

**Collected
Writings of J.N.
Darby**

Expository 4

By John Nelson Darby

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Compared View of the First Three Gospels: Matthew, Mark & Luke

Part 2.

I now turn to Luke. It is remarkable how this Gospel brings out the moral condition of things in their various phases, and first of Israel in the days in which the Lord came. We have first the whole status of Judaism most clearly and graphically presented. In the body of the Gospel Luke gives us in general the Son of man, and the great moral principles of relationship between man and God. But for this reason, before this begins, he pictures to us very fully the state of Judaism by itself, and all the blessings which remained to the faithful in it: Herod (an Edomite) king of Judea—the Jewish service going on in Davidical order; angels, ministers of God, His messengers to a godly priest, prophecy, and more than prophecy brought in according to promise; the house of David entering on the scene, but in poverty and low estate. Note, the explanation of the name of “Jesus,” as saving His people, is not given, but He is the Son of the Highest. At the same time, He will have the throne of His father David. Next, as Haggai said, the Spirit remains among them, and acts in holy men and women according to ancient Jewish witness, such as Hannah in the desolations of Israel. Jewish hopes are prophetically sealed of God by prophecy (Luke 1:67-79).

The Jews, at the same time, are under the dominion of the Gentiles, successors to those to whom Jerusalem had

been delivered. They are disposed of at their will. Still the promise is sure, and its accomplishment announced by an angel to the poor of the flock. The heavens see further into this grace; there is goodwill toward, more exactly, God's good pleasure in, men. But the Jewish order is still there; the faithful accomplish the ordinances of the law, but they await with desire the fulfillment of the promise, and see it in Jesus. They know each other as a remnant. Anna spake of Him to all them who waited for redemption in Israel. Yet prophecy in the remnant sees well the place the newborn child is to hold in Israel. He is for the fall and for the rising again of many. Such is the scene presented in the first two chapters of Luke, and of which the other Gospels say nothing, while this is silent on all the royal question and Herod's effort to destroy Christ, Jesus coming up out of Egypt, the coming of the Gentiles to Israel's King, all which referred to God's dealings with Israel. Further, Christ is a real man; grows bodily and mentally, and in favor with God and man, in His gracious ways. But, child or not, His person was not changed. He depended on no outward mission to have it. At twelve years old, full of the power of His relationship, He is, with comely fitness and marvelous competency, occupied with His Father's business, yet returns into the human child's obedient place.

After that comes the service. In the third chapter we enter on what is common to this Gospel and that of Matthew, but the form is very different. John's preaching, in Matthew, is repentance for the kingdom; in Luke, for the remission of sins. One feels the difference: one is dispensational, the other moral. So in Luke: "All flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Luke 3:6). It is not merely the Pharisees and Sadducees, but the multitude, who are a

generation of vipers. So he gives the practically moral test to each class that comes to him. The result as to John, at least his imprisonment, is given at once. Christ is owned Son of God by the Father, and the Holy Spirit comes on Him. Here this part of the Gospel closes, and the Lord's genealogy comes in, not connected with these Jewish scenes and the promises of Abraham's and David's, but traced up to Adam, Son of God; introducing the great and, to us, all-important character of Son of man.

This makes us easily understand the reason why the genealogy is placed here, and the distinctive character of what precedes it. The whole Jewish condition is there, as we have seen, brought out with one little inlet into heaven, on Jesus coming into the world; and now we have His place as Son of man, One who, as representative of man according to divine perfection and counsels, is come to begin the new thing, and become the center of the new creation. Only for that His death was needed for God's glory and our salvation. (Compare John 12:23-24.) But in His own moral perfectness we have the new thing.

The moment His being Son of man, descended according to the flesh from Adam, has been shown, He is led to be put to the test by the enemy who had deceived the first Adam (Luke 4). This scene we have had as a fact in Mark, and detailed in Matthew, with this difference, that there it is given in historical, and, I may add, dispensational order; here in moral, the scriptural temptation by the Scriptures coming last. Hence Luke omits the sending away of Satan after the offer of the world and Satan's proposal that He should worship him. After this, the moral power of work and victory in obedience is noted in His returning in the power of the Spirit into Galilee. None of that power

was lost; indeed, Christ not having failed in subjective obedience, the strong man was bound. Hence the first thing is not, as in Matthew, the manifestation of power, and then (attention being attracted) the description of the character suited to the kingdom; but the presentation of Himself in grace, the Spirit of the Lord being upon Him, He being therefore man. The gracious words told in their hearts; but in His own country He was, for them, Joseph's son — such is the place of the Lord from heaven, the Son of man (last Adam) presented in grace to men and to Israel. Christ had already preached and acted in Capernaum: but the Spirit of God we see thus formally presents Him in Luke. And the Lord shows, that coming in sovereign grace sent from God, there was no limitation to Israel, as Elias went to Sarepta, and Naaman, the Syrian, was healed; while in either case many in Israel are left aside. Hence unbridled rage in His Jewish audience; but He was not subject to its power. This is all peculiar to Luke.

With the exception of displacing the calling of Andrew and Simon, as we shall see, Luke now follows the same order as Mark. First, His power over the enemy is shown (Luke 4:33-37); next, over diseases, and all that sin had brought in. This is the power He had in the world as having bound the strong man — He could spoil all his goods, work an entire deliverance of man from Satan's power, and all its consequences in this world. But He seeks no witness to Himself, does not allow the devils to speak, and retires from the gaze and throng of men when His miracles had drawn their attention. He goes first into the desert, and then, when they would stay Him, pursues His work. This characterizes His presence in the world.

The Lord now begins to gather round Himself (Luke 5). In Matthew, this gathering round Himself is brought in immediately. He appears as the Light in Galilee, according to promise, preaching the kingdom; and then He goes round everywhere; and, when crowds follow Him, explains the character suited to the kingdom. Here, His mission and power as Son of man on the earth being shown, He, though retiring from view, begins then to gather to Himself. It will be remarked, that we have a much fuller development of the way in which the disciples are called to follow Him in Luke. Simon hears the word in his ship. Christ works a miracle which reveals His person; the effect is just and deep conviction of sin in connection with that person. Then they leave all and follow Him. It is, I apprehend, Luke who changes the place of this. In that which immediately follows, he takes the same order as Mark. In Matthew we have the whole of this arranged according to subjects.

What characterizes these facts in Luke is their being presented as the various displays of power in grace. First, Jesus heals that which Jehovah alone healed, the figure of sin as disease and defilement, which excluded from Jehovah's presence, and from communion with His people. He cleanses them from defilement. He charges the cleansed men to tell no man, but it is noised abroad. He heals all who come, but retires into the wilderness and prays. There is power and grace, but it is the Son of man. Next, doctors of the law and Pharisees were then there, and (an expression so fully showing the situation) the power of the Lord (of Jehovah) was present to heal them. Faith brings the paralytic man; Jesus goes to the root of all evil in Israel (and everywhere), but here especially deals with it in respect of the government of God, and pardons the man's

sins—Jesus brings forgiveness. The word is, “The Son of man hath power on earth to forgive” (Luke 5:24). Yet it was the Jehovah of Psalm 103. Here “so seen in Israel” is omitted. Next, we find grace receiving the vile. He came to call sinners as a physician for their need. Grace was thus shown in the midst of Israel, but on principles which went necessarily beyond it. Jesus receives sinners in grace, making all new. These cases, indeed, are common to the Gospels, whatever the order may be, and prominent in them as stamping a plain character on Christ’s mission. Only Matthew introduces the centurion’s case where he places it, as especially showing the bearing of the state of things on the extension of grace to the Gentiles. The fact that, though in connection with Israel, the presence of the Lord and the principles here brought into view went necessarily farther, and could not be confined to the Jews definitely, is brought out in the question as to John’s disciples, and the new wine and old bottles, and so forth; the vessels must be new for the new power. But Luke adds here a moral principle not noticed in the other two Gospels; that human nature will like the old thing best.

This subject is pursued (Luke 6) in two remarkable cases as to the Sabbath, the keystone of Jewish ordinances: the case of David eating the showbread—the Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath; and the healing of the withered hand—divine goodness rises above ordinances. Luke gives the facts more briefly than Mark. Matthew puts them much farther on in the history, where they are connected with the rejection of Israel. The first of these cases presents the position of the rejected King whose need was above ordinances, and whose condition really abrogated them; adding that, as Son of man, consequently, He was Lord of

the Sabbath. The second is the title of grace to rise above them. For grace is of God.

Next, we find the nomination of the apostles. After the Lord's personal position and character had been brought out, this finds a natural place. He selects His instruments. This still follows the same order as Mark; who, after a general statement of the position of Jesus, continues his account with the same event. Matthew has not this choice of the twelve. He continues his full account of Jesus' mission in the midst of Israel till He sends them out to continue it. In Luke we find again here the dependent character of the Son of man. He is all night in prayer before He chooses the twelve. Here comes in the sermon on the mountain in its place; and we have clear evidence of the intended omission by the Holy Spirit of this choice of the twelve in Matthew, for as a man he must have known it, for he was one of the twelve. We have seen Matthew bringing in the sermon on the mount much earlier, as the principles of the kingdom. In Luke 6:17 it should not be "the plain," but "a level place"—still on the mountain. Luke gives the substance of the sermon in its great moral principles. His power, note, was shown in the multitude (vss. 17-19). The Lord addresses Himself in Luke to His disciples, as being themselves in the place He speaks of, instead of stating the abstract principle. The woes too are added. It is an address to the heart and conscience of the person present. He weaves in too, as verses 39-40, other general principles connected with the precepts He is giving.

So verses 44-45. Here we have left Mark, who does not give the sermon on the mount. He gives the choice of the apostles, and then passes on to the full blasphemy of the Pharisees, and Jesus' refusal to listen to His mother,

preceding the parables from the ship, as in Matthew. 12 and 13. But the order in Luke, in this particular case, helps us, as it does in Matthew, to identify the sermon on the mount in the two Gospels.

From the *mountain* He enters into Capernaum, and heals the centurion's servant. Here Christ's divine title and power is shown; but he does not use it to show the rejection of Israel, and the reception of the Gentiles as in Matthew. The widow of Nain, again, shows the divine power and compassion of Jesus in the place of death and sorrow; this circumstance is peculiar to Luke. In Matthew 8 the leper, and the healing of Peter's wife's mother, are introduced respectively before and after the centurion's servant, without reference to the order of time. After this, the relative positions of John and Christ are brought forward; which is not in Mark, and is much later in Matthew. I apprehend its historical place is here. In Luke we have the moral effect of both inquired into. The people and publicans justified Christ, having humbled themselves under John's baptism; the Pharisees not, having refused to do so. Matthew introduces here Jesus thanking the Father for His way of dealing with the wise and with babes, and the real reason of the change taking place; taking it again, I apprehend, out of its historical order to complete the picture of that change furnished by John's position and message. This justifying of wisdom by her children is then illustrated by the woman who was a sinner, in contrast with Simon the Pharisee.

This deep-reaching moral picture is in Luke only, as are also the few words which follow (Luke 8); which cast so clear a light on the Lord's life; and give the double character of devotedness—that of the apostles, and of the women

who followed Him. One of the parables of Matthew 13 is then given, that is, the present service in the word, and responsibility of man, his duty to maintain the light. The case of Jesus' mother and brethren is then introduced in Luke, as showing Christ's value for those who kept His word, and not as a witness of His breaking His ties with Israel in the flesh. None of the parables relative to the kingdom are spoken of. Here we return to the historical order which is in Mark until the feeding of the five thousand inclusive; that is, the history of Legion, Jairus' daughter, the sending out of the twelve, and the feeding of the multitude. As regards Legion, the difference is remarkable. In Matthew we have the display of Satan's power, as it would afterward work in the Jews, and the request for Jesus' departure; not any detail as to the poor man that was healed. In Luke, as in Mark, we have the details of the effects on him:—the Lord's real work in grace in the matter. In the case of Jairus and the woman with the issue of blood, the same brevity may be remarked in Matthew.

In Luke all the moral circumstances are much more brought out in detail, as indeed in Mark also. What is shown in Luke especially is grace, divine power acting in the kindness and goodness of a Man filled with charity. It is not, as in John, a divine person so much as a divine character; and that in the perfect sympathy of a Man. What shows this (as the case of the widow of Nain, Simon and the woman that was a sinner) is constantly found in Luke and not in the other Gospels. It is grace in and towards man.

On the other hand (ch. 9), the mission of the twelve, which comes in its place here, is given much more briefly, and with no special reference to Israel; nor the elaborate

unfolding of the place which testimony would have among the people until Christ's return, which is found in Matthew. We have the fact: they are to preach the kingdom of God and heal the sick, and to go free from care and dependent on Himself. It is the same mission, but in its simple actual character. The effect on Herod is here introduced. Luke gives no account of John the Baptist's death. There is a short allusion to his imprisonment (Luke 3:19), when John's preaching is spoken of; but this part of Israel's sin formed no part of his subject. Otherwise the same order as Mark's is still followed here. On the return of the twelve, the Lord goes into a desert place, is followed, and heals those who have need of healing. In these miracles, necessary to relate as great witnesses to Christ's power, Luke gives but the fact briefly, and, as so given, having more power in that respect. The connection of it with Israel, and His dismissal of the people, and taking Himself another position while His disciples were toiling alone, are all omitted. In Matthew and Mark, the closing circumstances of this miracle lead to a series of events and incidents, which refer all of them to Christ's special relationship with the Jews, the moral position of these, and God's estimate of them; all of which are omitted in Luke (Matt. 14:22 to 16:12; Mark 6:47 to 8:26).

All three Gospels then come to Peter's confession of Christ and the transfiguration. Only in Luke the common opinions as to Christ connect themselves more directly with Herod's, and what is there said. For Luke 9:18 is directly connected with chapter 10, and that with what precedes. Still the transfiguration is a great central event in all, and that connected with the confession of Peter. In all the rejection of Christ and the taking up the cross are founded

on Peter's owning Him to be the Christ, and precede the revelation of His glory. There are some differences to be noted. Matthew recounts Christ's instruction as to the church, which was to take the place for the present of His Messiah glory; and the place Peter was to hold in the administration of the kingdom. Here also in Luke the matter is simply stated in its own moral force; and the details of Peter's dislike to the cross, and the Lord's rebuke, are omitted. The character of what they are about to see is also more simply stated.

