rejection of this evidence, was pronounced to be unpardonable blasphemy<sup>2</sup>. The guilty pair who lied unto the Holy Ghost, in so doing were said to lie unto God, and were punished with instantaneous death<sup>3</sup>. And the heaviest punishment also was denounced against those who should disgrace *his Temple* by impurities, as upon those who have incurred the full vengeance of heaven. “ Know ye not,” saith St. Paul, “ that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost<sup>4</sup>, that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy<sup>5</sup>.” These then are a few of the manifold proofs, which might easily be adduced, of the ascription of such

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xii. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xii. 31, 32.

<sup>3</sup> Acts v. 1.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. vi. 19.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17.

attributes and operations to both the Second and Third Persons of the Trinity, as fully demonstrate this indispensable obligation, that all men should honour *them*, “even as they honour the Father,” because it thus appears, that “in them dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.”

Thus far then it is clearly evident from Scripture, that each of those three persons who carry on the great work of our salvation, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, are *separately and distinctly God*. Nevertheless, the whole voice of Revelation, from the beginning to the end, concurs in that solemn truth proclaimed to assembled Israel, “the Lord our God is *one Lord*<sup>1</sup> ;” and hence it necessarily follows, that a threefold distinction in the Godhead and the perfect unity of God, are two points of doctrine as certainly propounded in Scripture, as any other article of faith.

But their entire *consistency* with each other is a profound mystery ; and the attempt to solve it is an effort too great for our present imperfect state, and may possibly continue so for ever. *How* those three separate subsistences are united together in

<sup>1</sup> Deut. vi. 4.

one common nature, it is utterly impossible for us to explain. Nor ought we to think this wonderful in things that relate to Beings uncreated and infinite, since the union of our own body and soul, though both of them created and finite, surpasses our comprehension; and yet we know them to be most intimately united, though the connecting link is undiscernible by the keenest mortal perception. But if each of these three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be *God*, of this we are sure, that in *absolute perfection* they *must be equal*. For perfection is inseparable from Deity, all whose attributes are infinite. And if this be really and demonstrably the doctrine of Scripture, then are we, as Christians, bound to believe it with sincerity, without a shadow either of doubt or reservation. To reject this or any other doctrine of Scripture, because we are unable to comprehend it, were as unreasonable as to deny that there is a Sun in the system of the universe, because we know neither the substance of which he is composed, nor whence he derives that inexhaustible flood of light, which he is continually diffusing over the face of creation. We may indeed shut our eyes and deny his existence; we may also doubt or despise the mystery of the gospel; but

both the one and the other will maintain their station in the divine economy, lasting monuments of infinite power and of inscrutable wisdom.

Since, then, this mysterious doctrine is placed by God, as the very foundation of Christianity, it deeply concerns us to inquire, whether we have actually embraced it, as it is propounded in Scripture, with our whole heart. For we are not to receive it merely as a barren, speculative truth; but to remember that, from our belief in God the Father arises a sense of filial obedience and devotion to Him “in whom we live, and move, and have our being:” from our belief in God the Son flow gratitude and love to Him who hath redeemed us by his precious blood; and from our belief in God the Holy Ghost, springs an earnest longing for communion with Him who “helpeth all our infirmities,” and, by the abundance of his grace, enables us to “bring forth the fruits of the Spirit.”

Should there, unhappily, be any among us, to whom this doctrine remains a stumbling-block, let me earnestly intreat them to examine the *grounds* of their dissent, and endeavour to remove them. And first, let them consider, whether there be not something in the tenor of their life, that tends to

the promotion of this spirit of error. For our Saviour himself hath said, “ if any man will do his will he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God<sup>1</sup>.” Let them strictly watch also the workings of their own minds ; being aware that human will has powerful influence upon faith, and is able to resist the very strongest evidence. Let them ask themselves whether they have indeed searched for wisdom, “ as for hidden treasure ;” let them listen to the words of instruction with the humble simplicity of children, with that humility which is the best foundation and surest mark of Christian character, and pour forth this prayer, from the inmost recesses of an unfeigned heart, “ Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.”

As for those, who declare that they cannot *comprehend* these things, and, till *more* evidence is produced, hold themselves entirely exempted from believing them, let them be entreated to reflect seriously upon the awful consequences of acting on such a principle, and of rejecting, through the pride of their heart, the blessing of eternal happiness. Let them remember also with thankfulness, that they are not commanded to *un-*

<sup>1</sup> John vii. 17.



*derstand* these mysteries, but simply to *believe* them. That command—the command of the Most High God, they cannot disobey, but at their most imminent peril. For by such obstinate disobedience they voluntarily declare themselves the associates of that Infidel band, who with minds distempered, with faculties cramped, with affections debased, inflated with pride and maddened with folly, fearlessly approach the mysteries of the Eternal, the shrines of the Holy One of Israel, “stretch out their hands against God, and strengthen themselves against the Almighty, and rush upon the thick bosses of his bucklers.” But “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh. The Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak to them in his wrath and vex them in his sore displeasure.” The everlasting—the unutterably dreadful effects of that displeasure, how can the wilful unbeliever ever hope to escape? “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” Shall not he avenge, with the arm of his might, the cause that is his *own*? At the Day of dread retribution, the clouds that now encompass him will be withdrawn, and his throne of righteousness and judgment will shine forth with unsullied glory, before the eyes of angels and of men. “I

have sworn by myself, saith the Lord, the Word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall *not* return, that unto *me* every knee *shall* bow and every tongue confess.”

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## SERMON II.

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### THE RISE AND GROWTH OF CHRISTIANITY.

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ISAIAH liii. 2.

*He shall grow up before him as a tender plant and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.*

THE person evidently alluded to by the prophet in these words is Messiah, the Son of God. The image under which he is here prefigured, was one that would very naturally present itself in full force to the mind of every inhabitant of Judea. For in that mountainous country, there were many extensive tracts, which consisted of rugged rocky ground, utterly destitute of water, and consequently very liable to become parched and barren under the influence of a scorching sun. Yet even on that sterile soil, where nature seemed to sicken and to die, did there spring up plants of inestimable value, which, though unpleasing to the eye, “without either form or comeliness,” were possessed of many healing virtues, calculated to relieve and

benefit mankind. With *peculiar* propriety, therefore, was this image selected by the prophet to denote, First, that though Messiah should come forth, under circumstances the most unfavourable, from a country whence, apparently, nothing good could be expected, yet should he grow up in the presence of his Father to finish the work undertaken from eternity: and next, that his religion, however unattractive its form, should ultimately triumph over every difficulty opposed to its progress. To the more particular consideration of these two points, I shall therefore direct your attention in the following observations.

Compared with surrounding states, the land of Canaan, when it came into the possession of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, was very inconsiderable; its enemies numerous, its people few. It enjoyed, however, many great natural advantages; whence it was designated in Scripture as “a land flowing with milk and honey,” and in the reign of Solomon, whilst the great body of the people still preserved their virtue and adhered to their religion, it extended its power beyond its natural limits, and bore sway among the nations of the earth. But toward the conclusion of that memorable period, Idolatry, that besetting sin of the Israelites,

began to seduce both sovereign and subject from worshipping the God of their Fathers. With vice and degeneracy, discord and all its attendant evils rushed in, "like a flood," upon that unhappy country. The descendants of the Patriarch were for ever parted from each other, the bond of brotherhood was severed, and the Tribe of Judah, from which Messiah was to come, was by all, save the tribe of Benjamin, the feeblest of the whole, completely deserted.

But though thus "stricken for their iniquities, they sinned yet the more;" though warned by prophet after prophet, they became more and more rebellious; they hardened their heart against conviction, "they refused to return." "Upon every high mountain and under every green tree" were their idolatrous mysteries celebrated; the fires of Baal smoked on a thousand altars, while the servants of the Most High God, who were sent to prophesy against these abominations, were so cruelly treated, that the cry of their blood, which was shed like water in the streets of Jerusalem, ascended to heaven for vengeance on the guilty. Nor did that cry ascend to God in vain. For the vine which he had brought out of Egypt, which had covered the hills with its shade,

stretching out its “branches unto the sea and its boughs unto the river,” was burnt with fire and cut down, and in the midst of its ashes lay the *glory* of their country, the Temple of their God. In a foreign land, by the streams of Babel, did the wretched captives mourn the punishment of their crimes, until the Most High, in the multitude of his mercies, recalled the penitent sufferers from their bondage.

But even when restored to the land of their fathers they gradually relapsed, not indeed into idolatry, but into every other species of crime, and that in an unexampled degree. The voice of prophecy, that so often had warned them in vain, at length became dumb; their former grandeur was gradually obliterated by foreign war or internal faction, until “the sceptre finally departed from Judah,” and that which had once been the glory of all lands, was confounded with the general mass of captive states, by the overwhelming dominion of the empire of Rome.

At that eventful period a general expectation prevailed among mankind that some great and godlike personage would appear upon earth. “The desire of all nations” was ardently looked for. But who, save the Jews themselves, would

have expected him from Judæa? As was said of Nazareth, so might it be said of that obscure and enslaved country which gave birth to the Messiah, “Can any *good* thing come out of Jewry?” Yet thence, most assuredly, in every circumstance according with the predictions of ancient prophets, Messiah came. But in what form did he then appear? Was he arrayed in the terrors of Divinity? Did he even assume the state and authority of an earthly prince? Was there any, even the *very smallest*, shew of external pomp to attract the gaze or admiration of mankind? Did that “Tree, whose leaves were for the healing of the nations,” tower at once in majestic grandeur above all that surrounded it, and thus invite the inhabitants of earth to flock for shelter and refreshment to its shade? Far from it. The prediction of the Prophet was verified to the very letter. A tender plant, a defenceless flower in a desolate field, was the true image of the Saviour of Men, amid the ruins of his guilty country. Against that tender plant, almost before it had risen into view on the poor and barren soil that produced it,—even at its very root, was the weapon of destruction levelled by the hand of power; but a higher power protected it from the threatened blow. Nor could

the desolating blast which assailed its maturer growth utterly destroy it. There was in it indeed "neither form nor comeliness;" but there was a living principle that could not perish,—a healing virtue never to be extinguished. Though "the visage of him who trod the wine-press alone was more marred than that of any man, and his form more than the sons of men;" yet he still "travelled in the greatness of his strength," and proved himself omnipotent to save.

For a short season, indeed, the powers of darkness seemed to have prevailed. Messiah was "cut off by cruel hands; was crucified, and slain." Yet, even when stricken to death and laid in the tomb, when the expectations of his followers and the redemption of mankind seemed buried with him in one common grave, even then did hope arise from the dust; the root budded from that dry ground,—it rose in majesty to the heavens,—filled the earth with its healing influence,—and brought forth the blessed fruits of pardon to the guilty, of consolation to the mourner, of salvation to the helpless and undone. Even from the darkness of that grave burst forth the light of immortality, to dispel the gloom that brooded over "the valley of the shadow of death." Then were



the gates of heaven not only displayed to our view, but we were invited, encouraged, and strengthened to follow thitherward the footsteps of Him, who, having triumphed over death and the grave, “ascended up on high, and led captivity captive.”

Having thus shewn that the prediction in the text, of the unfavourable circumstances attending our Saviour’s appearance on earth, and of his complete triumph over them all, was fully verified, I shall now proceed to shew, that it is equally true when applied to his *Religion*; that, however unattractive its form, it must ultimately triumph over every difficulty opposed to its progress.

In the economy of the universe, we are little apt to regard in their true light the objects to which we are constantly accustomed. Hence it is that many of those things are considered as mere matters of course, which are, in fact, abiding miracles of the divine power. We find the Christian Religion established upon earth, and to unreflecting minds it appears as much in the nature of things, as that the sun should rise and shine in the firmament of heaven. But if we trace backward and consider its origin, the deep-rooted prejudices it had to encounter, the inveterate supersti-

tions it had to destroy, the ancient systems of national religion supported by national power which it had to overthrow, and consequently the bitter persecutions which its despised and defenceless followers had to endure, we must pronounce the *establishment* of Christianity to be one of the greatest of *miracles*, and its *present existence* a permanent proof of its miraculous propagation.

Nothing was so improbable, at first, as its ultimate success. Had it been of men it must necessarily, in the words of Gamaliel, "have come to nought." For the very cradle, (if I may so speak) where it was nurtured, was environed by enemies, at once numerous, powerful, and indignant. What but the bitterest persecution could it experience from the hypocritical Pharisee, when it unmasked his secret wickedness, and exposed his vain pretensions to the derision of his followers? To the luxurious and infidel Sadducee, whose sensual enjoyments were heightened by the hope of annihilation at the close of life, and whose maxim was, "let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die,"—what unwelcome tidings were those proclaimed by Christianity, when it demonstrated the absolute certainty of a future state of rewards and punishments, and thundered in his ears this

solemn warning, “ Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, in the which all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of Man, and shall come forth: they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation<sup>1</sup>.”

With the chiefs of these two powerful sects united in league to stifle Christianity in its birth, what but the power of God could have preserved it from extinction? They had only to hint to the Jews that their ceremonial system was endangered by men guilty of blasphemy and sedition,— and at *once* was awakened all the fury of the multitude to destroy those, whom even an iniquitous tribunal was compelled to acquit. Nor were those who, in the emphatic language of their adversaries, “ turned the world upside down,” likely to meet with a much more gracious reception from the Gentile than from the Jew. For their leading object was to curb all those violent passions which the Gentiles were so prone to indulge, to brand with ignominy those vices which they were willing to excuse, and to deny the worth of those stern heathen virtues which formed at once their glory and their shame. It

<sup>1</sup> John v. 25, 28, 29.

recommended to the revengeful forgiveness, to the proud humility, to the impure holiness of heart and of life. It called upon the wise and the learned to renounce their knowledge as ignorance, their wisdom as folly, and to receive with the simplicity of children the humiliating doctrines of the cross. To the worshipper of unnumbered deities it announced, as a point of belief quite indispensable, "one only living and true God." For the blaze of altars and the pomp of sacrifice, it prescribed the unadorned worship of God, offered at *that* time in the midst of secrecy, darkness and danger. Their gorgeous idols that embellished the temples of their pride it levelled in the dust, and enshrined the image of God solely on the altar of the heart. Its rise and prosperity was necessarily the downfall of every religion upon earth, and its overthrow, therefore, the object of heathen fanaticism, incited by hatred and supported by power.

Yet under all these adverse circumstances the Religion of Jesus gathered strength and prevailed. Even among the Jews themselves did it gain multitudes of converts. Although as a *nation* they still blindly adhered to the Mosaical system, or rather to the traditions of the elders by which it

was supplanted, there were many, very many, of them, who embraced the substance instead of the shadow, and relied on Jesus Christ alone for salvation. However reluctant the rulers and chief priests and scribes were to permit its propagation among the people of Judæa, they were as little able to repress its growth, as were the Roman governors in the different provinces, acting under the authority of the Emperor himself. With a rapidity that far outstripped the progress of any *other species* of knowledge, in any country or in any time, it flashed like lightning from one quarter of the Roman world to another, until it at once pervaded the remoter parts of that mighty empire, and occupied the seat and centre of empire itself. The philosopher and vain disputant of this world, were compelled to recognise the “wisdom from above,” and the mightiest monarch upon earth bowed in humble submission to the majesty of that true Religion, adopting the cross on which its founder had ignominiously expired, as the symbol and standard of his power. That tender plant, once “without form or comeliness,” rising aloft on the Roman Capitol, struck deep its roots, spread far its branches, and the nations reposed under its healing shade, feeding on the blessed fruits of

eternal life. So completely, so literally, and so directly contrary to all probable appearances, was fulfilled that prophecy, contained in the text, of the *triumphant establishment* of the Christian Religion.

From the foregoing observations it seems to follow as a natural consequence, that we ought, by the habitual contemplation of all that our Saviour did, taught and suffered for our sake, to excite and cherish in our hearts a grateful sense of his infinite goodness. Did the Son of God from the ages of eternity offer himself as our ransom, was he “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,” did he, in the fulness of the time, descend into this abode of guilt and suffering, to take our nature upon him, to be persecuted by human malignity throughout the whole of his life upon earth, and to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption? Was this plan, which he pursued from eternity, not more remarkable for its magnitude than its mercy, not merely rescuing us from eternal misery, but exalting us to immortal happiness? At the contemplation of such *infinite* love, shall we not be ready to exclaim, in the language of the Psalmist, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, praise his holy name!” With what gratitude and adoration should we meditate

upon this wondrous scheme, from the period of its first revelation to that of its final accomplishment? With what intensity of interest should we naturally peruse those records in which the mystery of our Redemption is unfolded! Those records are the charter of our salvation, the Scriptures of truth. Let me ask you then, whether they form the subject of your serious and *habitual* meditation? Or whether it is possible for you to remain indifferent to the *only* thing, in fact, which gives life its true interest?

Is there any individual now among us, whose conscience at this moment accuses him of living in ignorance or neglect of these important matters? With regard to him, who *unnecessarily* allows one single day to pass without reading or meditating upon some part of the word of God, I fear there is but too much reason to adopt the language of the Apostle—"that man's religion is vain." For he takes not the means appointed by heaven for adding fervour to his piety or purity to his life and practice. In his Christian course he is not merely at a stand—he is positively going backward. Day after day he will become more and more careless: gradually, though imperceptibly, will he lose all relish for spiritual things; until their absence shall not only cease to give pain, but

their presence shall grow burdensome to his carnal mind, and he become a heathen in reality, though a Christian in name.

Let me 'entreat you, my brethren, as you value your souls' health, to avoid this fatal error. Cherish a warm recollection of your Redeemer's goodness by a frequent study of the Sacred Volume. Treasure up in your memories and in your hearts the precepts and promises of his Gospel ; dwell upon the history of that life which exhibited a love stronger than death ; and that you may be enabled to form your own upon the model there displayed for your imitation, draw near, this day<sup>1</sup>, to his sacred altar ; come to it *habitually* for the remainder of your lives ; and there devote yourselves, soul and body, to his service for ever. Come, that you may confirm the strength of your faith, that you may increase the sincerity of your repentance, that you may inflame the ardour of your love and gratitude. And though your goodness be now but "as a tender plant or as a root budding from a dry ground," it will flourish under the influence of heavenly grace, "As a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth its fruit in due season."

The only remaining inference that I shall men-

<sup>1</sup> Christmas Day.



tion as arising from this subject, is the duty incumbent upon us of promoting, on every occasion, to the utmost of our power, the diffusion of Christianity. If the blessings it confers are of inestimable value to mankind, if they are indispensably necessary for happiness here and hereafter, it follows as a natural consequence that, if either gratitude to God or mercy to men find a place in our hearts, we should be zealous in dispensing those blessings among perishing sinners.

The means of effecting this great object are many and various. Miracles, indeed, it is not in our power to perform, nor is their performance any longer requisite. To carry the light of the Gospel into the distant gloom of heathen lands, may also exceed the compass of our ability; but we can, *every one of us*, without either inconvenience or difficulty, extend its influence among our relations and our friends. Were we but fully alive to a sense of the awful importance of so doing, could we but be persuaded to make it a fixed and leading principle of duty, soon should we find it mingling without effort in all the common concerns of life, disturbing nothing, preventing nothing; but directing, purifying, improving, and blessing all. Parent with child, brother with brother, friend with friend,

would thus “provoke each other to love and to good works,” by habitually making the blessings of the Gospel the *theme* of their conversation.

Nor think that a mere casual hint, a mere passing observation, is enough; but “talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.” Let your actions be a comment on your words, your holy life a justification of your Christian profession, that “others seeing your good works may glorify your Father who is in heaven.” If you hope for substantial consolation when the empty shadows of earthly glory are vanishing away, when that which is now “without form or comeliness” shall *alone* appear excellent in beauty and in worth; if, at that awful hour, you hope for peace at the last, this *must* you do, and do it with your might. Defer not, therefore, a moment, either to form holy resolutions or, with fixed purpose of soul, to carry those resolutions into effect; and may “He, who alone can establish, strengthen, perfect us in every good word and work,” crown our sincere endeavours with success, and keep us blameless and without reproach, unto the day of the second coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

## SERMON III.

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THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST PROVED FROM SCRIPTURE, AND  
FROM THE WRITINGS OF THE ANTE-NICENE FATHERS.

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TITUS ii. 13.

*Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of  
the Great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.*

FROM the manner in which this verse has been translated, that expression, “the Great God,” is liable to be considered as referring to God the *Father*. That such, however, is not the true meaning of the Apostle seems to be more than probable, for the three following reasons:—

First,—Because the construction of the sentence, as it stands in the original, requires a different interpretation. To enter into a minute examination of the passage would be as tedious as it is unnecessary. It will suffice briefly to observe, that the Greek<sup>1</sup> Article stands immediately prefixed only to the “Great God,” being omitted before “our Saviour Jesus Christ;” and that according to a Rule established upon general principles, from

<sup>1</sup> Τοῦ μεγάλου Θεοῦ καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

an ample induction of particulars, by the ablest Biblical Critics<sup>1</sup>, the whole of these words, “the Great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ,” must necessarily all relate to the *same person*. The correct mode therefore of rendering this passage is either “the glorious appearing of our Great God and Saviour Jesus Christ;” or what amounts to the same thing, “the glorious appearing of Jesus Christ, our Great God and Saviour;” than which there cannot possibly be a stronger or more express attestation to our Lord’s Divinity<sup>2</sup>.

It is not, however, from the mere *collocation* of these words, that this inference may be drawn, but also, in the second place, from the scriptural use of the word ἐπιφάνεια, which is translated *appearing*. It occurs in only four<sup>3</sup> other places of the New Testament, beside the present, and in each it refers solely to Jesus Christ, but never to God the Father. The inference would therefore seem fair and reasonable, that in the text also it refers to the *same person*, and consequently that it so far strengthens the argument thence to be deduced in support of our Saviour’s Divinity.

<sup>1</sup> Granville Sharp, Bishop Middleton, &c.

<sup>2</sup> See Routh. Rel. Sac. ii. p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> These are 2 Thess. ii. 8. 1 Tim. vi. 14. 2 Tim. i. 10, and 2 Tim. iv. 1.

The third reason alluded to for ascribing such meaning to the language of the Apostle, is the reference expressly made to this text by two of the early fathers of the Christian Church, Clement of Alexandria, and Hippolytus Portuensis. We cannot but esteem their evidence as peculiarly valuable, when we reflect that they wrote in the same language as St. Paul, employing indeed the same expressions that he did, but connecting them with others, which prevent all possibility either of ambiguity or mistake. It may be further observed, that had it occurred to either of them that such an erroneous interpretation would, in after times, have been put upon the words of St. Paul, they would unquestionably have entered into a full elucidation of the doubtful phrase, since they were themselves most zealous promulgators of the doctrine that Jesus Christ is God.

With regard to one of the passages from Hippolytus, it is not given expressly in the form of a quotation from St. Paul; but still the allusion is so strong, as to leave no doubt of the reference. The only variety of expression observable is that which entirely, though apparently without any intention of the kind, removes the ambiguity.

“What is left,” says he<sup>1</sup>, “but the appearing of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who is God from heaven?” It is here remarkable that the word “Lord” occupies the same position in this sentence as is occupied in the text by the words “Great God,” and that the words “God from heaven” are immediately annexed to Jesus Christ, in such a way that they cannot possibly be wrested by the utmost ingenuity to any other meaning than the decided assertion that Christ is God. The other passage in the conclusion of the same work clearly alludes, not to the appearing of the Father, but only of the Son, though the word “God” here occupies the same position as the words “Great God” in the text: “looking for that blessed hope, and appearing of our God and Saviour, at which having raised up those of us who are holy, he will rejoice with them, glorifying the Father.”

Nor is the evidence of Clement of Alexandria

<sup>1</sup> Hippolytus de Antichristo, c. 64. In most of the following quotations from the Fathers, I have adopted Dr. Burton's translation, and have derived also much assistance from his judicious comments upon them. Those who would estimate the accuracy of such translation by a comparison with the original, are referred to his very learned and valuable work, “Testimonies of the Ante-Nicene Fathers to the Divinity of Christ.”

less convincing upon the subject. For the text stands incorporated with a portion of his writings, which asserts in the most unqualified terms the Divinity of Christ; and, what is very remarkable, he adduces this text expressly to establish the truth of his doctrine upon higher authority than his own—the authority of an Apostle. Had it then occurred to him that there was any ambiguity in the language of St. Paul, the same language which he himself wrote and spoke familiarly; or had he supposed that those who were less acquainted with that language would have translated it erroneously; is it at all probable or consistent with common sense, that he would have resorted to what he considered a *doubtful* text, for confirming the doctrine which he himself so openly promulgated to the world?

It should be remembered too, that his object in composing the Treatise which contains this passage, was not to correct the errors of those who were already converted to Christianity, but to give to the Heathen nations of the world, whom he was labouring strenuously to convert, a summary view of the leading doctrines universally held by all true believers, with regard to the Author of their religion. The passage is as follows: “The Word

therefore, that is, Christ, is the cause of our original being, for he was in God ; and he is also the cause of our well-being ; since this same Word, who alone is both *God* and *Man*, hath appeared unto men as the cause of all good things to us ; by whom we are instructed in living well, and conducted to eternal life." He then quotes literally the words of the text, and adds in the language of exultation, " This is the new song, the appearance of which has now shone forth among us, of the Word who was in the beginning and pre-existed ; the Saviour, who was before, hath appeared lately : he hath appeared who is in Him who is, because he is the Word who was with God : the Teacher hath appeared by whom all things were made ; the Word (who also in the beginning gave life when he formed us, as the Creator) hath taught us to live well, appearing as a Teacher, that he might afterwards give us eternal life, as God."

On sentiments so clear and decided it seems unnecessary to comment. I would only remark, that they not only appear in a striking manner to convey the true meaning of the passage in question, and of St. Paul's doctrine upon the subject at large, but also to express, most comprehensively



and explicitly, the doctrine of our Saviour's pre-existence, divinity, and humanity, contained in the commencement of the Gospel according to St. John.

In the further prosecution of this most important subject, I might adduce as proofs of our Saviour's Divinity many texts which translated, as they ought to be, according to the rule already cited, contain such expressions as the following: "In the kingdom of Christ who is also God<sup>1</sup>," "according to the grace of our God and Lord, Jesus Christ<sup>2</sup>;" "through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ<sup>3</sup>;" and "denying our only master, God and Lord, Jesus Christ<sup>4</sup>." It were easy also to adduce a multiplicity of passages from Scripture, ascribing to him those peculiar and incommunicable attributes of Deity, omniscience, omnipresence, immutability, and eternity: representing him also as the author of such works as belong unto God alone, the creation and government of the world, the miraculous suspension of those laws which, by his appointment, all nature obeys; and not only enjoining the homage of prayer and praise, of glory, honour, and thanksgiving, to be offered to him, but ab-

<sup>1</sup> Eph. v. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Thess. i. 12.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Pet. i. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Jude 4.

solutely ascribing to him the *very nature* of God himself.

But relinquishing so extensive a field of discussion, let us at present confine our attention simply to a few texts, in our received version of the Holy Scriptures, in which Jesus Christ is expressly called *God*. We will then inquire in what light those texts were regarded by the fathers of the Christian Church in the days of its primitive purity.

In the prophecy of Isaiah, it is written, “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the *Mighty God*, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.” It is obvious that this prediction of the incarnation of the Son of God embraces the doctrine both of his Humanity and Divinity. And this is the view taken of it by Irenæus, in his work against Heresies. Having stated that those who regard Christ as a mere man cannot attain eternal life, he declares that Jesus “had in himself that exalted birth, which is of the Most High Father, and that he had also that exalted birth which is of a Virgin; both which points the Divine Scriptures testify of him: and that he was a man ‘with no form nor comeliness,’ subject to suffering, ‘sit-

ting upon the foal of an ass ;' that he had vinegar and gall to drink ; that he was despised by the people, and condescended even to death ; and that he is the Holy Lord, and Wonderful Counsellor, and beautiful in appearance, and the *Mighty God*, coming in the clouds to judge all men <sup>1</sup>." Clement of Alexandria, after quoting the words of the prophecy, exclaims, " O the *Mighty God* ! O the perfect child ! The Son in the Father, and the Father in the Son <sup>2</sup> !" And Dionysius of the same city observes, that " Isaiah before this was inspired, and spake of the Child, who was God, the *Mighty God*, and of the Virgin who conceived <sup>3</sup>." He elsewhere refers to this prophecy, adding, " Isaiah says, ' Behold, a Virgin shall conceive,' and then shews that the mother of God, *i. e.* the Virgin, conceived some one, whom we acknowledge as our God, the Word, his Son, who is co-eternal with the Father. And what is the quality of the child who was laid in the manger ? God, mighty, powerful, the Prince of Peace, the Father of the world to come <sup>4</sup>."

Without further reference to the Predictions of the Old Testament, or to the proofs of this doc-

<sup>1</sup> Lib. iii. c. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Lib. i. c. 5. 112.

<sup>3</sup> Epist. adv. Paul. Samos. 210.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 237.

trine which it abundantly supplies, let us proceed to the consideration of that very remarkable text (to which we have already alluded) in the commencement of the Gospel according to St. John.

The leading object of his writings, says Bishop Blomfield<sup>1</sup>, was “to convey to the Christian world just and adequate notions of the real nature, character and office of that great Teacher who came to instruct and redeem mankind.” The other evangelists “wrote a history of our Saviour’s life, but St. John of his person and office.” Accordingly, instead of relating the circumstances of his birth, or tracing his genealogy from David, St. John commences at once with a declaration of his existence from eternity, in union with God the Father. “In the beginning was the Word<sup>2</sup>, and the Word was with God<sup>3</sup> ;” the truth of which assertion is fully attested by our Saviour’s prayer; “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world began<sup>4</sup>.” The

<sup>1</sup> Lectures on the Gospel of St. John, pp. 252, 253.

<sup>2</sup> For the full acceptation of this term among the ancient Jews, and for the testimony thence borne to the Divinity of Christ, as the Logos of St. John, see Townsend’s New Testament arranged, i. p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> John i. 1.

<sup>4</sup> John xvii. 5.

Evangelist further adds, “and the Word was God.” Language more unequivocal or more directly subversive of the Unitarian doctrine can hardly be imagined. And, as if to prevent all subterfuge or evasion in ascertaining his real meaning, he declares that the Word, who was God, was that same Jesus whose “glory” he had beheld on the mount of transfiguration, and at his ascension into heaven. For he further adds, “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth.”

How widely different were the sentiments of the early Fathers upon this subject from those of the Unitarians I will not attempt to shew, further than by the following quotation from Clement of Alexandria, who is in unison with the rest, and denominates our Saviour “the Divine Word, who was truly and most manifestly God, who was equal to the Lord of the universe, because he was his Son, and the Word was in God <sup>1</sup>.” The language in the original is strong beyond the power of translation, and has this marked peculiarity, that the phrase ὄντως Θεός, which he here employs to signify that Christ is *truly* God, is precisely that

<sup>1</sup> Cohort. ad Gent. c. 10.

by which he repeatedly asserts the same thing of God the Father.

The only other proof of our Lord's Divinity that I shall produce from this gospel, which abounds with them, is that of a most unsuspected witness, who obstinately withheld his assent to the truth of our Lord's Resurrection, even though attested by his most intimate associates, and who declared his resolution to persist in that denial, unless convinced by the evidence of his senses, after such an examination as it seemed presumptuous to ask or to hope for. "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my fingers into the print of the nails, and thrust my hands into his side, I will not believe." After persevering for eight days in this determined incredulity, his doubts were graciously removed by our Saviour, who thus condescended to address him in his mercy, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless but believing." And Thomas answered, and said unto him, in that language of faith and adoration which peculiarly belongs to the Supreme being, "My Lord and my God."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> John xx. 25.

“ This passage is the more deserving of our attention,” says Bishop Blomfield<sup>1</sup>, “ because it is the first time that Christ is called *God* by any of his disciples.” It is commended by our Lord, as he elsewhere remarks, “ as a direct and unequivocal confession of our Saviour’s divine nature;” and that it was so regarded by the ancient Fathers appears evident from the following observations by Dionysius of Alexandria<sup>2</sup>. “ But Christ, who rose from the dead, died and lived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. For he is God by nature, and has dominion over all things. He who was crucified and rose again, both rose again and was recognised by his wounds to be very God, and was declared by Thomas, with equal honour, to be God and Lord. For the Lord God, who had been wounded for our sakes, rose again, having the marks of the wounds in his hands; for God, who was handled by the apostles, not man by nature, but by nature God, has the heathen for his inheritance, and is the judge of all the earth.”

The next authority to which I shall refer is recorded by St. Luke, the Evangelist, in the Acts of

<sup>1</sup> Lectures on the Gospel of St. John, p. 328.

<sup>2</sup> Epist. adv. Paul. Samos. p. 210.

the Apostles. “ Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of *God*, which he hath purchased with his own blood<sup>1</sup>.” This passage so strongly supports the Divinity of Christ, that it has naturally excited the utmost efforts of the opponents of the doctrine. They labour hard to prove a variety of reading in the original. But even the most learned among them are compelled to admit, that both the oldest MS. and the oldest version of it, confirm the usual reading, “ Church of God.” The phrase for which they contend, “ Church of the Lord,”—a phrase (be it remembered) which occurs nowhere in the whole volume of the New Testament, is sanctioned merely by a Latin translation of a passage from Irenæus, of which the original is lost. Than that writer there is not any more strenuous advocate of Christ’s Divinity. “ Remember,” says he, “ that you have been redeemed by the flesh of our Lord, and restored by his blood; and holding the head from which all the body of the Church knit together increaseth, both confess him to be God and firmly acknowledge his human nature<sup>2</sup>.”

<sup>1</sup> Acts xx. 28.

<sup>2</sup> V. 14 p. 311.



Nor are they more correct in asserting that the phrase, "blood of God" is unknown to the earliest Ecclesiastical Fathers. For in the writings of Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, who was contemporary with the Apostles, we read in the commencement of his Epistle to the Romans<sup>1</sup>, "Being imitators of God, having animated yourselves by the blood of God, ye have performed perfectly the congenial work." "I well know," saith Tertullian<sup>2</sup>, "that we are not our own, but bought with a price; and what sort of price? The blood of God." And Dionysius of Alexandria thus emphatically expresses a similar sentiment: "The holy blood of our God Jesus Christ is not corruptible, nor the blood of a mortal man like ourselves; but of *very God*<sup>3</sup>."

The next passage of Sacred Writ to which we shall advert, as thus unequivocally asserting our Lord's Divinity, occurs in St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans: "Whose are the Fathers, of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, *God* blessed for ever<sup>4</sup>." But the more decided the evidence here given, the more strenuous are the advocates of error, in their efforts to over-

<sup>1</sup> p. 25.<sup>2</sup> Ad Uxorem. II. 3. p. 168.<sup>3</sup> Paul. Samos. Quæst. IV. p. 237.<sup>4</sup> Romans ix. 5.

throw it. They have, therefore, strained their ingenuity to the utmost in seeking to elude its force, by a perversion of terms contrary at once to the common use of language, and to the interpretation universally affixed to this passage, by the Primitive Fathers of the Church. Yet to these Fathers they appeal, and declare that since none of them ever referred to it as a proof of Christ's Divinity, they must have construed the words in a very different sense from their usual acceptation.

For enabling us to estimate the truth of this assertion and the value of the inference drawn from it, the following remarks will suffice. Irenæus, in confuting the Gnostics<sup>1</sup>, who, however, denied not the Divinity of Christ but only the union of the Divine and Human Natures in one Person, quotes literally the words as they stand in the original, and are rendered in our common version. Tertullian also quotes them literally, prefixing to them this important observation, "Paul also himself has called Christ God<sup>2</sup>." "As to this assertion of the apostle," saith Hippolytus, "he declares the truth properly and plainly. He who is over all, is God; for he thus says boldly, 'All

<sup>1</sup> Burton's Testimonies, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> Adv. Prax. c. xv. p. 509.

things are delivered unto me of the Father. He that is God over all is blessed ; and becoming man, is God for ever.' For thus St. John also said, ' which is, and which was, and which is to come, God Almighty. (Rev. i. 8.) He is right in calling Christ Almighty<sup>1</sup>.' ” Not to enumerate a multitude of other authorities to the same effect, we may merely remark, that by the council of Antioch, about the middle of the third century, in giving a summary of the religious creed, which they assert to have been preserved in the Catholic church from the time of the Apostles to that day, the text in question is cited fully, with this additional declaration, “ that all the divinely inspired Scriptures declare the Son of God to be God<sup>2</sup>.”

In his First Epistle to Timothy<sup>3</sup>, St. Paul confesses this doctrine to be a mystery decidedly great. “ Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness ; God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” Of Jesus Christ it is recorded in Sacred History, that he was “ manifest in the flesh,” when he was born of his Virgin-

<sup>1</sup> Contra Noet. c. 2. vol. ii. pp. 7 and 10.

<sup>2</sup> Concil. Antioch. apud Routh Rel. Sac. II. 466.    <sup>3</sup> iii. 16.

mother at Bethlehem, and sojourned upon earth for the space of thirty and three years; “justified in the Spirit,” at the stream of Jordan and on the day of Pentecost; “seen of angels,” after his victory over Satan in the wilderness, at his agony in the garden of Gethsemane, and his resurrection from the dead; “preached unto the Gentiles,” by his disciples, and more especially by St. Paul, who was a “vessel chosen” for that express purpose; “believed on in the world,” which was thus “turned from darkness unto light and from the power of Satan unto God;” and “received up into glory,” while in the act of blessing his Apostles at Bethany, whence “he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight.” Each of these *facts*, thus recorded of *Jesus Christ* by the Evangelists, are in the passage before us distinctly predicated of *God* by St. Paul, and we are hence led to the direct conclusion that *Jesus Christ is God*.

But it were tedious to dwell upon the illustration of words so obvious in themselves, or to shew their entire correspondence with the sentiments of the early Christian Fathers, one<sup>1</sup> of whom observes,

<sup>1</sup> Clement of Alexandria. Pædagog. l. iii. c. 1.

that “the Word himself is a mystery revealed, God in man and man in God :” and another<sup>1</sup> thus quotes the express words themselves, “Christ is one who is in the Father, the co-eternal Word : there is one Person of him, the invisible God, and who became visible ; for God was manifest in the flesh, being made of a woman, and begotten of God his Father. One only Virgin, the daughter of life, brought forth the living and self-substantial Word, the uncreated Creator, the God who came into the world and was unknown, God, who is above the heavens, the Maker of Heaven, the Creator of the world.”

That the Divinity of Christ is indeed a mystery, and, till revealed by Heaven, undiscoverable by man, is asserted by our Saviour himself. For when he had asked his disciples, “whom say ye that I am,” and Peter had answered in the name of them all, “Thou art that Christ the Son of the living God,” he replied, “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona ; flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven<sup>2</sup>.” Now, had our Saviour been merely a great Prophet, this revelation would not have

<sup>1</sup> Dionysius of Alexandria. Epist. adv. Paul. Samos. p. 210.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xvi. 17.

been necessary ; as his *prophetical mission* was sufficiently attested by his public miracles. But since such inspiration was by himself declared to be necessary for the clear comprehension of his character, it must have been, because he was infinitely *more* than Man, infinitely more than any inspired Prophet,—in other words, that he was really and truly God.

In the preceding observations, we have seen that this was undeniably the doctrine of the Apostles, and of those Fathers who best understood its real meaning, both because they were either the contemporaries and associates of the Apostles, or lived in times not far removed from them, speaking and writing the same language, often even in its most idiomatic form. Such most assuredly was the belief of the Fathers of the Christian Church, for the first three hundred years of its history. During that period, the chief contest which they had to maintain among Christians, was not for the Divinity of Christ, but for his Humanity ; which by some sects was denied, and by others its union with the Divine Nature incorrectly understood. Against the errors on this subject, which subsequently began to be more widely disseminated, the Fathers of the Church at

once took their stand in a collected body, at the Council of Nice<sup>1</sup>; declared what had been the true doctrine universally assented to till the days of Arius; and that faith, once delivered to the Saints, they laboured to transmit in undiminished purity to posterity, by whom it has been, with some few exceptions, received as the doctrine of the Church until this day; having been the joy of millions of the holiest and best men, who have lived and died in the faith of Christ for almost two thousand years.

And shall any who call themselves Christians, still presume with impious hands to extinguish that hallowed flame, that radiance of Divinity, which has guided so many of the wise and virtuous through this wilderness of life to the promised land? The attempt were no less vain and unprofitable, than it is wicked and presumptuous. For what else, at best, can they give us in its stead; but either the lamp of reason faintly glimmering amidst the darkness of human ignorance, or the cold splendour of a system of morality, devoid of that vital warmth and energy which would have been conveyed to it from the Divinity of its Author? They may leave us indeed those perfect precepts delivered to us by the great Teacher of righteous-

<sup>1</sup> A. D. 325.

ness, but they deprive us of that sure anchor of the Christian's hope, the doctrine of the atonement. For if Christ was not God, his death could not expiate our offences, and we must be yet in our sins.

As for those who acknowledge that Jesus Christ professed himself to be God, but still deny his Divinity, let them *tremble* at the boldness and impiety of their assertion; for, in fact, they arraign the Saviour of men as an impostor, and denounce the words which proceeded from his blessed lips as the most presumptuous blasphemy. In refusing their assent to this great doctrine, let them reflect that they do so at their most imminent peril. For if our Saviour *should* be divine, and they cannot prove him to be otherwise; if his religion *should* be true, and they cannot demonstrate it to be false; then, by all their strenuous exertions in this unhallowed cause, they are only treasuring up for themselves wrath against "the day of wrath." For at that awful day they shall behold *Him* whom they have thus dishonoured, seated on his tribunal as a judge, begirt with the terrors of Omnipotence incensed, and ready to vindicate the truth of his Divinity, by the power he will display in their destruction.



## SERMON IV.

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### PERSONALITY AND OFFICE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

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EPHESIANS iv. 30.

*And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God by which you are sealed unto the day of redemption.*

By the light of nature we perceive in our spiritual constitution defects so evidently resulting from an inherent principle of corruption, that it can neither be mistaken nor denied. But though these defects are visible, and their baneful cause too certain, it surpasses the power of man to discover the remedy. For one of the most fatal consequences, flowing from this original corruption, is the blindness of our understanding in the discernment of spiritual things. Unassisted Reason, finding its powers unequal to the task, soon surrendered itself to the guidance of a vain imagination, which still further darkened that which was already obscure, and perplexed that which was already intricate. Man wandered farther and farther from his God; the clouds that intercepted

the view of his true happiness became thicker and darker, until it pleased the Most High to disperse them in his mercy by the light of Revelation.

A dispensation so full of grace and goodness, was eminently calculated to promote our spiritual welfare ; and were there no other evidence that the Christian Revelation is divine, the perfect *adaptation* of it to our wants and woes, to our hopes and fears, to our capacities and powers, and to all the diversified circumstances of our common nature, would demonstrate most clearly that it proceeded from Him who made man, who knows what is in man, and who alone can discover by His wisdom a remedy as powerful and extensive as the disease.

The plan of our redemption exhibited in the Gospel is not only much too exalted for the human mind to have devised, but, even when thus devised and exhibited to our view, is in many particulars far beyond the limit of the most enlarged understanding. Yet the more carefully we contemplate that plan, the more distinctly do we perceive it to have been formed, not only in mercy but in wisdom. If then such parts of it as we can either wholly or partially understand

bear unquestionable marks of Infinite Wisdom, does it not follow, as a fair and legitimate conclusion, that those which exceed our comprehension must partake of the same character? When we acknowledge those parts which are perceptible to us, to be the result of the perfection of wisdom, upon what just ground can we pronounce those which we cannot comprehend, to be either less wise or less perfect?

Whenever, therefore, any mysterious doctrine is proposed to us as the subject of belief, our first duty evidently is, to ascertain that it is so proposed to us in Scripture, and, consequently, to receive it as the oracle of God; our next, to inquire *how* it can be rendered most efficacious in promoting the great work of our salvation. With this view let us now proceed to the consideration of the important doctrine contained in the text. After briefly stating the Scripture evidence for the Personality of the Holy Spirit, I shall endeavour, first, to describe his Office in “sealing us to the Day of Redemption,” and then point out to you the awful consequences incurred by “grieving the Holy Spirit of God.”

Were it my present intention to enter into an

argument upon the *Divinity*<sup>1</sup> of the Holy Spirit, I might shew by various passages, such as that in which “lying unto the Holy Ghost is termed lying unto *God*<sup>2</sup>,” that it is distinctly and unequivocally asserted in Scripture. But since those who acknowledge his *Personality* generally admit also his *Divinity* as a necessary consequence, by giving proof of the former, the latter will be sufficiently established.

The error into which many have fallen with regard to his *Personality*, arises from an improper interpretation of particular portions of Scripture, by substituting a part for the whole, and from such partial premises deducing a general conclusion. In the passages alluded to, the Spirit of God is spoken of as being “given or as being poured out,” and thence it is inferred that the Holy Ghost is a mere quality, or energy, or emanation of the Divine Grace. But whatever countenance certain texts of Scripture may apparently give to such an opinion, with others it is found to be quite incompatible. Both in the institution of

<sup>1</sup> For the proof of the *Divinity* of the Holy Spirit, see Sermon I., page 13.

<sup>2</sup> Acts v. 3, 4.

Baptism and in the Apostolical benediction He is joined with the Father and the Son, in such a manner as clearly denotes his Personality. To say, “ Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name<sup>1</sup>” of two Persons and of a quality, is contrary both to the language of Scripture and of common sense. And the conjunction of these expressions, “ the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of<sup>2</sup>” a particular *quality* or *operation* is equally incongruous and absurd.

But further, let us observe the peculiarly marked manner in which the Holy Spirit is distinguished from the two other Persons of the Trinity by our blessed Saviour himself. “ I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth<sup>3</sup>.” Now if our Saviour was himself a Person, as is universally admitted, it is fair to infer that his successor, *another* Comforter, must be a Person also. The same conclusive inference is drawn from such texts as these: “ the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxviii. 19.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

<sup>3</sup> John xiv. 16, 17.

all things<sup>1</sup>.” “When the Spirit of truth is come he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear that shall he speak; for he shall receive of mine and shew it unto you<sup>2</sup>.” Now in interpreting these expressions, it is impossible, without the grossest abuse of language, to confound the Holy Ghost either with the Father who sendeth Him, or with the Son in whose name He is sent, or to regard Him in any other light than as a distinct Person.

With this interpretation the language of the Apostles is in perfect accordance. St. Paul, for instance, states that “the Spirit maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered; that he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God<sup>3</sup>”—a form of expression which decidedly distinguishes him from the Father. And by the same Apostle, seeing, hearing, working in us, interceding for us, “dividing gifts to every man severally as he will”—such actions and operations, in short, are ascribed to him, as involve the inevitable conclusion, that the Holy Ghost is a distinct Person of the blessed Trinity, in glory equal, in majesty co-eternal.

<sup>1</sup> John xiv. 26.

<sup>2</sup> John xvi. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. viii. 26, 27.

Let us proceed next to inquire, what is the office of the Spirit in sealing us to the day of Redemption ; and to shew that the benefits resulting from the exercise of that office are peculiarly adapted to the wants and weakness of our corrupt nature. - With regard to the first of these subjects, we may remark that, at the Fall, the whole race of Adam, from being sons of God, became “ children of wrath,” and consequently lost that inheritance to which they were originally entitled. They were thence subject to sin and death, and were “ led captive by Satan at his will.” Ever since that fatal period, has man been more or less under their dominion ; and is never quite exempted from it on this side the grave.

At the departure of the righteous from this world, the power of sin and Satan over their *souls* is for ever abolished ; but death will still retain its authority over their *bodies* undiminished, until the day of the general Resurrection. On that awful day shall the Redeemed of the Lord be ransomed from the power of the grave, by “ that quickening Spirit which raised up Jesus from the dead, “ and their vile bodies shall be changed, like unto his glorious body, by the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto

himself." Then, and not till then, will they shake off the very last of those fetters that so long had held them in thralldom, awakening to light, to life, to liberty, and to the recovery of their forfeited inheritance by this public adoption into the family of heaven. By the Day of their Redemption then, we are to understand that day, on which they shall openly be proclaimed triumphant over the united powers of Satan, Sin and Death. It is unquestionably true that this redemption was effected by the death of Christ, and that the ransom was paid when he offered himself a sacrifice for the sins of mankind. But it appears equally true, from what hath been revealed to us in Scripture upon the subject, that the benefits of his purchase can only be rendered effectual by the application of the Holy Spirit; who thus ratifies the purchase and secures our salvation, by "sealing us to the day of redemption."

The *mode* in which the Holy Spirit effects this great object, we can only collect from the Scriptures. Of the miraculous powers, which he is there represented as bestowing on the Apostles, I shall not at present speak, but confine myself to those ordinary graces which we shall find equally indispensable to us, whether in a *converted* or



*unconverted* state, and peculiarly adapted to the supply of all our spiritual wants.

To the unconverted sinner the Holy Spirit acts as an admonisher and reprovcr. In the days before the Flood we find an unequivocal intimation of this nature, when the Lord said, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man<sup>1</sup>;" and when our Saviour foretells the coming of another Comforter, he declares that it will be "to reprove the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment<sup>2</sup>." This he accomplishes by the truths of his Word and the operations of his Providence; by which he gives strength and force to the admonitions of conscience when we are sinking to rest in fatal security. When the temptations of the world displayed before our eyes are seducing us far from the paths of virtue, His is the warning voice that recalls us, saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it." After a long course of vicious conduct, when sudden calamity overwhelms the guilty, or when the Angel of death seems summoning them to judgment, then is the power of the Searcher of hearts felt in all its terrors, reprovng, convincing, exciting to contrition and amendment of life, if life

<sup>1</sup> Gen. vi. 3.

<sup>2</sup> John xvi. 8.

be still allowed ; and when, with returning health, temptation regains its power and corrupt nature is fast yielding to its sway, the same Spirit that inspired our good resolutions, recalls to our remembrance our former vows, confirming the work so happily begun, until it end in our complete reformation. Such is the case with the *unconverted* sinner.

Nor are the influences of the Holy Spirit, in suggesting, directing, protecting, strengthening, less requisite or beneficial to the *sincere Christian*. Even in the best of men there remains very much of weakness and corruption. St. Paul himself laments, that though he delights in the law of God after the inward man, "there is another law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin<sup>1</sup>," so that "the good that I would," saith he, "I do not ; but the evil which I would not, that I do." This inward corruption then, which upon every fresh temptation manifests itself in pride or intemperance, or discontent, or sloth, or worldliness, or some other evil habit or affection, is constantly striving to regain its ascendancy. Nor could it

<sup>1</sup> Rom. vii. 19 and 23.

fail ultimately to succeed, unless the good principle within us received strength to resist. Such strength is afforded us by the gracious aid of the Holy Spirit, suggesting devout thoughts, prompting good resolutions and enabling us to carry them into effect. It is only "the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus that can make us free from the law of sin and death<sup>1</sup>."

It remains for me to mention still another mode in which the Holy Spirit helpeth our infirmities; and that is, by "bearing witness with our spirits that we are the children of God<sup>2</sup>." When we look back upon our past life, so many evil thoughts, words and actions, all contrary to the Divine law, rise to our view, that we are compelled to exclaim with the Psalmist, "Our sins are more in number than the hairs of our head, therefore our heart faileth us;" we are ready to sink into despair, and to abandon for ever all hope of working out our salvation.

Here then it is that the Comforter most seasonably interposes with his Heavenly grace. He suggests to our mind the infinite mercy of God in Christ "whose blood cleanseth from all sin." He

<sup>1</sup> Rom. viii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. viii. 16.

encourages us with the promises and consolations of the Gospel ; he seals the truth of the word preached ; he gives complete efficacy to the holy sacraments, to the engagements contracted at our baptism, to the vows made at his holy table ; and thus diffuses peace through our troubled spirits, by his sacred influences—the pledges of present pardon, the earnest of eternal happiness. As the Spirit of prayer, the Intercessor for the Saints—he fills us with true devotion, enables us to pour forth our hearts in fervent supplications, sometimes “ with groanings that cannot be uttered ;” but even those silent aspirations of unutterable anguish rise audible and acceptable before the Throne on high. It is by inspiring such feelings, by ministering such assistance, and by enabling us to judge of the reality of that spiritual aid by its fruits and effects, that “ he fills us with all joy and peace in believing.”

And here let me earnestly caution you against forming, from your feelings alone, any opinion, whether favourable or unfavourable, of your spiritual state. Between these aids of the Holy Spirit and the natural operations of our own mind, it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to distinguish with certainty. So silently doth the Spirit work through the me-

dium of our own thoughts, subduing our wills, purifying our affections, and counteracting our natural corruption, that had not Scripture assured us of the fact, we should not, when practising holiness, have known ourselves to be actuated by a Divine power. This *imperceptibility* of the Spirit's influence upon our mind is denoted in Scripture by "the wind blowing where it listeth:" we perceive and feel its effects, but know neither "whence it cometh nor whither it goeth<sup>1</sup>." As the great Creator is seen only in his external works, so is the Author of grace in the heart invisible, but his work is manifest. Trust not, therefore, implicitly to internal feelings, which are often presumptuous and deceitful; rely not, as some have done, upon particular revelations which are fond and often fatal delusions; but, in judging of your spiritual condition, adopt this only certain and infallible rule recommended in Scripture: "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God, if ye love God and keep his commandments, and bring forth the fruits of the Spirit. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth *not* his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him<sup>2</sup>."

<sup>1</sup> John iii. 8.

<sup>2</sup> 1 John ii. 4.

Before I conclude, allow me to direct your attention to the import of the phrase, “grieving the Holy Spirit of God,” and to the awful consequences to which those who are guilty of such offence are exposed. This is evidently a metaphorical expression, employed after the manner of men, to denote that, in pursuing a certain course of conduct forbidden by the Spirit of God, we act towards him in such a manner as would create grief and displeasure in our fellow-creatures; and then that he, in consequence, acts towards us as our fellow-creatures would act, when grieved and offended by us—withdrawing former kindness, and leaving us to ourselves.

In *what* that conduct so grievous to the Holy Spirit consists, may be gathered from the context. The Apostle begins by recommending unity to the whole Church of Corinth, and to its individual members perfect purity and renewal of mind. As the means of producing this unity, and as an evidence of this renewal of mind, he warns them diligently against committing sins injurious to society; earnestly inculcates truth, honesty, diligence, gentleness in cultivating a useful intercourse with each other, as well in temporal as in spiritual matters; and then emphatically adds, “grieve

not the Holy Spirit of God, by which you are sealed unto the day of redemption."

The inference to be drawn is obvious and irresistible. It is clear, that if we introduce discord and division into the Church of Christ, we destroy, as far as in us lies, the very *means* which God has appointed for bringing us to a knowledge of the truth. It is clear, that if our heart be not filled with love to God, it must become the prey of every evil passion. From this impure fountain will flow waters of bitterness, full of deadly poison, dangerous to others, destructive to ourselves. By the encouragement or permission of evil thoughts come evil actions. By the repetition of evil actions, habits are formed and confirmed, which not only deaden the power of conscience, but even quench and expel the Spirit. *One single evil habit*, rendered familiar to the soul, is utterly inconsistent with the spirit of holiness. It is a fatal delusion to say that we are free from many sins to which other men are habituated. Few men are such monsters as to addict themselves to all. But if we have one favourite sin which we cherish or tolerate, all our pretensions to godliness are vain. For, in *habitually* yielding to that one sin, we are in principle violating the whole law; since we are

solemnly assured in Scripture, that “whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all<sup>1</sup>.” That sin, that favourite sin which so easily besets us, is the rival of God in our hearts, and stamps us as the children of disobedience, with whom he hath most solemnly declared that his “Spirit shall not always strive.”

Let us not deceive ourselves with the vain hope that, without our hearty desire and strenuous endeavour, he will *compel* us to be virtuous. For the influence that he exerts is merely of an assistant, not of a compulsive nature, nor does it supersede the use of our own exertions. By our own voluntary act, through the aid of Divine grace, must our evil passions be sacrificed on the altar of religion: by our own determined resolutions must we steadily obey all good motions within us: by our own utmost efforts must we “walk after the Spirit,” if we would be conducted by Him to the mansions of bliss.

But if, on the contrary, we harden our hearts, or remain inactive and disobedient, he will most certainly abandon us, a prey to our own lusts and to the dominion of our spiritual foes. From the

<sup>1</sup> James ii. 10.



moment that the Holy Spirit abandons us, we are in the jaws of ruin, though we know it not ; we are slumbering on the brink of a precipice, and in hell shall we lift up our eyes. From the moment that he abandons us we are sealed, not to the day of redemption, but to the night of everlasting perdition. When the Son of man shall come in his glory, we shall indeed arise from the grave to meet him ; but it will only be to receive from Him, as our judge, the punishment of our obstinate impenitence. For “ if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, and been made partakers of the Holy Ghost, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation. For if he that despised Moses’ law died without mercy, of how much sorer punishment suppose ye shall *he* be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of Grace<sup>1</sup> ?”

Since these things are so, let us resolve, through the aid of Divine Grace, henceforth to promote to the utmost of our power the work of the Spirit in our souls. For this important purpose let us

<sup>1</sup> Heb. x. 26, 29.

zealously follow the means which He hath appointed, and hath promised to bless. Let it be our fixed determination, never to permit one single day to pass over our heads without reading and meditating upon the revealed Will of God ; never, so long as we are blessed with health and opportunity, to suffer one Sabbath to glide away without our waiting upon the Lord in His holy temple ; never to turn our back with ingratitude or indifference upon the altar of our Saviour, but to draw near to it, upon this most solemn day<sup>1</sup>, that we may receive fresh supplies of grace and goodness,—praying always most fervently to the Father of mercies, that He may render these His ordinances effectual to our eternal salvation, and enable us to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit to the praise of His glory.

<sup>1</sup> Whitsunday.

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## SERMON V.

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### THE MILLENNIUM.

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1 Peter 11, 12.