In Matthew, for whom the change from Messiah to Son of man is a main point, and the future coming of Christ in this character (see Matt. 24:30), the expression used in connection with this display of His glory is the Son of man coming in His kingdom. In Mark, where service in the word forms the subject, it is the kingdom of God come with power. In Luke it is simply till they see the kingdom of God. There is a difference also in the details. The moral circumstances again appear in Luke. The disciples are asleep. The Lord is speaking of His decease. It is the entry of Moses and Elias¹ into the cloud that alarmed them. All the ensuing conversation relative to John's being Elias, of which Matthew and Mark speak, is not found in Luke's account; but he returns after the casting out of a devil to the doctrine of the cross (vss. 44-45). And further, in the rest of this chapter, in Luke 9, we have all the forms which self takes, and which it would excuse and justify from the grossest to the most subtle; and the claim of Christ and the service of grace in the kingdom is shown to be paramount to everything. Two of the circumstances are

1 It rather appears that the second "they" refers to Moses and Elias, though it is not absolutely certain.

given in Matthew and Mark; the second, that of the little child, as an example, with a large addition of instruction as to offenses; and with the addition, in Matthew, of the position which the church takes, as in the place of Israel in respect of offenses. This passes off in Matthew to other questions relative to the Jews.

We then find in Luke a mission not noticed in the other Gospels, that of the seventy (Luke 10). It is in principle the same as that of the twelve, only more urgent, but there is no limit as in Matthew 10. Those that rejected them were to be equally sure that the kingdom of God had come nigh to them. Such was essentially the message, with proofs of the power of Him that sent it. From this onwards to the commencement of the closing scene (Luke 18:31), what we read in Luke is either not in Matthew and Mark, or is here connected with other subjects than the historical ones found in those Gospels; and the various circumstances are introduced in their moral connection. On the return of the seventy the great moral connection of the gospel with eternal hopes comes out. The power of Christ's name over the demons brings to Christ's mind the final overthrow of Satan. Still the subject of joy for them was not that they could cast out devils, but that they belonged themselves to heaven—their names were registered there. This gave a very clear and definite character to the Gospel. It is in this connection that the hiding these things from wise and prudent, and revealing them to babes, is introduced here; not in connection with the rejection of John Baptist and Christ, and the total change in God's dealings with man taking place, as in Matthew 11. Hence it is added here, that the Lord turned to the disciples to remark their

blessedness, for these things were brought to their eyes. It is the blessing of the heavenly people which is before us.

What follows is in Luke alone. After the essence of the statement of the law, the Lord shows to him who would justify himself by a cavil on the terms, that grace, the new and blessed principle of God's dealings, makes us, by its own nature, the neighbor of every one that has need, and obliterates, by its divine nature, the divisions formed by ordinance which work no grace, but, with the heart such as it is, tend to nourish pride by distinguishing him to whom they belong. The bearing of this instruction, and its deep moral character, are evident.

Next, we learn the value of hearing the word—in contrast with cares—and that of prayer, its character and success (ch. 1). We have then the final hardness of the Pharisee shown, and the way in which Satan possesses the heart void of God, though it seem reformed; but without application to Israel's final state, as in Matthew. The Lord turns, on one speaking of the value of natural ties with Him, to the word; that God owned those who heard and kept it, as the only true tie—the Ninevites and Queen of Sheba, as owning the word from feebler lips than He who was there, would condemn that generation. We have then the judgment of the moral state of the Pharisees, but not here connected with the final judgment of Jerusalem, and the connection of the disciples with Israel, as in Matthew. Still the Lord shows, that all the blood shed would be required of them, as in Matthew.

We have then a general warning as to their principles, and those on which the disciples were to act, taken, partly from a private warning to His disciples, partly from His instruction to the twelve when He sent them out, partly

from His statement as to the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit: but this is here employed to encourage the disciples in acting on the principles of the upright testimony He had spoken to them of; showing that the Holy Spirit who was spoken against, spoke in them, and would tell them what to say (ch. 12).

As the Lord had urged on His disciples, faithfulness, uprightness, and boldness in testimony, so now He goes on to press on them disinterestedness and absence of all carefulness. This, however, is introduced by one who looked to Him to order things rightly on earth. This He entirely disclaims, and turns to the multitude to press on them the folly of having their portion here, which death in a moment could snatch away. With His disciples He presses another motive, namely, their preciousness in the Father's eyes. Here some of the instructions of the sermon on the mount come in.

But the Lord goes on to urge another motive, giving an additional character to their devotedness. Not only it was the Father's good pleasure to give them the kingdom, so that they might well trust Him for all things: but He Himself was coming again. Christians were to be as those that waited for Him. He gives the beautiful picture of His love making them happy in glory, girding Himself and coming forth to serve them; till then they must watch with girded loins. The difference of the faithful and unfaithful professing servants is then brought out. One cannot but feel, in all this and what follows, even though parts of what is recorded are found in Matthew and Mark, that we are in a wide sphere of moral instruction not entered on elsewhere: and that all this is given with a moral purpose, not in reference to historical order. He is in Israel, but

developing great principles which cannot be confined to Israel.

In what immediately follows, He shows that they must bow to the truth or be judged. He came in grace, and the power of divine love: but there was nothing to answer it. His death would open the flood-gates of this love to the chief of sinners, not wait till there was righteousness enough to receive it. But while this love was in Himself, He was straitened in its display and revelation, till this baptism of death was accomplished. This love, this incoming of God, would raise all the enmity of the human heart. It is not as Prince of peace that His power would be shown. Not only so, but, by the present manifestation of the grace, though straitened, the fire it would light was already kindled. The Jews ought to have discerned this time. Looked at, naturally, as under the law, they did not become reconciled on the way; they would go to prison till all was paid.

Personally, if they did not repent, they would all perish, like those slain by Pilate at Jerusalem, whom they thought special objects of judgment (Luke 13). This instruction is closed by the parable of the fig-tree in the garden, spared by the intercession of the gardener, that is, for the painstaking service of Christ; then, if fruitless, to be cut down. It only spoiled the garden. In all this, and what follows, we have the judgment of the present state of Jerusalem and the people, in connection with the Lord's presence. Meanwhile, He asserts, while showing their hypocrisy, His right to minister in grace, in divine power, blessing to Israel, in opposition to their legal ignorance of and absence from God. The urgency of the acceptance of this ministry is then pressed. He was going through the cities and villages teaching, and presses the entrance at the strait gate; for the

time would come when they would seek to take credit from His having been among them, He would in glory reject them, and they would see Gentiles with Abraham and the fathers, and themselves thrust out. Finally, on the Pharisees urging Herod's evil intentions, He shows that Jerusalem must fill up its guilt in rejecting Him, the Jehovah who would ever have gathered her children, and now mourned in tender grace over her who was henceforth to be desolate, till, according to Psalm 118, she saluted Him who came in the name of the Lord.

In Luke 14 the Lord, on occasion of a dinner in the Pharisee's house, continues His instruction on the grace which characterized God's ways now, and that again in contrast with the Sabbath; silencing them, with the same reasoning as to their own conduct. He then unfolds the path of present grace, and its results with God; namely, first lowliness, taking the lowest place (God would exalt, in due time, those who did so: such was His own course); next, to act in grace, and not on the principles of worldly selfishness. The recompense would be in the resurrection of the just. In all this, He is bringing out the spirit and character of the new thing, into which He was leading men; the character of the new man in a world of evil. The reference of one of the company to the joy of eating bread in the kingdom of God, perhaps a commonplace remark, perhaps felt, leads Him to apply the principles He is expounding, to the consequence of their rejection in Israel then. The kingdom was presented in grace; the Jews, in their national capacity, from temporal motives, were slighting it. The Lord would call the poor of the flock, glad to come; and the Jews, as such, be excluded. But the enjoyment of blessing, at the same time, would depend on unqualified decision in oneself, and against the

much greater power, in flesh's judgment of it, exercised against those who sought it.

It will be remarked, that the parable of the great supper in Matthew has a much more dispensational and judicial character. The city is burnt up. It is the king's son the marriage is for. The king's turning to the poor of the flock in Israel, the judgment of those entered, the conduct of many towards the messengers, are not found in Luke; nor the fact of the house being filled with guests. That is, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the general Gentile body of professors are not brought out. The first invited are excluded from the Supper in Luke as unworthy. I am disposed to think it a different occasion.

After insisting on decision, and counting the cost, the Lord concludes by saying, a man must forsake all that he has; and if the salt has lost its savor, it is good for nothing.

Luke 15 begins a series of instruction, showing the character and effects of grace; and the change, dependent not on dispensation, but on the full revelation of the divine character, and the consequent judgment of the whole condition of man; though it was in Israel that condition was put to the test. The well-known fifteenth chapter brings out the whole scheme of God's ways in grace with the sinner; in Christ, the Spirit, and the Father; and, in general, that it was the divine joy to save and act in grace. It shows the way in which Christ sought His sheep, and charged Himself with bringing it home; the way the Spirit sought diligently with the light brought to bear on all; the path of man's ruin, and the way the Father received Him on His return; and, finally, the self-righteous Jewish condition.

Next, we find the way in which grace estimates this world, and man in it; with the use to be made of his forfeited

possession in it; that is, of what he possessed, though he had forfeited all title to it. Of this, also, the Jews were the special illustration. When the human earthly place was lost, another future was to be the motive on which the use of present possessions was to be founded. Then the veil of the other world is removed, and we see that this world's being our portion, excludes from that. In the close of this parable, which points at the complete substitution of the heavenly blessing for the earthly, and the judging of all things, in their eternal character, by the letting in of that new light, the Lord shows that Moses and the prophets would have led the Jews to own Him, and be delivered; and that if they did not hear them, His own resurrection would have no effect. The connection of great moral truths with the setting aside of the Jewish system, and the setting it aside by these moral truths, and the grace which belonged to God's nature, when He revealed Himself; both of them too wide for Judaism (the latter, contrasted with its spirit, as the former left all its ordinances necessarily behind), instead of setting it aside dispensationally, is very remarkable in all this part of Luke 16.

In the beginning of Luke 17, are collected a number of passages found in Matthew and Mark, with additional matter, in which the principles on which the disciples had to walk, in their new service, are stated. Such are—care against giving occasions of stumbling to the little ones of Christ; forgiveness of what is personal; the power of faith; the recognition that, at best, we have only done our duty. The order and way in which these are introduced and used is the only thing to be particularly noted here. In what follows we have an interesting example of the way of deliverance from the legal ordinances. Ten lepers are cleansed. The Lord

sends them—their cleansing was the fruit of Jehovah's power—to show themselves to the priests, according to the law. They go, believing Him, and are cleansed. Nine pursue their course; one turns back. Outwardly farther from privileges which exalt flesh, he more easily discovers that Jehovah, whom he went to own in Jerusalem, is in Him who had cleansed him. He turns back to offer his thanks there. The Lord, since he had found the true place where God was, sets him entirely free from Jerusalem: "Go thy way," He says, "thy faith hath made thee whole" (Luke 17:19). He was not only blessed but free. The kingdom of God was really in its power in His person amongst them. And this was so true, that, rejected as He was going to be, the time would soon come, when the disciples would be glad to have such days as they then had with Him.

The Lord then, as in Luke 12, He had given the church's place at His coming, gives the Jewish condition and in general the world's. The same instructions are given, in connection with the judgment of Jerusalem, in Matthew, of which the prophetic announcement in Luke is farther on. Here it is the unfolding the condition of the disciples and the Jews, flowing from His then presence and the place His removal would give them. The condition of the witnesses in the final days of Jerusalem is given here, not as in Matthew in connection with the destruction of Jerusalem. This last is directly and distinctly given by itself, and with plain reference to presently coming events, as a positive object of revelation in Luke.

Here the subject is the condition of the disciples; and the warnings are connected with His teaching on that point. Hence the direction to pray, though having a peculiar parabolic application to the latter days in Jerusalem, has

a universal one for men in every circumstance in which they are in difficulty and need. But this dependence upon God was hardly to be expected when the Lord returned. Except the comparison of the times of Noah and Lot, all this is found in Luke only; and the whole is general, and applicable to the coming of Christ, in its bearing on the world at large, though where the carcass is there the eagles will be gathered together.

The characteristic traits, suited to the kingdom, and approved of God, are next shown. Lowliness—because of our sinfulness—lowliness in the sense of our nothingness. Here we have some of the account, given in Matthew, of the relationship and position of children, in a moral connection, as is usual with Luke. Then, entire devotedness, and the heart purged; not simply the outward keeping of the commandments, however sincere. Goodness is denied to man. One only is good—God Himself. What seems blessing here below, is the greatest hindrance to entering into the kingdom; but grace can do everything. Nor will devotedness lose its reward in this world, or the next; Luke 18.

This closes the moral developments which compose all the middle part of Luke, and form instructions of the highest interest, connected with the present moral introduction of the kingdom. They contrast with Matthew 13, where we have the dispensational earthly survey of it; and with chapters 16-17, when the great change of system and organization is brought out to light. Save two or three general principles, such as taking up the cross, the young ruler seeking the best commandment to have eternal life, and the exhortation to lowliness, all this part is omitted in Matthew and Mark. It characterizes Luke; and even the

topics introduced, which are found in Matthew and Mark, are so in a different connection. On the other hand, a good deal that precedes the transfiguration in Matthew and Mark is omitted in Luke. In this part of Luke historical order is not generally to be sought. This is now again taken up, as it is in the other Gospels too, by telling the disciples that rejection awaited Him from the Jewish rulers. The prophecies were thus going to be accomplished. The disciples did not understand Him.