*Of this salvation the Prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.*

ST. Peter, in addressing the Christian converts, who were dispersed through a great part of Asia Minor, blesses God, who, “ by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, had begotten them again to the lively hope of an inheritance eternal in the heavens.” He assures them, that, as this immortal inheritance had not been purchased with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, so would it be secured to them by his ever living to bestow it upon those “ who should be kept through faith unto that salvation,” which was ready to be revealed in the last time, or, in other words, at the end of

the world. He thence suggests to them the consolatory reflection, that however afflicted they might be in this mortal state, such trial of their faith would ultimately redound unto “praise and honour and glory, at the final appearing of Jesus Christ.” Their belief in this invisible Saviour he pronounces to be so strong, that “they rejoiced with joy unspeakable, receiving the end or object of their faith, even the salvation of their souls.” For that salvation which could only be considered as fully completed at the reappearance of Jesus Christ, was already assured to them through faith, which is “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Of the first purchase and ultimate completion of that salvation, “the Spirit of Christ, which was in the ancient prophets testified,” foreshewing the sufferings that should come upon him at his first manifestation as the Saviour of men, and the subsequent glory of his second coming as Judge of all.

St. Peter represents those Prophets as “searching, if haply they might discover to what time or what manner of time the Spirit in them was pointing;” when it exhibited those prospects of blessedness which were afterwards more fully revealed, by our Saviour and his Apostles in the

Gospel; and which he declares to be a subject of earnest contemplation even to the angels of God. Those ancient Prophets were naturally desirous to comprehend distinctly the events which they foretold, and to ascertain the period of their accomplishment; but the dimness of that vision which, though clearly displayed to future ages, *they* were permitted but obscurely to behold, is a strong admonition to all, to guard against that adventurous boldness, with which many persons in the present age presume to intrude themselves into the hidden counsels of the Eternal, and rashly to promulgate their interpretations of his future purposes as matters of demonstrable certainty. They forget, as has been well observed by a distinguished Prelate, that “the knowledge given by prophecy was not intended to convey more information than was necessary for raising expectation *before* the event, and for proving, *after* the event, that the expectation was well founded<sup>1</sup>.”

As the evils resulting from such conduct are great and manifold, it shall be my endeavour, in this discourse, to shew the necessity of interpreting, with the utmost caution, such Scripture Prophecies

<sup>1</sup> Van Mildert's Boyle's Lectures, Sermon xxii.

concerning the future state of the Christian Church as remain still unaccomplished.

In consequence of the predictions of their Prophets, the whole Jewish nation longed earnestly for the promised Messiah; who, as they falsely imagined, would enable them to gratify their two leading passions—the love of gain and the love of power. The intensity of those passions was increased by the privations which they suffered from the exactions of the Publicans, and oppressions of their Governors, who made them fully sensible of the galling weight of the Roman yoke. They accordingly represented their expected Deliverer as one who would relieve every want, supply every luxury, and exalt them to ample wealth and extensive sway. Through this darkened medium of interest, prejudice and passion, they contemplated the prophecies, and gave them a corresponding interpretation. Thus, even while they seemed to be walking under the guidance of Moses and the Prophets, who pointed them directly to Christ, they were quite unable to recognize Him “of whom Moses and all the Prophets spake.”

So addicted were they to a *literal*, rather than a *spiritual* interpretation, that they were sub-

jected to the pointed animadversion of our Saviour, when they asked, “ how shall this man give us his flesh to eat :” “ The words that I speak unto you,” said he, “ they are *spirit* and they are life<sup>1</sup>.” Their very knowledge, or supposed knowledge of the place of his birth, proved to them a stumbling-block. For they cherished a notion, quite unauthorized by heaven, that “ no man should know whence Christ came<sup>2</sup>.” They also believed, relying on prophecy, but, as the event proved, on prophecy erroneously interpreted, that Elijah would come with distinguished pomp ; and therefore they received not the testimony of the Baptist, who “ came in his spirit and his power.” For by artfully glossing some texts and misinterpreting others, they figured to themselves *their* Christ in a form so entirely adapted to their own favourite notions, that when he actually came and “ spake as never man spake,” when he did wonders such as never man performed, “ they hardened their hearts, and saw not with their eyes, nor heard with their ears,” nor perceived the fulfilment of prophecy, though it was blazoned with the bright beam of Divinity to public view ; but denied, and

<sup>1</sup> John vi. 52, 63.

<sup>2</sup> John vii. 27.

utterly rejected the Messiah, and nailed him to the cross.

Such was the perversion of prophecy by the Jews of old, and such it continues among their descendants to the present hour. Upon that subject, however, we will not at present dwell, but merely notice the very remarkable fact, that many of the errors with regard to prophecy, which prevailed among the *Primitive Christians*, and still continue to prevail, were derived from the Jews themselves. My object in adverting to their error at all, is to shew the *danger* of certain Christian imitators of that Jewish example, in their interpretation of the prophecies which relate to the second coming of our Lord, and to the future state of the Christian Church, which is his spiritual kingdom. For they have specified, with greater hardihood than even the Jews themselves, the times, and the seasons, and the manner of his coming, and the nature of his reign. Although the ancient believers in the Millennium, as well as many at a more recent period, having indiscreetly fixed the date of its commencement within their own time, had seen their interpretations falsified by the event, their successors, notwith-



standing, have woven again the same flimsy texture of interpretation, forming theories the most chimerical; expatiating in the wide field of conjecture, and sometimes even laying such daring and presumptuous claim to inspiration itself, as might almost seem to imply a judgment upon them from Him “who maketh diviners mad.” Were this error confined only to a *few*, it were best perhaps to pass by it unregarded. But when it is in various forms disseminated by them through all classes of society, with a zeal and industry daily increasing, it becomes us to “inquire and search diligently,” whether there be in Scripture any sufficient warrant for their doctrines.

To enter upon an examination of the various theories adduced, is utterly foreign to my present purpose. But it is impossible not to advert to the foundation and corner-stone of them all, namely, that prophecy in the twentieth chapter of the Revelation of St. John, in which he asserts that he “saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and that they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years; and that this was the *first* resurrection.” The authors of these theories assert that by interpreting this passage in a

figurative and spiritual sense, as the ablest commentators have done, we explain away also the *second* or general resurrection. Such might perhaps be the consequence, were the general resurrection no where else mentioned in Scripture. But the proofs of it are so numerous and so direct, propounded in such simple and emphatic terms by our Saviour in the Gospel, and by the Apostles in their writings, as would have demanded our belief and been equally entitled to it, although the apocalypse had never been written.

But even taking the Text in its most literal sense, it does not justify the conclusion drawn from it with regard to the resurrection of the Christian martyrs. For St. John declares that he beheld, in vision, “the *souls* only of those who were beheaded for the witness of Jesus,” but of their *bodies* nothing is said. To their *material* part there is not even the least shadow of allusion. *What* the change is, which is here indicated with regard to their spiritual nature, may be difficult to conjecture, and will probably remain inexplicable till ascertained by the event. But it is quite undeniable, that those who value themselves peculiarly upon their adherence to literal interpretation, here decidedly exceed that which is indicated

by the letter itself. For with regard to the revival of the body, at what he terms the first resurrection, St. John not only observes a profound silence, but distinctly states that what he saw was not the *bodies* of the martyrs; not the martyrs themselves composed of soul and body together; but specifically the *souls*, and the souls only, of “those who were beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the word of God.” The inference to be deduced from this remarkable fact is still more forcibly impressed by another equally remarkable—that in every other part of Scripture where the resurrection is mentioned, it universally and exclusively refers to the body.

Without, however, proceeding to a minute discussion of particulars, it appears preferable to state generally a few circumstances, which should lead us either entirely to reject such doctrines, or to be extremely cautious in giving them the remotest assent.

A maxim is laid down by St. Peter, to which, in all inquiries of this nature, we can never too closely adhere—that “no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation<sup>1</sup>,”—or, in other words, inconsistent with the general tenour

<sup>1</sup> 2 Peter i. 20.

of Revelation. If, therefore, any doctrine is deduced from prophecy, irreconcilable with what has been established by our Lord as an unquestionable principle, that deduction must, of necessity, be false.

I need scarcely remind you, that no principle was ever more distinctly and repeatedly inculcated by our Saviour than the entire *spirituality* of his kingdom. “My kingdom is not of this world<sup>1</sup>,” was his own specific and authoritative testimony. Yet was it in direct contradiction to this declaration that the Jews hailed him as Messiah, their temporal king. It is in equally direct contradiction to it, that many professing Christians, at the present day, anticipate his reign with his saints upon earth for a thousand years. And, what is not a little singular, the advocates of this doctrine generally agree in describing the *seat* of Christ’s empire to be in the city of Jerusalem—in that very spot where he had himself given the most express denial of it. Papias<sup>2</sup>, the first propagator of the doctrine, asserts that Christ would reign in bodily form upon earth; and many of his

<sup>1</sup> John xviii. 36.

<sup>2</sup> Euseb. Eccl. Hist. l. iii. c. 39. p. 137. See also Routh, Rel. Sac. i. p. 32.

followers represented it not only as a sovereignty over many subject nations, but as a state of luxurious sensual delight<sup>1</sup>; fitter for the paradise of Mahomet and his dissolute votaries<sup>2</sup>, than for those who are accustomed to “look for a kingdom not made with hands, immortal in the heavens.” So strongly indeed did they avow those doctrines, that the more pious Christians among them were ashamed that such statements should reach the ears of the heathens. But however they might shrink from the consequence, it was undeniable that a too literal interpretation of many passages in Scripture, respecting Messiah’s kingdom, led them by an inevitable inference to such conclusions.

Among the modern supporters of the doctrine such consequences are generally passed over in silence. The more prudent among them venture not explicitly to declare “how these things will be.” In attempting therefore to remove one difficulty, they create many more, quite inexplicable. Now these difficulties are avoided by the advocates for the *figurative* and *spiritual* sense, who contend that the Christian church, upon the conversion of

<sup>1</sup> Routh, *Rel. Sac.* i. pp. 9, 11, 27.

For ample illustrations of the truth of these assertions, see Whitby’s “*Treatise of the True Millennium.*”

the Jews and a great accession of Gentile converts, will enjoy a more glorious state of peace and purity under the spiritual reign of Christ, than it has ever before experienced. For the empire of darkness will then be abridged, so that Satan may be said “to be bound a thousand years;” and as the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, was in ancient prophecy denominated Elijah, because he “came in the spirit and power of Elijah;” so may the souls of the primitive martyrs be said to live and reign with Christ a thousand years; because the spirit and principles of those martyrs will animate the Christian church during a long period of unexampled spiritual prosperity.

This interpretation entirely accords with the general language of Scripture, in which the restoration of the Church to glory and power is represented by the prophet as life from the dead<sup>1</sup>; and also most expressly by St. Paul himself, when speaking of the accession of the Jews to the Christian faith<sup>2</sup>. This is that *spiritual kingdom* which our Lord has uniformly asserted to be his own. That *temporal* power therefore, which he has universally disclaimed<sup>3</sup>, cannot be received as the doctrine of Scripture upon such

<sup>1</sup> Hos. . 2. Ezek. xxxvii. 11—14.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. xi. 15.

<sup>3</sup> John xviii. 36.

very questionable evidence. The two are utterly irreconcilable; and it seems bordering on presumption, if not impiety, to draw from the description of a *vision*, naturally expressed in language highly figurative, a conclusion directly opposed to our Lord's most explicit and repeated assertion, and which therefore, as Christian believers, we should feel ourselves bound to reject.

Nor is the temporal reign of Christ and the saints upon earth more inconsistent with the direct declarations of Scripture, that his kingdom is exclusively spiritual, than with those hopes and prospects which it constantly holds out to all true Christians, and with those graces and dispositions of mind which it uniformly requires as conditions and qualifications for enjoying them. We are instructed "not to love the world, neither the things that are in the world<sup>1</sup>;" "to set our affection on things above, not on things upon the earth<sup>2</sup>;" "to seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God," "to look at things not temporal but eternal<sup>3</sup>," "to lay up treasures in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour<sup>4</sup>." In the whole of these objects

<sup>1</sup> 1 John ii. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Col. iii. 2.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 18.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. vi. 20 and Phil. iii. 20.

of our high calling there is no allusion to earthly recompense,—no admixture of worldly motive. And when we consider the richness and immensity of the reward, and its infinite superiority to every thing that “eye hath seen or heart conceived,” we are ready to exclaim with the Fathers of the Church, “if the inheritance of the martyrs be in heaven, their reign on earth is no better than a fable!” To the attainment of that immortal crown all their views were directed; their minds soared to the regions above, their thoughts assumed a loftier range, their hearts a purer glow, their graces and virtues a more vigorous and energetic expansion. Could there have been held forth to them, in the hour of their suffering, all the wealth and power that the most favoured of the sons of men ever enjoyed upon earth, how poor, how unsatisfactory, how infinitely short of what they had conceived of the inexhaustible treasures of eternity! Or if we could imagine their departed spirits recalled from that state of bliss in which our Saviour hath represented the Father of the Faithful<sup>2</sup>, and those who after death tasted with him the joys of Paradise, to be placed in that land of

<sup>1</sup> Luke xvi. 22.



Canaan, which he and the faithful Patriarchs had already despised, in comparison of “ a better,— a heavenly country<sup>1</sup>,” would it not be felt as a degradation from their high estate—a change utterly unfit for their celestial nature?

If we refer for a practical illustration of the truth of these remarks to the feelings and hopes of the most distinguished men that ever wore a martyr's crown—St. Peter and St. Paul—it seems hardly possible that there should remain a single doubt upon the subject. For the hopes that animated St. Paul, in the full anticipation of that martyrdom which awaited him from the cruelty of Nero, he thus expresses in a tone of triumphant exultation: “ I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith : henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that day ; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing<sup>2</sup>.” There is no mention of any temporal reward, of none but that which will be conferred at the day of judgment ; nor of any different

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xi. 16.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Tim. iv. 6—8.

in its kind from that which awaited every sincere Christian. But to withdraw the Apostle from the bliss of Paradise to this transitory scene of earthly grandeur for a thousand years, if we may judge from the result of his own experience, must resemble less a reward than a punishment. For when, in the days of his flesh, he had been admitted for only a short period to the joys of Paradise<sup>1</sup>, he was so elevated by its ineffable mysteries, so utterly exalted beyond measure, that a severe visitation of Providence became necessary to remedy the evils which thus threatened his spiritual welfare.

Nor does it appear that St. Peter ever contemplated his entrance into any other kingdom than the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. For on the eve of his martyrdom, which, as we find in the conclusion of St. John's Gospel<sup>2</sup>, had been foretold by our Saviour himself, he declares his perfect knowledge that he was under the indispensable necessity of "speedily putting off his earthly tabernacle, as the Lord Jesus Christ had shewed him<sup>3</sup>." But he makes not the remotest allusion to a *temporal*

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. xii. 4, 7.

<sup>2</sup> John xx. 18, 19.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Pet. i. 14.

*sovereignty* either of a thousand years, or of any other period. Yet, had there been in his mind the slightest ground for such allusion, he would doubtless have stated it in this Epistle ; in which he enters so fully and so earnestly upon the animating and glorious theme of the *coming* of Christ. He shews that, with regard to his first advent, the Apostles had not “ followed cunningly devised fables, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty on the Mount ;” and with regard to his second advent, he asserts that there “ was a more sure word of prophecy, to which they would do well to take heed<sup>1</sup>,” and not be misled by private and defective interpretation. He further declares, in the beginning of the third chapter, that the object of his second Epistle was to “ stir up their pure minds, to be mindful of those things spoken before by the holy Prophets, and of the commandments of the Apostles of the Lord and Saviour ;” and to shun the doctrine of the Infidel scoffers who derided our Saviour’s coming. The Day of that awful event he then describes in terms of the most overpowering sublimity ; but makes not the remotest allusion to any other day than that which

<sup>1</sup> 2 Pet. i. 16, 19.

should come silently and suddenly, “ as a thief in the night.” He declares that “ he looked for and hasted unto that day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat.” But of any previous coming of Christ he is utterly silent, and of any earthly reward he gives not the slightest indication. The reward,—the sole reward, which he looked for, was that which the whole tenour of Scripture had uniformly exhibited—a glorious immortality beyond death and the grave—“ a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

Thus does it appear that the direct tenour of Revelation is opposed to this doctrine ; and Scripture cannot be inconsistent with Scripture. But those who maintain this favourite speculation, instead of abiding by the *general tenour*, adopt the *exception*, bending other passages to a forced accommodation with it, and wresting the word of God, if not to their own destruction, at least to the complete delusion of themselves and their followers.

The *evils* resulting from these errors concerning the Millennium are great and numerous. For the very best that can be said of it is, that with some it is a merely *speculative* opinion—a visionary dream—entirely unconnected with our salvation—

productive neither of benefit nor injury to mankind. Yet, even when merely speculative, harmless it can hardly be. For it tends to cast a ridicule upon religion, and particularly upon *Prophecy*, that mighty pillar of Revelation—that permanent miracle and conspicuous monument of the divine foreknowledge to the end of time—since it leads Infidels to scoff, and the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme!

But it has often assumed an active, *practical* form, and never with greater external violence than in this very country, or accompanied with effects more directly subversive of the peace, order, and happiness of society. For there is no page in our history more dark or revolting, than that which records the outrageous daring of those enthusiasts and fanatics, who lived in the daily and avowed expectation of Messiah's entrance upon his earthly kingdom, in which they had promised to themselves a distinguished station<sup>1</sup>. Though those dangers are now past, who shall be bold enough to say that they may never again recur? The spirit of fanaticism, though differently modified by circumstances, is in every age the *same*; and

<sup>1</sup> Hume's Hist. of Eng. vii. c. 60, 63.

the language of many advocates of the doctrine, at this day, shews that the flame, though smothered and repressed, is neither quenched nor extinguished.

Let us then, adhering with inflexible firmness to the principles and doctrines *clearly* promulgated in the Gospel, shun those theories which are at once visionary and obscure, dangerous and unprofitable. Let us cherish that meek disposition of mind, which presumes not to intrude into the hidden counsels of the Eternal, but sinks back into its own conscious weakness; ever remembering, with thankfulness, that though much remains to us entirely unknown, enough has been revealed to confirm faith, to animate hope, and to call forth into exercise the best graces and virtues that can adorn the Christian character. And when, like Daniel, who heard, but understood not the “wonders” foretold by “the man who held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven,” confirming the period of their accomplishment by a solemn oath;—when like Daniel we are impelled by ardent curiosity to inquire, “O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?”—then let us listen to the salutary counsel of Him who declared to the Prophet that they were wrapped in dark-

ness, for the trial of patient expectation, till their final completion. “Go thy way, Daniel; for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. Blessed is he that waiteth. But go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days<sup>1</sup>.”

<sup>1</sup> Dan. xii. 9, 13.

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## SERMON VI.

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### THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST.

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2 COR. V. 10.

*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether good or bad.*

It seems impossible that a truth more awfully important, than that which has just been announced to you, should be expressed in language more explicit or more forcible. It inculcates a lesson that comes home to the bosom of each individual; for it regards every action of our life, involving the whole course of our conduct in Time, as connected with the tremendous interests of Eternity. Were we to hear this most solemn warning proclaimed to us from heaven, by the thunder of the Almighty's voice, how should we stand trembling and aghast, as though we were summoned immediately to appear before the tribunal of our judge! But though no voice from



heaven audibly proclaims to us this awful truth, is it therefore in any degree less certain, or is there one of us who can doubt for a moment the final accomplishment of the event described in the text, however studiously he may banish it from his thoughts, or however lightly he may reflect upon its consequences? For though our doom may for a time be suspended, still is it incessantly approaching and may overtake us in an instant, without time being left either for repentance or for pardon. "Behold, I come quickly," saith our Lord, "watch therefore, for ye know neither the day, nor the hour, in which the Son of man cometh."

In the hope that you may be induced to meditate, with becoming seriousness, upon the practical inference which this important doctrine is calculated to convey, I shall now direct your attention, First, to the absolute certainty of our appearing before the judgment seat of Christ; Next, to the character of the Judge before whom we must appear; and Lastly, to the consequences of the final sentence which he will pronounce upon our conduct.

With regard to the first of these topics, we may remark, that the belief of a future judgment is

evidently a feeling natural to men. Though disguised by fable and by mystical allusions, still has it generally prevailed among heathen nations in every age. Nor need we search far to discover the cause of such belief. For not only does *Reason* infer a future state of retribution, but in the human breast there is also implanted *Conscience*, the arbiter of our moral conduct, the watchful monitor at the moment of action, the faithful remembrancer of deeds that are past. It may be lulled to repose, it may be hardened by crime, it may even be "seared as with a hot iron;" but till that fearful state of insensibility is attained, it will faithfully discharge its office and remind us of our responsibility to God and to man. Whence, but from the power of conscience, has guilt known only to God racked the bosom of the guilty with intolerable anguish? and whence, but from the power of conscience, has the secret murderer felt his burden so insupportable, as to seek refuge from the internal cry of blood in ignominious death? Hence, too, for crimes which human law cannot reach, has the death-bed of the dying Heathen been often the scene of despair; the termination of life been regarded by him as only the beginning of sorrows, the hour of his departure from

this world as the commencement of severe retribution.

Under the Mosaic dispensation, where the rewards and punishments due to their actions were dispensed to the Jews by the visible interposition of heaven, though a future state was but little appealed to by their Great Lawgiver, yet was it both by the Prophets and other inspired writers very plainly revealed. “ Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth,” saith the wisest of men<sup>1</sup>, “ and let thine heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart and in the sight of thine eyes: but know that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.” And he sums up his whole doctrine in these emphatic words. “ Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil<sup>2</sup>.” Thus also the prophet Daniel<sup>3</sup> declares that they “ that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And

<sup>1</sup> Eccl. xi. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Ib. xii. 13, 14.

<sup>3</sup> Dan. xii. 2, 3.

they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament ; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever.”

But, what to the Heathen was the suggestion of conscience doubtfully supported by the deductions of reason, and to the Jew a secondary motive to that obedience which was rewarded chiefly by temporal prosperity, is, under the Christian dispensation, a doctrine of primary importance to which every other has an ultimate reference. Upon the positive certainty of a future judgment hinges the whole of the Christian system. Its influence extends to every part of our conduct, stimulating every virtuous resolution, checking every vicious propensity. For when we are encouraged as Christians, to fight the good fight of faith, it is by the prospect of a crown of immortal glory<sup>1</sup> ; when deterred from the commission of sin, it is by the assurance “ that indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, await every soul of man that doeth evil<sup>2</sup>.” And to impress on our minds most deeply this all-powerful motive, the solemnities of the last tribunal are portrayed in terms calculated to fix them everlastingly in our

<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8,

<sup>2</sup> Rom. ii. 9.

memory. “ And I saw,” saith St. John<sup>1</sup>, “ a great white throne and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God : and the books were opened ; and another book was opened, which is the book of life ; and the dead were judged out of those things which were in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them ; and they were judged every man according to their works.” Such a representation of a scene most deeply affecting the whole race of man, is no where to be met with but in the records of Christianity ; and could we preserve the impression lastingly on our minds, it would prove a defence against the most violent assaults of temptation,—a motive constantly and irresistibly impelling us to an active preparation for Eternity.

Not only, however, does the certainty of a future judgment appeal to our fears, but it is blended also, though often imperceptibly, with our most deliberate reasonings, upon moral subjects,

<sup>1</sup> Rev, xx. 11, 12, 13.

and imparts to them both clearness and force. The consistency and justice of the Divine Government are thus clearly established. We thus see all inequalities in life compensated, the most perfect equity succeeding apparent injustice, order and beauty arising out of confusion and deformity. A moral conviction is thus impressed generally on society, that strikes terror to the heart of the wicked in the height of his power ; that consoles the pious in the season of sorrow, and supports him when assailed by malevolence, or borne down by oppression. For there *are* moments when the good man feels to his unspeakable comfort, as the wicked to his unutterable dismay, that if God be true, if God be just, unless religion be a fiction, revelation a mockery, the day of retribution must come at last ; “ We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.”

Let us now consider the character of the Judge before whom we must appear. “ God hath appointed a day,” saith the Apostle<sup>1</sup>, “ in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man,” Christ Jesus, “ whom he hath ordained.” It would be easy to shew by a great variety of reasons,

<sup>1</sup> Acts xvii. 31.

that our Saviour's appearing at the end of the world as Judge of all, is in perfect accordance with the whole system of the divine administration toward the human race. Throughout every part of it, that person of the blessed Trinity whose agency is more particularly visible is our Lord Jesus Christ. His agency is conspicuous in the work of creation, for "by him," says St. John, "all things were made," "and by him also," adds St. Paul, "God made the worlds." His providence watched over the interests of man from the hour of Creation. Whatever intercourse subsisted between heaven and earth in the days of the patriarchs, seems to have been conducted by the same "Great messenger of the covenant;" and when a final revelation of the Divine Will was to be made, He came to publish the glad tidings of salvation to a lost world, to teach by his precepts, and enforce by his example, perfect holiness of heart and of life.

In every thing, sin only excepted, was our Redeemer "made like unto his brethren." Subject to the multiplied infirmities of our nature, he was assailed by all the various ills of life; he was exposed by human malice even to tortures and death; he experienced temptation in its most trying form, from the malignant fiends of darkness;

and he suffered the wrath of offended heaven, when, bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, in utter desertion he exclaimed, “ My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ? ” There is no variety of wretchedness, no extremity of mortal agony, no injustice, oppression and ignominy, that he did not in his own person as man endure. “ Therefore, also,” saith the Apostle, “ God hath highly exalted him<sup>1</sup>.” And a very essential part of this exaltation consists in the open possession of that honour which will be conferred upon him, on that awful day, emphatically styled the *Day of the Son of Man* ; when he shall come in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory, to “ gather together in one ” all his rational creatures, “ of every kindred, and people, and tongue,”—those whom his death has rescued from endless perdition, with those for whom that sacrifice was offered in vain,—the Patriarch believing upon a Saviour unborn, with the infidel scorner of a Saviour revealed ; that he may judge, in his righteousness, those whom he had created in his wisdom, governed by his providence and redeemed with his blood.

<sup>1</sup> Phil. ii. 9.



Since the sentence which he will then pronounce must be for ever decisive of our fate, let us in the last place consider, what appear from the text to be the nature and consequences of that sentence. “ Every one shall receive the things he hath done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether good or bad.”

Such a declaration renders a serious review of our past conduct no less awful than important. To those who are cut off in early life, the short span of existence must necessarily abridge the number of their acts of probation. But from those who have enjoyed for a longer term the mercies of heaven, in proportion as much has been given, much will be required. If to him who is still in the vigour of his days such a retrospect is full of anxiety, how much more fearfully alarming to him who has passed the meridian of life, or who has descended far into the vale of years. To look back upon the levities, or follies, or errors of our childhood, upon the wayward passions and violent desires of youth, upon the daring hopes and ambitious schemes of manhood, upon the inveterate habits and extended projects of old age, still doating on its vain pursuits—how stout, or how insensible must that heart be, which such a survey would not appal!

For in many things we all offend. Much of what good we might do we indolently omit; much that we do indifferently we might easily do well; much that we do well, might, with equal facility, be done better. There is not one individual here present, whose conscience does not bear witness that such is the fact. But if, at the present moment, the very best among us revert to the events of his past life, he will at once recollect many thoughts, words and actions, which will make him shrink at the prospect of the last tribunal. A deliberate and unsparing survey will recall many more. And how many of those, which now seem scarcely to partake of the nature of sin, will appear dark and appalling when the glitter of life is over, and we review them with an anxious eye on the bed of death. Not one of our actions will perish or be forgotten, but will accompany us, in all their naked deformity, into the presence of our Judge. Nothing so unimportant that shall not be remembered, nothing so secret that shall not be made manifest; but the true character of each of us will be displayed before the eyes of angels and of men.

Dare we fairly ask our own consciences what prospect we should have, in our present circum-

stances, of acquittal or condemnation? Or dare we firmly abide its unbiassed answer? “If our own hearts,” upon serious examination, “condemn us not, then may we, through the merits of Christ, have confidence towards God.” It is indeed most consolatory to reflect, that he who will judge is the same merciful Saviour who died to redeem us. But what will that avail, if we still continue in sin, proceeding from iniquity to iniquity, until our habitual transgressions exceed the limits of his mercy, and our frequent and wilful relapses into vice seal us to destruction? “If the Righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and impenitent Sinner appear<sup>1</sup>?”

Of the precise nature of the reward and punishment that await these two descriptions of persons, we can form no adequate conception. For what mind can figure to itself the realities of that bliss which eye hath not seen, nor heart conceived, nor heaven revealed; or of the torments of that place of outer darkness, where “there is lamentation, and mourning, and woe;—where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched?” But the Text assures us that every one shall receive *according*

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet. iv. 18.

to that he hath *done*, whether good or bad. If, therefore, our works have been holy, our minds pure, our lives virtuous, we shall be thus prepared to mingle with the holy angels and the spirits of the just made perfect in the presence of God, where all the best affections of our nature will be expanded, and we shall enjoy that entire happiness which must accompany their perfect exercise. Every step therefore that we advance in holiness exalts us nearer to heaven, and qualifies us for a fuller participation in its blessedness.

But if, on the other hand, our works are wicked, our minds debased, our lives vicious, we are thus, by our own act, preparing ourselves for still greater damnation : since all the evil passions we have fostered here will thus become instruments of our punishment in a future world, when there is no scope for their exercise or means of their gratification. And if, even in this life, such privation is to the vicious man a source of misery, how infinitely more intense, more exquisite must that misery become when pure and unmixed, without prospect of diminution, without prospect of end. For whatever the misery of the next world may be, there is this certain and bitterest ingredient in the cup of wrath, that hope never brightens

with one cheering ray the darkness of that despair.

These are fearful realities, involving our eternal interests. Let me therefore, in conclusion, warn you against the fatal error of believing them to be remote contingencies. It is folly,—it is madness to delude ourselves by shutting our eyes against our immediate danger. I say *immediate* : for in a moment we may cease to breathe, and our period of trial be over. As certainly as death terminates all our works and all our labours under the sun, will sentence be pronounced upon them at the Day of Judgment. That sun will continue to shine ; but to them who are laid in the grave, his light is for ever extinguished : the seasons will revolve in ceaseless change, and the generations of men arise in perpetual succession to the end of time, but *we* can have no share in their hopes or their fears ; our fate having already been finally and irrevocably fixed. “ As the tree falleth so must it lie :” as Death leaves us, so will Judgment find us. All that will thenceforward await us, is endless reward or endless punishment, unmingled happiness or unmitigated misery.

While such a fate is suspended over our head, and may arrest us in a moment, is it not astonish-

ing that we should ever be at rest, until we have done our utmost, through Divine assistance, to secure our eternal happiness, by the exercise of “Repentance toward God and Faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ?” Is it credible, that the insignificant concerns of time should wholly occupy our thoughts, instead of their being devoted to the awful interests of eternity? Can we call ourselves rational, reflecting, intelligent beings, and yet allow our thoughts to be engrossed by the riches, the pleasures, the follies, the vanities of this life, as if they only were worth living for and were for ever ours; while we are totally regardless of the sublimer and more enduring objects of a world to come? Or can we by banishing these solemn thoughts, banish equally or even delay for an instant approaching Death, or reverse the decree of Heaven which has appointed a future judgment? If we could, there might be some shadow of excuse for our conduct. But the hope is delusive, the attempt is vain. For the Night of Death will certainly and speedily involve us all: the Last Day will certainly and finally dawn upon the world; when the Angel will lift up his hand to heaven, and swear by Him that liveth for ever and ever, that *Time* shall be no more. Then

must we *all*, without one single exception ; without possibility of escape, we *must* appear before the judgment seat of Christ ; when they that have done good, shall “ enter into life everlasting ; ” and they that have done evil, into everlasting death.

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## SERMON VII.

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### THE GUILT OF MURMURING AGAINST THE AFFLICTIVE DISPENSATIONS OF PROVIDENCE.

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JOB xi. 5, 6.

*O that God would speak and open his lips against thee, and that he would shew thee the secrets of wisdom that they are double to that which is! Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth.*

THESE words were addressed to Job by Zophar, the Naamathite, in reply to certain expostulations which he had been excited to make by the keen reproaches of his other two friends. With the most unfeigned sorrow for his affliction, they had come from their distant places of abode to mourn with him and to comfort him. But they took a very erroneous view of his real situation. Because they saw him the most afflicted, they accounted him also the most guilty of men. Conceiving him to be a sinner above all others, they inveighed against him with the most unfeeling bitterness, reminding him that “ they who plow iniquity and sow wickedness, reap the same ; that by the blast



of God they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils are they consumed ;” that therefore the robber had swallowed up his substance, and his children been destroyed by the arm of Divine vengeance ; while he himself, incorrigible still, was “ adding rebellion to his sin, and multiplying words against God.” To such reproaches, as unkind as they were unjust, well might the indignant sufferer exclaim, “ Miserable comforters are ye all ! How forcible are right words, but what doth your arguing reprove ? Ye have dealt deceitfully as a brook ; ye dig a pit for your friend.”

Conscious of his integrity of principle, and resolved that “ his heart should not reproach him so long as he should live,” though he confessed his sins to the Almighty—though he deeply deplored the errors into which, through nature’s infirmity, he had been betrayed ; yet could he neither plead guilty to those crimes which they laid to his charge, nor acknowledge their exaggerated accusation to be just : and while repelling it, in the bitterness of his spirit, he seemed, perhaps, in some degree, to arraign the justice of the Divine dispensations. The Naamathite, therefore, could no longer suppress his indignation, but burst forth in a strain of animated and lofty argument which,

though in general very inapplicable to Job, contains a most important lesson, to which we shall do well to take heed. To the presumptuous spirit that daringly questions the counsels of the Almighty, and impiously repines at the afflictive dispensations of Providence, this admonition is peculiarly appropriate: "Oh that God would speak and open his lips against thee; and that he would shew thee the secrets of wisdom, that they are double to that which is: know, therefore, that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth."

In illustrating these words, I shall endeavour to shew the criminality of murmuring against the afflictive dispensations of Providence, first, from our imperfect knowledge of the counsels of God; and then, from the vast disproportion between our guilt and its punishment, which, however great, is still infinitely "less than our iniquity deserveth."

Most of our errors in judging of the Divine dispensations arise from a narrow and contracted view of them; from a too minute attention to particular cases; from an overweening idea of our own knowledge and of our ability to pronounce upon the nature and fitness of things with absolute certainty. A very large portion of mankind pass their days in brutish indifference to what, as

rational beings, they should account the most important thing in life. They find themselves placed upon this scene, called to act a certain part in it, united by various relations to beings of their own species ; but the beauty and harmony produced by those ties, or the attributes of Him who formed them, they never contemplate : none of them saith, “ Where is God my Maker, who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven ? ” To the man whose mind is more enlarged, and his sphere of mental vision more extended, the cloud by which they are enveloped is partially lifted up or withdrawn to a distance, so that he learns from what he perceives with certainty, as well as from what he but dimly discerns, the unsearchable nature of the Divine operations. The beautiful arrangements of the moral world, the qualities with which man is endowed, his various capacities both as a thinking and a social being, the admirable structure of society for calling those capacities into such exercise as to promote his best happiness—these subjects, if duly examined, will convince him, beyond a doubt, of the infinite power and goodness of the great Creator.

This is indeed the conclusion to which every

virtuous mind must be led by a deliberate and impartial view of the moral government of God. But still there are so many apparent deviations from a perfect system ; so many circumstances utterly unaccountable, so many perplexing inconsistencies pervading it, as often puzzle the understanding of the weak, incline those whose faith is wavering to doubt, and lead those who are destitute of religious principles either to spurn the idea of an over-ruling Providence, or utterly to deny the wisdom and justice of the Divine dispensations.

“ I grant you,” says the man of contentious spirit, “ that there is much to admire in the structure of society ; that its kindred ties are beautifully formed, its various gradations finely concerted ; that the different systems of civil government thence arising, are calculated to call forth the best energies of man ; and that those feelings of the heart, which make him look for consolation and support to the blessings of religion, are apparently well adapted both for his present and future happiness. But then,” adds he, “ while I grant you that this theory may sometimes assume a specious appearance, I ask, why it is so often falsified by fact ? Why do those kindred relations of life so often become the sources of bitter misery,

which we can neither foresee nor prevent? Why is the mutual heart of conjugal affection so often and so early severed by the stroke of death?— Why is the parent bereaved of his beloved child, the widowed mother of her only son? And why are such multitudes of infants born but to open their eyes to the light, to pour forth the helpless wail of sorrow, and sink into the grave? Why such a waste of human life, such prodigality of human suffering? In the distribution of worldly riches and honours, why such inequality, such neglect of moral worth, that the wicked are often highly exalted, but the good in low place? Why are the forms of civil government so easily and so often converted into engines of destruction, of tyranny and oppression; and the malignant spirit of one single individual permitted to cramp the energies of millions from generation to generation? Why does Religion herself, instead of consoling, enlightening, and uniting in fraternal affection the race of man, so often rack him with superstitious dread, fill his soul with the frenzy of bigotry and fanaticism, and convert into a man's enemies even 'those of his own household'? Who can behold such sights, and not weep over the multiplied miseries of man? Who can behold such

sights, and not doubt either the existence, or the justice, or the wisdom of his Maker?"

"Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say unto him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus<sup>1</sup>?" "O that God would speak, and open his lips against thee, and that he would shew thee the secrets of wisdom that they are double to that which is"—to that which, in thy shallow conception, in thy daring presumption, in the discontent of thy rebellious spirit, thou imaginest them to be! "Canst *thou*, by searching, find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea<sup>2</sup>." God giveth not account of any of his matters, but "hideth pride from man." If, however, thou desirest in thy heart to learn true wisdom, and wouldst seek for it as for hidden treasure, approach with humility of spirit, with a sincere love of the truth, these "deep things of God." Under the influence of such feelings, ponder with candour and deliberation those apparent defects

<sup>1</sup> Rom. ix. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Job xi. 7, 8, 9.

in the Divine economy, and thou wilt perceive that most of them will admit of a satisfactory explanation ; while others, if duly investigated, so far from being defects, are illustrations of infinite goodness, so clear, so convincing, as to incline us, with regard to such as are buried in the secrets of wisdom, to be silent and to adore.

Often, for instance, is the privation of earthly blessings obviously incurred by our setting our heart upon them as our *sole* treasure, that, when they are withdrawn, we may fix our “ affections on things above.” A beloved relative, a favourite child, the only son of a widowed mother, interposes perhaps between her and her God, and is therefore removed, that she may place her confidence wholly upon Him “ who is the widow’s stay.” If the ties of friendship are rudely, treacherously broken, and the tenderest affections of our heart blighted for ever, is it not that we may cleave more firmly to Him “ who is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother ?” If the wicked are exalted in high place, is it not to shew the utter worthlessness of worldly honours, or to teach, by their fall from the summit of power, the instability of that prosperity which is founded upon crime ? If the righteous, on the contrary, are fre-

quently needy and distressed, is it not that they may come forth from the fiery trial like gold seven times refined, and shine for ever with unsullied lustre in the kingdom of their Father? If a tyrant is allowed to inflict lasting woes upon a nation, let us read the preceding annals of that nation, and we shall find that it was to scourge a guilty people for their iniquities, that they might “turn, with weeping and with mourning, to the Lord their God.” And if Religion itself is sometimes perverted into the means of afflicting man, it only shews how liable to abuse is the very best of blessings; how necessary the pure light of revelation, how indispensable its heavenly influence; and warns us, as guardians of that hallowed flame, to watch over it with the most assiduous care, lest the pestilential vapours of superstition and fanaticism should obscure its heavenly lustre.

In thus tracing these difficulties patiently to their source, we shall be inevitably led to the conclusion, that the miseries of man are often of his own procuring and their remedy placed in his own power; that many of the afflictions which befall him, apparently without a cause, are sent by the great Author of his being for the wisest and most beneficial of purposes; that



even in the darkest dispensations of Providence, the wisdom and justice of God are unimpeachable, though the secrets thereof are double of that which we can understand: and we shall be brought to acquiesce implicitly in this great truth, enforced by the Deity himself, with a grandeur and solemnity exceeding all human conception. "In thoughts," says the awe-struck Eliphaz<sup>1</sup>, "in thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men, fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. Then a spirit passed before my face: the hair of my flesh stood up. It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof: an image was before mine eyes; there was silence, and I heard a voice, saying, Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his Maker? Behold, he put no trust in his servants, and his angels he charged with folly: how much less in them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed before the moth? Doth not their excellency which is in them go away? They die, even without wisdom."

The criminality of murmuring against the afflic-

<sup>1</sup> Job iv. 13—21.

tive dispensations of Providence may be still further shewn from the vast disproportion between our guilt and its punishment, which, however great, is still infinitely "less than our iniquity deserveth."

This truth will appear at once obvious and undeniable, if we consider the nature of sin and its necessary tendency. It is in principle, and from its very essence, directly opposed to and subversive of every thing that is good. Of those sins which immediately affect human society, if we select any one in particular, we shall perceive that, when carried to the full extent of its enormity, it involves a complete demolition of the whole system. Dishonesty, for instance, in its common modes of operation by fraud or rapine, if totally unchecked, would speedily dissipate all idea of property and dissolve the bonds that hold society together. Man could have no confidence in man. Civil compact, plighted faith, an oath the most sacred and solemn, would be empty names; while treachery, perjury, rapacity, would prevail with resistless sway, and sweep down in their course the protecting barriers of the weak against the strong, of the just against the unjust, of peaceful industry against tyrannic oppression.

Or were revenge uncurbed in its relentless fury, arming man against man, the injured against the injurer, what but ceaseless bloodshed could ensue, entailing eventual extermination?

Were we to examine in detail the whole catalogue of transgressions against the peace and order of society, we should doubtless be led to the same result. But if we view sin in another light, as committed against God, we shall be still more struck with its heinous enormity. Is the Supreme Being a God of order? Sin hath introduced confusion into the heart of his creation and deranged the system of the universe. Is he a God of infinite goodness and love? Sin hath rendered his creatures the objects of his displeasure and armed his right hand against the guilty transgressor. Is he a God of perfect purity and holiness? It was sin that deformed the face of nature, that tainted the abode of innocence with crime, that degraded the rational offspring of heaven, and made them an abomination in their Maker's sight. Nay more—it has converted the creature into a rebel against his Creator, compelled him to wish in his heart that there were no God, even to hate the existence of that merciful Being, from whom he derives his every blessing.

If we seek for still further proof of the inexpressible enormity of sin, we may behold it portrayed in the deep humiliation, in the life of misery, in the dying agonies of the Son of God! What else but sin brought him from the abodes of blessedness, from the bosom of his Father, to this scene of wretchedness and guilt; that tortured his soul with unutterable anguish and crushed him to the dust of death? How deep must have been that stain which nothing but blood Divine could wash away,—how fearful that perdition from which nothing but the arm of Divine might could rescue,—how inconceivably dreadful that wrath, which nothing but the Lamb of God, offered as our propitiatory sacrifice, could appease. This was indeed to shew the holiness of the Divine law great beyond conception; this was indeed to prove “sin exceeding sinful.”

If then, with the knowledge of these truths imprinted on our mind,—if against the clearest light and the fullest demonstrations of love from on high, we still continue by our iniquities to injure our brother man—to despise the God that made us, to deny the Lord that bought us, to grieve the Holy Spirit who sanctifieth us; if, under such circumstances, we still persist in sin,

I ask not what is the *full* punishment that it deserveth, but rather *what* punishment can be conceived adequate to such aggravated guilt? If conscience bears witness that such is in any degree the nature of our spiritual condition, dare we murmur against our light afflictions here, which are but for a moment, and are as the small dust of the balance, in comparison with that mass of iniquity, which too many of us have been treasuring up against ourselves ever since we entered on this mortal state? No, my brethren, let us rather lay our hands upon our breasts; let us humble ourselves in the presence of the God of the whole earth; let us look up to Him with the eye of tearful contrition, where he sitteth upon the throne of his holiness, and say with his servant Job, "Behold I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes<sup>1</sup>."

Let us not, by our murmurings, add rebellion to our iniquity, and multiply words against God. Let us rather call to remembrance the various sins to which we have been addicted, inquire strictly

<sup>1</sup> Job xlii. 5, 6.

which of them we have already forsaken, and to which of them we still obstinately cleave, and receive with thankfulness the chastenings of a Father in the visitations of our God. Let us, through Divine grace, form a determined resolution of deriving from affliction and adversity all the benefits which they are intended to produce; that, though grievous to flesh and blood, they may become the blessed means of promoting the salvation of our immortal souls. We shall thus, in looking back upon the various trials that have befallen us, rejoice in the realization of the assurance given us by the Apostle, “that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope<sup>1</sup>:” and find ample reason to exclaim with the Psalmist, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted<sup>2</sup>.” “I have borne chastisement; I will not offend any more. That which I see not, O God, teach thou me; if I have done iniquity, I will do no more.”

<sup>1</sup> Romans v. 3, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. cxix. 71.

## SERMON VIII.

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### THE DUTY OF SELF-DENIAL.

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Luke ix. 23.

*And he said to them all, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.*

THE practice here recommended by our Saviour, as preparatory to the due reception of the Gospel, refers to a mode of punishment long familiar to the Romans, and introduced by them into the Jewish state, when it had fallen under their dominion. The lingering agony of crucifixion was strongly characteristic of that savage spirit, which marked their sanguinary power. But so painful and disgraceful was this punishment accounted, that they exempted from it their own free-born citizens, inflicting it upon such malefactors only as were aliens or slaves. These they loaded with the utmost ignominy. That they might harrow the soul, before torturing the body, they compelled the destined sufferer to go forth to

public view, amid the scorn of surrounding spectators, bearing on his shoulders the cross on which he was doomed to expire ; and in such circumstances, accordingly, did the Saviour of men proceed to the last scene of his sorrows, in order that he might thus expiate “ our sins in his own body on the tree.” Such a spectacle the disciples doubtless had frequently witnessed, and must therefore have been fully alive to the magnitude of the sacrifice which, as the Text indicates, is required from those who would become the devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

The occasion on which our Saviour made this declaration, is thus stated by the Evangelist : “ And it came to pass, as he was alone praying, his disciples were with him : and he asked them, saying, Whom say the people that I am ? They answering said, John the Baptist ; but some say, Elias ; and others that one of the old Prophets is risen again. He said unto them, But whom say ye that I am ? Peter answering said, The Christ of God.” To the truth of this frank and unreserved avowal of his Messiahship he at once assented. But instead of encouraging them to proclaim the glad tidings to others, and to expect great honour and dignity for themselves, he for-



bade their divulging the fact to the world, lest by a premature disclosure they might excite to the utmost the malice of the Jews, before the hour of his sufferings was fully come. For “ he strictly charged them, and commanded them to tell no man that thing; saying, the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the Elders and Chief Priests, and be slain, and be raised the third day.” This explicit prediction of a catastrophe equally unexpected and deplorable, could not be otherwise than most unwelcome to those who had cherished hopes of his attaining great temporal power. Hence we find it, in St. Matthew’s Gospel, warmly reprobated by the most zealous of the Apostles. For, “ Peter took Jesus and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men <sup>1</sup>.”

The same circumstances are related almost literally by St. Mark, together with this express observation, that before rebuking Peter, our Lord “ turned about and looked on his disciples <sup>2</sup>”

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xvi. 22, 23.

<sup>2</sup> Mark viii. 33.

with a look, doubtless, as expressive as that which afterwards melted that temporary apostate into tears of contrition. And to render the great truth which he was about to announce still more solemn and impressive, he called together not merely the disciples, but also the people along with them, and said unto them all, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

It is further evident from the expression *daily*, in the text, that the sacrifice here required was to be constant, habitual, permanent, to the end of their lives. Even life itself, if demanded, was not to be withheld, as is distinctly expressed in these words immediately following the Text: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall save it. For what is a man advantaged if he gain the whole world and lose himself, or be cast away? For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory and in his Father's, and of the holy angels."

In language like this there was neither subterfuge nor reservation. It was not one great and signal effort of magnanimity in doing or suffering

that was required : for, to many minds, the very magnitude of a single difficulty or danger is the strongest incentive to courage, in a contest, accompanied with the prospect of a distinguished fall, or the hope of a glorious victory.—No ; the trials which the disciples were voluntarily to undergo, were of a severe, and a more enduring, but less animating kind. They were to renounce ease, quiet, pleasure, every thing dear and enjoyable that this world could bestow ; for a series of trials at once harassing and inglorious, struggle after struggle, privation after privation, with the probable prospect of a painful and ignominious death at the close. This prospect, this joyless prospect, from which humanity naturally recoiled, was that which Our Lord displayed before the eyes of his disciples. This was the cup of bitterness, which he himself was prepared to taste, but which Peter then endeavoured to dash with prompt indignation from his Saviour's lips, as at a subsequent moment of nature's infirmity, with oaths and execrations, he put it away from his own.

How fully and how soon this spirit of self-denial was called into exercise, is signally attested by the history of the early propagators of Christianity. There was nothing bitter in malice, no-

thing ingenious in cruelty, nothing terrible in revenge, from which their implacable enemies refrained. Of bodily want, and bodily torture, of scorn, and reproach, and reviling, and false accusation, they experienced the uttermost. But they never faltered in their duty because it was difficult, nor relinquished it because accompanied with danger. Bearing their cross, they wandered as outcasts from region to region, over the earth, on which, like their divine Master, they "had not where to lay their head." Like him they patiently endured that their good name should be blackened with ignominy, their purest intentions traduced, their most benevolent actions branded with reproach and requited with ingratitude, submitting without a murmur to be imprisoned, buffeted, scourged, and crucified.

Without, however, entering into a history familiar to us all, of the privations and sufferings of the first Christians, I shall merely call to your recollection the words of one, who was neither fearful in the contest, nor impatient under its difficulties. "I protest," saith the great Apostle of the Gentiles, "by your rejoicing, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and

are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place, and labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the earth, and are the off-scouring of all things unto this day<sup>1</sup>." Yet these expressions, which indicate suffering of a kind the most mortifying to humanity, and the most discouraging to contend with, only shew the firmness of his spirit in encountering them. The cross which his enemies esteemed his opprobrium, he accounted his highest boast. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." That cross indeed was naturally at first an object of terror to the disciples. But when it had once been dignified and consecrated by their Saviour's death, *there* St. Peter expired, and *there* St. Paul expired, and *there* multitudes of their associates in the work of the ministry expired, all rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus.

Such was the self-denying spirit of Christians in ancient times. Such also was that which was

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 31, and iv. 13.

displayed at no very remote period in our own country; when holy martyrs bled in the cause of truth, finally (though after many a severe struggle) triumphant over error. Those days of trial, it is true, are now past. We can profess our belief in safety, without being summoned either to the stake or to the scaffold. Have then our Saviour's words, in consequence of this state of security, no warning import with regard to *us*? Have *we* no dangers to contend against? Have we no cause to train ourselves in the severe school of self-denial? May we lay aside our cross with fearless confidence? In following our Saviour now, do we tread on paths that not only present no serious obstacles to our heavenward progress, but are strewed, as it were, with flowers, and abound with whatever can minister either to pleasure or repose? We need not hesitate to assert, that *they* take a very erroneous view indeed of the Christian life, who entertain such an opinion. They know little of the Christian warfare as exemplified in the history of St. Paul, who think that external enemies were the only ones, or the most difficult that he had to subdue. For the warfare that he waged was not merely carnal; it was also spiritual. Over all external ills we have already witnessed his high

exultation : but over those that were internal, we find him, in the heaviness of his spirit, pouring forth such heart-rending exclamations as this : “ O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from the body of this death<sup>1</sup> ? ”

The body of this death still adheres and depresses to earth every son of Adam. And if it fell with such overwhelming weight upon that great Apostle, how anxious should *we* be to imitate his example, in adopting the only remedy for the evil. “ I keep under my body,” says he, “ and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away.” In reminding his Colossian converts of their danger, he exhorts them earnestly to practise self-denial, by setting their affections on things above, withdrawing them from things on the earth ; and further excites them, in the most urgent terms, to “ mortify their members which are upon the earth ; since by indulging them, the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience.”

Can we then doubt for a moment, that these awful warnings, that these salutary admonitions, that these terrific consequences, have equal refer-

<sup>1</sup> Rom. vii. 24.

ence to *us* as to the early Christians? If the great Apostle himself was in danger of being cast away from eternal life for his defect in the practice of self-denial, may *we* not justly tremble for our greater deficiency. For at the time that he was impressed with this dread, he was living a life apparently free from all such danger. The strong passions of youth had died away; he had relinquished the pursuits of his maturer years; and those intellectual treasures which he had amassed, he accounted all but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. All the power and distinction which he had acquired among the proud and self-righteous Pharisees, he utterly despised. He was moreover so incessantly occupied in that most sacred of duties, the propagation of the Gospel, that it seemed almost impossible to suppose him released, even for a single moment, from the voluntary and habitual, though painful occupation of bearing his cross. If in such a case apprehension of failure could exist; if in such a man incessant vigilance was indispensable, how incalculably greater must be the liability to danger in ourselves! To shield us from that danger, and at the same time lastingly to impress us with a sense of the great object of our life,



when our Church first numbered us amongst her children, what was the token she then employed? She “signed us with the sign of the cross, that we might feel ourselves bound manfully to fight under the banner of Christ crucified, and to continue his faithful soldiers and servants until our life’s end.”

What peculiar proofs then, let each of us ask ourselves, do we exhibit of being seriously engaged in this our Christian profession? Do we actually and daily take up our cross? Have we indeed put off the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light? Do we prove by constant vigilance our conviction that our spiritual foes are not imaginary, but real? Be our belief of them what it may, they are assuredly near us, and about us, and within us, assuming a thousand forms, and incessantly pursuing their deadly work. In every stage of our Christian progress they beset us, and accommodate themselves to the age, situation, and circumstances of our diversified condition. The world of nature teems not with objects more diversified in their structure, form and fashion, than the moral world with temptations and allurements to sin. As the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with

hearing, so neither is the heart of man with pursuing the objects of sense.

In every stage of our life, in Youth, in Manhood, in Old Age, the danger is imminent. To the eye of Youth, gazing with intense ardour upon an untried world, each scene of temptation is too apt to appear only that of innocent amusement, where the heart may revel in delights that never cloy, and in pursuits that never tire. While, then, these unthinking votaries of pleasure are fearlessly indulging the wishes of their hearts, shall a Heavenly Monitor interpose between them and their joys, and sternly command them to deny themselves, and take up their cross and follow Him whithersoever he goeth? Follow they must—or, like our first parents, amid the new and apparently inexhaustible joys of Paradise, they must “surely die.” “For the carnal mind is enmity against God, and to be carnally minded is death<sup>1</sup>.”

But it is not the young alone who are liable to be beset by temptations and trials. Those enemies renounced in our baptismal engagements, Sin, the World, and the Devil, assail us even in the very strength of our manhood, and the more

<sup>1</sup> Rom. viii. 6, 7.

fatally from that overweening confidence, pride, and security of heart, which we are then so prone to indulge. We look perhaps with pity or with scorn upon the past pursuits and follies of our youth ; form higher plans tending to the increase of our wealth, our influence, and our power. Hence do we listen with impatience to that salutary counsel, “ Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might ; let not the rich man glory in his riches.” For these are, in the estimation of the worldly man, the primary, the only important objects in life ; and provided he seek them not by unlawful means, he holds zeal in the exclusive pursuit of them to be an object of the highest commendation. But when required by a Heavenly Monitor to abate his ardour and relax his exertions in the attainment of those objects, whatever they may be, which, if immoderately pursued, withdraw his heart from the concerns of religion, like the young man in the Gospel, who sorrowed at the surrender of his great possessions, however near he may apparently be to the kingdom of God, he will never enter it : because he shuns that strait and narrow way of self-denial which leadeth unto life, and

follows the broad path of worldly gain and worldly honours, as his ultimate end.

When the selfish passions, unchecked by Christian principle, are thus allowed to spring up in the warmth of youth, and to flourish in the strength of manhood, what can be expected but that they will entwine their deadly roots with our advancing years, and darken our old age with their baleful shade? In the decrepitude of his years, it is not indeed utterly impossible, that the sinner may be roused to such a sense of danger as would impel him to take up the weapons of Christian warfare; but how small is the hope that he will either have the courage, or the strength to combat resolutely and successfully against the world and the devil? How often do we see the selfish passions strengthened to an overwhelming magnitude! How often do we witness an utter indifference to that religion, which should be the solace of his age, and can be his only consolation, if any consolation he can know, upon the approach of inevitable death! How often does the love of the world cling around his soul, and the most sordid avarice corrupt his inmost heart: though Reason, Religion, and Experience tell him that he can take nothing hence

of all his labours, wherein he hath laboured under the sun ; nor can his glory, or the objects of his glorying, descend with him into that grave, on whose very brink he is trembling.

When such are the fearful, the eternal consequences of surrendering ourselves, in each stage of our existence, to the things of the world, how watchfully solicitous should we be to check every evil desire, and bring it into subjection to the law of Christ! “Know ye not,” saith St. Paul, “that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, *his* servants ye are to whom ye obey ; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness<sup>1</sup>?” From the moment, therefore, that we suffer ourselves to be enslaved by our passions, from that moment we cease to fight under the banner of the cross, and fatally abandon the Captain of our salvation. If once we submit to be governed by pride, anger, or revenge, we shall unavoidably turn a deaf ear to that merciful admonition, “Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” If envy and malice are once harboured in our breast, we have already renounced all pretensions to be disciples of Him who went about continually

<sup>1</sup> Rom. vi. 16.

doing good, who “gave us this new commandment, that we should love one another,” and enforced it by dying for us, while yet we were his enemies. If we live in the gratification of those “fleshly lusts which war against the soul,” what hope can we cherish of attaining that salvation which Christ hath purchased by his blood; when assured that “every man who hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure<sup>1</sup>?” Or, even though guiltless of such flagrant actual offence, if we live habitually neglectful of any one known duty, with what truth can we profess to follow our Saviour *daily*? If strangers to secret prayer, we prove ourselves utterly destitute of that spirit of devotion, with which he enjoined us to address our Father who is in secret, and which often led him amidst the gloom of night, to some lonely mountain, apart to pray. If in like manner we abandon the public service of the sanctuary, what hope can we entertain of enjoying the inestimable blessing of his Divine presence, who hath said, that “wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them?” Or if we rarely or never draw near to his holy altar, what more thankless indifference can we testify for

<sup>1</sup> 1 John iii. 3.

the sacrifice of His most blessed body and blood, who, on the night in which he was betrayed, enjoined such solemn commemoration, in these emphatic words, "Do this in remembrance of me?"