The history of the last events, begins, as we have seen in reading Matthew, with the entrance into Jericho, where the blind man owns Him as Son of David, and receives his sight. But here also the grace which receives the vile, in spite of Jewish prejudices, must be brought out in Luke; Luke 19. This is the more remarkable here, as connected with His character as Son of David, and His speedy entry into Jerusalem, according to Zechariah. Zacchaeus had been honestly faithful to his conscience; but that day salvation came to his house. His heart had been drawn; but now salvation came to him. The Son of David, Messiah the King, would, in spite of Pharisees, meet the wants of the poor and despised in Israel, however false their position. And that of Zacchaeus was so; and no attempt to satisfy the exigencies of his conscience changed its falseness; indeed this creates them. But in a time of confusion (and who does not see such?) grace reaches through the forms this confusion takes in individuals, to meet the need which lies at the bottom of the heart, and which grace had produced, and which shows itself in many a detail of which grace takes notice, and which grace can see (though selfishness cannot), as the Lord did here. Such grace as Jesus' draws them out, as it did here; but that grace, at the same time,

passes by as well all the efforts to quiet the conscience. It brings salvation. Zacchaeus was a son of Abraham, surely as much as the Pharisees. I am disposed to think, that the healing of the blind man is out of its place in Luke, and is introduced before the Lord's entry into Jericho, in order to give its true character to the reception of Zacchaeus.²

Besides the very interesting history of Zacchaeus, Luke adds the parable of the traffic with the *mina*, referring to the way in which the kingdom would be set up, and the Jews' rejection of Him. It is evident that there are certain points of analogy between this and the parable addressed to the disciples in Matthew; but there are important points of distinction. Here responsibility is much more distinctly brought out; God's sovereignty, though ever wise sovereignty, in gifts, less. In Matthew one had five talents; another two; another one, according to his several ability. Here each has one; all depends on the faithfulness of the servant. Hence, it is not, as in Matthew, one common joy, "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matt. 25:21); but "Be thou over ten, thou over five cities" (Luke 19:17,19). It is reward in the kingdom, not common joy with Christ; each being faithful in what was entrusted, and having gained according to what was given him. But another point is brought in, not merely the faithfulness of the

2 The expression employed, I judge, carefully avoids the moment or act of entering into Jericho. The Greek for "as he was come nigh unto Jericho" (Luke 18:35), is in a form always distinctively used for a period or course of action, a state of things during which a thing happens. It may refer to an individual act; but it is while a thing takes place, not as it takes place, as a particular point. It is at the period in which Jesus came into the neighborhood of Jericho, which He did in a particular manner; in fact, at that time.

servants, in which the analogy, though not sameness, of the two parables lies. The question of the Jews receiving the kingdom or not is treated; they could not, for they would not receive the King. Christ was now near that place where this question was to be decided, the city of the great King; and men thought the kingdom should immediately appear. He shows them that another order was to be followed. He was going to a far country, heaven, to receive the kingdom. Meanwhile, He left His servants to trade; not yet to be His partners in the glory of the kingdom—that would come afterward. They would have their place in it according to their faithfulness in His absence; to them that had, more would be given. But there was another class of persons, His citizens—over whom He should have reigned—the Jews; but they, in their rejection of the gospel after His departure, declared they would not have Him to reign over them. They are, on His return, brought before Him and slain. It was not merely the rejection of Christ—He interceded for them on the cross, for that as their ignorance, and the Spirit comes to tell them, He will return on their repentance;—but their opposition to this last, as a message sent after Him, that they will not have Him. This gave the full instructions as to the course the introduction of the kingdom would take.

He rides into the city on an ass. Part of the cry recited here, not in the other Gospels, is worthy of remark: “Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest” (vs. 38). That is, in Luke, they not merely raise the cry of Israel in the last day, according to Psalm 118, but the announcement is extended to heaven. There peace is settled. The power of the enemy is gone; and that glory, which is above the heavens, fully established. Peace reigns there, so that the blessing on earth

can follow. This additional and characteristic announcement naturally belongs to Him who reveals the Son of man, and heavenly and eternal things. Further, we have still grace shown here; the other special part of Christ's character in Luke — He weeps over the city on seeing it.

The question of His authority is in all the three Gospels, as is also the seeking of fruit from the husbandmen; but Luke omits the marriage of the king's son, which, in Matthew, gives the other part of God's dealing with the Jewish people. Luke had already given an analogous parable; but dealing with the subject morally as to the effect of Jesus' teaching, and calling men, and the result in its extension to the Gentiles, after He had shown His love to the poor of the flock in Israel. In Christ's reply to the Sadducees, an additional and important element is brought out in Luke — the first resurrection peculiar to the children of God. In Matthew, the present authority of scribes, etc., as in Moses' seat, is recognized; but they are denounced by the Lord in the most awful way. Here, after the manner of Luke, the true moral point of their character is stated; no authority is spoken of, and they are left there. A few words suffice for this; Luke 20.

Then comes the widow's mite (Luke 21), which is not in Matthew.

In all this part Luke's account tallies exactly with Mark's. The character of Jerusalem, as killing the prophets, and the Lord's patient grace, which would have so often assembled her children, found in Matthew immediately before the prophecy of chapter 24, is in Luke 13. I apprehend, as I expressed in speaking of Matthew 23, it is introduced by Matthew, in connection with his subject, somewhat out of its place, but not so far as to time as might be supposed.

The journey mentioned in Luke 9:51, and in chapter 17:11 was the last, which, I suppose, are the same, if the sense of chapter 9:51 is rightly given.

The collection of moral instructions, which follows on chapter 9, leaves the chronological connection untouched. The transfiguration practically closed the Lord's ministry, as the Lord in the midst of Israel; and that, in all the three Gospels. In all the three, besides the account of the birth of the Lord, which is not in Mark, there are three parts: His ministry in Galilee, which closes with the transfiguration; then He specially announces that He is to suffer, and that as Son of man; then we have a course of instruction, whether dispensational or moral. The latter character is largely developed in Luke, so that this second part, in which Christ has the place of Son of man (the subject of Luke's Gospel), is very much longer, contains a great deal of additional matter, and draws out what is found in Matthew and Mark in quite another connection. The third part begins with the blind man near Jericho.

In the second part, in all three Gospels, there is, as to historical circumstances, merely the last journey, and what passed in it; so that the blind man at Jericho connects itself, through this journey, almost immediately with the transfiguration. He then finally left His service in Galilee, and set out to suffer in Jerusalem; so that the character of His service was changed, or rather it was closed: only that He continued to show mercy, and to bear witness in grace, till it was actually and finally closed. But He had forbidden His disciples to say He was the Christ, for He was soon going to suffer as Son of man, and could say now, "How long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?" (Luke 9:41).

John shows, I apprehend, that there was, after His leaving Galilee, a course of movements in detail not found in the other Gospels. He goes up into the coast of Judea from Galilee, the other side Jordan, and goes to Jerusalem (Mark 11). Jesus was at Jerusalem in winter, at the feast of the dedication (John 10:22). They seek to kill Him, and He goes beyond Jordan again; comes up to raise Lazarus, and again departs to a country called Ephraim. Then He comes up for the last time (Luke 9 and 17). This, of course, was a little before Easter. The address to Jerusalem was thus, at any rate, on His last journey up to Jerusalem.

To come now to the prophetic warning of the Lord. The question recorded, as put by the disciples, shows at the outset the difference of the object of the revelation. Christ, as in Matthew, had assured them that the temple would be thrown down. The inquiry, as to the sign of Christ's coming and the end of the age, is not presented nor noticed in Luke. The question here put, relates solely to the destruction the Lord had spoken of. Hence, while the early warnings referring to this epoch are found here, more briefly, yet much as in Matthew, the prophetic account closes with the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, and says nothing of the abomination of desolation. The times of the Gentiles have then their course, till they are fulfilled, Jerusalem being trodden under foot. After this come the signs, and the Son of man is seen coming in glory. The difference of this and Matthew is evident. The passage in Luke, while giving the subsequent events and the coming of the Lord, is specially occupied with the Roman destruction of Jerusalem, judicially ushering in the external Christian order of things; while Matthew is exclusively occupied with the time which is yet to come,

and (save the fact that the gospel of the kingdom was to be preached to all nations) confines himself to the testimony in Israel. We shall see something analogous in the Lord's supper.

The close of the warning in Luke 21 is also peculiar. The warnings of Noe and Lot are not given here in Luke, but in chapter 17. Instead of that, we have verses 34-36, where the day is declared to come on the whole earth; but then the warning directed to the disciples, that they may escape and stand before the Son of man, leaving it open to a full millennial accomplishment. Thus, while it deals with the remnant, it is much more large and general. In Luke 17 the Noe and Lot comparisons are given as a warning, in contrast to the present character of the kingdom then through Christ's presence. The kingdom was there in His person; but His rejection would change all, and then He would come as a flash of lightning in the midst of the busy selfish occupations of this world, like the deluge on the world and the fire on Sodom.

I do not think, from chapter 17:22, the Gospel of Luke has a date, until the last events. What is narrated, is added to what precedes; and then, when the prophetic warnings are given, that is, when the residue are warned, the present change is brought forward, and the time of the Gentiles dispensationally stated.

In what follows in chapter 22, in the main, the three Gospels are alike; only Luke, as he usually does, where not led out into moral development, gives a very brief and concentrated résumé of the facts more distinctly stated elsewhere. I refer particularly now to Judas and the chief priests. The "then" of "then entered Satan" (vs. 3), is not in the original. It was after the sop he entered in. Before that,

he had put the betraying of Jesus into his heart. This is all put together, with the chief priests' counsel (Luke 22:1-6). A similar instance is as to John Baptist (Luke 3:15-19): as is also the visit of the women to the sepulcher.

Then follows the choice of the room for the Passover. Here there are some important circumstances peculiar to Luke. First, the Lord's love and feeling about it (vs. 15); next, the reference to the eating the lamb for the last time, and the cup: besides the institution of the Supper, the presence of Judas, and the strife among them who should be the greatest. The manner of expression, too, is according to the character of that Gospel; that is, opening the then next present order of God's dealings, instead of going on dispensationally to the renewal of God's relationship with the world. The Passover was to be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. Hence He was glad to eat of it for the last time in His earthly association with His disciples. This is not in Matthew. It is the great moral fact of universal bearing of the death of Christ.

Next, as to His drinking of the fruit of the vine. In Matthew, He takes His character of Nazarite separation from Israel, until He drinks it in a new way in the Father's kingdom: the time of future blessedness spoken of, in this way, in Matthew. Compare chapter 13. Here, He takes the Nazarite place as a present thing, but closes, so to speak, every thought of this association in the present time, fixing the mind on the present setting up of the kingdom. In Matthew in connection with His death, and the founding of the new covenant thereon, He goes quite on to the establishment of the Father's kingdom: only showing His separation from all on earth, till that establishment of the kingdom came. The words of institution differ, also,

somewhat. In Matthew, He replaces the passover: and the words, “this is my body” (Matt. 26:26), only are given. In Luke the gift of grace is noticed. In Matthew it is noticed as going out beyond the Jews, to whom Christ had presented Himself, as related in that Gospel—shed for many, for the remission of sins. In Luke it is the simple, personal application of grace—“for you.”

The inquiry among the disciples who should betray Him, is found in Luke in a few words, as we have seen in other cases. On the other hand, an humbling moral circumstance is stated; that, even here, was a strife among them who should be greatest—at such a moment! But it gives occasion to the perfect and patient grace of Christ, to teach them the true path of glory He had followed—that of humility, and being servant to all; and to own, in unspeakable grace, as if dependent on their kindness, their perseverance with Him. Also He appointed to them a kingdom, as His Father had appointed to Him: so that they should be at table in His kingdom, and sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. The very greatness of the glory and the blessing ought to silence the dispute.

In Matthew the fact here revealed is given (Matt. 19:16-30) in connection with setting aside human righteousness, and riches as an advantage and reward connected with it (that is, the setting aside the Jewish system); and with the glory, in the time of the regeneration, consequent on the loss of all for faith: still showing, in chapter 20, that grace—sovereign grace—characterized God’s dealing with men in the kingdom.

To turn to Luke 22, where the general application of Christ’s death to faith is spoken of, the result of the present

faithfulness of the disciples in connection with Christ before His death would meet its judgment in Jewish millennial glory. But into His death—which, while witnessing judgment of sin, was the means of salvation—they could not follow Him; to be saved by it was another thing. Their service in His suffering in the kingdom would be recompensed with glory in the kingdom; but death, as such, man could not stand in, such as he was: that belonged to Christ only, a lesson they had not yet learned. They could not go into it as death from the divine judgment of sin; but they could as a sifting from the enemy, to learn that they could not, but must be dependent on Another's doing it. This is found only in Luke; and the ardor of nature is suffered to go farther in Peter, to teach the entire incapacity of the energy of nature to do the work of God (its ardor only making its fall more apparent and terrible); so that, by the experience of what it was worth, and grace meeting it, one should be better able to strengthen others with true strength. This done, the Lord shows the difference of their position during His life, and that induced by His death. He had served them as a living Savior. They must suffer, and, humanly speaking, shift for themselves when He became a dying one. On the earth He was reckoned among malefactors; for the things which concerned Him drew to a close. New ones would begin.

This contrast of Christ's life, and His disciples' connection with it; and His death, and the impossibility of their being connected with Him in it, is peculiar to Luke. Into the latter, that is, the scenes connected with His death, he now enters. This point is important. The human character of the blessed Lord's suffering in Gethsemane is much more brought out in Luke; and circumstances of the

deepest interest are added, while the details of the thrice repeated prayer are omitted, and all is brought together in its moral character. The chief circumstances added are these.

The Lord already on arriving at the place, Himself perfect in the sense of what it was, warns them of their need and how to meet it. "Pray that ye enter not into temptation" (Luke 22:40).

Further, an angel from heaven appeared to Him to strengthen Him. Here we find His human position clearly brought out. Again, we have the solemn sign of the conflict in which He was: His sweat as great drops of blood falling down. All this is brought together without distinguishing His three prayers. Save the answer of the Lord to Judas as to his kiss, nothing distinctive, that I am aware of, is in what follows, only the healing of Malchus is more briefly noticed. Conflict through prayer in view of temptation, not to enter into it, characterizes Luke's account of Gethsemane, not the being sorrowful unto death. The forsaking of the disciples is not in Luke. The personal human conflict of Jesus is His subject. The trial of Peter follows in Luke. The Lord had closed His address to those that came, by saying that it was the hour of Satan's power—alas! their hour also, but the time of the exercise of the power of darkness; happily for us, for the light has shone there, and in that light, the power of darkness is gone for us. This Gospel brings in, in connection with this, Peter's history under temptation and the power of the enemy, before pursuing that of Christ's interrogatory.

There is no difficulty in the details, as has been imagined. The maid spoke to the men, a man to Peter. The perfect grace of the Lord is brought out here in a circumstance

omitted elsewhere—the Lord's looking at Peter. The personal sorrows of Christ are given as such in Luke. His being buffeted is given also before His interrogatory: and this last very briefly in the testimony of Christ Himself, who declares the uselessness of reply; that henceforth they would not see Him, but in glory. All the witness as to the destruction of the temple is omitted.

The account of Luke is here also much more brief, but an important fact added (Luke 23). Judas' death is not found (see the Acts), nor the message of Pilate's wife, nor the Jews taking His blood upon their head, nor, subsequently, the crown of thorns and insults. On the other hand, the sending to Herod is brought before us, and thus the full uniting of all against the rightful Lord of the world—the Christ—is presented to us; with the solemn but too natural picture of the opposition to Christ, uniting those who in their personal interests and passions were otherwise enemies. They can complement each other in treating Christ thus. Pilate, doubtless, would have quieted thus a disturbed conscience by throwing the matter over on Herod, or avoided the guilt. But thus it was to be. Nor can men thus escape the fruit of their own wickedness. He hoped to get rid of the matter. What is noticed in Luke is, that he delivered Jesus to their will.