Let us then, my brethren, in every thing that bears the least semblance of sin, adopt the maxim of St. Paul; "touch not, taste not, handle not." Let us use this world, as not abusing it; enjoy it, as though we enjoyed it not; continually conscious of our insecurity from the multiplicity of its surrounding temptations; and ever preparing ourselves to leave its changeful, fluctuating scenes, for that land of permanent bliss, "where a rest remaineth for the people of God." Through every path of life, whether public or private, whether in prosperity or adversity, in sorrow or in joy, let us never forget that we are Christians; but daily and habitually bear with us the standard of our Christian profession; and when we die (as die we must) let it be at the foot of the cross, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who "for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of the majesty on high."

## SERMON IX.

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ELIJAH THE PROPHET AND JOHN THE BAPTIST  
COMPARED.

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ST. LUKE, i. 17.

*And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*

IN the prophecy by Malachi it is written, “ Behold, I will send my Messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me : and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple<sup>1</sup>.” That Messenger is further declared, in the concluding words of the Old Testament, to be Elijah the Prophet: but that the prediction referred solely to John the Baptist is evident, not only from the annunciation of his birth to Zacharias, by the Angel Gabriel, but also from our Saviour’s declaration to his disciples, immediately after his transfiguration: “ I say unto you, that Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have

<sup>1</sup> Mal. iii. 1.



done unto him whatsoever they listed. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist<sup>1</sup>.”

In endeavouring to ascertain those points of the Baptist's character, indicated by that expression, “ the spirit and power of Elias,” it will be necessary to take a brief view of Elijah's history; considering, First, the object he had to effect; and next, his mode of effecting it.

His object was evidently the reformation of Israel in the worst of times; when, according to the statement of the son of Sirach, “ their sins were multiplied exceedingly<sup>2</sup> :” “ and Elijah was ordained for reproofs in their times, to pacify the wrath of the Lord's judgment, before it brake forth into fury; and to turn the heart of the father unto the son, and to restore the tribes of Jacob<sup>3</sup>.” For many years previous to the time of Elijah, the chosen people of God, following the example of their successive sovereigns, had been sinking deeper and deeper into idolatry. Even King Solomon, who had built with great magnificence a temple to the Lord, in his old age deserted that temple, turned his heart away after other Gods; and on the very “ hill that is before

<sup>1</sup> Mat. xvii. 12, 13.

<sup>2</sup> Eccl<sup>us</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Eccl<sup>us</sup>. xlviii. 10.

Jerusalem, he built an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, and for Moloch, the abomination of the children of Ammon."

When, at the commencement of his son's reign, the descendants of the Patriarch were divided into two nations, each monarch pursued the same idolatrous course. In Judah, however, the mischief was speedily arrested for a long series of years; but in Israel, the degeneracy was fearfully rapid, during several short and disastrous reigns, till that of Omri; "who did worse than all that were before him:" but even he was surpassed by his son Ahab, who carried wickedness to the extreme, abolished to the utmost of his power the worship of the true God, erected the idol temple of Baal, supplied it with altars, priests and groves; and "did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger, than all the kings of Israel that were before him<sup>1</sup>."

The evil that had assailed the head was naturally communicated to the members; till the body of the state became entirely corrupted. For the mischief was of a double nature; not merely the contagion of bad example given by a sovereign to his subjects, but, what was more deadly still,

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings, xvi. 33.

an entire extinction of Religious Principle—a total abandonment of the true God, and abolition of his worship; in the room of which was established a wicked and debasing superstition. This recourse to the abominations of the Heathens was a death-blow to any vestige of moral virtue that might have survived the blood-stained annals of the preceding reigns: when treason, murder, and civil war divided and desolated the land, “setting the hearts of the fathers against the children, and the hearts of the children against the fathers, and consuming the tribes of Israel.”

It was under such awful circumstances that Elijah the Prophet arose to stem the torrent of iniquity. The abrupt mode in which he is first presented to our view, and the dreadful denunciation that he instantly thunders forth against Israel, strikingly indicate his spirit and his power. “And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word<sup>1</sup>.” He then immediately disappears from the abodes of men, according to the commandment of the Lord, awaiting the miracu-

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings, xvii. 1.

lous accomplishment of his prediction, and the salutary reformation of principles and morals which it was intended to produce. Very far from being pronounced in anger, it was uttered as the means of averting a still heavier judgment, which perseverance in a course of iniquity would necessarily entail. For the sins of those that dwelt therein he turned a fruitful land into barrenness; and until the whole of nature, animate and inanimate, should sympathize with the sorrows of the guilty, he withdrew; doubtless offering up prayers for that repentance, which should produce the restoration of a suffering people. He left them to the workings of their own minds, that they might, by the force of circumstances, be led to acknowledge, that "the Most High God ruleth alone over the inhabitants of earth, and giveth command unto whomsoever he will." They read his Divine commission legibly traced on the face of the flaming sky, and of the parched earth, that burnt like a furnace under their feet; no less than in the famished forms of man and beast, perishing under the arrows of Divine vengeance. And yet so treacherous, so tenacious of its grasp is Unbelief; so dreadfully had it pervaded their souls, so vitally corrupted their hearts, that for three

whole years they continued to offer their vain supplication at the altar of Baal, nor sought for relief in the only quarter where it could be found, in the pardoning mercies of the God of Israel.

Such was the first instance of the spirit and power of Elias, that we find in the sacred records. It was only, however, preparatory to another equally memorable and alarming. Though the desired point of reformation was not yet attained, it was impossible that some effect should not have been produced, even on the hardened hearts both of prince and people: and by this miraculous display of the Divine authority under which he acted, the Prophet had prepared their minds for witnessing, with candour and impartiality, the test which he was preparing for the Prophets of Baal.

By the command of the Lord, Elijah presented himself before Ahab, who accosted him with these ungracious words: “Art thou he that troubleth Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy Father’s house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim<sup>1</sup>.” To this stern remonstrance he added an equally stern injunc-

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings, xviii. 18.

tion, that Ahab should gather all the prophets of Baal in presence of assembled Israel at Mount Carmel, that, by a miraculous display of Divine power, the people might be decided in their choice.

To this proposition they, who would previously have given a direct refusal, overawed by the fearful circumstances of the times, now readily assented. When, therefore, the false prophets had vainly attempted to prove the divinity of their Gods by their superstitious rites, Elijah “repaired the altar of the Lord which was broken down, and prayed to the Lord God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Israel,” that the same signal testimony by fire which had been borne to Moses, to Gideon, and to David, might now be vouchsafed to him. Then, “the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The Lord he is the God; the Lord he is the God<sup>1</sup>.”

Then did Elijah, as the extraordinary minister of the Almighty’s vengeance, with the perfect

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings, xviii. 38, 39.

concurrence of sovereign and subject, enjoin the instant execution of the command long before issued, that the authors of idolatry “should die the death.” By that very people, whom they had blinded and deceived and exposed to the wrath of Heaven, were four hundred and fifty of the priests of Baal dragged to the brook Kishon, and there made to expiate their crimes of destroying the souls of the Lord’s people, and of inciting Jezebel to murder the Prophets of the Most High. It was but just that for their flagrant wickedness they should pay the forfeit of their lives, as a sacrifice and salutary example for the general good: thus affording another awful instance of the spirit and the power with which Elijah discharged his prophetic commission.

A third public example of the same nature is that which, for his singular impiety, was inflicted upon King Ahaziah. Even his father Ahab, hardened and rebellious as he was, had humbled himself before the Lord with fasting and mourning, and had thus averted the Divine judgments from himself and his people: but Ahaziah, notwithstanding all he had seen, “walked in the way of his father: for he served Baal, and worshipped him, and provoked to anger the Lord God

of Israel, according to all that his father had done<sup>1</sup>." Nay, so profligate in heart was he, that when labouring under an apparently mortal disease, instead of seeking counsel and assistance from the God of Israel, he most shamefully gave the preference to Baal-zebub, the God of Ekron. And for this flagrant act of impiety, which was aggravated by the danger of impending death, Elijah reproved his messengers, and foretold the certain and speedy fate of their king; who, burning with rage at this unwelcome interference, sent an armed force to execute vengeance on the Prophet. Upon two bands of those messengers, breathing their master's impious and vindictive spirit, the fire of God, at the Prophet's bidding, successively descended; and a third company only escaped upon their confessing and reverencing the God of Heaven<sup>2</sup>. These acts, however, terrible as they were, proceeded from no malignity of spirit, but exhibited only a needful zeal for the support of that Divine authority, by whose sanction they were confirmed and approved.

Having thus before the eyes of all Israel vindicated the majesty of Heaven, which had been so flagrantly and publicly insulted, the Prophet, with

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings, xxii. 52, 53.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Kings, i. 10—14.



undaunted firmness, encountered the indignant monarch, and in the midst of his court arraigned him for his crime and pronounced his punishment. “Forasmuch as thou hast sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub, the God of Ekron, is it not because there is no God in Israel to inquire of his word? Therefore thou shalt not come down off that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die. So he died, according to the word of the Lord, which Elijah had spoken<sup>1</sup>.”

These three public examples then, the famine, the destruction of the prophets of Baal, and of the murderous bands of the impious King Ahaziah, followed by the death of Ahaziah himself, are all stamped with the same character; and, without our recurring to other instances, sufficiently demonstrate that spirit and that power, in which the Baptist is declared to have come.

A life thus illustrated by all that was bold and daring and grand, was closed by a scene the sublimest, the most memorable, that Scripture records of any mortal man. The Prophet went forth to the banks of the river Jordan, whose flood, smitten by his mantle, parted and fled hither and thither; so that with Elisha he passed

<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings, i. 16.

through on dry ground. There they walked, holding solemn converse for the good of Israel, while fifty sons of the prophets stood afar off, to witness the scene which he had predicted as the termination of his earthly existence. "And behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder, and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof<sup>1</sup>,"—thus intimating that the departed Prophet had done more by his spirit and his power for the preservation of Israel, than all the chariots and horsemen and military pomp, that Israel could boast.

Let us now, according to the plan proposed, advert to the points of resemblance between this great Prophet and John the Baptist. We found that when Elijah first appeared upon earth, the wickedness of Israel was such as could only be corrected by the miraculous interposition of the most distinguished of ancient Prophets. We will now consider those which rendered the coming of the Baptist equally indispensable: for the vices that infected the Jews at the era of the Baptist's mission, and Israel during that of Elijah, though

<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings, ii. 11, 12.

very different in their character, had equally the effect of estranging them from their God.

From the taint contracted in the land of Egypt—that seat of superstition—the Israelites for many ages cherished an almost invincible attachment to idolatry: and in this their favourite vice, they were so strongly confirmed by the neighbouring nations of Canaan, that a long succession of Prophets could not wean them from their backslidings, nor promise nor threatening move them, till they had groaned for seventy years under the yoke of captivity in a foreign land. The remedy, however, in that instance was complete: for they never afterwards bowed their knee to any strange God.

But evils as pernicious in their nature, though less flagrant in appearance, before the coming of the Baptist, had corrupted the heart of the nation, and extended themselves to every gradation of society. All the principles that could tend to the dissolution of morality were in full force; while every motive that could yield it support was sinking fast into total inaction. By one great sect among the Jews, that most powerful of all moral restraints, the expectation of reward and punishment in a future state, was utterly rejected. They

extinguished all that was divine in the soul of man, degrading him to a level with the beast of the field, and after pampering his body in vicious indulgence, they consigned it for ever to the dust. The floodgates of iniquity were thus thrown open, and the nation was deluged with the tide of evils that never fail to follow avowed infidelity.

The other great sect which divided the people, though less openly, was not less thoroughly depraved. They did not indeed bow the knee to Baal, like their idolatrous ancestors, nor deny the existence of God, like the infidel Sadducees ; but the world with all its vanities was enthroned in their hearts, and, while affecting a profound reverence for their universally neglected law, they annulled the Divine authority, by “ teaching for doctrine the commandments of men.” The act of prayer had become a mere pretence—their shew of sanctity a mask under which they robbed the widow and the fatherless : and that very Temple, for which they professed such unbounded veneration, they so shamelessly profaned, that it was aptly denominated a Den of Thieves. The kindred bonds of life were all relaxed ; and fraud, treachery and oppression, envy, jealousy, and revenge, prevailed with uncontrollable sway, from

the highest of those who were revered as masters in Israel, to the lowest of that promiscuous multitude who adhered to no sect, professed no religion, but merited by their conduct the name of sinners, as their most characteristic and appropriate appellation.

When such was the general complexion of the times, it was not wonderful that men should look eagerly for that Elijah, promised by Malachi as the forerunner of the Messiah, to unite the discordant members of society; “to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, lest the earth should be again smitten with a curse.” The expected Prophet at length appeared in the person of John the Baptist. The first announcement of him by the earliest historian of Christianity, St. Matthew, is almost as abrupt as that of Elijah. “In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea<sup>1</sup>.” The first word he utters fully bespeaks the general purpose of his mission—“Repent;” and the reason for this repentance is totally different from what was ever before urged: namely, the immediate advent of the Messiah—“For the kingdom of Heaven is at hand.”

<sup>1</sup> Matt. iii. 1.

The Baptist came forth from the solitude of the desert, like the inhabitant of a world unknown. On the banks of the Jordan,—those very banks from which Elijah had ascended to Heaven in a chariot of flame, he was seen arrayed in that prophet's garb, clothed in sackcloth, “in raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins,”—partaking merely of the food of the wilderness, “locusts and wild honey.” Possessing the same passions as other men, he had restrained them from his earliest youth. All that was gross and earthly in his nature, he had refined by severe self-denial and mortification of the flesh: all that was heavenly in his spirit, he had exalted by lofty contemplation and communion with his God. He had gained a complete victory over the world, which had nothing in all its pageantry to dazzle his eye—nothing in all its treasures to excite the desire of his heart.

This was a victory which it had rarely fallen to the lot of humanity to achieve, and by this he became, according to the words of the angel, “Great in the sight of the Lord.” It was this internal greatness of character, which gave him that commanding power over the human heart, and that superiority over every prophet born of woman. He shewed

no sign, he wrought no miracle—no curse was pronounced upon the land of Judah—no life was sacrificed to appease offended Heaven ; and yet he swayed the minds of men with all the spirit and power of Elijah, whose miraculous deeds of terror had filled a whole nation with dismay<sup>1</sup>.

Thus qualified for the discharge of his high commission, which was to reform a guilty people and prepare the way of the Lord, he proceeded to baptize in the wilderness, and “to preach the baptism of Repentance for the remission of sins.” “And there went out unto him, all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in Jordan confessing their sins<sup>2</sup>.”

I stop not at present to enlarge upon the excellencies of the instructions which he addressed to the different ranks of men, who were struck with conviction to the heart, and asked in the very agony of repentance, “What shall we do?” It will be sufficient that all his instructions were adapted to

<sup>1</sup> Josephus (*Antiq. Jud.* l. xviii. c. 5.) strongly attests the power which the Baptist possessed over the minds of his countrymen, whom he describes as coming in such crowds about him, because greatly moved by hearing his words, that “Herod, who feared lest the extent of his persuasive influence upon the people might lead them to revolt (*for they seemed ready to do whatever he advised*), thought it best to prevent any such evil, by putting him to death.”

<sup>2</sup> *Matt.* iii. 6.

correct the errors incident to their peculiar situations, and to improve their moral conduct which, as appears from the writings of Josephus, was at the time of the Baptist characterised by a hard-hearted spirit of avarice, rapacity and oppression. He therefore counselled the rich to impart of their superfluity to the poor: the publicans that they should exact no more than their due: the soldiers that they should neither oppress the people nor murmur against their superiors. “But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism<sup>1</sup>,” all the spirit of Elijah seemed roused within him, against those teachers of error, those blind guides who, like the prophets of Baal, had shut the gates of happiness upon mankind. “O generation of vipers,” said he, “who hath warned *you* to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits, not merely vain professions, but *fruits* meet for repentance—*works* that demonstrate a real amendment of life; and think not to say within yourselves, “We have Abraham for our father—that will avail you nothing, unless your actions justify your profession: for God is able of these stones—of these Gentiles whom you despise as the dust of the earth, to raise up children unto

<sup>1</sup> Matt. iii. 7.



Abraham. And now also the axe is laid to the root of the trees,—this is the final trial of yourselves and your nation, and every one among you whose works do not attest his sincerity—every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, shall be hewn down and cast into the fire.”

Such were the spirit and the power with which he commenced, and speedily effected his Divine commission. To the whole body of the nation, to the high and the low, the teachers and the taught, the learned and the unlearned, his reproof was addressed, his counsel was extended, their consciences were smitten, their sins were confessed : and in the waters of the Jordan did they emblematically wash away the pollution of their souls.

There remained yet one great public duty to be discharged, one great public error to be corrected by him.—Herod, the Tetrarch of Galilee was, at that very period, living in open adultery with his brother's wife, before the eyes of his repentant people. The Baptist, therefore, having been enjoined by Heaven to preach repentance unto *all* without exception, shrank not from reprobating vice because protected by power. Entirely corresponding with his high authority, was the mode

in which he executed his Divine commission. He does not timidly hint a suspicion that Herod's conduct was improper, that it was offensive to the nation, and that therefore it might be prudent and advisable to reform : but he boldly declares with all the severity of that prophet who rebuked the unrighteous Ahab, "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife<sup>1</sup>."

The consequences of such a declaration it was not difficult to foresee. In the first moment of resentment, Herod, at the instigation of Herodias, cast him into prison. But such are the awful powers of virtue over minds not absolutely hardened in vice, that he not only spared his defenceless captive, but even feared him, says the Evangelist, knowing him to be "a just and holy man."

His ministry on earth was now accomplished ; he had warned them all, prince and people, enemies and friends, to "flee from the wrath to come :"<sup>2</sup> he had borne the fullest testimony that Jesus Christ was the promised Messiah<sup>2</sup> ; he was ready to be offered up, and the time of his departure was at hand. Though the closing scene

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xiv. 4.

<sup>2</sup> This part of the subject will be considered in the next Discourse.

of his life and ministry was of a less splendid character than that which was witnessed at Elijah's removal from earth, still it was such as fixed for ever on his brow the Martyr's unfading crown ; with which he ascended from the gloom of his ensanguined prison to the light and liberty of the blest above.

We have thus seen that there is in many respects a striking similarity between the Prophet Elijah and John the Baptist, in their general object, which was the reformation of a guilty people—in their abrupt and unexpected appearance upon the scene of their ministry—in the vehement zeal with which they urged all classes of society to repentance—in the dauntless courage with which they reprov'd the flagitious impiety of the Sovereign—and in the suddenness of their awful removal from this earthly state.

Other instances, were it necessary, might be easily adduced : one, in particular, is of so extraordinary a nature that it ought not to be omitted. On<sup>1</sup> Mount Horeb Elijah stood in the immediate presence of his Maker, while the mountains were rent by a mighty wind, and the rocks were broken in pieces before the Lord, and the quaking earth

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings xix. 11.

burst forth in flame ; and he wrapt his face in his mantle, and stood at the entering in of the cave, and behold there came a voice ! and that voice was the voice of God !

To the Baptist, too, was the Divine glory displayed in a manner equally sublime, but better corresponding with the pure and peaceful nature of that dispensation, whose commencement he came to announce to the world. “ And Jesus when he was baptized went up straightway out of the water, and lo, the heavens were opened unto him : and John saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon him, and lo, a voice from heaven saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased<sup>1</sup>. ”

Were we to pursue still farther the parallel between Elijah and the Baptist, we might advert to the lamentable similarity which marked the transient effects of their ministry, and of all their exertions for the reformation of their fellow-countrymen. When the people of Israel, notwithstanding all the signs and wonders wrought among them by Elijah, had again relapsed into idolatry, and lent a deaf ear to the warnings of succeeding prophets, the Almighty finally rejected them, and

<sup>1</sup> Matt. iii. 16.

they were carried away captive into the land of Assyria. That the Jews also, after the preaching of the Baptist, speedily returned to their evil courses, is thus distinctly declared by our Saviour: "John was a burning and a shining light, and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light<sup>1</sup>." That season, however, was speedily at an end: and then the overflowings of iniquity, which for a time had been restrained within narrower bounds, burst forth with accumulated violence, hurrying that rebellious race to the farthest verge of impiety, extinguishing the glory of their temple, overthrowing the bulwarks of their boasted city, and scattering the wretched survivors of their country's fall over every region of the earth; where you may behold the relics of their race, still unrepentant and unreclaimed, wandering from city to city, living monuments of the Divine indignation against obstinacy, infidelity and vice.

It was for *our* warning that *they* were smitten. Let us then profit by their fatal experience. Let us remember that there is scarcely an instance upon record of a single nation which, after abandoning religious principle, and being confirmed in

<sup>1</sup> John v. 35.

vicious habits, has ever retraced its steps, before it has been overtaken by some great national calamity. We should remember, too, that public virtue is best promoted by individual reformation. Let us then, each of us, in humble reliance upon Divine grace, devote ourselves zealously to the accomplishment of this momentous work, in the hope that we may thus, in some measure, bring down the blessing of heaven on our country, and with the full assurance that we shall at least deliver our own souls, in the day of the fierceness of the Almighty's anger.

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## SERMON X.

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THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST CONTRASTED  
WITH THAT OF THE APOSTLES.

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ST. MATTHEW xi. 11.

*Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*

IN our last discourse we considered that part of the Baptist's office which consisted in preparing the minds of the Jews, by the correction of their moral conduct, for receiving the testimony which he was sent expressly to bear to the expected Messiah. Let us now proceed to inquire into the nature of that testimony itself.

The first witness borne by the Baptist to our Saviour's office of Messiah was, in point of fact, a prophecy. "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy

Ghost, and with fire<sup>1</sup>." This prophecy was soon after fulfilled, and its fulfilment announced, upon that important occasion, when "the Jews sent Priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed and denied not; but confessed I am not the Christ<sup>2</sup>." After avowing himself the forerunner of the Messiah foretold by Esaias, he emphatically added, "there standeth one among you whom ye know not; he it is who coming after me is preferred before me." This statement he could advance with confidence, although he explicitly denies any personal knowledge of Jesus before the commencement of our Saviour's ministry.

This is a very remarkable fact, and the probable explanation of it is, that Zacharias and Elizabeth, who at the Baptist's birth were both well stricken in years, had died while he was still very young; and that he passed the preparatory part of his life in the wilderness of Judea, while Jesus inhabited the remote and sequestered village of Nazareth of Galilee. When therefore Jesus appeared among the multitude that resorted to the banks of the Jordan, he was recognized by John solely from the impression made upon his mind by

<sup>1</sup> Matt. iii. 11.

<sup>2</sup> John i. 19, 20.



Divine inspiration ; and in consequence of this impression, he administered to our Lord, with the utmost humility, the sacred rite of Baptism. But when that solemn ceremony had been performed, and Jesus was ascending from Jordan, the miraculous descent of the Spirit upon him in bodily form was strikingly calculated to confirm that impression, and to fix for ever the certainty of his Messiahship in the Baptist's mind. "And I knew him not," are his own express words ; but "he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw and bare record that this is the Son of God<sup>1</sup>."

We find it stated that, at the time when this testimony was borne, "John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the Sin of the world<sup>2</sup>:" thus distinctly indicating that great expiatory sacrifice which was to be offered for the sins of mankind and our redemption through his blood, as of "a Lamb without blemish and without spot." And he further bears witness to our Saviour's existence, in a higher state of being, before his appearance

<sup>1</sup> John i. 33, 34.

<sup>2</sup> John i. 29.

upon earth : “ he was preferred before me, for he was before me,” not only in dignity but in time, being “ the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” “ The next day John stood and two of his disciples, and looking earnestly on Jesus as he walked, he saith, behold the Lamb of God<sup>1</sup> !” Those disciples, struck with the infinite superiority of Him who was thus designated, humbly solicited an interview with him, and speedily confessed and joyfully declared to their kindred and friends, “ we have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ<sup>2</sup> .”

From this period, such zealous disciples attached themselves to our Saviour, and such multitudes flocked to his baptism, of those who had previously received the baptism of repentance, that the disciples of John became jealous of his rapidly increasing fame, and solicitous for the preservation of their master’s authority. To their master, therefore, they came, and said unto him ; “ Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him<sup>2</sup> .” With the utmost candour and humility, the Baptist at once openly confesses his own inferiority. “ He that

<sup>1</sup> John i. 35, 36.

<sup>2</sup> John iii. 26.

hath the bride, is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly, because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled<sup>1</sup>." "I cordially rejoice in his superior success. In the natural order of things, he must increase, but I must decrease. He that is of the earth, is earthly, and speaketh of the earth; his office, like his form, partakes of his weakness, as a child of the dust: but he that cometh from heaven is above all, his essence Divine, his doctrines the infallible oracles of God. And since the Father hath given all things into his hand, far from repining at the augmentation of his followers and the wonders of his power, be assured, that upon your heartily embracing his doctrines depends your eternal salvation. For he that believeth in the Son, hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him<sup>2</sup>."

This is the last testimony borne by St. John, as forerunner of the Messiah, while he enjoyed full liberty in the execution of his office. And we may remark, not only the elevated tone which he now assumes, but also, that instead of merely

<sup>1</sup> John iii. 29.

<sup>2</sup> John iii. 36.

inculcating, as formerly, the doctrine of Repentance, he now most forcibly declares that Faith in the Son of God is indispensably necessary for our salvation.

Every part of the Baptist's conduct that has hitherto come under our review, has been perfectly consistent and worthy of the office with which he was invested. But there was one incident of a more dubious nature, which occurred after his imprisonment, and is thus stated by the Evangelist. "Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached unto them. And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me<sup>1</sup>!" Now from this passage it has been argued that John, discouraged by the length of his imprisonment, and by the reserve which our Saviour maintained with regard to his Messiahship, at length doubted the fact which he had

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xi. 2-6.

once believed, and therefore, for his own satisfaction as forerunner, sought a more explicit declaration.

But it seems that a careful survey of all the concomitant circumstances should lead us to a very different conclusion. We have already seen that among the disciples of John there was excited an extreme jealousy of our Saviour's miracles, of the growing number of his followers, and his increasing celebrity throughout the country. We have seen also the Baptist labouring most zealously to counteract their overweening idea of his superiority, but never himself for a moment doubting that Jesus was the Christ. Notwithstanding his clear and explicit declarations, there seemed still to prevail among them a great degree of unbelief upon this subject. In order therefore that by ocular observation it might be for ever removed, and the faith even of the weakest of his disciples made as stable as his own, he sent them upon this most important inquiry. The period too that he selected for the purpose was very remarkable—immediately after the performance of those two signal miracles, the cure of the Centurion's servant and the restoration to life of the only son of the widow of Nain—miracles so

stupendous, that “there came a fear on all men: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and that God hath visited his people<sup>1</sup>.” This surely was not the moment most likely to shake the Baptist’s faith, but eminently calculated to dispel the doubts of the most incredulous of his disciples.

He accordingly afforded them an opportunity of conviction, which he neither needed himself, nor, from the circumstance of his imprisonment, could enjoy, by sending them to be themselves eye-witness of our Saviour’s miracles. These miracles had already superseded the necessity of any further witness from him, and it was not unnatural—it was even highly desirable, that at the close of his ministry, he should point his disciples to that new ground of belief, that higher species of evidence, which should demonstrate our Saviour’s Messiahship to the end of time. Hence it was that Jesus said to the Jews, “Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth. But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me<sup>2</sup>.” In the same hour, there-

<sup>1</sup> Luke vii. 16.

<sup>2</sup> John v. 36.

fore, when these incredulous disciples arrived, he condescended to remove their doubts by curing many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight. And when the messengers were departed, he immediately spoke of John the Baptist, and pronounced upon him the highest eulogium that he ever bestowed upon man. "What went ye out into the wilderness to see? a reed shaken with the wind?" "Far from it," we must infer him to mean, if he had completed that elliptical expression—"far from it: for he was strong and immovable in his faith as the deep-rooted cedar of Lebanon. But what went ye out for to see? a man clothed in soft raiment? Far from it. His raiment and food were those of the desert wilderness. Behold they which are gorgeously apparelled and live delicately are in king's courts. But what went ye out for to see? a prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face to prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women, there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist."

Having stated thus explicitly the Baptist's superiority to all the prophets under the Law, our Saviour adds, in the concluding words of the text, "notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."—By that expression, the kingdom of heaven, it is universally allowed that we are here to understand the Gospel Dispensation. We are not, however, thence to infer, that the Baptist was inferior to the very meanest individual that believed in Jesus Christ; but only to the least of the evangelical prophets, that is, the very humblest of our Lord's apostles. Their superiority, then, over the Baptist appears to consist in three things—in their office; in those seals of their office, miracles; and in the peculiar nature of their doctrines.

1. In their office. John was, strictly speaking, only the messenger of God, sent to prepare the minds of men for the reception of the Messiah. He was merely the herald that announced his coming. He partook largely of the spirit of the Prophets under the Old dispensation, but possessed not the more enlightened and more elevated character of the New. He could neither with propriety be considered as the immediate servant of our Lord; nor was he admitted to that degree of frequent



and confidential intercourse that could entitle him to the appellation of friend ; nor was that veil ever withdrawn during the lifetime of the Baptist, which concealed from his view the secret plans, and counsels, and operations, of the Founder of our holy religion. This was not, however, to be imputed to any defect either in his character or his conduct. For as, in the wisdom of Providence, he had been entrusted with a higher charge than was ever before committed to the greatest of prophets, so was he destined to give way to those who were commissioned to undertake a task still more arduous and important.

To his chosen disciples our Lord graciously condescended to communicate those schemes of infinite mercy and wisdom, which till then had been hidden in the counsels of the Eternal. “To you it is given,” said he, “to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God.” I call you not servants ; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth ; but I have called you friends ; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you<sup>1</sup>.” To some of them he displayed the celestial brightness of his nature at that ineffable scene, his Transfiguration ; when “his face did

<sup>1</sup> John xv. 15.

shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light; and there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him, in his glory," upon the high mysteries of redemption, even upon "that decease which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem<sup>1</sup>." By all of them were his fortitude and resignation attested, at his Agony, in the Garden of Gethsemane; and when for forty days he had sojourned with them on earth after his Resurrection, they were the spectators of his Ascension into heaven. Thus admitted to the contemplation of all that was most interesting in our Saviour's life, and instructed in mysteries unknown to the Baptist, they went forth as the friends and ambassadors of the Prince of Peace, to bear the glad tidings of his salvation to the ends of the earth.

2. It was not, however, in their office only that the apostles excelled the Baptist, but also in the seals of their office—miracles. St. Paul, in his second Epistle to the Corinthians, terms miracles "the signs of an apostle<sup>2</sup>;" and, since they lie beyond the compass of human power, they are the most certain and satisfactory proofs of Divine authority. But of the Baptist it is distinctly asserted, that he did no miracle. The influence that he possessed,

<sup>1</sup> Luke ix. 31.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. xii. 12.

as we have already seen, was chiefly owing to the austerities which he practised himself and inculcated upon his disciples ; to the superiority and indifference which he had thus acquired to all worldly objects ; and to the power of conscience in convincing his auditors of sin, when he arraigned them for the guilt of their moral conduct. Thus unattested by miracles, the authority of his baptism was by many accounted very dubious and questionable, as clearly appears from the dilemma in which the chief priests, and the scribes and the elders were placed, by that trying question proposed to them by our Saviour—"The<sup>1</sup> baptism of John, was it from heaven or of men ? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven ; he will say, Why then believed ye him not ?" Why doubt his testimony, so distinctly given, when you admit his Divine authority ? Since you believe that he was what he avowed himself to be—the forerunner, you must of necessity also admit that I am, what he uniformly declared me to be, the expected Messiah. "But and if we say, Of men ; all the people will stone us : for they be persuaded that John was a prophet."

<sup>1</sup> Luke xx. 4.

But the apostles of our Lord undertook not their office upon any such questionable grounds. To his *own works* he constantly appealed as the test of his Divine mission—as higher witness than was borne to him by the Baptist. “If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not; but if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works<sup>1</sup>.” The same miraculous power which he himself thus displayed, he imparted to his disciples in proportion to the strength of their faith, and empowered them, as they went preaching the doctrines of the kingdom, to give full proof that, like His, *their* mission was divine. “Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received; freely give<sup>2</sup>.” So vast was the effect thus produced, so mighty was the blow thus levelled at the power of the prince of darkness, so great the triumph achieved, so rapid and conspicuous the overthrow, that we hear our Lord himself declaring, “I beheld Satan, as lightning, fall from heaven<sup>3</sup>.”

It was not, however, till after his departure from earth, that the full effect was displayed. Nor was it till the day of Pentecost, that the prediction of the Baptist was fully verified, “he shall

<sup>1</sup> John x. 37, 38.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. x. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Luke x. 18.

baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." On that memorable day, when the apostles were all assembled "with one accord in one place, there came suddenly a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of *fire*, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance<sup>1</sup>"—a miracle, which not only communicated to the apostles a full knowledge of the doctrines of the Gospel, but the power also of preaching them, to every nation under heaven, in its own language.

3. The last instance that we shall now cite, in which the apostles were manifestly superior to the Baptist, is the peculiar nature of their doctrine. That which John more particularly inculcated was Repentance. His endeavour was to recall the Jews to that state of moral discipline which would have prevailed had the Mosaic Law been faithfully obeyed. But that dispensation itself, even in its most perfect state, was only the shadow of good things to come and destined soon to pass away :

<sup>1</sup> Acts ii. 3, 4.

the light of its glory to fade at the near approach of the Sun of righteousness, and the Baptist himself, the last and greatest of its ministers, to share in the general fate. Abraham had rejoiced to see Christ's day afar off, and he saw it and was glad ; kings and prophets had desired to see it, but were not able. But the highly-favoured Baptist, emphatically styled the Prophet of the Highest, *did* see it, and did glory in announcing it to the world. But still, exclusive of that testimony which he had to bear to the true light, his task was merely the correction of ancient abuses, the repression of growing evils, the purification of that inveterate pollution which, like a leprosy, had infected the whole body of the state. He stood, as it were, at the outer court of the Temple of the New Jerusalem, sprinkling with water those who were desirous to worship with the congregation of the Lord ; but, even thus purified, they were still counted unworthy to enter into the immediate presence of their God in his holy place.

But under the Christian dispensation, St. Paul, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, assures us, that our situation is totally different. " Christ," saith he, " hath obtained a better ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant,

which was established upon better promises. Having, therefore, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an High Priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water<sup>1</sup>.”

I have cited this passage very fully, because it specifically embraces, in one view, most of those purely Christian doctrines which are separately found in almost every page of the New Testament. Christ is here represented as the Mediator of the New Covenant of Grace, by which we are justified through faith; not of the Old Covenant of Works, which, unless assisted, we were utterly unable to perform. Having our penitent “hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience by the blood of Jesus,” we are thus enabled to present ourselves as justified before God, with perfect reliance upon his infinite mercies,—in the full assurance of faith. It is this faith, with all its manifold fruits—this active, lively, efficient faith, displaying itself by piety towards God and charity towards man, that

<sup>1</sup> Heb. x. 19—22.

forms the most prominent principle in the Christian system. Its peculiar importance is at once perceptible, from the manner in which our Saviour enforces it, even from the beginning to the close of his ministry. For at the commencement of it, immediately after his baptism and temptation, he “came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand : repent ye, and *believe* the Gospel<sup>1</sup>.” This Faith is, indeed, a most important addition to that Repentance so earnestly inculcated by the Baptist ; and when taken together, in their largest sense, they form what St. Paul declares that he testified both to the Jews and to the Greeks, as the sum and substance of all religious and useful truth—“repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ<sup>2</sup>.”

But though the Baptist inculcated with the utmost zeal the doctrine of repentance, it was reserved for the Gospel to enforce it by motives and arguments of far mightier power. The truth of this remark is fully established by St. Paul, in his address to the Athenians. Speaking of the period that preceded the resurrection of our

<sup>1</sup> Mark i. 14, 15.

<sup>2</sup> Acts xx. 21.



Saviour, he observes, “ the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men every where to repent ; because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained ; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead<sup>1</sup>.” The certainty that there is a future state of reward and punishment, that obstinate impenitence will be condemned at the Day of Judgment, and that the Judge who will sentence is the Redeemer who died to save us,—is an incitement to repentance apparently irresistible. Christianity is, in truth, as it has been most justly termed, “ the religion of high motives.” Many—nay, most of our duties to God and to man, are discernible by the simple light of nature ; but that is of little avail, unless there are *motives*, powerfully impelling us to carry them into effect—and such motives are most amply supplied by the Gospel, and by the Gospel alone.

Still further may we remark, that Christianity comes to our aid when nothing else can afford us support or consolation. The act of repentance is, from its own nature, full of pain and bitterness.

<sup>1</sup> Acts xvii. 31.

In Scripture it is expressed by cutting off a right hand and plucking out a right eye. Remorse, which is intimately allied to it, is frequently found a punishment too great for the spirit of man to sustain. Unless the mind can turn itself to some sure source of comfort, it is liable to be overwhelmed in despair. Or, not unfrequently, when the favourite passion has been abandoned, the sinner, feeling a void which he knows not how to supply, recurs to his former course, and “the last state of that man is worse than the first<sup>1</sup>.”

Here, then, the Gospel interposes its soothing consolation between man and his misery. It calms the agitations of remorse, it cheers the darkness of despair, it strengthens the weakness of our nature, and satisfies the longing soul with things spiritual and divine. It is Faith, through the merits of Christ, in the pardoning mercy of God, which thus fills the soul with all joy and peace : “that Faith which is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen ;” which grasps in the distance of the invisible world, and presents to our view, in all the grandeur of immortal perfection, those things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor heart conceived ; but in

<sup>1</sup> Luke xi. 26.

which, "believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

From the preceding observations, these two very important practical lessons are clearly deducible: First, that good moral conduct is the best preparative for a sincere belief in the doctrines of the Gospel; and next, that without such belief, even the best moral conduct is insufficient for our eternal salvation. It is recorded of the people that heard our Saviour, and of the publicans, that they "justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John<sup>1</sup>;" that is, they proved, by a reformation of their conduct, the wisdom and justice of his counsel in calling them by the Baptist to repentance; and they consequently believed that Jesus was the Christ. But it is equally stated of the Scribes and Pharisees, that "they rejected the counsel of God against themselves, not having been baptized of him." Firmly attached to their vices, they declared that they needed no repentance; wedded to their inveterate prejudices, they resolved that they would have no faith; but rejected the counsel of God as unjust and unrighteous, and spurned at his offers of mercy.

<sup>1</sup> Luke vii. 29.

This is precisely the case, in our own times, with those who, living in this land of light, profess to disbelieve the doctrines of the Gospel. With a very few exceptions, it may fairly be said of those who have openly avowed themselves infidels, that, if we judge of them from the immorality of their lives, they have listened fully as much to their wishes as to their reason. It is decidedly and unquestionably the interest of such persons that the whole should be a fiction; that they should never hereafter be accountable for their actions, but should perish in the dust like the beasts of the field. From the truth of Revelation they have nothing to hope, but every thing to fear. He, on the contrary, whose "hands are clean, whose heart is pure; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully: he shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation." "If any man," saith our Saviour, "will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God<sup>1</sup>."

The other practical lesson deducible from this subject is, that without a sincere belief in the doctrines of the Gospel, the best moral conduct

<sup>1</sup> John vii. 17.

is insufficient for our eternal salvation. Had the reformation of moral conduct been enough, that repentance, inculcated by the Baptist, would not have been regarded merely as the means of preparing men's hearts for believing in Christ. In many parts of Scripture the indispensable necessity of faith is stated in the strongest terms. "Without faith," saith the Apostle, "it is impossible to please God<sup>1</sup>." Language more expressive or more forcible is hardly to be conceived. And yet there are men (I fear not a few), who, calling themselves Christians, are quite content to preserve a becoming decency in their moral conduct, but hold as very unimportant the peculiar doctrines of Christianity.

This error proceeds from the false pride of intellect—from an overweening idea of their own superior knowledge—of that spurious knowledge which puffeth up, but will never make them wise unto salvation. Nothing is so cheerless—so irrational, as this defective belief. For it deprives them of that confidence towards God which, while it purifies and hallows the enjoyments of the present life, forms the only sure ground for hope of blessedness in the life to come. Till they can

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xi. 6.

demonstrate the faith of Christ to be false, their only safety consists in believing it to be true, and in strenuously exerting themselves, by devout meditation, and by earnest prayer to the Spirit of Truth, for the attainment of the full belief of the essential doctrines of the Gospel. And in order that their minds may be awakened to a sense of its infinite importance, let them listen, and tremble while they listen, to these solemn words, with which the Baptist closed his public ministry: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him<sup>1</sup>."

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<sup>1</sup> John iii. 36.

## SERMON XI.

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### THE ATONEMENT.

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John i. 29.

*Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.*

FROM the union of the Divine nature with the human, in the person of our Saviour, there arise such mighty contrasts, such combinations of opposite qualities, that the peculiar characteristics of the most strikingly different objects of Creation are there found united in their highest perfection. He who was “despised and rejected of men” is also “the mighty Counsellor”—the “desire of all nations:” He who was “found in the form of a servant” is also the “King of glory:” the feeble “light shining in a dark place” is also “the Sun of righteousness that should arise with healing in his wings:” the “tender plant without form or comeliness” is also an image of Him whose “countenance was as Lebanon, excellent as the

cedars :” and the “ Lion of the tribe of Judah is also the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” As the last figure alluded to is that under which our Lord is represented by the Baptist in the text, it shall therefore form the subject of our present consideration.

First, then, we may remark, that it denotes his perfect purity and innocence. Although a lamb without blemish and without spot is the very emblem of innocence, it is quite inadequate to express, in its full extent, that guileless simplicity of mind, that immaculate purity of thought, word and deed, displayed by the Son of God. “ He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth<sup>1</sup>.” From his cradle to his grave, though he was on every hand beset by enemies eager to detect the least taint in his character, so far from any moral offence being imputed to him, we only hear urged against him, as matter of the most serious accusation, that “ he received sinners, and did eat with them.” The compassionate kindness of his heavenly spirit, thus manifested toward those who were wandering in darkness and error, his enemies, from their pride and spiritual blindness, could neither comprehend nor endure. But even with

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 22.



all their virulence and bitterness of censure, while they reproached him as “the friend of publicans and sinners,” they could never bring forward one single act to prove him a partaker in their guilty deeds. It is true that they declared him to be leagued with infernal spirits, “casting out devils by Beelzebub the prince of the devils;” but éven the very miracles on which they founded this accusation were miracles of mercy, promoting at once the happiness of man and the glory of God. In consequence of his declaring God to be his Father, they accused him of blasphemy; but when, by his resurrection from the dead and ascension into heaven, he was declared to be “the Son of God with power<sup>1</sup>,” that accusation also fell to the ground. And so fell every charge, that malice could invent or calumny propagate, against the unspotted purity of the Lamb of God. With peculiar propriety, therefore, might one of the purest and most harmless objects in creation be employed to denote Him, who was thus “holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.”

Not only, however, does this figure denote his innocence and purity, but also his meekness, patience and resignation. Though he was the

<sup>1</sup> Rom. i. 4.

God of heaven, he appeared in the humble simplicity of a child. During his early years he was obedient to the will of his earthly parents. And in the language of perfect truth, he could appeal to the confirmed habit of his whole life, and exhort his disciples to profit by the example which he displayed for their imitation—"learn of me, for I am meek." When the succeeding period of his public ministry brought upon him a successive series of trials, every new trial was only another opportunity of proving, that in him patience had its perfect work. All the common ills of life he bore without a murmur. The faithlessness of friends and the injustice of enemies excited no complaint: the ingratitude of those whom his miraculous power had relieved, and the scornful neglect of those whom his wisdom had instructed, only made him "grieve at the hardness of their hearts:" and when amidst the ridicule and scoffing of an insolent multitude, thirsting for his blood, he bore the cross on which he was to expire, he went, calm and unresisting, "as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before his shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." "When he was reviled, he reviled not again, when he suffered, he threatened not," but repaid good for

evil, blessing for cursing, and in return for the most unjust, the most cruel treatment, he poured forth for his murderers the prayer of forgiveness. Nor did deeper sorrow than any that mortal power could produce, draw forth from his wounded spirit any other expression than that of the most submissive resignation. "O, my Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me," was the natural feeling of his agonized spirit, when the cup of divine wrath,—the cup which he drank for a guilty world, was presented, in its utmost bitterness, to his lips: but that prayer was speedily followed by a declaration, as perfectly meek, patient, and resigned, as language could express,—“not as I will, but as thou wilt<sup>1</sup>.”

The last important doctrine suggested by the expression, “the Lamb of God,” is that which is explicitly stated in the text,—his “taking away the sins of the world.” This, beyond every other part of his character, is to us of peculiar importance. For, however great his power, however infinite his wisdom, however humble his condition, or however exalted his majesty, had not the Son of God offered himself as a sacrifice and oblation to make full atonement for the sins of mankind,—all

<sup>1</sup> Mark xiv. 36.

else that he did and taught while sojourning on earth, would have been to us of no avail. "For by one man's disobedience, sin entered into the world, and death by sin"—death involving the destruction both of body and soul. Against the Sovereign of the universe, his Almighty Creator, his bountiful benefactor, man had rebelled. Moral pollution, like an incurable leprosy, had infected every faculty of the soul, and made him loathsome in his Maker's sight. Disorder was introduced into the fair system of the universe, the guilty offender stood defenceless at the bar of Eternal Justice, and "without shedding of blood there was no remission<sup>1</sup>." But throughout the regions of space there could nowhere be found blood—the blood of any created being—able to expiate the foul pollution. When the angels had sinned, there was none to save; and they are therefore "reserved in darkness under chains to the judgment of the great day." And what other fate must have awaited us, had not the Son of God, in the abundance of his mercy, stood forth as the willing victim for the sins of the world, saying, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God,"—to appease thy wrath, to satisfy thy justice and restore erring,

<sup>1</sup> Heb. ix. 22.

guilty, ungrateful man to the inheritance of immortal bliss!

Notwithstanding this manifestation of goodness so unparalleled, there have still been found some who have denied that this was an expiatory sacrifice, and have regarded the Death of Christ, not as an atonement for the sins of mankind, but simply as an attestation to the truth of his doctrines. That this opinion is in direct contradiction to the general tenour of Scripture seems undeniable; and it is from Scripture alone that we derive whatever knowledge we possess of the plan of our redemption. Our Redeemer is there termed the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." This comprehensive expression clearly denotes that, though he was only once offered, when at the end of the Mosaic dispensation, "he appeared," as St. Paul declares, "to take away sin by the *sacrifice* of himself," still was the healing efficacy of that sacrifice extended to those, who, from the earliest period of time, had with true faith offered up the typical victims. For man had no sooner become subject to sin, through the temptation of the devil, than God graciously consoled him with the prospect of deliverance through Jesus Christ, "who should bruise the

head of the serpent ;” while the serpent should bruise his heel ; or, in other words, visit his human nature with severe and painful afflictions.

We thus learn, from the first mention made of a Saviour in Scripture, that he was destined to suffer ; and it seems highly probable, though it is not absolutely so stated, that, in order to prefigure those sufferings, the Almighty accompanied the revelation of his will to our first parents, with an injunction, that living victims, without blemish and without spot, should be offered to him in sacrifice. For we find the practical observance of animal sacrifice prevailing in the very earliest ages ; while the voice of the Almighty, revealing his will, was still audibly meeting the human ear : as it is recorded, that “ by faith Abel offered unto God<sup>1</sup>” from the firstlings of his flock, whose blood was typical of the blood of Jesus, “ a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.” Such too was the sacrifice offered by Noah, which appeased the Divine wrath and drew down a blessing from heaven, accompanied by a promise from Jehovah himself, that the earth should never again perish by water. For “ Noah builded an altar unto the Lord, and

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xi. 4.

took of every clean beast and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt-offerings upon the altar. And the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not curse the ground any more for man's sake<sup>1</sup>." Such a method of expiating sin must evidently have proceeded from a source higher than human reason, which could never, even by its profoundest deductions, establish any necessary connexion between human crime and animal sacrifice. But no sooner does that institution appear to have been appointed by Him who knew what was in man, and could therefore best supply the wants of our nature by the revelations of his grace, than the human heart felt its healing influence, and clung to its future observance with an earnest solicitude, far beyond that which could have been inspired by unassisted reason. For in almost every region of the earth, even in those countries where dark idolatry prevails, and the typical nature of the ordinance and its reference to the Saviour's sacrifice are utterly unknown, such sacrifices have been the constant resort of the sinner, suffering under a deep sense of guilt and a dread of Divine vengeance.

<sup>1</sup> Gen. viii. 20, 21.

In such circumstances, the soul, feeling within itself no refuge or resource, looks abroad for some support, on which it may rely for exemption from merited punishment. It was in this state of helpless perplexity that the idolatrous king of Moab addressed to God's Prophet this most anxious and important enquiry : " Wherewithal shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God ? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old ? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams or with ten thousands of rivers of oil ? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul<sup>1</sup> ?" *He felt*—and every sinner under a sense of conviction must feel, that repentance, however indispensable, is not of itself enough. It cannot reconcile him to an offended God. It is not reparation : it is not satisfaction. As it cannot avert those injurious consequences which naturally flow from indulgence in guilty pleasure, nor be received as compensation for acts of injustice in the ordinary intercourse between man and man, so neither is it capable of restoring us to the Divine favour, which all of us have guiltily forfeited. But though human reason

<sup>1</sup> Micah vi. 6, 7.



plainly points out the insufficiency of repentance, in a matter of such infinite importance, we are not left to the direction of so uncertain a guide. For God hath graciously and expressly indicated in Scripture the way, by which only we can be restored to that favour—not by repentance alone, but by faith also in the infinite merits of our Redeemer's sufferings and death. For “he that believeth on the Son of God hath life, but he that believeth not, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him<sup>1</sup>.”

The first and most essential point of such belief is, that Christ was once offered; not merely to attest the truth of his doctrine—though that followed as a necessary consequence—but he was “offered to bear the sins of many<sup>2</sup>,” and “suffered, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God<sup>3</sup>.” In establishing this great truth, this fundamental doctrine of Christianity, the Law, the Prophets, and Apostles, most fully concur.

Speaking of Messiah in prophetic vision, Isaiah declares<sup>4</sup> that “he was wounded for our

<sup>1</sup> John iii. 36.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. ix. 28.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Pet. iii. 18.

<sup>4</sup> Chap. liii. 5.

transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities : the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed." The prophet dwells with peculiar emphasis upon this doctrine, and represents it with the utmost force under different forms ; but under every variety of expression employed, we find one uniform reference to the sacrificial atonement made by our Saviour's death. "All we like sheep have gone astray ; we have turned every one to his own way ; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall justify many ; for he shall bear their iniquities. He hath poured out his soul unto death ; and he was numbered with the transgressors ; and he bare the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."—Of these expressions, when viewed in connexion with the sacrifices under the Law, the full import at once becomes evident. For on the Great Day of Atonement, after a sin-offering had been made by sacrifice for the whole people, their transgressions were confessed over the Scape-goat and "put upon his head<sup>1</sup> ;" that is, were entirely transferred to it. "And the

<sup>1</sup> Lev. xvi. 21.

Goat," says the Jewish lawgiver, "shall bear upon him all their iniquities."—The comment upon these sacred rites, by St. Paul, leaves no doubt of the vicarious nature of the sufferings of Messiah, who, according to the prophesy of Daniel, "should be cut off, but not for himself, causing sacrifice and oblation to cease<sup>1</sup>;" and who, according to the Apostle, "appeared in the end of the world to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, and who, by his own blood, entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us<sup>2</sup>."

When such is the concurring voice of the Law, the Prophets, and Apostles, we cannot for a moment mistake the true meaning of our Saviour's words, when instituting that new sacramental memorial of his own sacrifice, which was the consummation of all that had preceded it: "this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins<sup>3</sup>." Let us then adhere with immovable steadfastness to the doctrine of the atonement, in this its plain, genuine and scriptural sense; ever remembering, with unspeakable gratitude, that, at the

<sup>1</sup> Dan. ix. 26, 27.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. ix. 26 and 12.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. xxvi. 28.

solemn period which we this day<sup>1</sup> commemorate, the Saviour of mankind “redeemed us from the curse of the Law, and bare our sins, in his own body, on the tree.”

Having thus considered the *doctrine* contained in the text, let us now briefly reflect upon the *practical* lessons suggested by it for our instruction.—Was our Saviour holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners? Let us then endeavour, through Divine grace, to purify ourselves even as he is pure. “Let us put away from us all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive the ingrafted word that is able to save our souls.” “Let us lay aside every weight and the sin that most easily besets us,” and contend for the glorious prize of immortal bliss.

Was our Saviour meek, patient, and resigned? Let us then cherish all those mild and gentle virtues, which form the brightest, the distinguishing ornament of the Christian character. Let us banish all envy, fretfulness and malignity; let us “seek peace and ensue it;” let us not harshly judge the faults of our neighbours, nor harbour in our bosom one bitter, one injurious thought, but

<sup>1</sup> Good Friday.

drive it from us as that which “biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder.” Under the weightiest afflictions let us not repine, but receive them as the chastisements of a Father to the children of his love. Let us reflect that, however grievous our punishment, it is still “less than our iniquity deserveth,” and let us humbly say, in the language of Him who suffered as never man suffered, “Not my will, O Father, but thine be done.”

Finally, was Christ our passover sacrificed for us? “Therefore let us,” according to the earnest exhortation of the Apostle—“Therefore let us keep the feast, not with the old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth<sup>1</sup>.” Let us embrace, with thankfulness, every opportunity that presents itself of commemorating that great sacrifice, which taketh away the sins of the world: and let us this day shew the sincerity of our faith and the fervour of our gratitude, by presenting ourselves in holy, humble, thankful adoration at the altar of our Saviour. There let us remember and gladly recount all the benefits he hath conferred upon us; the unutterable woes

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. v. 8.

from which he hath rescued us ; the glorious hopes of eternal bliss which, by his body that was broken, and his blood that was shed, he hath obtained for us ; and there, by solemn vow, by fervent prayer, by fixed, immovable resolution, let us devote ourselves, soul and body, to his service for ever and ever.

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## SERMON XII.

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CHRIST IN GLORY THE CHRISTIAN'S SAFETY.

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REV. i. 17, 18.

*And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last; I am he that liveth and was dead; and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.*

THE circumstances in which St. John is here presented to our observation are calculated to excite the deepest interest. He had long been deprived of the bodily presence of his Divine Master, whom he had served with such faithful affection, and by whom he had been honoured with such singular regard, as to be termed “the Disciple whom Jesus loved.” He had survived the whole of his fellow-servants in the work of the Apostleship, and had stood forth as the champion of the true faith, against the virulent attempts of its enemies—some denying the Divinity and some the humanity of Jesus Christ. At that advanced period of

his life, which peculiarly required the soothing consolation of his friends, he was separated from them all, and driven by the persecution of Domitian to the Isle of Patmos—an exile for the Word of God which he had faithfully preached; and for the testimony of Jesus which he had laboured strenuously to maintain.

In addition to these afflictions, he seemed in his exile to be doomed to new trials, still more awful and severe, when the terrors of the invisible world burst upon him with such unparalleled grandeur, that he was filled with amazement, and fell as dead at the feet of the Divine Being, who, though like unto the Son of man, was encircled with the overpowering splendour of celestial glory. It was under such circumstances that He, who never permits his faithful servants to be assailed by sufferings beyond what they are able to bear, addressed to him words of consolation, calculated not only to remove his present alarm, but to efface from his memory every distressful circumstance of his former life, and to give him a joyful anticipation of futurity. “Fear not, for I am the first and the last,” the unchangeable and eternal God. “Fear not, for I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore:” I am Jesus



who was crucified, but who rose again from the dead and ascended into the heavens. "Fear not; for I have the keys of hell and of death"—power absolute and uncontroled, not only over the invisible world, into which the spirits of the departed are removed at death, but even over death itself, in all its forms and in all its terrors. To the consideration of these three different sources of consolation, suggested to St. John, we shall now, therefore, proceed in their respective order.

In the first place, then, the Apostle is consoled by the assurance that Jesus Christ is the First and the Last, the unchangeable and eternal God. As the truth of this doctrine had been disputed at a very early period of the Christian Church, by Cerinthus and various other heretics, it was evidently most important for the correction of so fundamental an error, that an especial testimony, conspicuously bearing the impress of the Divine authority, should be given against it, before the last of the apostles should be laid in the grave. This great object was effected in the Revelation here made to St. John, under circumstances the most impressive that it is possible to conceive. So full and explicit, indeed, was the testimony thus conveyed to him, that were there no other

evidence for the Divinity of Christ than what is contained in the Apocalypse, and in the Gospel subsequently published by St. John, there seems more than enough to carry the fullest conviction of the truth of that doctrine to every reasonable and reflecting mind.

Having, however, already considered the scripture evidence for the Divinity of Christ<sup>1</sup>, I shall not enter further into that subject than is necessary to shew the nature of the doctrine contained in the declaration, "I am the first and the last." This passage is similar to that which occurs near the commencement of the same chapter, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, which was, and which is to come, the Almighty<sup>2</sup>." If regarded, as it has been by commentators in general, as referring to Jesus Christ, there is no passage in the whole volume of inspiration that more distinctly and fully proves Christ to be God. Not only are his eternity and immutability asserted by these expressions, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending," but in the original the phrase  $\delta \omega \nu$ , "which is," or according to a more strict interpretation, "*the being or the existing*

<sup>1</sup> See Sermon III.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. i. 8.

one," is that which corresponds to the Hebrew word Jehovah,—that ineffable name employed to denote the entire fulness of the Godhead ; and which, as appears from the Gospel of St. John, was peculiarly appropriated by our Saviour to himself, while he was upon earth. " Verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am<sup>1</sup>, " was his declaration to the Jews, who accounted it so decided an assumption of Divinity, that they instantly took up stones to cast at him as a blasphemer worthy of death, " making himself equal with God."—In addition to this, we find it also stated, that " he was, and is to come," that he is the Almighty—the Ruler, Director and Supreme Governor of All.

If, however, this passage is interpreted as referring to God *the Father*, then it is clear, from many places in the writings of St. John, where each of these phrases is applied separately and peculiarly to our Saviour, that, in power, dignity, and Divinity, He and the Father are one. For in the text the expressions, " I am the first and the last," are applicable only to Him that " liveth and was dead and is alive for evermore." Besides, in this very chapter it appears, that he who declared with a great voice as of a trumpet,

<sup>1</sup> John viii. 58.