The circumstances attending Christ's crucifixion give a very different character to the scene, though the great central truth is necessarily the same. He is all through now, indeed, the green tree. It is the Man, the Man dependent on the Father, the holy confiding Man, as full of grace now as when walking through a world enlightened (had it been possible) by His miracles. His sufferings, His death as King of the Jews, are recounted surely, the veil of the temple is

rent; but the accomplishing so many prophecies, and the expression of His expiatory agony, are not noticed. Nature wept at His sorrow, His loss, and the terrible act was felt; but it was over themselves these daughters of Jerusalem should weep. He was the green tree, and if this happened in Him, what should be done to the dry, the lifeless Jerusalem, whose sorrow He was bearing, whose state in judgment He had in grace stepped forward to take for the remnant, who would fain have seen Him received, and acknowledged the sad estate of Jerusalem? Still a nation's sin was there. Judgment was due, and He, the green tree, took it on Him. The remnant would thus escape, but the dry tree, what would be done in it? It is not simply salvation here, but judgment on the nation. This unfolds many Psalms, and the desire that the meek and righteous should not be ashamed for His sake.

Verses 35-38 very briefly recount what the other two evangelists relate in detail; and then we have the deeply interesting account of the malefactor, which, as the weeping women drew out the judicial dealings with Jerusalem, and the place Christ took as to the judgment due to the people, unfolds the heavenly portion through faith in Jesus, in virtue of expiation and grace of one who leaves this earth, however great a sinner a man may be, be he who he may, before even the kingdom is set up at all. This we have constantly seen is in view in Luke—the eternal, moral, heavenly blessing, what we call Christianity, in contrast with the order of dispensations, while even owning these. Even the dispensational part (the weeping women) is treated morally. The poor thief, converted, justified, and cleansed, was to be that very day with Him in paradise. The traits of his conversion and faith are admirable. The circumstance

that the sun, the center of all natural light and life, and of the whole system of nature for us, was darkened is added (vs. 45). Nature was put out, and its central sun darkened, as it were, but the way into the holiest laid open by the very same thing.

But, on the other hand, there is no rising for the earthly witness (as in Matthew) of bodies of the saints. Further, there is not the agony of rejection from the light of God's countenance — the opposite to all that every righteous man in Israel hitherto could say, for they had been heard. But we have the new man, the man that trusts in God. Having passed through it and drunk, in perfect obedience, the bitter cup, He can say, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (vs. 46). In death, He trusts His soul to His Father. So the centurion also here recognizes the Lord in this character; "Certainly this was a righteous man" (vs. 47). Luke adds the moral effect on the people now, as so often happens under the effect of what their misguided passions had led to. That He was with the rich in His death is then related by all.

In what follows, as we have so often found, Luke relates in a general way, bringing all together, the discovery by the women and by Peter of the resurrection of Jesus; but there is no apparition of Jesus here to any of them; Luke 24. Angels spoke to the women — they to the disciples. It was as idle tales to these; only Peter went to the sepulcher and found it was so, and departed wondering. But then Luke gives the details of the touching history of the journey to Emmaus, just noticed by Mark, where Jesus reveals Himself; and here it is by an allusion to His death, which, though in no way the Lord's supper, intimated a part of the same truth as that. The Christ they had to know was

a Christ who had died, whose body had been broken for them, and who then disappeared—was to be known by faith. At the same time He had expounded to them the Scriptures. This and indeed something more, is again found after His personal revelation of Himself to Simon, and to the eleven and others. We have His revelation of Himself first to Peter, and then the clear setting forth that He was really a risen man, having flesh and bones, and having even eaten with them. Two things then are presented, divinely given intelligence of Scripture, and power given from on high.

Such are the great bases of the Gospel here presented—the Man risen—known in death, and gone away; scripture understood by divinely—given spiritual intelligence; and power from on high. Of this last we have little to boast. Next, all that passed in Galilee, recorded by Matthew, is omitted. Matthew gives his last glimpse of Jesus there, and does not speak of the ascension. What is recorded also by John as passing in Galilee is also omitted.³ He closes with the respective positions of Peter and John (representing the Jewish and Gentile parts of the Christian church), without historically mentioning the ascension. All this part of the history is omitted in Luke, and the link of the Lord's departure is with Bethany, His home when rejected of Jerusalem, the heavenly family. There He blesses them, and, as He does so, is taken up to heaven. The mission they receive is according to this. It is not going forth to the Gentiles, assuming the acceptance of, at any rate, the remnant of Israel; nor simply enlarging the service to all creation; but as from outside all, as from heaven, to

3 The Lord teaches the ascension to Mary Magdalene. See John's Gospel, though there be no account of it.

preach to all the Gentiles, beginning at Jerusalem, which for heavenly things needed it as much as Gentiles, and as to dispensation, had the first place as object of promise. They were to go to all, but “to the Jew first” (Rom. 2:10). The apostles were witnesses, but the Holy Spirit also would be given. Though their blessing and mission were from heaven, they find their way to the temple, there praising God.

Notes on Luke 1

Luke 1.

The Savior is presented to us in Luke in His character as Son of man, displaying the power of Jehovah in grace in the midst of men. At first, doubtless, we find Him in relationship with Israel, to whom He had been promised; but afterward moral principles are brought out, which apply to man, as such, wherever he might be. And indeed what characterizes Luke's account of our Lord, and gives special interest to his Gospel, is that it presents to us Christ Himself, and not His official glory as in Matthew, nor His mission or service as in Mark, nor the peculiar revelation of His divine nature as in John. It is Himself, such as He was, a man upon the earth, moving among men day by day.

Luke 1:1-4. Many had undertaken to give an account of what was historically received amongst Christians, as it had been related to them by the eye-witnesses. However well intended this might be, yet it was a work undertaken and executed by men. Luke had an exact and intimate knowledge of all from the beginning, and he found it good to write in order to Theophilus, that he might know the certainty of the things he had been instructed in. It is thus that God has provided for the whole church by the teaching contained in the living picture of Jesus that we owe to this man of God. For Luke, although he might be personally moved by Christian motives, was of course none the less inspired by the Holy Spirit to write.

Luke 1:5-17. The history brings us into the midst of Jewish institutions, feelings, and expectations. First, we

have a priest of Abia (one of the twenty-four classes: 1 Chron. 24), with his wife who was of the daughters of Aaron. "They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless" (vs. 6). All with them was in accordance with God's law Jewishly; but they did not enjoy the blessing so earnestly desired by every Jew; they were childless. Yet it was according to the ways of God to accomplish His work of blessing while manifesting the weakness of the instrument which He was using. But now this long-prayed-for blessing was to be withheld no longer; and when Zacharias draws near to offer the incense, the angel of Jehovah appears to him. At the sight of so glorious a being Zacharias is troubled; but the angel says to him, "Fear not, thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John," that is, "the favor of Jehovah." And not only should the hearts of many rejoice in him, but he should be great in the sight of the Lord and be filled with the Holy Spirit. "Many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." The "spirit of Elias" was a firm and ardent zeal for the glory of Jehovah and for the re-establishment, through repentance, of Israel's relations with Him. The heart of John clung to this link of the people with God, and it is in the moral force of his call to repentance that John is here compared to Elias.

Luke 1:18-23. But Zacharias's faith, as is alas! so often the case, was not equal to the greatness of his request. He knows not how to walk in the steps of Abraham, and he asks again how such a thing can be. God's goodness turns the unbelief of His servant into a chastening that

was profitable for him, and that served, at the same time, as a proof to the people that he had been visited from on high. Zacharias remains dumb until the word of Jehovah is accomplished.

Luke 1:24-25. Elizabeth, with feelings so suitable to a holy woman, remembering what had been a shame to her in Israel (the traces of which were only made the more marked by the supernatural blessing now granted to her), hides herself, whilst at the same time she owns the Lord's goodness to her. But what may conceal us from the eyes of men has great value before God.

Luke 1:26-38. And now the scene changes, in order to introduce the Lord Himself into this marvelous scene that is unfolding itself before our eyes. In Nazareth, that despised place, there was found a young virgin, unknown by the world, whose name was Mary. She was espoused to Joseph, who was of the house of David; but so out of order was everything in Israel, that this descendant of the king was a carpenter. But what is this to God? Mary was a chosen vessel; she had found favor in the eyes of God.

We must remark that the subject here is the birth of the child Jesus as born of Mary. It is not so much His divine nature as the Word which was God and which was made flesh (though, of course, it is the same precious Savior presented here as in John's Gospel); but it is Jesus as really and truly man—born of a virgin. His name was to be Jesus, that is, Jehovah the Savior. He "shall be called the Son of the highest, and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David" (Luke 1:32)—still looking at Him as man born into the world. But He was God as well as man. Holy by His birth, conceived by the power of God, this blessed One, who even as born of Mary is spoken

of as “that holy thing,” was to be called “the Son of God” (vs. 35).

The angel then tells Mary of the blessing God had bestowed upon Elizabeth. The wonderful intervention of God had rendered Mary humble instead of lifting her up: she had seen God and not herself in what had happened. Self was hidden from her because God had been brought so near, and she bows to His holy will. “Be it unto me according to thy word.”

Luke 1:39-45. Afterward we find that Mary goes to visit Elizabeth, for her heart loves to see and acknowledge the goodness of the Lord. Elizabeth, speaking by the Spirit, acknowledges Mary as the mother of her Lord, and announces the accomplishment of God’s promise. “Blessed is she that believed,” etc.

Luke 1:46. The heart of Mary is filled with joy, and she breaks forth into a song of praise. She acknowledges God her Savior in the grace that has filled her with such joy, whilst, at the same time, she owns her utter littleness. For whatever might be the holiness of the instrument that God might employ, and that was found really in Mary, yet she was only great so long as she hid herself; for then God was everything. By making something of herself she would have lost her place; but this she did not. God kept her in order that His grace might be fully manifested.

The character of the thoughts that fill the heart of Mary is Jewish. It reminds us of Hannah’s song in 1 Samuel 2, which speaks prophetically of this same blessed intervention of God. But Mary goes back to the promises made to the fathers, and takes in the whole of Israel.

Luke 1:56. After remaining three months with Elizabeth, she returns to her house humbly to follow her

own path, in order that God's ways may be accomplished. Nothing is more beautiful in its way than this account of the conversations of these holy women, unknown to the world, but who were the instruments of God's grace to accomplish His glorious designs. They moved in a scene where nothing entered but piety and grace. But God was there Himself, no better known to the world than were these poor women, but preparing and accomplishing what the angels would desire to look into.

Luke 1:57-59. But what is only known in secret by faith is at last to be accomplished before all men. The son of Zacharias and Elizabeth is born, and Zacharias, no longer dumb, pronounces the blessed prophecy we have in Luke 1:69-80. The visitation of Israel by Jehovah, which he speaks of, embraces all the happiness of the millennium, connected with the presence of Jesus upon the earth. All the promises are Yea and Amen in Him. All the prophecies encircle Him with the glory which will be then realized. We know that, since He has been rejected and while He is now absent, the accomplishment of these things is necessarily put off till His return.

Notes on Luke 2

Luke 2.

When God is pleased to occupy Himself with the world, and to take a part in what passes therein, it is marvelous to see how He acts and the instruction He gives. There is no agreement, but a total opposition between His ways and those of men. The emperor and his decree are but insignificant instruments. Caesar Augustus acts in view of his subjects; yet he is, without knowing it, the means of accomplishing the prophecy that Jesus should be born in Bethlehem. The entire course of the world is outside the current of God's thoughts. The capital fact for Him and for His kingdom here is the babe's birth at Bethlehem; but the emperor has no thought about it. The decree puts the world in motion, and God makes good His thoughts here below. How wondrous! All the world is in movement to bring about this event, needed to fulfill prophecy, that the poor carpenter, with Mary, his espoused wife, should be in the city of David, and David's heir should be born there and then. And this is the more striking, for the census itself was first made some years afterward, when Cyrenius was governor of Syria: God is accomplishing His purpose of love. But man was blind to it. Who cared to notice the poor Jew, though he might be of the house and lineage of David? The things that are perfectly indifferent to man fill the heart and eye of God.

Still we are in Jewish atmosphere. Promises are being accomplished; the babe must be born in Bethlehem. "The city of David" (vs. 4) is nothing to the Christian as such,

save as showing prophecy fulfilled: to us the Son comes from heaven. On earth the babe is the object of God's counsels; angels and all heaven are occupied with His birth; but there is no place in the world for Him! Go where the great world registers every individual, go to the little world of an inn, where each is measured by the servant's knowing eye, and place is accordingly awarded from the garret to the first floor; but there is no room for Jesus! And the manger led, in due time, to the lowest place—to the cross.

What a lesson for us as to this world! What a difference, too, between giving up the world and the world giving us up! We may do the one with comparative ease; but when we feel the world despises us as Christ was despised, we shall discover, unless He fills and satisfies the heart, that we had a value for its esteem that we were not aware of. When obedience is as important to us in our measure, as obeying was to Christ, we shall go right on whatever be before us, without regarding the world: not that we shall be insensible, but when Christ is the object we shall only be occupied with Him.

All intelligence of the things of God comes from His revelation, and not from the reasonings of men. Hence, the simple go farther in spiritual understanding than the wise and prudent of the earth. God acts here so as to set aside all appearance of human wisdom. Happy he who has so seized the intention of God as to be identified with it, and to want none but God! This was the case with the shepherds. They little entered into the great intent of the registration; but it was to them, and not to the prudent, that God revealed Himself. Our true wisdom is through what God reveals. But we never get God's fullest blessings till we are where the flesh is brought down and destroyed—I

speak as regards walk. We cannot get into the simple joy and power of God, till we accept the place of lowliness and humiliation—till the heart is emptied of what is contrary to the lowliness of Christ. These shepherds were in the quiet fulfillment of their humble duty; and that is the place of blessing. Whoever is keeping on terms with the world is not walking with God; for God is not walking with you there. From the manger to the cross all in Christ was simple obedience. How unlike a Theudas, who boasted himself to be somebody! Christ did all in God's way; and not only so, but we must come so too.

The glory of the Lord shines round about the shepherds, the angel speaks to them, the sign is given; and what a sign! "Ye shall find the babe wrapped up in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God"—and for what? "The mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16). The hope of Israel is revealed to them—glad tidings of great joy to all the people. For Jesus is the pivot of all God's counsels in grace. Adam himself was but a figure of Him who was to come. Christ was ever in the mind of God. Such displays of glory are not shown to mortal eyes every day; but God sets them before us in His word, and we must every day follow the sign given—follow Jesus the babe in the manger. If He filled the eye, the ear, the heart, how we should see the effects in person, spirit, conversation, dress, house, money, and so forth.

Such, then, is the sign of God's accomplishment of promise and of His presence in the world—"a babe in a manger" (Luke 2:16). the least and lowest thing. But God is found there, though these things are beyond man, who

cannot walk with God, nor understand His moral glory. But God's sign is within the reach of faith. It is the token of perfect weakness; a little infant who can only weep! Such, born into this world is Christ the Lord. Such is the place God chose—the low degree. God's intervention is recognized by a sign like this. Man would not have sought that. The heavenly host praise God and say, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, goodwill toward [in] men." Nothing higher nor more astonishing (save the cross) for those who have the mind of heaven. The choir above see God in it—God manifested in flesh, and praise God in the highest. They rejoice that His delights are with the sons of men. Of old God had displayed Himself to Moses in a flame of fire, without consuming the bush, and here, still more marvelously, in the feeblest thing on earth; infinite thought morally, though despicable in the eye of the world! How hard it is to receive that the work of God and of His Christ is always in weakness! the rulers of the people saw in Peter and John unlearned and ignorant men. Paul's weakness at Corinth was the trial of his friends, the taunt of his enemies, the boast of himself. The Lord's strength is made perfect in weakness. The thorn in the flesh made Paul despised, and he conceived it would be better if that were gone. He had need of the lesson, "My grace is sufficient for thee." It is God's rule of action, if we may so say, to choose the weak things. Everything must rest on God's power, otherwise God's work cannot be done according to His mind. One can hardly believe that one must be feeble to do the work of God: but Christ was crucified in weakness, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For the work of God we must be weak, that the strength may be

of God; and that work will last when all the earth shall be moved away.

Luke 2:21-38. But besides the additional testimony rendered by the offering of His mother to the circumstances in this world, in which the Lord of glory was born, we may see that, while God all through the Gospel is settling man in his new place with Himself, He did not forget His ancient people. He shows us here that He met every thought in every heart that was touched by grace in Israel. His heart was especially toward those who sorrowed over the sins and desolation of His people; and who, withal, waited for redemption, crying from the darkness, "How long, O Lord?" God will accomplish in power that wherein man has failed in responsibility. Should we therefore be content if God's people do not glorify Him? No; faith is not hard; it will sorrow, but it will wait for God, and God's time too; for faithful is He who hath promised, who also will do it. He will bring about His own purposes.

Luke 2:25. Thus was Simeon "waiting for the consolation of Israel." Thus Anna departed not from the temple, but served with fastings and prayers night and day; thus all that had looked for redemption in Jerusalem. There were those who watched, and Anna knew and spake to them. The rest doubtless were occupied with Roman oppression; but these few waited for Him, bowing before His hand in judgment of evil, but looking for His deliverance.

I believe there was something more in Simeon's soul than the joy of holding in his arms the babe, the expected Messiah; Simeon felt he had God, and was satisfied. So he says, without even looking on to the glory, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word" (Luke 2:29). In Romans 5:11 the apostle, after

speaking of rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God, says, “and not only so.” What could be more than that hope? Yes, there is more: “we also have joy in God.” The eyes of Simeon have seen God’s salvation, and he begs of the sovereign Lord that he may go.

We often see something like this in dying saints, who deeply joy in the Lord’s love to His own, and in the nearness of His coming for them. Why, one might say, what is His near coming to those who are dying and departing to Him? Just this—the nearer we are to God, the more precious is all the truth of God, and everything which is near to His heart. So in verses 30-32 Simeon rejoices as he surveys the extent of the divine deliverance. It was for the revelation of the Gentiles, who had been till now hidden in the dark of idolatry and ungodliness, as well as for the glory of Israel. But his soul is satisfied possessing Christ, and anticipating the effect of His presence in the whole world: he has all in Him, and desires to depart. If a man walks with God and has finished his course, he knows that his work is done and is conscious of the Lord’s time being come. He has a companionship and communion with the Lord he has walked with. If simply brought to a bed of sickness, he is not then ready to go; not that he fears, but God is teaching him something else. But when God’s time is come, all is joy and readiness. He feels like Simeon, “Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace” (Luke 2:29).

But, further, when Simeon blessed Joseph and Mary, the Spirit gives him to disclose the more immediate results of the babe’s presence in Israel. He should be the touchstone of many hearts, an occasion for the fall as well as the rise of many; He should be a sign spoken against, a rejected

Messiah; and Mary's heart should be pierced through, whatever the present joy or the future glory.

Israel was low indeed, but did not know it; Israel must be made to know it, and Christians too; for Christ had to descend to the grave and rise again. The thoughts of the heart must be revealed, whatever the outward garb. But then He is the one who brings out God's thoughts too. If He is the Christ, the glory of God's people, He is also the one who will abase the flesh, and meet and humble man in his pride; He is the one who will make you know whether His rejection is more precious than all beside.

Luke 2:39. When all was done according to the law, they returned to Galilee to Nazareth. Jesus would not be the Christ we need, if He had taken any glory from Jerusalem. His place is among the poor of the flock—His place all through in Israel.

Luke 2:40. "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him." Luke gives us more of the reality of His childhood than the other Gospels. He was not made man full—formed like Adam.

If one only reads the account without comment, how the soul feels it unspeakably precious! When we see who it was, we see human nature in Him filled with God, so to speak. It is not official distinction, but the heart feels God brought nigh. The blessedness of the child's intrinsic loveliness fills the heart. Deeply instructive too is the incident recorded in connection with the passover when He was twelve years old. His true character comes out, though He was not yet to act upon it. He came to be a Nazarene—to be about His Father's business. This is here stated distinctly before He enters upon His public ministry,

that it might be seen to be connected with His person, and not to depend merely upon His office. He was the Pastor of the flock in spirit and character. It belonged to Him. He was the Son of the Father, though abiding God's time for showing it.

Luke 2:51. Nevertheless "He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them." What a majesty in His whole life! His being God secured His perfection as a child and man here below. He had ever the blessed consciousness of His relationship to His Father—an obedient child, but conscious also of a glory unconnected in itself with subjection to human parentage. He belonged to Mary and even Joseph; in another sense He was not theirs. His divine sonship was as well known to Him, as His obedience to His parents was in due season absolutely right.

Luke 2:52. "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." His human intelligence being developed, He, though ever perfect, became so in a full way—the perfect man. The lovely plant grew up and unfolded before God and man.

Notes on Luke 3

Luke 3.

The two preceding chapters have given the general character; they have shown the going out of the thoughts of God to man. Accordingly we find that the Gospel, as a whole, is particularly occupied with what is not Jewish. Still the Jewish part is given at first with considerable detail, inasmuch as Israel, because of their unbelief and moral worthlessness, are to be set aside, in order to make way for new relationships, founded on what God reveals Himself to be for man in Jesus, the true and only mediator. But if Luke 1 disclosed the faithfulness of God to the Abrahamic promises, to His covenant and His oath, Luke 2 puts us in the presence of the actual government of the world and of the Lord's land and people under the fourth beast, the Roman empire. What confusion does not sin create? The Jews are subject to the Gentiles; Joseph and Mary, of David's royal house, go up to be taxed. Nevertheless the ways of God shine so much the brighter for the darkness that surrounded them: He was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. Israel, however, would be put to a new moral test by His presentation of Himself. Alas! it would soon appear that, if they had not kept the law, they hated grace. "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against" (Luke 3:34).

In Luke 3 we have the ministry of God coming in by a prophet as of old by Samuel. "The word of God came unto John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness." It is not

without object that the Spirit mentions the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar, etc. All the earth was seemingly at rest under its heathen lord; the word of God found its suited sphere in the wilderness. The law and the prophets were until John: and where should he be in such a state of things but the wilderness? Could he morally own it? God will not have His messenger in Jerusalem.

Prophecy is the sovereign means whereby God can communicate with His people when they are ruined and departed from Him. John understands this, and preaches the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And such was the place assigned him, many centuries before, by Esaias the prophet. It was vain for Israel to plead their privileges and rights. All was wrong, and the Judge was at the door. John's work was not to lead the people back to the law: he was preparing the way of the Lord. Herein he differed from the prophets as well as the law, or rather he went farther; for God's time was come for a step in advance. The prophets led back to Horeb: John says not a word of this, though his father was a priest, and himself, of course, an Aaronite. He does not try to set up again what was closed; he announces the kingdom. He may not introduce the church, nor even the glad tidings of God's grace (both awaited the accomplishment of the work of redemption), but he drops the law, and shows that God's purpose is the kingdom.

The quotation from Esaias sets aside Israel—not the Gentiles merely but Israel—as grass, withered grass, without a green blade left. Yet the word of the Lord endureth forever, and this when all hope for man was gone. Israel may have failed, but the word of the Lord shall stand. Moreover, since it was the Lord who was coming,

every valley should be filled, etc. Not the Jews alone, but all flesh, should see God's deliverance. If sin plunges all in indiscriminate ruin and a common judgment, God can meet man thus ruined, but His glory will not be shut up in the narrow limits of Israel.

Luke 3:7-14. But, to be blessed, man must repent. God would have realities, and not a mere nominal people; He must have fruits answering to hearts which felt and judged their moral condition, and which therefore turned from themselves to God. Ordinances, formal claims, etc., which should have been means of blessing, would be no shelter against the coming wrath; nor would God permit them to hinder His creating true children of the promise, if this generation were but Ishmael over again. Judgment must begin at the house of God.

In fact, as we know, John was beheaded, and the Lord was crucified, and the kingdom, presented in Him, and by Him, was rejected by Israel. By-and-by it will be set up visibly and in power.⁴ Meanwhile the church is set up, because the kingdom is not set up in this manifested way.

4 Observe, that Matthew only uses the expression, "kingdom of heaven." It is often, in a general sense, capable of being interchanged with "kingdom of God," as we see by comparing Luke. Notwithstanding, the two phrases cannot always replace each other, and Matthew uses "kingdom of God" in a few passages where "kingdom of heaven" could not be used (Matt. 6:33; 12:28; 21:43). Thus "the kingdom of God" was there when Christ the King was there; "the kingdom of heaven" began with Christ going to heaven. By-and-by, when Satan ceases to rule, it will be the "kingdom of heaven" (and "of God" too, of course), not in a mystery, but in manifestation. "The kingdom of God" has also a moral force which "kingdom of heaven" has not; and in this way it is frequently used by Paul, and was peculiarly suitable to the Spirit's design in Luke.

And those who now take their place with the Lord share His rejection. They are members of His body, the church. They shall share His glory, but it will be heavenly, and not earthly, glory. In another sense we are in the kingdom now. To faith heaven rules now, and we own it, and know it; but Satan is actually prince and god of this world; and hence those who are made kings to God (for that is our true place) are called to suffer. Therefore Paul went everywhere preaching the kingdom of God, as well as Christ and the church. We have that by virtue of which we shall reign with Christ; but even that is not our best portion. To be one with Christ—His body and bride—is far more blessed. If your mind only rests on the person of Christ, there is no difficulty in seeing that when He is cut off, all must cease as regards the earth. He is the center of all; and when rejected, what prophecy spoke of, and what seemed about to be accomplished, breaks off. Thereupon Christ ascends, and takes up a glory above the heavens, and there now the saints find their place with Him. Compare Psalm 2 and 8.

John Baptist, then, addresses himself to the Jews, demanding repentance, and righteousness as its fruit; shows them that, if they were nearer to God outwardly as Jews, they must expect judgment the sooner. If the Lord was coming, He must have what became the Lord. The ax was even then lying at the root of the trees; if there was not good fruit on the trees, everyone must be hewn down and burnt. Repentance or wrath—which? The Lord would allow no plea of descent from Abraham, if their ways belied Abraham; He must have righteousness. It is the Lord that is just at hand, and He must have a people fit for Him, or He would out of the very stones make a suited people for Himself.

Evidently John's word is not a voice of mercy to the poor sinner. God is presented in the way of judgment, not of sovereign mercy. He does not say, "Come unto me." John could not say it, because he was not Christ, and none but He could say, "Come unto me." John came in righteousness.

In Luke 3:10-14 moral testimony is given, and that in detail. John deals with the practical iniquity of each set of people. So even when the question of the Christ is raised (vss. 15-18), "one mightier than I cometh," says he. It is of His power specially he thinks—His power morally as outwardly. "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." It is the power of the Holy Spirit and His consuming judgment. He could not speak of the grace of the gospel which we know now. He proclaims One who was coming after him, not a present salvation. Whatever would not stand the fire was to be burnt up. For His fan "is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner, but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable." (Compare Isa. 21:10.) God's floor was Israel; there He was getting His wheat, if any were to be found. But His fan is in His hand; He is going to make short work. Titus finally set aside God's floor upon the earth; Israel's sin had lost it morally when they rejected Christ, but at the destruction of Jerusalem it was done with thoroughly for the present.

Luke 3:19, etc.—Luke's method of instruction is to be noticed in passing. He shows that John had preached and exhorted moral truth, and then disposes of him, putting him, as it were, out of the scene, in order to bring Christ in. It was not that historically John was imprisoned at that juncture by Herod the tetrarch; it took place long after. But it is a sample of Luke's manner, who returns to the

Lord's taking His place amongst the remnant of Israel. For the Lord does not identify Himself with the nation; but, directly there is a poor remnant, He identifies Himself with it.

This history opens with verse 21, and how wonderful and full of grace! "Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased" (Luke 3:21-22). One may have looked and listened mournfully, as one reads of John Baptist and his testimony. We might have asked, as the dying record of men passed before us, What is man? But now my eye rests on Jesus: I find the Lord from heaven a man. All is to begin again. Do I ask again, What is man? At once Christ comes out. Do I look at myself? at all around? What do I see? Enough to break my heart, if there is a heart to be broken. The only thing which prevents people being utterly broken down is that they have not a heart to feel things as they are.

But a rest is here! I have got a man now who satisfied God—this blessed man on earth in the presence of God, looking to God, and an object to God! not Messiah purging His floor, but Him in whom God's thoughts and purposes are all folded up—not man perishing before the moth, but Jesus the Son of man, not merely coming down from Abraham and David, but traced up, "which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God" (Luke 3:38)—the second Man, the last Adam, the quickening Spirit. What a relief; for what is man? What one's self when the heart's sin is known—giving up God for an apple from the beginning hitherto! But now a man, a

blessed man, appears, “and praying.” We are not told this elsewhere, and why here? Because Luke presents man in his perfection—the dependent man; for dependence is the essence of a perfect man. Truly we see God shining all through, but yet in Jesus the dependent man, in the place and condition of perfectness as man. The root of sin in us is self-will, independence. Here my heart has rest! A dependent man in the midst of sorrow, but perfectly with God in all. See Luke’s account of the transfiguration also: in humiliation or in glory, it makes no difference as to this; the perfect is ever the dependent one.