“ I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last,” was He who in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks was “ like unto the Son of Man :” and in the following chapter it is added, “ These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like a flame of fire and his feet like fine brass.”—When consoling the Church at Smyrna under her tribulation, he represents himself under the same character of “ the First and the Last, who was dead and is alive.” Toward the conclusion of this Book, when he declares that he cometh to judge the world, that he may “ give every man according to his works,” he describes himself as “ Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the First and the Last<sup>1</sup> :” and then, as if to remove all possibility of doubt or mistake with regard to his person and identity, he declares, “ I, Jesus, have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches.”—Whatever interpretation, therefore is given to the first passage alluded to, which, though it in all probability refers to the Son, may still, by possibility, be applied to the Father ; there cannot exist the slightest shadow of doubt, that the other texts which we have cited do refer

<sup>1</sup> Rev. xxii. 13.

solely to Jesus Christ, making him equal with the Father.

The force of this inference will be greatly strengthened in our estimation, if we reflect that the terms here so repeatedly and so unquestionably applied to our Saviour, are proclaimed in the ancient Prophets as the infallible characteristics of Jehovah,—the *true* God ; in opposition to those *false* gods worshipped by idolatrous heathens. In the prophecy of Isaiah, the proofs of this assertion are equally numerous and remarkable. “Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called : I am he, I am the first, I also am the last. My hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens<sup>1</sup>.” “Thus saith the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer the Lord of Hosts ; I am the first and I am the last, and beside me there is no God<sup>2</sup>.”

From these instances, and a multiplicity of others equally strong, it appears that precisely the same phrases are employed indiscriminately to express the Eternity, Immutability and Self-existence both of the Father and of the Son ; and that, without an utter abuse and perversion of language, the conclusion is irresistible, that the Second

<sup>1</sup> Is. xlviii. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Is. xlv. 6.

Person of the Trinity is, in the fullest sense of the term, Jehovah, the self-existent, unchangeable and eternal God.

The next source of consolation suggested to St. John, was expressed in these words, "I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore."—The fact of our Saviour's death could by no one be attested more fully than by St. John. He had been an eye-witness of that awful event: for he stood at the foot of the Cross, on which his Divine Master expired amidst the tumult of surrounding Nature, which, wrapped in gloom and convulsed to its very centre, seemed to sympathize with the dying agonies of its Lord, and struck conviction to the heart even of the heathen beholder, that "This was truly the Son of God<sup>1</sup>." St. John also, with St. Peter, was the first of the disciples who proceeded to ascertain the fact, that Christ had risen from the dead, and he was the first also who beheld that place empty "where the Lord lay."

However destructive to the hopes of the disciples had been the death and sufferings of our Lord, and however incredulous they naturally were of his resurrection, they had received from

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxvii. 54.

his own lips the assurance that, according to the predictions of the Prophets, it behoved him to suffer these things, and to rise from the dead the third day, and to enter into his glory. St. John also, with the other disciples, had witnessed his ascension,—that event which abolished all their delusive expectations of Messiah's earthly grandeur, expanded their view to higher objects, and made them look for “a kingdom not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

To hear therefore, from the lips of him who declared himself the First and the Last, this assurance, “I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore,” could not but awaken in St. John's mind the liveliest feelings of hope, and confidence and love. For it naturally excited at once his recollection of that meek Being, whose mercy was so tender and whose forbearance was so great, that he would not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. It recalled the unparalleled goodness of Him, who himself bare our griefs and carried our sorrows; and who, in that hour of agony, in which his disciples failed to watch with him, apologized for their infirmities, by declaring that “the spirit indeed was willing, but the flesh was weak.”

It could not but impress him with a sense of the inextinguishable fervour of that Divine love which had led his Saviour to lay down his life for the sheep, and devote himself to a cruel and ignominious death, that he might purchase for them the glorious inheritance of immortal bliss.

When He who had declared himself the First and the Last, the unchangeable and eternal God, further shewed, that though exalted to heaven he still bent upon earth an eye of gracious regard,—still retained that affectionate, that boundless compassion, which, in the days of his flesh, had distinguished him from all the sons of men, nothing could possibly be more calculated to fill the Apostle with consolation and encouragement, amidst the dangers and difficulties by which he was surrounded. But that was not all. There was also in the words, “ Behold, I am alive for evermore,” the best, the only security which could be given, against the evils which might arise in distant futurity. For this protection extended not merely to the ills of time, which to the aged Apostle could naturally be but of short duration ; but likewise to those of eternity. It was this joyful assurance that cheered St. Paul also under every difficulty, and was the constant



theme upon which he dwelt with exultation, in the whole of his numerous writings. "Christ<sup>1</sup> being raised from the dead, dieth no more: death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once, but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God." For it was at once the proof that the sacrifice which he had offered for the sins of man was accepted of heaven, and that those who were willing to derive the benefits of salvation from that sacrifice, were infallibly safe; since "he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

The last source of consolation suggested to St. John is contained in these words, "I have the keys of hell and of death," that is, power absolute and uncontrouled, not only over that invisible world into which the spirits of the departed are removed at death, but even over death itself, in all its forms and in all its terrors.

According to the best commentators, the term here rendered "hell," means only the invisible abode of departed spirits. Of its precise nature, though little has been revealed to us, enough has been said by our Saviour himself, in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus<sup>2</sup>, to shew, that

<sup>1</sup> Rom. vi. 9, 10.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xvi. 23.

it was divided into two parts of a diametrically opposite character. What the *degree* of happiness or misery allotted to departed spirits in each of them may be ; or what proportion it may bear to the extreme of happiness or misery here, or to that which we shall experience after the Day of Judgment, it is beyond human wisdom in this our present state of ignorance to discover. But “ Paradise ” and “ Abraham’s bosom ” plainly denote high honour and enjoyment ; and the words of the suffering Sensualist, and his earnestness to procure even a moment’s ease, and his anxiety to prevent his brethren from sharing a similar fate, sufficiently depict the misery of that place of torment <sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> In reply to those who imagine, “ that separate souls must lie in a state of utter insensibility, till, being joined again to their bodies at the resurrection, they shall have the use of their benumbed and sleeping faculties restored,” Dr. Townson (Disc. xvii. p. 215) acutely remarks, that our Saviour says, “ Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul : but rather fear him, who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

“ If it were true, that body and soul became lifeless and insensible together, then he who killed the body, would, at the same time, and in the same sense, kill the soul also ; for the body can die only till the day of the resurrection ; and, till that day, the soul would die, if its life and faculties of thinking and perceiving depended only on its union with the body. But our Lord assures us, that men cannot kill the soul. It has, therefore, a separate life and power of perception.”

From that parable it also appears, that the transition to this state of happiness or misery was immediately consequent upon death. And this inference seems equally clear, from our Saviour's assurance given to the penitent thief upon the cross, "this day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." That the happy region, to which our Saviour applied this appellation, did not signify that heaven of heavens which is considered as the more immediate scene of the manifestation of the presence of God, is evident from his own explicit declaration to Mary Magdalene after his resurrection, that he had not yet "ascended to the Father<sup>1</sup>." This distinction is also indicated by St. Paul, in his account of those visions and revelations, with which he was so singularly favoured. For when he had been permitted to enter the third heavens, where he himself, with the redeemed of the Lord, should be admitted after the final judgment; to repress his eagerness for the immediate possession of that unparalleled glory and blessedness, he was also received into that Paradise, which his soul should enter at its separation from the body, and there heard mysteries incommunicable to earthly ears,

<sup>1</sup> John xx. 17.

and surpassing, in sublimity of expression, the powers of earthly language.

That our Lord himself entered this abode of departed spirits is evident, not only from his words upon the Cross already cited, but also from that passage in St. Peter's first Epistle, which at the period of the Reformation was thus interpreted by the Church of England, as a sanction for this doctrine; that "as Christ died and was buried for us, so also it is to be believed, that he went down into hell; for the body lay in the grave until his resurrection; but his Ghost, which he gave up, was with the Ghosts which were detained in prison, or in hell, and preached unto them, as the place in St. Peter doth testify<sup>1</sup>." The passage here referred to states, that "Christ was put to death in the flesh but quickened by the spirit, by which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison<sup>2</sup>," or "in safe keeping," as the phrase may strictly be rendered.

Without, however, entering into a minute examination of this passage, which undoubtedly is one of no common difficulty, we may refer confidently to another, as conclusive upon the subject,

<sup>1</sup> See Bishop Horsley's Sermons, xx.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Pet. iii. 18, 19.

from the very explicit manner in which it is referred to by St. Peter, in his first sermon on the day of Pentecost, as verified by our Lord's resurrection, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thy Holy one to see corruption<sup>1</sup>." The interpretation of this passage by the Apostle, gives this most pointed application to the words of the Psalmist: "He being a Prophet, and seeing this before, spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither did his flesh see corruption." Whence it is clear, that as his body was unquestionably in the grave, but still saw no corruption, so his soul was most certainly in hell, but was not left there longer than the third day, when, according to his own prediction while alive, it was re-united to his body.

It was then over this region, in which the departed Spirits of the Righteous enjoy rest and peace, expecting the consummation of their bliss, and where the wicked, in hopeless agony, await their final doom, that our Lord announced himself to St. John as invested with complete and uncontroled authority, "I have the keys of hell." Whatever terrors, therefore, that invisible world

<sup>1</sup> Acts ii. 27.

might possess, whatever the spirit of man in its restless anticipations of futurity might shadow forth, (and who does not, at some moments of his life, dwell with intense interest upon that world unknown?) the realization of those doubtful conjectures might safely be intrusted by St. John, and by every real Christian, to that merciful Saviour who possessed such boundless authority. As his love for mankind had brought him from the abodes of heaven to sojourn upon earth, so did it impel him to accommodate himself to every circumstance of human being, and in his state of humiliation, to enter even into that abode of Departed Spirits. But when he had accomplished the redemption of man and was exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on high, it was an essential part of his exaltation, that not only things in heaven and things in earth, but also things under the earth, should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the Glory of God the Father.

In the prosecution of this mighty plan, the last enemy which remained to be conquered was Death. That final triumph, in the cause of mankind, he assures St. John had been achieved. "Fear not: for I have the keys of hell and of death;" absolute and indisputable dominion over

that implacable enemy, who hath tyrannized over a subjugated world from the period of Adam's transgression, and who will still tyrannize over the last of his offspring to the end of time. But at the final consummation of all things, my righteous people shall be for ever freed from those slavish fetters, death itself shall be cast into that lake of fire, and the weakest, and meanest, and humblest of my followers shall be enabled to exclaim, in the grateful exultation of their hearts, "Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ<sup>1</sup>."

From the doctrine thus stated and illustrated may be deduced two important practical consequences. First, that if we are true and faithful disciples of Christ, we may safely commit ourselves to his guardian care, both in time and in eternity. For He in whom we have believed is not only the self-existent, unchangeable, and eternal God, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; but also that gracious Being, who died to deliver us from the pains of everlasting death, and who ever liveth to secure to us the inestimable blessings of redemption. When, therefore, the ills of life gather thick around us, when the

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 57.

terrors of eternity are unfolding themselves to our view ; though nature, in frailty, may recoil from the awful sight, yet may each of us strengthen our hearts with the thought, that we are still under the Almighty protection of our Lord and Saviour, and say, in the language of the Psalmist, “ Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil ; for thou art with me ; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me ; thou wilt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.”

There is yet another practical lesson connected with the doctrine in the text, full of terror and alarm to the wicked,—that at their departure from this life, they will enter immediately upon a state of penal suffering. From the nature of the human mind, punishment distant or indefinitely deferred loses much of its salutary influence. “ Because sentence upon evil deeds is not executed speedily,” saith Solomon, “ therefore the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil.” If then there be any among us, who, from our very limited knowledge of the invisible world, think that punishment will not be executed at all, or that it will be deferred to some distant, some indefinite day, let such persons be assured that they



are deceiving themselves to their eternal ruin. For, could we draw aside that veil which separates this world from the world of spirits, we should behold the Divine indignation descending upon the head of impenitent sinners, and overwhelming them at their departure from this life in instant misery. That Saviour, whose offers of mercy they had obstinately despised here, will there be found their implacable enemy. For as certainly as He liveth and was dead, and is alive for evermore, shall they be delivered over to that death of the soul, which shall be felt in all its augmented bitterness at the final Judgment, when they shall be abandoned as a hopeless prey to the worm which never dieth, and to the fire which never shall be quenched.

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## SERMON XIII.

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### NATURE AND OBLIGATION OF THE CHRISTIAN SABBATH.

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ST. JOHN XX. 19.

*Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut, where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.*

HAD it been the object of the Sacred Writers to exhibit, in one comprehensive view, a system of Christian doctrine and discipline complete in all its parts, many subjects of the greatest importance, which are now alluded to as if incidentally, or mentioned as matters of universal notoriety, or left to be collected by inference, would doubtless have been placed in a more clear and conspicuous light. But nothing appears to have been more foreign to their intention. Hence does it often become necessary to examine, with the utmost diligence, many portions of the Sacred Records, where doctrines of the highest import-

ance are barely indicated, and would lie partially obscured or entirely concealed, amid the circumstances of the narratives in which they are introduced, unless thence elicited by a careful comparison of Scripture with Scripture.

Viewing the text as a striking illustration of these remarks, let us proceed to consider the important instruction contained in it;—first, with regard to the Time, so particularly specified, at which our Lord appeared to the Disciples—the evening of the same day on which he had risen from the dead—the first day of the week; next, that benefit which the Disciples received, and which we, when devoutly occupied with our religious duties, are encouraged to expect, the confirmation of our faith, by our Saviour's benediction,—the blessing of peace; and then conclude by inquiring into the manner in which the discharge of such duties and the expectation of such blessings should lead us to spend the Christian Sabbath.

With regard to the Time so particularly specified, at which our Lord appeared to his disciples, it was the evening of the first day of the week. We are told in the Book of Genesis, that when God had finished the heavens and the earth, and

all the host of them, he rested on the seventh day from all the work which he had made. “And God blessed the seventh day and *sanctified* it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made<sup>1</sup>.” By the blessing that he pronounced upon it, he declared it the source of good to those rational creatures whom he had appointed to be the lords of his new creation; and in sanctifying, he set it apart from common purposes, that it might be devoted to such as were spiritual and religious. The rest that the Creator is represented as enjoying after his six days’ work could not be for himself, since “He fainteth not, neither is weary;” nor could that character of holiness impressed upon the day be for the increase of sanctity in Him, to whom every day was holy; but God blessed and hallowed it for the special observance and benefit of those rational beings, whose bodies would find refreshment by a suspension of their toil, and whose souls would be elevated, purified and strengthened by stated periods of devout communion with their Maker.

It is true that no account of the celebration of the Sabbath is found in the history of the antedi-

<sup>1</sup> Gen. ii. 3.

luvian fathers of mankind. But thence to infer, as many have done, that the observance of it was utterly neglected, were to draw the most extensive conclusion from the very narrowest premises. When we reflect, that the whole account of events, which occupied the space of nearly two thousand years, is comprised in a few short pages--in seven chapters of man's first history,—we must at once perceive the unreasonableness of expecting any minute detail. But it seems very improbable that our first father, who had been accustomed to enjoy communion with his God in the peaceful abode of Paradise, would not frequently be disposed to withdraw himself from his ordinary occupations, and devote a portion of his time to the service of his Maker. And as he and his posterity had been condemned to eat their bread in the sweat of their brow, an opportunity for performing this religious service would best be secured by the fixed periodical return of that holy rest, to which one day in seven had been already consecrated.

At the conclusion of the long period preceding the Deluge, even when all flesh had corrupted its way, we still find reference to this peculiar division of time. For not only were seven days spent in

collecting the animals into the ark by the Patriarch Noah; but, at two separate intervals of seven<sup>1</sup> days he sent forth the dove—as if on the seventh day he expected some signal blessing—some grateful indication that the anger of the Lord was appeased. From the vestiges that we still trace of the celebration of this day among the nations of the world, it would appear to have prevailed among the descendants of Noah, and the recollection of it never afterwards to have been entirely effaced.

But in whatever manner it was observed in the patriarchal ages, the regular celebration of it had probably been interrupted in Egypt, or placed under some severe restraint in that land of intolerable bondage; so that liberty was demanded from Pharaoh, by the authority of heaven, to worship the God of Israel in the wilderness. But that the sabbath was then unknown to the Israelites is evidently not the fact. For, in the Sixteenth Chapter of Exodus, we find Moses referring to the sabbath as to an institution with which they were familiarly acquainted, when he directed them to collect a double portion of manna on the sixth day, that by resting on the seventh, they might refrain from the violation of

<sup>1</sup> Gen. viii. 10, 12.

the sabbath<sup>1</sup>. As this memorable circumstance occurred *prior* to the delivery of the law at Mount Sinai, it distinctly proves, that the promulgation of the fourth commandment in the presence of assembled Israel, was, in fact, a solemn recognition of an institution already existing. Even the commandment itself may be fairly adduced as confirming the same inference. For it does not enjoin the Israelites to set apart a particular day as a sabbath, but to “remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy,”—which very terms imply a previous acquaintance with it. It is further evident, that the reason assigned for such observance has a direct reference to the work of creation: and the commandment clearly refers the divine sanctification of the day to the period of the creation, not to that of the delivery of the law; for it does not state that God, now for the first time blesses and hallows the seventh day, but specifies a former period when he “blessed and hallowed it, because he had rested on it from all his works<sup>2</sup>.”

It is true that, subsequently to the delivery of the law, we find a variety of reasons assigned to the Israelites peculiarly, for the more rigid en-

<sup>1</sup> Exod. xvi. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Exod. xx. 8—11.

forcement of the strict observance of the sabbath. “ Verily, my sabbaths ye shall keep, saith the Lord : for it is a sign between me and you, throughout your generations, that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you<sup>1</sup>.” In the repetition of the decalogue in the book of Deuteronomy, the further reason assigned for keeping the fourth commandment is this, “ Remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence, through a mighty hand and by a stretched-out arm : therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day<sup>2</sup>.” But that these reasons for obedience to God, as their sanctifier and deliverer from Egyptian bondage, did not, could not abrogate that which bound them, as well as all mankind, to Him as their great Creator, is evident from this most express command : “ Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever : for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed<sup>3</sup>.”

We may therefore safely adopt this reasoning

<sup>1</sup> Exod. xxxi. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. v. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Exod. xxxi. 16, 17.



of the Apostle, upon a similar subject, in his Epistle to the Galatians ; “ And this I say, that the ordinance which was confirmed before of God, at the beginning of the world, the *law*, which was two thousand five hundred years after, could not disannul, so that it should make that ordinance of none effect <sup>1</sup>.” “ An institution of this antiquity, and of this general importance,” says a late most distinguished prelate <sup>2</sup> of our own church, “ could derive no part of its sanctity from the authority of the Mosaic law : and the abrogation of that law no more releases the worshippers of God from a rational observation of the sabbath, than it cancels the injunction of filial piety, or the prohibitions of theft and murder, adultery, calumny, and avarice. The worship of the Christian Church is properly to be considered as a restoration of the Patriarchal, in its primitive simplicity and purity : and of the Patriarchal worship the sabbath was the noblest, and perhaps the simplest rite.”

The sabbath having been thus, at Mount Sinai, instituted afresh, and loaded with a multitude of observances, became, like many other parts of the Mosaical system, typical. It formed a part of that

<sup>1</sup> Gal. iii. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Bishop Horsley, Sermon xxii.

ceremonial system,—“that hand-writing of ordinances,” which the Apostle declares that Christ “took out of the way, nailing it to his cross:” and from which he therefore exempts his converts at Colosse, in these express words: “Let no man judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of an holiday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days, which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ<sup>1</sup>.” What clearer proof can we require than this, that the Jewish sabbath, that is, the sabbath as far as it was strictly and peculiarly Jewish, passed as directly into the first day of the week, as the ordinance of circumcision into baptism, or the Passover into the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Of these two *new* ordinances, indeed, we have the actual institution recorded; and with regard to the *old*, we only know, that they perished with the rest of the ceremonial system.

That the observance of the Jewish sabbath was thus also entirely abandoned by all Christians, in every country and of every denomination, is an equally acknowledged fact. But that the seventh portion of man’s time, which had been hallowed at the beginning of the world, should ever have

<sup>1</sup> Col. ii. 17.

been desecrated by the apostles was utterly impossible ; especially after they had heard their Master not only expressly declare himself Lord of the Sabbath, but also that the sabbath was made for man<sup>1</sup> ;”—not for the Jew only, but for man, both in his individual and collective capacity,—for man, under every diversity of circumstance and situation,—for man in every region of the globe, which is visited by the light of divine revelation. Though rejecting the Jewish sabbath, they kept most devoutly one day in seven as holy to the Lord. For wherever the Gospel was preached, there also the first day of the week, or as it was denominated by St. John in the Apocalypse and by the primitive Christians generally, the Lord's Day, was universally hallowed.

Whether the day itself was sanctified by that stupendous event, the resurrection of our Redeemer from the grave, which was of itself more than sufficient to stamp it as the most memorable day since the world began ; or by Christ's own verbal command, when, before his ascension, he instructed the disciples in things concerning the kingdom of God, it was in either case clearly an institution constantly celebrated by the apostles,

<sup>1</sup> Mark ii. 27, 28.

and its origin, therefore, not referable to any subsequent age. For, in the same chapter from which our text is taken, we are told that “after eight days” (that is, at the commencement of another week, both days inclusive,) “the disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.” In various places in the history of the apostles, the same habit of assembling at this stated period is distinctly expressed. Thus, “upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread<sup>1</sup>;” that is, to celebrate the sacrament of our Lord’s Supper, Paul preached unto them at Troas.

But previous to that period the first day of the week had become for ever memorable by another miraculous and stupendous event,—the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the day of Pentecost, when the apostles “were all with one accord in one place<sup>2</sup>.” And in the first Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, we find him repeating to them the injunctions which he declares that he had given to the Galatians, and which speedily became, as appears from the concurrent testimony of history

<sup>1</sup> Acts xx. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Acts ii. 1.

both sacred and profane, the established practice throughout the Christian world. “ Now concerning the collection for the Saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him <sup>1</sup>. ”

It is thus, as hath been already observed, that in examining with care the true meaning of the text, in which the first origin of the Christian sabbath is indicated, and in comparing Scripture with Scripture, we arrive at such a certainty with regard to that institution, as ought fairly to satisfy every reasonable and unprejudiced mind. And if we consider the general analogy pervading the whole system of the divine operations, from the beginning of time to the present hour, we cannot but feel that such an institution was naturally to be expected—was solemnly demanded by that astonishing event, which marked the completion of the great scheme of our redemption. For as God, when he called the world from nothing into existence by his creative word, and commemorated that glorious act by sanctifying one day in seven to the peaceful celebration of his praise

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2.

by all his rational creatures upon earth, from the beginning to the end of time, and as the restoration of his chosen people from servitude to liberty was signalized by a second promulgation of the sabbath, confirmed by the strongest ceremonial sanctions, and strengthened by a three-fold motive for its strictest observance; so when he called the world that was buried in spiritual darkness to the marvellous light of his salvation; when he had delivered from slavery the captives of Sin and Satan, and had restored them to the glorious liberty of the sons of God, it was natural, it was consistent with the whole course of Divine Providence, to commemorate the event, by hallowing that most joyful day on which our Saviour not only rested from all penal suffering, but rose triumphant over death and the grave, "leading Captivity captive."

It was consistent also with divine wisdom, that each person of the glorious Trinity should receive the due tribute of praise and honour on this most solemn day. The same God who said, "let there be light, and there was light," on the first great day of creation, is on this day on which he shined into our hearts, by the glorious Gospel of his Son, remembered with grateful emotion as

the Father of all spiritual light and life. The Son of God by whose blood that world was redeemed receives, on this his own appropriate day, the homage of blessing and glory and power. And that Holy Spirit whose influence was displayed at the feast of Pentecost, in the conversion of three thousand souls to the Christian Church, is still honoured by the pious worshipper in the Temple of the Lord, as the Author of all those spiritual influences by which we are sealed unto life everlasting.—So completely in celebrating this glorious day, the First Day of the week, do we offer the tribute of grateful devotion to the Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier of mankind.

We ought now to proceed to the consideration of the other important doctrines contained in the text ; but it will suffice at present to deduce, from what has been already stated, two motives of the deepest gratitude to Almighty God, for the blessings which we as Christians enjoy.

The first is, that we are permitted to worship according to our conscience, without fear or distraction of mind. The disciples, at the period mentioned in the text, encompassed with a thousand dangers, were assembled in secrecy and

retirement, for fear of the Jews, that they might thus shun the assaults of their ferocious enemies. There they lamented, with grief and mortification of heart, their vain belief that Christ, who had expired on the Cross, was He whom they had hoped would have redeemed Israel. Those hopes had been buried with him in the grave, and seemed to admit of no future resurrection. The cloud of unbelief had settled on their minds, and obscured even those visible proofs of their risen Redeemer, which were in bodily form displayed before their eyes. But *we* are enabled to assemble weekly in the house of our God, with our relatives, and friends, and neighbours, to unite with them in the calm and undisturbed tranquillity of our national worship. The prayer that is poured forth is directed less against temporal than spiritual foes : the strain of praise that ascends is unchecked and untainted by earthly fear. The Saviour whom we adore is He who has been worshipped for nearly two thousand years by myriads of the holiest, and best, and wisest of men, and He is. “ the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.” Encompassed by that glorious cloud of witnesses we enter the courts of the Most High, acknowledge with thankful hearts that Christ is



risen indeed, and that he is here, in the midst of us, converting this ancient Temple of his presence into the scene of such holy solemnity, that our hearts respond to that sentiment which burst forth from the lips of the Patriarch at Bethel: "How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven<sup>1</sup>."

Another motive of gratitude to which, in conclusion, I shall briefly allude, is the free and spiritual nature of that Christian sabbath which it is given us to enjoy. We are not, like the Jews, overwhelmed by a multitude of ceremonial observances, but are invited to join in exercises calculated to enlighten the understanding, to elevate the spirit, and to purify the heart. Neither are we called upon to commemorate, like the ancient fathers of mankind, the completion of that work of creation which was so soon defaced by man's fatal transgression; nor, like the Israelites, to celebrate that deliverance from the tyrannic yoke which their fathers had borne; nor to contemplate, with both, the distant prospect of a promised Messiah; but to exult in the joyful conviction, that He, the desire of all nations, is already come: that he hath delivered us from a load of oppres-

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xxviii. 17.

sion which must have inevitably sunk us to the depths of hell, and that we are created again unto new works, and to the consequent participation of an immortality of bliss. May we then be enabled, by the aid of divine grace, to walk worthy of the high vocation whereunto we are called, and so to employ this consecrated portion of our time, that when, at the resurrection of the Just, the day-spring of that eternal Sabbath shall dawn upon the world, and the Son of man shall come in his glory to judge all the nations of the earth, we may be prepared to ascend with him to the kingdom of light, and enter into that blissful rest which remaineth for ever for the people of God!

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## SERMON XIV.

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### DUTIES OF THE CHRISTIAN SABBATH.

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ST. JOHN XX. 19.

*Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.*

IN a former discourse upon these words we endeavoured show, from various parts of Scripture, the real nature of the Sabbath, the cause and object of its first institution, its second promulgation, and its final change from the seventh to the first day of the week. Let us now consider the inestimable benefit which the disciples received, when assembled together on that sacred day, and which we also, when devoutly occupied with our religious duties, are encouraged to expect from our Saviour's benediction—"Peace be unto you!"

It seems evident, from the occasion on which these words were uttered, from the connexion in

which they stand, and from the solemn repetition of them after our Saviour had, by an act of the most gracious condescension, confirmed the faith and consoled the hearts of the disciples, that they ought by no means to be considered as a common salutation, but as a solemn blessing, communicating great spiritual benefits. Without attempting an enumeration of all those spiritual benefits, or a description of that peace of God which passeth all understanding, we shall endeavour to show, by reference to Scripture, the prominent place that is assigned to it in the Christian system.

When the Prophet Isaiah foretold the Messiah's coming, he designated him as "the Prince of Peace<sup>1</sup>: of the increase of whose government and peace there should be no end." When his birth at Bethlehem was proclaimed by the Heavenly Host, the blessing that they announced was "on earth, peace<sup>2</sup>." "Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord!" was the acclamation that burst forth on his triumphant entry into Jerusalem; "peace," not merely on earth, but "in heaven, and glory in the highest<sup>3</sup>." The commission which he gave to his apostles on their going forth to preach the Gospel of the kingdom,

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah ix. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Luke ii. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Luke xix. 38.

was of a similar character: "Into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house." That this was no unmeaning salutation appears evident from that further injunction, "If the Son of Peace be there, if the house be worthy, your peace shall rest upon it; if not, it shall return to you again<sup>1</sup>."