And when that blessed heart thus expressed its dependence, did He get no answer? “The heaven was opened.” Does heaven open thus on me? It is open to me indeed, no doubt, but I pray because it is open; it opened because He prayed. I come and look up because the heavens were opened on Him.

It is, indeed, a lovely picture of grace, and we may be bold to say that the Father loved to look on—to look down, in the midst of all sin, on His beloved Son. Nothing but what was divine could thus awaken God’s heart; and yet it was the lowly perfect man. He takes not the place of His eternal glory, as the Creator, the Son of God. He stoops and is baptized (Psa. 16). He says, “in thee do I trust.” He says to Jehovah, “Thou art the Lord: my goodness extendeth not to thee.” He says to the godly remnant in Israel, “To the saints that are on the earth, and to the excellent...in them is all my delight.” He needed no repentance, yet is He baptized with them; just as when, later on, He puts forth His sheep, He goes before them. He identifies Himself in grace with Israel, even with such as were of a clean heart. And the Holy Spirit descends like a dove on Him—fit

emblem of that spotless man!—fit resting place for the Spirit in the deluge of this world! And how sweet, too, that Jesus is pointed out to us as God's object. I know the way the Father feels about Him. I am made His intimate, and admitted to hear Him expressing His affection for His Son, to see the links reformed between God and man. Heaven is opened, not on something above, but upon a man on the earth. Thus I get rest, and my heart finds communion with God in His beloved Son. It is only the believer who enjoys it, but the link is there. And if I have that in and about me which distresses the soul, I have that in Him which is unfailing joy and comfort.

The genealogy quite falls in with the thought that God is showing grace in man and to man. Jesus, the beloved Son of God, is traced up to Adam and to God. Jesus is Son of man; He is heir in this sense. He takes up the inheritance God gave to man. O what a truth! Where could one's heart turn for rest, if it had not Jesus to rest in? With Him, let heaven and earth be turned upside down, and still I have a rest. What blessedness for the heart to have the object God Himself is occupied with! May our hearts also be more and more occupied with Him!

Notes on Luke 4

Luke 4.

We saw the Lord taking His place of servant with the excellent in Israel, and thereon the heavens opened, and Himself owned by the Father as His beloved Son. His delights were with the sons of men, and He is traced up, not to Abraham only, the root and depositary of Jewish promises, but to Adam and God Himself. Independently of His proper divine glory as Son of the Father, Jesus should be called the Son of the Highest, the Son of God. As man on earth, He was sealed with the Holy Spirit. He took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. His entire perfectness now was to fulfill, as a servant, the will of Him who sent Him; for a servant doing his own will is a bad servant. Dependence, waiting, and obedience, were the characteristics of this place, and they are found in Him to the uttermost. Hence, as in the Psalms, "I waited patiently for the Lord" (Psa. 40:7). He would not ask for power, but waits on God. "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt. 26:53). Put thoroughly to the test, He would do nothing but His Father's will. He was to learn obedience. Having taken the place, He would go through it wholly, not in one act, but experiencing the force of that expression, learning obedience, without one comfort here, with enemies around, bulls of Bashan besetting, dogs compassing. He had to learn obedience where obedience was always suffering, even to the yielding up of life. Every single step was humiliation till the close came in the cross,

where the wrath of God was borne in love to us. No doubt He found, in His rejection, fields white for harvest, and so shall we, in our measure, when walking in the same path. But the cross was always before Him, everything that could stop a man. Nevertheless He went on, patiently waiting, and not asking for deliverances. Thus He presented perfect God to man, and perfect man to God.

Luke 4:1. In this chapter He begins the walk of suffering obedience publicly. And the first thing to be remarked is that, being full of the Holy Spirit, He is led by Him into the wilderness, where He is tempted by the devil. There are two ways in which the enemy has power; first by allurements, and secondly by terror. In the one he works upon us through our lusts, presenting what is calculated to attract, and so he rules over us naturally. In the other he has the power of death. Thus, Judas being a covetous man and without the faith which purifies the heart, Satan suggested the occasion and gets him. He has no right to rule over men, but he acquires dominion through the lusts of the flesh. Another way is through the terror of death. In both he assailed the Lord, but found nothing in Him.

Here, then, we have the devil meeting man in the power of the Spirit of God—man tempted, not in paradise, but in the wilderness. Jesus does not say, “I am God, and you are Satan; go away.” That would not have glorified God, nor have helped us. But as the Lord was led into the wilderness, not by lust (God forbid the thought!) but by the Holy Spirit, so in His blessed grace He puts Himself in the place where man was. He has help from none, not even from John the Baptist. There was all that might have stumbled rather, had it been possible; through all He goes as man. He must be tempted, and must overcome where

man not only had failed, but was lying under the power of wickedness.

Luke 4:2-3. There was no harm in hunger: it was no sin. He could have commanded stones to be made bread, but to do so, save at His Father's word, would have been doing His own will, and then He had not been the perfect man. Satan tries to introduce into His heart a desire which was not in the word of God; He succeeded in insinuating a lust into the heart of Adam; he fails with Jesus, though He was for forty days exposed to his presence and power. Jesus had to know by experience what it was to have working at Him, without a single support, without a friend, in solitary dreariness (save indeed the wild beasts) with the devil! Thus He measured the power of Satan. The strong man was there, putting forth all his weapons, but the stronger than he overcame: Jesus binds the strong man. He was abstracted from human condition for forty days, not like Moses to be only with God, but as the one who was always with God, to be exposed to Satan. None other man needs to be abstracted in order to be tempted, he has only to go along with men. In this case, this extraordinary separation was to be with the devil. To be with God He did not need anything out of His everyday path, for it was His natural place; but to be with Satan, He needed it. Others were strangers to God, and at home with Satan. He, in the most adverse things, is a stranger to Satan, and dwells in the bosom of the Father. But He emptied Himself as God to become a servant as man, and there He waits in dependence on the word of Him whom He served. The living Father had sent Him, and He lived by the Father. He was as man under His authority, and His meat was to do

His will. "By the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer" (Psa. 17:4).

Luke 4:4. It is the written word He ever uses, and Satan is powerless! What amazing importance Jesus gives the scriptures! God now acts by the word, and Satan is resisted morally in this way. A man cannot be touched by Satan while the word is simply used in obedience. "He that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not" (1 John 5:18). It was not as an exercise of divine authority He dismissed Satan, but the enemy is proved unable to grapple with obedience to the word of God. If he cannot take out of the path of obedience, he has no power. What more simple? Every child of God has the Holy Spirit acting by the word to keep him.

Jesus does not reason with Satan. A single text silences when used in the power of the Spirit. The whole secret of strength in conflict is using the word of God in the right way. One may say, I am not like this perfect Man: it might be so with Christ, but how can I expect the same result? True, we are ignorant, and the flesh is in us; but God is always behind, and He is faithful, and will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able. Temptation may be simply a trial of our obedience, as in Abraham's case, not a snare to lead us astray. Satan presents what has no appearance of evil. The evil would be—doing one's own will. Now it solves every difficulty to ask—not, what harm is there in doing this or that?—but, why am I doing it? Is it for God or myself? What! am I to be always under this restraint? Ah! there the secret of our nature comes out; we do not like the restraint of doing what God will approve. It is restraint to do God's will! We want to do our own will. To act merely because one must is law, and not the

guidance of the Spirit. The word of God was the motive of Christ, and such is Christ's guidance. Not fencing the old man, but the new man living on the word is defense against Satan.

Verses 3-13. The first temptation is an appeal to the need of the body. The second in Luke (not in Matthew) is the inducement of the world's glory. The third in our Gospel is the religious temptation through the word of God, and therefore morally the hardest of all to one who values that word. And this is the reason why Luke departs from the actual order of the events, in order to group them morally, as is the habit of this evangelist elsewhere also. Thus we have the tempter assailing the Lord Jesus, first, as to man's life; second, as to the power given to man; and third, as to the promises made to Christ Himself.

The Lord might have argued with the devil, but He does not even tell him that the dominion of the world would be His by-and-by. He takes His stand on that which settles everything, and is a perfect example for us. He stands to God's word, and God's worship. He awaits His word, He worships Him, He serves Him only. How simple and how blessed! It was the immediate link of an obedient heart with God. The question was one of relationship to God. So of old, Eliezer receives blessing, but before he begins to enjoy it, he gives thanks. He had the word first, then the blessing—and what follows forthwith? He bows his head and worships. God is the first thought of his heart. And so still more fully with the Lord here. The last and subtlest temptation was grounded on the promises to Messiah (vss. 9-11). If thou art the Son of God, why not try? But why should He try, who KNEW that God was for Him? Why should He be like presumptuous Israel of old, who would

go up the hill in disobedience, to prove whether the Lord was among them? Not even when Lazarus was sick would He stir, till it was the Father's will, though all nature would have moved: and He knew well the sorrow of that house which was His refuge; for "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus" (John 11:5).

The Lord did not listen. Who would? you say. But you do listen to Satan, every day of your lives that you seek a very little bit of the world. But was there not a promise? Doubtless there was; yet why should He throw Himself down to see whether God would be as good as His word? Did He not know that God was with Him? And so with us: let us only have the word behind us, no matter what may be before us. Never should we raise a question whether God is with us. If He does not send, let us not move, but let us never question His presence. If we are in the simple path of His will, the Holy Spirit will act in us to guide, and not merely on us to correct.

Thus then, in the order of Luke, which, as we have seen, is not historical, but moral, we have the progressive exercises of a man. First, natural lusts; secondly, worldly lusts;⁵ and lastly, spiritual temptations. The Lord Jesus was tempted here, not in Eden, but in the great system where we are. He put Himself, by the will and wisdom of God, in the place of our difficulty in the world, where man is. He has gone through all the difficulties a saint is in. Who wants His help? Not a sinner, for he wants salvation: but a saint needs help and sympathy in his path. We have practically to keep our first estate, as renewed. Satan cannot touch the new

5 Satan's saying in Luke 4:6, "All this power," was false as to right, but true in fact, through men's lusts. So far as these go, he gives the power; but God, after all, is above him, and governs in providence.

man, but he tries to entice us out of the path of godliness. We want the succor to walk as obedient ones where Christ walked.

Luke 4:14-15. "And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee...and he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all." In all things His obedience is shown. Untouched by Satan, He goes forth in unhindered power: as we shall in a measure, if like Him we pass through temptation, so as not to be touched by Satan.

Luke 4:16. "And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up"—the low, despised place, but just the place where spiritual power is found. Was it not ever thus? When was it [power] found allied to the great things of this world?

Verse 18. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor," etc. It was the characteristic of grace to come to such. The great business of Christ was to preach, that is to present God. The Holy Spirit gives the right word at the right time, and in the right way. "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (vs. 21). The Lord does not reason; He says, Here it is. The way of God is to present what we want. You want salvation, there it is; you want mercy, and there it is. God alone can thus come, by grace, into the place of a sinner. They wonder, for His were precious words, but soon they ask, Is not this Joseph's son? Was He ashamed of being the carpenter? Grace goes down to the lowest need. But man will take occasion to despise grace, because it is clothed in humiliation: he cannot but see God, but he steps aside to look at the humiliation, and so show out the hatred of his heart. God's grace is despised and His sovereignty is hated. God did not despise Nazareth, but

man despises Jesus because He came out of Nazareth. Even the guileless Nathaniel asks, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). How little appreciation of the way of grace there is even in the godly! Christ comes into man's misery, and finds him where he is. Could an angel? No: he stays in his proper position, doing the Lord's commandments, and hearkening to the voice of His word. An angel ought not to come down to me in my sins: God only can in His grace. And man despised the lowliness to which grace brought Him — wretched man!

But Israel ever resisted grace, and yet it was ever the way of God's delight. Witness the widow of Sarepta in Sidon, and Naaman the Syrian leper. Grace overleaped the bounds of Israel (vss. 25-27). They might be enraged, but grace does overstep their limits. They rose up to thrust down Him who had denied their privileges, but He passed through (vs. 30) to renew the work of grace elsewhere (vss. 31- 32). This does not move Jesus; it tries Him and breaks His heart, but it does not move Him. The reproach of man turns Him to God. His comfort in His rejection is His Father's will: "Even so, Father." It was perfectness in the scene of grace, as before in the scene of temptation.

There was also the manifestation of power, and not merely promise. There was the accomplishment of promise for the deliverance of man in power as well as grace: and this remains true for us, who know Him as a man risen, and at the right hand of God. Mere promise does not give a center for the affections: Christ Himself is that — Christ to whom promise pointed. He awakens divine feelings and thoughts in us, which find no response or satisfaction from anything in this world. It is the special character of Christ: when He presents Himself, it is perfect peace and grace;

and in fellowship with Him, the soul can praise and rejoice in what He is.

This grace adapts itself to all difficulties, so as to bring man into peace with God. The very demons knew who He was; man alone was dull and blind. The demon held captive, but a single word of Jesus sets the captive free. He was there, not a promise merely, but power accomplishing, the living power of the Lord Himself among men, the power of God in man overcoming Satan. Such was Jesus in the synagogue of Capernaum, dealing with the unclean spirit (Luke 4:33-37). And it is the same when He goes out and enters Simon's house. Disease disappears, the weak is made strong. He ministers unto Simon's wife's mother, as she lay taken in a great fever, "and immediately she arose and ministered unto them" (vss. 38-39). What can resist this delivering power in the person of the Lord Jesus? "Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases, brought them unto Him, and He laid His hands on every one of them, and healed them; and demons also came out of many" (Luke 4:40-41). He went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil. Therefore when men stayed Him that He should not depart, He pleads His mission to preach elsewhere also. He is ever the obedient One.

Notes on Luke 5

Luke 5.

It is interesting to know the progressive power of the word of God. The Lord was preaching, as related at the close of chapter 4, and in so doing, as well as in the miracles He wrought, He was manifesting the power of goodness. Thus, in performing miracles, two purposes had to be accomplished — confirmation of the testimony given, and present deliverance from the power of Satan. But His great business was preaching the kingdom of God. He will set up the kingdom in power by-and-by, but His great object then was (and is) to bring the heart into contact with God; and the word does this more than miracles.

Luke 5:1. In a measure even the unconverted are sensible of the presence of God. Adam was, when he tried to hide himself. When the gospel is preached with power, crowds are gathered together by it, touched, perhaps, by something new, but without fruit. So it was with the Lord's preaching and miracles. We know their motives were selfish often, yet He went on all the same. Come for the blessing of man, He would associate others with Himself in this work of grace; but He calls them in such a way as leaves no glory to man. He "saw two ships standing by the lake, but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would launch out a little from the land; and he sat down and taught the multitudes out of the ship. Now when he had left off speaking, he said to Simon,

Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draft" (Luke 5:2-4).

The word had authority in the conscience. Peter and Andrew had seen Jesus before, but had not yet stayed with Him; there had not been sufficient power in their faith to attach them to Christ. There are many now, as ever, who own the authority of the word, and yet not attached by its power to His person—many absorbed by their everyday pursuits, the word not having laid hold of their souls so as to make them walk thoroughly with Christ. It is one thing simply to hear His word when spoken to them; quite a different thing when the word reaches them, and becomes the spring and motive of all their ways. So, here, these men had spent a little time with Jesus, had heard Him speak, and owned Him as Messiah; so, now also, we see obedience to His word when it comes to them. They launch out at His word, and at His word they let down their nets.

The miracle which the Lord wrought was one every way suited to act on those concerned. Their own powerlessness was confessed. "Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing." Man could do nothing in such a case: if Jesus could, it was because everything was at His disposal. "At thy word I will let down the net" (Luke 5: 5).

Luke 5:6-8. "And when they had this done, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes, and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners...and they came and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink." There was not even strength to receive of themselves. "When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." If the word of Jesus had not reached Peter's heart, he would merely have obeyed it as a means of temporal help; but he owns Him as Lord,

hearing far more in the words spoken. His conscience was reached. The Lord Himself is revealed to Peter, and that shows Peter himself. When the eye of God is consciously upon us, we see in ourselves what He saw. This was Peter's *case*. He, when brought into God's presence, feels that he has been deceiving himself.

Grace begins here, but we have not the end yet. So Paul was blind three days, and his soul so wrought on that he could neither eat nor drink. Here Peter falls down at Jesus' knees. So with us: when brought really into His presence, there is the discovery of our sinfulness. The means used to bring us there may be various—circumstances of life, providential occurrences (with Luther, a thunder-storm). But when we are there, there is the revelation of Christ Himself, and wherever He is, He takes His right place in the soul. It is not only that a man then has salvation, but he cannot longer be content without God having His due place before him.

Peter does not fly away from the Lord, like Adam hiding himself; he is attracted to Him. At the same time he is there a judged, convicted, sinful man in his own conscience, which takes the part of Christ against itself. "Depart from me," he says, but he says it at Jesus' knees. This might seem like a contradiction. It was really love to the Lord and care for His honor, because His word had become the revelation of Christ to him. His heart has not perfect peace, but Christ has got possession of it. Grace draws to Christ, but there is withal the sense of unfitness till His work is known in all its peace-giving consequences. God sees the thoughts and intents of the heart, and we are made to see these as He sees them. Righteousness is planted in the conscience; God and man are brought

together. It was not that Peter could be happy anywhere but at the knees of Jesus, but he felt all the while how unfit he was to be in such company.

But the Lord deals in perfect grace. He does not leave Simon Peter. He knew all his sin before He went into the ship, and says to him, "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men" (Luke 5:10). Jesus went into the ship to show Peter that he had nothing to fear. Truly "perfect love casteth out fear" (1 John 4:18). Fear has torment till grace is fully revealed; and now it was, with as much authority as that miracle-working word, "Let down your nets for a draft." It was the word of Christ to his heart. If he trusted it for the fish, why not for his fears? Peter had said, "Depart," but instead of that, Christ had already come, knowing all he was better than Peter. He was come as a Savior; nay, more, He intimates to Peter that He was going to make him an instrument in gathering others. Everyone who has the love of God shed abroad in his heart becomes a vessel of living grace himself: not the source, but the river flows through him, so that people may come and drink. Recipients of grace, we are associated with Christ in the activity of love. Outward gift is not meant here, but that, as members of His body, there is living fellowship with the Head in the testimony of His grace and power.

We see in these disciples the effect of all. They are absorbed with Christ now. They not only look to Him for salvation, but they think of nothing else for life, speaking now generally and apart from any particular failure. "They forsook all, and followed him" (John 5:11). Christ becomes their life. It is a new line altogether — not merely obedience to an express command, with the reserve of thinking and saying, perhaps, "there is no harm in this or that." Christ

pleased not Himself. His reason for action was His Father's will, and not the absence of a prohibition. And we are sanctified unto the obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. "They forsook all," and where Christ went they went. They are associated with their Lord in His love to souls, and in the walk of life. This is liberty. May we, having Christ our life, have Him as our one motive! detached from all to Him, yet channels for all the blessing and grace we have ourselves tasted in Him! There is power to attract out of every corruption around, and to gather the soul into the thoughts and ways of God, by the revelation of Christ Himself.

Luke 5:12. Christ was the manifestation on earth of God's power and character—of grace. Of this the leper's case which follows is a striking witness; for leprosy was an evil which none but God could remove. But God was there in grace. Leprosy presented sin in the aspect of uncleanness. A man full of it on seeing Jesus, fell on his face, and besought Him, saying, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." There is the recognition of divine power in Jesus, but He has not full confidence in His grace. He seems disheartened by misery, and almost in despair says, "If thou wilt," and so forth. But He who alone on earth had the title so to say, says, "I will." It was God only—not in heaven, but come down in man and among men. Christ was there, who could touch the leper and the leprosy without being touched by it. Divine power was needed, doubtless, and the very priests could not but attest the results of its intervention, but there was divine and perfect love in His touch, while it was the touch of a man, a man who acknowledged the ordinances of God, as one who had been born under law. Thus this "turned for a

testimony.” For the leper must go to the priest, and what could he think? Why, who has been here? Jehovah must have been to heal the man.

Luke 5:16. And what next? Jesus “withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed.” Let the power exercised be ever so great, and manifestly divine, He is the dependent man; and this is just where we fail.

Luke 5:18. Here we have another thing—not the power of Satan, as in chapter 4, nor the uncleanness of sin, typified by leprosy, but the guilt of sin. They brought the man, because they felt the need; and there was the perseverance of faith, which would not be put off till another day. And Jesus brings forgiveness of sins, as well as cleansing from defilement. This is what appears in the instance of the palsied man. The first and grand point is that Jesus pronounces his sins forgiven. Authority to pardon was come in the Person of the Son of man on earth, whatever scribes and Pharisees might think. It was God, the Lord Jehovah, but the Son of man withal, having on earth power to forgive sins, and using it. It is in this way Israel is to be forgiven by-and-by (compare Psa. 103:3); and accordingly, the Lord here gives the proof of that authority to forgive by the healing the disease of the paralytic. “That ye may know” (Luke 5:24). The man was to know in his relationship to God, that his guilt was gone.

Through infinite grace, we are entitled to more than even this; for we have the righteousness of the accepted man in God’s presence. We are made the righteousness of God in Him. This palsied man was a sample of what will be, in the future day, Israel’s portion. Jesus was forgiving iniquities and healing diseases. He had shown the power to do the one; now He would show that He could do the

other also. It is God's delight to do it all. You may not believe that you can have such a boon, but it is ours in Christ. The perfect Man has come with perfect title in His Person. God wrought there, but it was also as a man filled with the Holy Spirit. The believer walks, too, a proof not to himself so much as to others that God is there. The man ought not to say, "I wonder if I can walk"; if he has faith, he will get up and do it.

Two things are here present. First, the exceeding blessed grace that the Lord is come, the power of God within the sphere of human misery, which, extreme as it may be, does but make that power evident. If I look around as a man, I am lost. I cannot un-riddle the history of the world—abominations committed in the name of Christ, Himself rejected by His people Israel, and crucified by those Gentiles to whom God had entrusted the government of the world, Mohammedanism, heathenism; what kind of a God have you, says the reasoning heart, when it is such a world! But here I have the Lord come down into all the wretchedness, sickness, sin; and my heart is drawn away from pleasure and sorrow to Him. How beautiful to see heart after heart brought around this One, the only true center, soon to be the risen head of the new creation, Himself the object drawing out feelings and affections of which He alone is worthy; He who by His excellency, gives excellency, and by His gracious thoughts towards us produces and draws out gracious thoughts in us. Next, our hearts are fixed just so far as we have an object—fixed according to God, when we have Christ Himself before us. How can I love if I have nothing to love? A man is what he feels, and likes and thinks. If my soul lives and feeds upon that which is most excellent—Christ the bread of God,

Christ becomes, in a practical sense, formed in the heart. In Him, the man Christ Jesus, God has had all His delight, and the display of it too.

Remark further, that in the accounts we have seen, divine power in the person of Jesus, the Son of man, is exercised in the midst of Israel. First, Luke 4:31-41, its triumph over the enemy's power in sicknesses and in demoniacal possessions, and the testimony of the kingdom, when all such effects of Satan's work should disappear. This last opens the way for the more positive and deeper blessing of souls, being put in relationship to God. Hence from Luke 5:1-26 (the call of Peter, the cleansing of the leper, and the pardon of the palsied man), it is a question of the state of the soul (whatever the outward accompaniments might be), of the authority of the word of the heart, of faith, and of Christ's personal glory. Still it was grace in operation towards Israel; grace, if one may so speak, in government. To Israel God had said that *He* would not put upon them the plagues of Egypt, save for their sin. They were an outwardly elect, redeemed people, but they were under God's government; and hence chastening came, of which the leprosy and the palsy were peculiar samples. Jesus shows Himself to be "Jehovah that healeth thee" (Ex. 15:26), in the midst of Israel, though He was passing away from them into a wider display of power and goodness. He could have healed every one, leprous or paralytic; He could have removed all the diseases, now, alas! brought on the Israelites; but in these cases it is where they come to Him in quest of healing, that is, it is in answer to faith that He works. He was there, showing divine power and grace in healing.

Luke 5:27, etc. But this grace, being of God and sovereign, could not be bounded by human circumstances. Wherever a want appeared to Him, could He gainsay His power or His love? Now, see how that connects itself with what follows. There was full deliverance for all who trusted in Israel, but He could not, and would not limit His grace. The law limited, but when Himself, the God who gave it, came, everybody who needs Him is welcome; His house is a house of prayer for all nations. Hence He calls a publican, a Jew indeed, but detested by the Israelites, and in a sense rightly, when viewed as the mark of their servitude nationally. A publican was one who profited by their Gentile masters, to extort money from Israel, and therefore naturally regarded with horror. But Jesus calls one named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom—calls him to be an apostle! Grace must act according to its own rights. If God has been good to you and me, does that hinder His mercy and love to another? Grace creates the instrument it wants to act by; and it will flow farther than the publican yet, even to the most distant Gentile. True, Israel had the promises, the Gentile, strictly speaking, had none; but for that very reason it was more purely grace; and grace would act towards the Gentiles. The Lord Himself, God, was there, and Israel could not be the center, nor the temple, when He was there, the despised Lord of both. He is the door, the new center and turning-point of blessing; not a mere branch of the old vine, but Himself the true vine. As a Jew, He was subject to ordinances, but as the Lord, He is above them, and He breaks out beyond all the old restrictions.

“Levi made him a great feast in his own house, and there was a great company of publicans and of others

that sat down with them; but their scribes and Pharisees murmured" (Luke 5:23-30). It was a terrible sight and blow to such. But Jesus answers, "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." They mistook the Lord altogether: He came to show how grace could deal with those who had no righteousness.

Luke 5:33. He is now breaking, as it were, out of the old thing. He is faithful to Israel, but breaking up that order of things. How could they fast who owned the presence of the divine husband of Israel, the Messiah! The time was coming when the cross must be taken; but when the Bridegroom is there, fasting was out of place and season.

Luke 5:36-39. Further, the old garment cannot be patched with new cloth. Jesus would do no such thing as tack on Christianity to Judaism. Flesh and law go together, but grace and law, God's righteousness and man's, will never mix. Neither can the new wine, the power of the Spirit, be put into the old legal ordinances without loss on all sides. A man accustomed to forms, human arrangement, fathers' religion, and so forth, never likes the new principle and power of the kingdom; he says, The old is better. Such is nature; grace is offensive to it. Nor does man improve in divine things. He can degrade himself and give up what his heart never relished. And this goes on rapidly today.

Notes on Luke 6

Luke 6.

Here we have a most weighty thing spoken of—the sabbath. It is a question that often agitates the minds of men, and it was then specially important as closing Jewish relations. And this, it will be borne in mind, was just where the Lord had morally arrived at the close of the preceding chapter. The rights of His person and His grace, now becoming more rejected by the religionists, of Israel, reach out beyond the narrow bounds of that proud people. God thereon, by degrees, intimates the coming purpose of His mercy; His salvation in due time shall be sent unto the Gentiles, and they will hear if the Jew judges himself unworthy of everlasting life. God will have His own joy of saving souls somewhere.

Now it is very evident that the incident of the cornfield (vss. 1-5), “on the second sabbath after the first,” thoroughly falls in with the object of the Spirit in hand. “The Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.” His person entitles Him to supremacy over that which was the sign of the covenant of the law. In the next case (vss. 6-10) He asserts the right to do good on the sabbath-days, as His adversaries on the same day show their disposition to destroy.

The sabbath, in any real sense, man had entirely lost; indeed he had never entered into God’s thoughts of rest. It was His rest, and had not sin spoiled all, man should have enjoyed that which was the result not of his own, but of God’s labor. This is the proper character of that rest which belongs to man distinctively; but sin having come in, the

necessity has arisen that God should work afresh, if man is ever to share the rest of God (Heb. 4). Meanwhile Christ has appeared and finished the work which God gave Him to do. Hence, we who believe, find rest in Christ, as does God Himself. In Him, by virtue of the accomplished and accepted work of redemption, we *have* our sabbath spiritually.

The day was set apart and hallowed from the beginning (Gen. 2). Afterward it came in, first in grace to Israel, marked by the cessation of the manna, and a double portion to provide for that holy day (Ex. 16): and, secondly, as a part of the law of Sinai, and incorporated with every new and special dealing of Jehovah (Ex. 20). (See also Ex. 31:13-14; 33:14; 34:21; 35:2.) It was a memorial thenceforward of the deliverance out of Egypt (Deut. 5:15). Accordingly, the prophets expressly treat it as a sign of Israel's separation from all other nations unto God, and God's covenant with them (Ezek. 20:12-20; 22:8; 23:38; 44:24; Isa. 56; Isa. 58; Jer. 17:21-27). But then, in the past, Israel, a sinful people, had the sabbath as a legal ordinance, and consequently are condemned by it as by all else.