The same spirit of peace which was thus to characterize the preaching of the apostles, was also conspicuous in their writings. St. Paul, in the commencement of the Epistle to the Romans, pronounces upon his converts at Rome this fervent benediction: "Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!" This benediction, indeed, is found in the commencement of each of his Epistles, except in that to the Hebrews, an omission which is thus amply supplied at its close<sup>2</sup>: "Now the God of Peace, that brought again from the dead that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will!" "Grace unto you, and peace be multiplied!" saith St. Peter. "Grace be with you, mercy and peace," saith St. John, "from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and

<sup>1</sup> Luke x. 6., and Matt. x. 13.    <sup>2</sup> Heb. xiii. 20, 21.    <sup>3</sup> 1 Pet. i. 2.

love<sup>1</sup>!” “Mercy unto you, and peace, and love be multiplied<sup>2</sup>!” saith St. Jude. In short, though on different occasions various terms are employed to convey the apostolical benediction, yet (what is very remarkable) in every instance, “Peace” is invariably expressed, as if forming an essential and indispensable part of it.

The instances already cited tend strongly to show the importance of the benefits attached by the disciples to that blessing of peace, which was pronounced by our Saviour to the disciples when assembled together on the first day of the week; but if any thing could more forcibly impress them with a sense of its inestimable value, it was his last solemn and affectionate address to them immediately before his agony and crucifixion. In terms the most emphatic, he then consoled their hearts and confirmed their faith, by bequeathing to them an inheritance infinitely surpassing, according to his own declaration, the utmost that earth could bestow. “Peace<sup>3</sup> I leave with you; my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In

<sup>1</sup> 2 John i. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Jude 2.

<sup>3</sup> John xiv. 27.

the world ye shall have tribulation : but be of good cheer ; I have overcome the world.”

When such was the tenor of our Saviour’s parting address to his disciples, how great must have been their confidence and joy on hearing again the blessing of peace pronounced by that voice of which they had so often witnessed the miraculous power ! For they must at once have felt assured, that he who had triumphed over the powers of darkness could control the rage of their enemies,—could dispel their doubts and fears, and restore them to that stedfast serenity of mind which arises from a conviction of forgiveness of sins and of reconciliation with God ; from immoveable faith, from joyful hope, and from those multiplied privileges and blessings which they were destined to derive from the glorious Gospel of peace.

Since such were some of the inestimable advantages conferred by our Lord upon the disciples, when assembled together on the first day of the week, and since we have his own express declaration, “ Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word ;” and “ wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst

of them," let us now, therefore, proceed to consider the thoughts and occupations appropriate to that sacred day and the manner in which we ought to spend it, in order that we may become partakers of the blessed effects of our Saviour's benediction.

In performing the services of our religion, it is obviously both our duty and our interest to follow, as closely as possible, the example of the primitive Christians. Like the disciples on their way to Emmaus, upon the day of our Lord's resurrection, we should dwell in thought upon the sufferings and death of Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet, mighty in deed and word, before God and all the people: that *our* hearts "may burn within us" like *theirs*; when, beginning at Moses and all the prophets, "He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." Like others of the disciples who were gathered together, as is described in the text, upon the first day of the week, we should labour to impress our minds with the full evidence of our Lord's resurrection—a fact which, to the devout worshipper, will ever continue to be the first object of inquiry, as forming the main proof of the accomplishment of our redemption. The result



of such inquiry, if sincerely made, will be that conviction which was produced in the minds of the disciples by the gracious words which our Saviour uttered, by the acts which he condescended to perform, and by his giving them a pledge of the full effusion of the Holy Spirit, when “he breathed on them, and said unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.” When that pledge had been fully redeemed at the day of Pentecost, the same theme was resumed by St. Peter, with a force and energy that carried conviction at once to no less than three thousand souls; who continued stedfast in the apostle’s doctrine and fellowship, and “in breaking of bread<sup>1</sup>,” that is, the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, and in prayers.

If we seek still further evidence of the thoughts and occupations of the early Christians upon the first day of the week,—we have the testimony of a distinguished heathen adversary, in these express words, addressed to one of the wisest and mightiest of Roman Emperors<sup>2</sup>: “The Christians are wont to meet together, on a stated day, before it is light, and sing among themselves a hymn to Christ as God; and bind themselves by an oath, not for

<sup>1</sup> Acts ii. 42.

<sup>2</sup> See Pliny’s Letter to the Emperor Trajan, Epist. x., 97.

the purpose of committing any wickedness, but to abstain from theft, robbery, and adultery; never to falsify their word, nor to deny a pledge committed to them, when called upon to return it. When these things have been performed, it is their custom to separate, and then come together again to a meal, which they eat in common in a harmless and inoffensive manner.”—In following such examples as these, we obviously comply with that apostolic injunction, “not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, but to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom: teaching and admonishing one another in songs and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord<sup>1</sup>.”

Such high spiritual exercises in the public service of the sanctuary evidently presuppose an entire abstraction from the common business of life, from its pursuits, its pleasures, and its cares, united with a fervent devotion to the study of things heavenly and divine. The same great objects that so deeply engaged the thoughts of the disciples remain unchanged, and will remain to the end of time the sublime theme of contemplation to the Christian worshipper. The mercies of God

<sup>1</sup> Col. iii. 16.

through Christ to a lost world, the development of the great scheme of salvation in the writings of Moses and the Prophets, the verification of those types and predictions by the sufferings and death, resurrection and ascension of our blessed Redeemer, with all those unfathomable mysteries of redemption into which angels themselves desire to look: such are the objects that should excite the grateful emotions of our hearts on the first day of the week, when we enter these sacred walls, when we bow down in penitential sorrow at the footstool of the Divine Majesty, and unite together in the celebration of the praises of our God.

The nature of these solemn duties seems sufficiently to indicate the manner in which we ought to spend the large portion of that day which cannot be devoted, or at least which never is devoted, to the *public* service of the sanctuary. How utterly shocked should we have been by the inconsistent conduct of our Lord's disciples, had we found them rushing forth from their retirement, from that spot hallowed by their Saviour's presence, to mingle in the round of worldly business, or in scenes of amusement and frivolity, or in the haunts of unhallowed and guilty pleasure? Should

we not have felt, that it was pouring contempt upon that sacred day on which their crucified Lord had triumphed over death and the grave? And can we then ever forget that to *us* that day is equally sacred? That it is the pledge and seal of our final deliverance from death and hell? It is the solemn covenant, which the Lord of Hosts, our Redeemer, hath established between Him and us for ever, to be observed “as a memorial to the Lord throughout all generations.”

Are there then any among us who, after performing the public services of the day, think themselves entitled to spend the remainder of it entirely in such a manner as may best suit their interest, their convenience, their pleasure, and never feel that they are thus flagrantly transgressing the solemn command of Him who hath sanctified it wholly to himself? I fear there are but too many, who though they would unwillingly forego the name of Christians and the high privileges which they justly attach to that name,—yet devote a large portion of the day to secular occupation—to correct the errors, to supply the deficiencies of their worldly transactions in the week that is past, and to anticipate the labours of that which is commencing. If they have any extraor-

dinary object to be accomplished, any distant journey to be undertaken, do they not studiously select the sabbath for that additional toil, and desecrate it by that profane pursuit? How little do they heed either the command or the example of Him who rested from all his works, and hallowed the sabbath to himself! Amid the calm repose of the Christian world, that salutary cessation from bodily toil—so refreshing to the spirit, so soothing to the heart, they are for ever labouring in the service of Mammon, for ever seeking the meat that perisheth, but are regardless of that which endureth unto everlasting life. They are “like the troubled sea when it cannot rest: whose waters cast up mire and dirt<sup>1</sup>.”

But it is not business alone that interferes with the observance of the Lord's day. Pleasure, too, has its calls, and those of a power seldom to be resisted. Look around you, and see how the votaries of pleasure, both among the rich and the poor, of every age, sex and condition, in this great city, are fluttering in the deceitful glare of sinful enjoyment, and perishing without hope, because without adequate preparation for the world to come. Strangers they are, and must thus ever

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah lvii. 20.

continue to be, to that enjoyment of God which the prophet Isaiah describes as the reward of those who duly observe this sacred day. "If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable ; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasures, nor speaking thine own words, then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord<sup>1</sup>."

But how, it is often said, how is the whole length of the day to be consumed in religious exercises ? Is it to be spent in the abstraction from all enjoyment—from all recreation—from all pleasurable amusement ? This question is generally put by those who feel the sabbath to be an intolerable burden, who know nothing of religion but its empty forms, who give nothing of religious service to God but what they dare not withhold : who frequent the house of prayer either from a mere compliance with the custom of their country, or from a wish to stifle the admonitions of conscience ; but who enter there with thoughts wandering upon the vanities of the world, with cold affections and languid desires, present in

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah lviii. 13.

body but absent in spirit, drawing near to God with their lips and honouring him with their mouths, while their hearts are far from him. Can it then be expected of such formal worshippers, that having thus reluctantly discharged a debt which they felt themselves constrained to pay, they will devote any remaining portion of the day as a free-will offering of gratitude to the Father of mercies? Will they not more eagerly seek to indulge their natural desires, and to indemnify themselves by such indulgence for the irksome privations which they have been previously enduring. However unwise or unworthy of a professed worshipper before the heavenly throne, such, it must be confessed, is but too frequently the practice of many who, on the first day of the week, appear in that character in the congregation of the Lord.

But how widely different are the feelings and occupations of the really devout Christian! He regards the sabbath not merely as a day on which his body ought to rest from labour and his mind from worldly cares, but he keeps it in spirit and in truth as the Lord's day. For when the public service of the sanctuary is over, and he returns to his own home, so far from dismissing the thought

of heavenly things from his mind, he earnestly strives to cherish and improve every spiritual emotion which the preaching of the Word of God may have awakened within him. He delights to meditate on the mercies vouchsafed to him by heaven, to ascribe every blessing that he enjoys to the Giver of all good things; and, as his heart overflows with gratitude and praise, he longs to dedicate himself to the service of his Divine Benefactor. In this blissful frame of mind he opens his Bible, and as he dwells upon the love of God in Christ, upon the pardon of sins purchased by the blood of the Lamb, upon the shortness of his mortal pilgrimage, upon the eternity of the life to come, upon the joys prepared for the faithful followers of Christ and the wrath denounced against the children of disobedience, his mind becomes so strongly impressed with the grandeur of his immortal destiny, that he feels religion to be "the one thing needful," and the working out his salvation to be the great business of life. He strives, therefore, by every effort to keep alive the impression within him, as an active feeling of the heart, as an abiding principle of conduct: and while pursuing the task of self-examination, and comparing himself with the standard of Gospel



holiness, he becomes so deeply conscious of his manifold imperfections, that he supplicates the assisting grace of the Holy Spirit, who helpeth our infirmities, and “worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

From the retirement of his closet he returns to his domestic circle, with every benevolent affection purified and exalted, anxious to diffuse the spiritual blessings, of which he himself has been a partaker, among those for whose welfare he feels deeply interested. While he rejoices to instruct the ignorant and to guide the steps of the young into the paths of wisdom, he joys also, like the Psalmist, to “take sweet counsel” with his chosen friends, and with them to dwell in grateful contemplation upon the blessings of religion. According to the means which Providence hath bestowed on him, are the wants of those around him relieved, their sufferings mitigated, their miseries consoled ; until that blessing promised by the Most High to such deeds of mercy is experienced by him to its fullest extent : “If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul, then shall thy light rise in obscurity and thy darkness be as the noon-day<sup>1</sup>.”

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah lviii. 10.

The sabbath ended, the Christian returns again to the performance of his worldly duties : and with what disposition ? With a mind unfitted for temporal concerns or discontented with the toils and cares inseparable from worldly business ? No : he has learnt, from the study of his Bible, that sloth and discontent are sinful in the sight of God, that diligence in our callings is a Christian duty ; that the spirit of religion ought to accompany us into all the various concerns and relations of public and private life ; that “ whatsoever we do, we ought to do all to the glory of God<sup>1</sup> :” and therefore his spiritual exercises on the sabbath, far from unfitting him for the business of the world, serve at once to refresh, purify and invigorate his mind for the resumption of the labours of the week.

If for such exercises as these, my brethren, you have no relish, be assured that you have no real knowledge of religion. This you may rest assured is an infallible test of your Christian piety. For until such an employment of the sabbath as we have described has more delights for you than all the rest of the week, your spiritual state is precarious ; you are not yet duly prepared to enjoy, in

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. x. 31.

the heaven of heavens, that “rest which remaineth for the people of God.”

We have seen, from the example of the first Christians, the manner in which we ought to spend this first day of the week. But there is one very striking peculiarity in their observance of it, to which, in the conclusion of this discourse, I would solicit your most serious attention. It was their constant and unvarying habit to celebrate the Lord's Supper at least once every week, and that sacred ordinance was regarded by them as the most essential part of divine worship. Such frequent observance of it may well be conceived to have kindled and preserved in their souls that holy fervour of piety, which so eminently sanctified their life; and, like them, we also should anxiously seek to derive from it the same spiritual benefit. Let me, therefore, earnestly entreat you to present yourselves habitually at the table of the Lord; and above all, if any of you feel yourselves at present unworthy to make so solemn an approach to God, delay not an hour, through divine grace, to prepare yourselves by faith, by repentance, by self-examination, by meditation and prayer, for commemorating, upon the very first opportunity that occurs, the meritorious

sufferings, death and resurrection of our Saviour from the dead. Whether we shall *all* of us be spared to witness the recurrence of such opportunity, or whether *some* of us shall previously be laid in the silent grave, is known only to Him in whose hand are the issues of life and of death. But let us at least begin our preparation, and trust to the divine mercy for the completion of so holy a work.

So may we hope that when our Redeemer shall stand at the latter day upon the earth, in the midst of an innumerable host of angels and of men, we may be acquitted at his dread tribunal, and receive from his own lips that sacred benediction, the pledge of our immortal blessedness in the kingdom of his Father, "Peace be unto you!"

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## SERMON XV.

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### THE NECESSITY OF A STRICT ADHERENCE TO SCRIPTURE.

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COLOSSIANS ii. 8.

*Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.*

“ To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ at Colosse ” St. Paul, in this Epistle, expresses himself in terms of the utmost affection ; urging them to a watchful and zealous consistency in their Christian character, and cautioning them against the danger of being perverted from the true faith, by heathen philosophy or Jewish tradition, or by those worldly principles which, to a vast extent, pervaded both the one and the other. In guarding them against this danger, he labours to impress them with a sense of the transcendent goodness, greatness and dignity of Christ, and with a due value for that superior light of his religion, compared with which the highest precepts of

Pagan and Jew were mere elements for children ; unworthy of regard from “ perfect men in Christ Jesus.”

Now it is evident, that though there may be a diversity of circumstances between those early converts and Christians of the present day, yet does the admonition of the Apostle apply to us with no ordinary force ; since, like them, we are liable to be influenced by the three sources of error specified in the text, first, “ philosophy and vain deceit,” or the deceitful spirit of false philosophy : next, “ the tradition of men,” that is, doctrines promulgated as scriptural on the authority of erring teachers : and lastly, “ the rudiments of the world ”—those maxims and principles which regulate the life and conduct of worldly-minded men. After considering these several topics, we shall then endeavour to enforce the indispensable duty of surrendering ourselves entirely to the guidance of revelation, faithfully following after Christ, by a strict adherence to the doctrines and precepts contained in the Holy Scriptures.

First, then, we are liable to be influenced in matters of religion by the deceitful spirit of false philosophy. Among the philosophers that encountered St. Paul while preaching at Athens,

were the Epicureans, who treated his doctrine with unmeasured contempt. "What will this babbler say!" was their scornful exclamation, when "he preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection<sup>1</sup>." Nor was it wonderful that such should be the reception given him, when he spake of "God who made the world and all things therein," to a sect who either denied totally the existence of God or at least his interference in the affairs of mankind.

At times not very remote, such infidel doctrines prevailed widely over Europe, and were but too ardently embraced and propagated by men in our own country, who enjoyed the reputation both of learning and ability. At the present day, I believe, it may be stated with confidence, that not a single philosopher of distinction in the isle of Britain deems such opinions worthy of his regard. They have descended to men of an inferior order,—to daring disputants, but empty sciolists,—with vast pretensions but contracted powers,—with great ignorance but still greater presumption,—boldly deciding before they have examined, or examining only to give plausibility to their errors; exalting themselves in word against all that is

<sup>1</sup> Acts xvii. 18.

called God, while in works they deny him ; their life and doctrine corresponding so entirely to each other, that God is not in all their ways, nor the fear of Him before their eyes ; but they obstinately deny the existence of Him, who will at length appear as the judge and avenger of their ungodly deeds. The God who sitteth enthroned in the circle of the heavens is to them undiscernible. They see him not “ through the thick cloud ” with which they are encompassed ; they walk, as if hood-winked, in the midst of the light of revelation, “ groping in noonday as in the night,” and like birds of night watching in darkness for their prey. Upon the young and the unwary they too often exert a fatal influence. By the wiles of sophistry they inveigle or pervert them, at least distracting their minds with impious doubts, if not involving them in confirmed infidelity. To such persons the caution of the Apostle is no less needful than salutary, to beware lest they be spoiled, or led a prey (as the word *συλαγωγῶν* in the original literally imports) through philosophy or vain deceit ; for if they walk in the steps of such men as deny both the Father and the Son, it is an utter impossibility that they should follow “ after Christ.”



There is another class of false philosophers who are equally dangerous and much more attractive, because their doctrines exhibit, in a less flagrant manner, the stamp of impiety. They survey the system of the universe, and find all nature proclaiming the existence, power, wisdom and goodness of Him who made and who rules over all. With this knowledge they are satisfied, and seek to know no more. They would rebuke the infidel because he sees not what they see ; while they deride the Christian, because he humbly contemplates what God has been further pleased to reveal. For the light that is in their deistical minds is darkness : “ And how great is that darkness ! ” The God of Nature, whom no eye hath seen, they readily acknowledge ; but the God of Redemption, though he appeared on earth in human form, they cannot or will not discern. Because the truths of revelation are undiscoverable by reason—because they surpass their comprehension or controvert the opinions which they have already conceived, are humiliating to the pride of human nature, or inconsistent with maxims which they adopt as unquestionable, they therefore reject such truths as worthless. They forget that it has been demonstrated again and again, that mysterious difficulties

abound no less in natural than in revealed religion—difficulties of precisely the same character, and thence bearing evidence that they proceed from the same divine source—from the unsearchable nature of Him whose attributes are infinite, whose ways are past finding out, and who dwelleth amidst light that is inaccessible and inconceivably glorious.

In guarding against such errors as these, we should remember, with thankfulness, that we are not bound to assign a sufficient reason for every part of the divine dispensations, but may safely leave such vindication to the Author of revelation himself. Our sole province is to ascertain, whether there is sufficient evidence that a revelation has actually been made ; and if so, our only alternative is to embrace it, notwithstanding its inexplicable difficulties, with our whole heart.

Now it has been repeatedly shewn, that the account of our Saviour's life, death, resurrection and miracles, has been fully verified by the very strongest body of historical evidence. But to require that those events should be reconciled entirely with our own preconceived notions, is at once to assert, that God's ways must necessarily be as our ways, his thoughts as our thoughts ;

that we can fathom the depth of the Almighty mind and comprehend “the wondrous works of Him that is perfect in wisdom.” And yet how little do we know of his operations! How little can we guess at what is passing at this moment in the distant regions of space! How unequal are we to describe the occupations of the myriads of angelic beings that have surrounded the throne of the Eternal through unnumbered ages,—what they now are, and what they will hereafter be! How little could we have anticipated, from the beginning, the course of divine Providence in the world of nature! and if so, what better conjecture could we have formed of that scheme of mercy, in the world of grace, which was devised in heaven, and which we can only know from Him, who himself descended from heaven to reveal it to mankind? We “are of the earth and speak of the earth” and reason of the earth; but Christ is of heaven and speaketh of heavenly things. “If he speak of earthly things and we conceive not, how shall we conceive, if he tell us of heavenly things;” or how shall we estimate their fitness or unfitness by our own inadequate conceptions? These must be abandoned, if we would follow after Christ. We must listen to His voice and to *his* alone;

and not suffer ourselves to be cheated and “spoiled by philosophy and vain deceit.” Reason *must* submit; religion *must* triumph; and Christ be all in all: else will the prejudice and pride engendered by the specious theories of the Deist, upon subjects that transcend the limits of created intelligence, delude our steps and lead us blindfold to destruction.

The second source of error stated by the Apostle is “the tradition of men.” We find our Saviour repeatedly arraiguing the leaders of the Jews for “rendering, by their traditions, the Word of God of none effect.” The most express precepts of the moral law—even that precept which was sanctioned by those first feelings of our nature, binding children in dutiful obedience to their parents—were rendered null and void. The fatal consequences of such error in principle were visible in the history of that desperately wicked and irreclaimable nation, and we may read their sin written in their punishment.

That Jewish example was afterwards fatally followed by the Christian Church. The pure doctrines of the Gospel were corrupted by “the tradition of men:” the Word of God was by Papal authority completely superseded or per-

verted. Though given by God as a light to the world, it was thus, as it were, "placed under a bushel;" its pure rays were withdrawn from the eyes of the perishing multitude, that the gloom of ignorance, superstition and fanaticism might prevail in its stead. It was not till the period of the Reformation that this spiritual eclipse passed away, and that the benighted nations rejoiced to behold the Sun of righteousness, in the firmament of revelation, again "shining in his strength."

But though this was the blissful condition to which we were then restored, yet the spirit of error has, since those days, in one shape or another been continually striving to pervert the truth "as it is in Jesus;" and its baneful influence is easily discernible at the present day throughout a large portion of what may be termed the religious community of England. It is a fact not to be denied, that there are many assuming to themselves high authority as expounders of Scripture, who, from their dogmatical but conflicting interpretations, would almost lead us to suppose that two different revelations had been made to man by the Spirit of God, directly the reverse of each other.

For one class of interpreters perceives in them only the plain doctrines of morality, though ad-

mitting that they are inculcated in a purer and more influential form than they had ever before been by the wisest of heathen philosophers. The corruption of human nature by the fall of our first parents,—our restoration by the death of Christ to a state of salvation,—the indispensable necessity of faith in Him, as Saviour of the world,—the internal influence of the Holy Spirit,—and all those purely scriptural doctrines peculiar to the Christian system, though not denied by these interpreters, are yet passed over by them in such a way as if they were unworthy of their serious consideration. The beauty of virtue; the deformity of vice, the advantage of a sober, circumspect manner of life; such points of morality, in short, as are essentially connected with our conduct rather than our belief—with our character in the eyes of the world rather than with our duty to God—are, in their opinion, the most essential parts of revelation; and they hesitate not to declare, that he who honestly endeavours to conform his life to such precepts has nothing to fear.

Others; again, fly to the opposite extreme. They have formed to themselves a certain set of opinions, which they erect as the standard of sound doctrine, and reckon any deviation from it an

unpardonable offence. The doctrine of justification through faith alone,—of the utter worthlessness of good works,—of the irresistible efficacy of grace communicated by the mysterious operations of the Holy Spirit,—upon such subjects as these they continually dwell, in a manner that savours more of the enthusiasm of the visionary, than of the sober and rational spirit of Christianity. Willingly overlooking the *practical* excellence of the Christian scheme, they see faith, and faith only, pervading the whole volume of inspiration. They reflect not how very large a portion both of the Old and the New Testament is devoted to the inculcation of our practical duties, by regulations descending even to minute particulars, while the performance of those duties is enforced by every motive that can most effectually influence the heart of man. Did such religious obedience flow *necessarily*, and without any effort of our own, from the principle of faith itself, whence this waste of moral instruction and of moral precept,—this enforcement of practical consequences? and whence that most earnest admonition of the Apostle, “to those *who have believed* in God, that they should be careful to maintain good works<sup>1</sup>?” Such erring

<sup>1</sup> Tit. iii. 8.

teachers forget, that faith without works is dead : they repose in its all-powerful efficacy, and exult in the thought that they are full of grace and secure of glory.

To these two classes of Scripture interpreters flock multitudes of followers. The young and enthusiastic, the ignorant and unwary, attach themselves blindly to their respective guides, and follow whithersoever they lead, but not "after Christ." It is obviously, therefore, both their interest and their duty to abandon all such narrow and confined views of the Gospel scheme of salvation ; shunning no less anxiously that heathen system of doctrine and of duty, than that spirit of mystical but barren belief ; and embracing, not only without partiality or prejudice, but also with thankfulness and humility, "the whole counsel of God" upon these important subjects, as revealed in the Scriptures of truth.

The last source of error stated by the Apostle, is that which he characterizes as "the elements of the world." We shall the better understand the import of this phrase, so repeatedly used by St. Paul, if we refer to what he himself has written in his Epistle to the Galatians : "Howbeit, then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which



by nature are no gods ; but now after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage<sup>1</sup> ?” It hence appears that this knowledge of the true God is the means by which we are put in possession of “ that liberty wherewith Christ makes his people free ” from a slavish subjection to the maxims, manners, and customs of the world. Of such worldly principles St. John, in his first Epistle<sup>2</sup>, gives a summary account, when he divides them into “ the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life,” that is to say, the love of guilty pleasure, the love of wealth with its pomp and splendour, and lastly, the love of honour, dignity and power.

Upon the evils resulting from these sources of error it is unnecessary for me to enlarge. For who perceives not daily the inevitable tendency of guilty pleasure to draw away the soul from following after Christ—the madness with which multitudes, particularly the young, plunge into its impetuous stream, and are hurried along till they are ingulphed in misery ? Or who perceives not how “ the love of money, that root of all evil,”

<sup>1</sup> Gal. iv. 8, 9.

<sup>2</sup> 1 John ii. 16.

engrosses not merely the soul of the miser, but the thoughts and desires of those who would disdain to be called by so odious a name? While their minds are bent upon low pursuits, how can they rise to “things above, where Christ sitteth,” devoted as they are to the acquisition of that earthly treasure which they at length discover, when standing upon the brink of the grave, to be worthless as the dust with which they must soon be mingled? Or who, that is incessantly occupied with striving after the attainment of the dignities and honours of the world, can recall his thoughts from such objects, to follow the footsteps of Him who constantly shrunk from all temporal grandeur, and who, while sojourning in this lower world, “had not where to lay his head?”

The consequences of subjecting ourselves to these elements of the world are, in Scripture, depicted in colours as vivid as if traced by the sunbeam of heaven. And yet so blinded are men by their passions, that they cannot or will not believe that they are rendering themselves liable to such consequences. Each finds, or flatters himself that he finds, an exemption in his own particular case. He therefore reads the denunciations of the Divine Law against all ungodliness, with an un-

moved heart ; and proceeds fearlessly in the path that leads to eternal ruin. If then we would avoid this hardness of the heart, this blindness of the understanding in the discernment of spiritual things, it is obvious that we must not love the world nor the things of the world, neither must we be “ conformed to it, but transformed by the renewing of our minds, that we may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God<sup>1</sup>.”

Having thus considered the three sources of error specified by the Apostle in the text, I would, in conclusion, endeavour briefly to enforce the indispensable duty of surrendering ourselves entirely to the guidance of revelation ; faithfully following after Christ by a strict adherence to the doctrines and precepts contained in the Holy Scriptures.— If the Scriptures are in deed and in truth, as all of us confess, the Word of God, then are we bound to listen to it with the utmost docility, as to a voice that speaketh from heaven, telling us of heavenly things. If Jehovah, therefore, proclaims from his throne on high that “ He is God, and there is none else beside Him<sup>2</sup> ;” the assertions of the infidel are dissipated at once as an unmeaning

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xii. 2.

Deut. iv. 35.

sound, and we leave him to his own region of chance, annihilation and eternal darkness. When "God manifest in the flesh" commands all "nations to be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," and also declares, "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned<sup>1</sup>;" we surely need no further authority for embracing that glorious scheme of redemption carried on by the three Persons of the Trinity, but we ought to abandon at once the plausible reasonings of the Deist, nor listen to his specious delusion, "charm he never so wisely;" but turn from him as from one who would poison for ever our future happiness. If the Holy Spirit assures us that "the world through wisdom knew not God, but was given over to a reprobate mind to do those things which are not convenient, being filled with all unrighteousness<sup>2</sup>;" shall we not resolutely reject those blind guides who, extolling the morality of the Gospel as an improved code of Heathen ethics, think lightly of the doctrine of the atonement, and of all those other essential doctrines peculiar to the Christian system? Or what better confidence can we place in those

<sup>1</sup> Mark xvi. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. i. 29.

speculative enthusiasts, who rely upon the omnipotence of faith alone, though most solemnly admonished to give all diligence in *adding* to their faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity<sup>1</sup>? Or how can we rely for a moment upon the elements of the world—its maxims, principles and practice, when the “Friendship of the world” is pronounced to “be enmity with God, and whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God<sup>2</sup>”?

These great truths are, every one of them, recorded in the volume of inspiration, and it is at the peril of eternal death that we presume either to alter or reject them. For in the emphatic language of St. Peter, “all flesh is grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever<sup>3</sup>.” Our only safety, therefore, consists in adopting the inference hence drawn by the same Apostle, “Wherefore, laying aside all malice and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil-

<sup>1</sup> 2 Pet. i. 5, 6.

<sup>2</sup> James iv. 4.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Pet. i. 24, 25.

speaking, as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby.”

May God in his mercy grant, that the genuine principles of Christianity may finally be so strengthened and confirmed in you, that “ye may continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel<sup>1</sup>!”

“And this also I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment, that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God<sup>2</sup>!”

<sup>1</sup> Col. i. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Phil. i. 9, 10.

THE END.

Author **Irvine, Andrew**

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