Where is this covenant with Israel? All gone because of their iniquity. Hence they were thrown into the hands of the Gentiles, and became slaves. "Behold, we are servants this day, and for the land that thou gavest unto our fathers to eat the fruit thereof and the good thereof, behold, we are servants in it; and it yieldeth much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us because of our sins: also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure, and we are in great distress" (Neh. 9:36-37). If they had a temple after the captivity, it was only at the mercy of their Persian masters. The outward emblem lingered on,

no doubt, and was especially made much to dishonor Him, of whom and whose work it was so significant; but where was its reality when Jesus was on earth? Alas! He lies in the grave all the day which His murderers kept as a day holy to Jehovah ("for that sabbath day was a high day!"); awful testimony to the Jews of their position. Their own Messiah slain by His own people; such was the truth which that sabbath-day uttered to him who had ears to hear. Israel never had the rest of God. If Joshua had given them rest, and so forth (Heb. 4). There remaineth therefore a rest. They must own Jesus first.

But the rejected Jesus was Son of man, and the Son of man was Lord of the sabbath (vs. 5) — a truth of the utmost gravity, to be asserted with all strength. Those who confound the Lord's day with the sabbath are in danger of forgetting this. It was the very point here in controversy with the Jews who maintained that the sabbath was superior to the Lord. But He shows that another new principle had come in, which wholly overleaped the old, and that to remain in the old was to have no deliverance. For there is no possibility for a lustful creature to be under a commandment that condemns lust, without being condemned. Grace, however, has entered through a rejected Christ, and now there is rest for us who believe—not for those who are on the ground of law.

This is the reason why Christians keep the first day of the week, and not the seventh or sabbath day. The rest was acquired by the power of Christ's redemption, and the first day, when He arose from the dead, was that which proclaimed it to faith, spite of man's guilt and ruin. The seventh day will be the rest of man on earth; the first day celebrates Christ's taking us in Him to heaven. Then was

life from the dead, life more abundantly, liberty from the law and every consequence of sin — in a word, the victory of grace. The Christian therefore has the first day distinctively, because it belongs to and witnesses of the perfected work of Christ, and consequently introduces heavenly rest. The first day is in contrast with the seventh, which appertained to the round of man's labor in nature and of the Jew's under the law, in which Adam and Israel utterly broke down. It is the Lord's day emphatically, and thus testifies of the triumph of Christ's word and the glory of His person — not the day which guilty unbelief would have perverted into the proof and means of His inferiority. It is positive, direct blessing to him who owns and honors it — not because it is the close of legal toil, but the commencement of Christian hope — the resurrection-day when we begin our spiritual life; and look on for what will crown so precious a pledge.

Here, however, the grand thing is the maintenance of the rights and the authority of the Son of man. You never can, according to God, raise up the title of the sabbath against the Lord of the sabbath.

Luke 6:3-5. What did David, the anointed of the Lord, when Saul persecuted him and sought his life? Was it of God, then, to uphold the ritual and so starve the man after His heart? No; the foundations were out of course, and everything became common in Israel when the chosen king was thus iniquitously rejected. But a greater One, and a graver sin, were now in their midst. The Son indeed, but the Root of David, God Himself was there; He who instituted the sabbath, its Lord, was there in the person of the Son of man.

Luke 6:6-10. But if God was there, would He deny His own goodness or restrain His power in presence of

human misery, because “the scribes and Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the sabbath-day?” Divine love must act and heal the withered hand, even if wretched man should seek to find therein an accusation. And they were filled with madness and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus (vs. 11); but Jesus in those days retired to a mountain to pray. He drew near to God, to commune with Him what He was to do for them (vs. 12). His was the activity of grace—of love displaying itself holily and mightily in the midst of evil.

Luke 6:13-16. “And when it was day, he called unto Him his disciples,” and so forth. In this call He proves that He was the only One who could empower others to bear this testimony also, and yet here, as in all that passed before, He is the lowly dependent One—perfect man, as well as God. He was in perfect unbroken communion with His God and Father, though Himself God manifest in the flesh. How blessedly near us this brings Him, though so infinitely above us! What He did, we should aim at, whatever our measure and our little sphere. In Him we see man perfect in that place of power wherein He came.

He knew whom He chose. He knew that one of them had a devil; but He sent them out. Twelve He chose specially, whom also He called apostles, “sent ones.” It was an important and significant word, as quite a distinct thing from both law and promises. No one was sent out by law. Now God is active; He is sending His Son, and the Son is sending out apostles. The love of God is active in gathering souls. This first sent One is a man, really and truly. God’s work of His grace must be done by His Son: not by angels, but by His own Son, as the Man Christ Jesus, and He sends men out from Himself. The gathering point

is Man—Himself of course. To Man God has committed all things. While it must be God who shows grace, the Son of man it is who comes on the mission of love, and sends out men to men.

Luke 5:17-19. Whatever He attracts by, He gathers round Himself to worship, surrounds Himself with them, and then comes down and stands in the plain. The great multitude are attracted by His miracles and their wants, coming to hear and be healed. The company of the disciples were an inner circle. "The whole multitude sought to touch him." It is not said that they were converted, which is another thing; but living power went out of Him, healing their bodily misery and delivering from the power of Satan.

Luke 20, etc. He now lifts up His eyes on His disciples and speaks to them, not as in Matthew 5, giving them the developed principles of the kingdom; but distinguishing those before Him as the remnant. Hence it is "ye" here. He puts seal and stamp on those actually gathered round Himself. They are to be like Him. He is at once their center and their pattern. He was God, but the fullness of the Holy Spirit dwelt in Him as man also; and so He could say, "I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29). So should it be with those around Him.

Luke 6:20-26. "Blessed [are] ye poor; for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed [are] ye that hunger now; for ye shall be filled. Blessed [are] ye that weep now; for ye shall laugh. Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you." These words of the Savior give the contrast of those He pronounces blessed with all that are in ease in this world. Those who, if in this life only they had hope in Christ, would be of all men the most miserable, are the only happy few; they are severed from all others, and put in relationship with

Him the source of blessing, to be blessed. If you can make yourselves happy and comfortable in this world which has rejected Jesus, count not on His blessing.

It is the poor, the despised with Jesus, who shall have the kingdom. He says, if we may so speak, “I am distinguishing *you*” (for there is no enunciation of abstract principles, as in the beginning of Matthew 5, but a speaking to the hearts of those gathered around Him). “I am come as the center of power and active love. There is but one sole place of blessing on earth. *With Me* you are blessed.” Others may be gay and cheerful where Christ has no place; but it is a time when a true spiritual soul can get no good save with Christ. It is a definite distinction of, and address to, the disciples who attached themselves to Him. This is made clear in verse 22, where the persecution for righteousness, which Matthew carefully records, is omitted. Here it is only a question of suffering “for *the Son of man’s sake*.”

In the midst of a world of misery and selfishness there came One who displayed not law nor judgment, but grace. But the light shines in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not. Like the adder that hears nothing, the world goes on as deaf as it is blind. No; you who are “full,” now Jesus has no charm for you; but *you*, disciples, are weeping now—the sorrow and the sin of man distress your spirit: you shall rejoice. When God has His way, you, who cannot be satisfied with the husks, shall be filled. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven; for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. You have your portion with Christ here, you shall have it with Christ in heaven. You suffer with the suffering One, you shall have glory with the glorified One. But the others!—they shall have what

they seek. For the full there shall be a famine by-and-by, for they have lost God. If you can laugh in such a world as this, you shall weep when God's time for blessing comes. They are of the world, and the world loves its own. "So did their fathers to the false prophets" (Luke 6:26). Are the times altered? Is Christ's character changed? It is not a whit more agreeable to the flesh. And if you can find your joy, ease, and pleasure in the world, Christ could not, and you have not His Spirit. He that will be its friend is the enemy of God. Can the disciples of Jesus be merry and gay in a world which has sin wrapped up in it? There is communion with Jesus, joy in the Spirit, while patient in tribulation; but this is quite another thing. It is a serious joy, though very real and blessed.

From Luke 6:27 He shows what must be the conduct of the disciples as such. They were to manifest *God*, to be the unfolding of what was displayed in Him. Grace which was in Him in fullness and perfection should be reproduced in them, sadly as we all fail in this—the principle of our path. "Love your enemies," and so forth. God loved *us* when we were His enemies, and we have now to show practically what God is. Luke 6:29 brings us into entirely human circumstances, patiently learning in them: or, as in 1 Peter 2, doing well, suffering for it, and taking it patiently. This may seem poor comfort. But *Jesus* did so, and love *must* so manifest itself in an evil world. The time comes when God will judge, instead of bearing long as now; but now, at whatever cost to self, show love as Christ did. Flesh can love for love (vss. 32-33), but the disciples of Christ are called to imitate God, and walk in love. "Love ye your enemies, and do good and lend, hoping for nothing again, and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children

of the Highest; for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil" (Luke 6:35).

What a blessed character of God comes out here! It is not righteousness, though surely there *was* that; but in the world where God had to do with the unthankful and evil, He shows grace. For the angels He has not grace, but love: but Christ in this world of sin is grace (that is, love to those who deserve it not). "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful" (Luke 6:36). It is not "with" but "as your Father." As He loves His enemies, so do you; He is merciful, be ye also merciful. In all this, God's character is displayed—perfect love in a world of sinners. It must cost us something; it cost the life of Christ. His love was a stream, which, if it met with hindrances in its way, only went on flowing over, and leaving them behind till it reached the cross.

Luke 6:37. This is not certain things required in order to get life, but the result of certain conduct shown. "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged." As though He had said, You will find the consequences of your conduct as Christ did. He took the lowest place, but He has got the highest now. He humbled Himself; "wherefore God also hath highly exalted him," etc. He came not to judge, and now "all judgment is committed to the Son." Thus we not only have the display of grace, but divine character meeting its consequences. It is a question of government—of walking with the Lord; it must cost a great deal in the path, but in the end it will be "full measure, pressed down." There will be God's blessing too in the way; though self is mortified. Grace will abound according to God's way.

Luke 6:39. See the contrast of those who are utter blindness, and the blind leading the blind. You must let

them alone; leave them to go on their own way; but you have to take your place with Me; and the disciple is not above his master, but you shall be as your Master. If your Master suffers, you suffer; if it has cost your Master much, it may cost you much. If Christ teaches you, it is to make you possess the divine learning that He has Himself. And see what a place He gives us! When He gives, what does He give? The very same that He has Himself. "As he is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4:17). "Not as the world giveth" (John 14:27), which, if it gives a little, reserves the chief for itself; but as though He said, "I am putting you in the very same learning that is in My nature: the grace that I have you are to have." But people do not like to do those things that Jesus did.

Why is there so much argument about that one passage, "resist not evil"? (Matt. 5:39). It is because you like to resist evil. Your will is touched, your conscience is reached; for it is given you as matter-of-fact exhortation; but you do not like it, and you will rid of it if you can. These things are given as tests for the conscience; they judge the eye, not the path only. "If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light" (Matt. 6:22). The object is wrong, if you have not light for the step. There may be difficulties in going up a steep hill, but if the object before you is clear, you get over them as quickly as you can. This is what is meant by the expression, "This one thing I do" (Phil. 3:13). It is having one object, and the mind intent on accomplishing it. If it is so with you, there will be sure to be light in the path — light, not for ten years hence, but for this one step that is before you, and then for the next. It was said to Moses, "Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward" (Ex. 14:15); and when they were out

in the wilderness, the pillar was given to be their constant guide. So with us; we are called out to go after Christ on the principle of obedience, and this puts us into connection with Him in the revelation of His will, not giving us to see all the path onwards. A man may see a wall, and say, "I cannot go that way: there is a wall," while, if he but takes a single step, he will find that there is a path all down by the side of the wall.

Luke 6:44. "Every tree is known by his own fruit." Not only bearing fruit, but fruit that Christ produces should be ours. There is fruit that an upright nature produces, such as that of the young man who came to Jesus, but this was not divine fruit—"its own fruit"; and where Christ is the root and the stock, it is Christian fruit, that is, fruit that will remain (John 15:16). Two men may go together up to a certain point, and then some test for Christ comes; one goes on with Him, and the other turns aside. "Its own fruit" fruit shows itself, springs of itself. There will not be the question of, What harm in this or that? What harm in being rich? as a person once asked me. If it shuts you out of heaven, is there any harm in that? Oh, I did not think of that! But the secret is, that you like the things. The evil is not the things themselves dug out of the earth, but the love in the heart for them. Out "of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Luke 6:45). An impatient word betrays the heart. A blow I may restrain and yet utter the word.

Luke 6:47. In the hearing of all the multitude the Lord speaks now about the house built upon the rock. This is not a question about building upon Christ, the Rock, for the salvation of the sinner. It is the path of the saint. But where Christ's word does connect with Himself, see the result.

The very thing people are called upon to do is to follow Him; and when I follow, it proves that the Master's words have taken such hold upon my soul that they have power to carry me over the difficulties. "My soul followeth hard after thee" (Psa. 63:8). A man's affections, heart, will, are taken and connected with Christ, instead of with himself. Is Christ sufficiently precious to make me leave all beside and follow Him, to do those things that please Him? "If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of the world" (John 11:9). "As when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light" (Luke 11:36). Keeping close to Christ, the light shines upon us. If we have to get into the light, we may be dazzled by it. Thus He has gathered round Himself in light and love, set out in those words, those whom He will have to enjoy Himself, and be as their Master, at length to be conformed to His image in glory.

Notes on Luke 7

Luke 7.

We have seen the Lord, rejected by Israel, gradually, in virtue of His person and rights, breaking out beyond the ancient limits, and gathering the remnant round Himself, the new and only just object of God, the source of a mission in grace, and the full development and exemplification of holy love in an evil world; for, whatever the principles laid down in chapter 6, they are but the expression of God's character in grace, as displayed in Christ here below.

In accordance with this, we have now (vss. 1-10) the case of the centurion, and a very full and striking one it is. It is not merely an act of grace, but grace to a Gentile. Nor is this all. The principle on which the apostle rests this question is brought out. "It is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed" (Rom. 4:16). Faith, as the great turning-point, is introduced. It was no mere theory; it was living faith, and such faith as had not been seen in Israel. Neither was there presumption, but, on the contrary, remarkable humility. He recognized the honor God had put upon His people; he sees, holds to it, owns and acts upon it, spite of their low and debased, and, in every other respect, unworthy condition. Despised and failing as they might be, he loved the Jews as God's people, and for His sake, and he had built them a synagogue. Unfeigned lowliness was his, though (yea, rather, for) his faith was far beyond those he honored. Consequently he had a very high apprehension of the power and glory of the person of Christ as divine, reaching

out beyond Jewish thoughts altogether. He does not refer to the Lord as Messiah, but recognized in Him the power of God in love. This was blessed faith, which forgets itself in the exaltation of its object. He had not seen Jesus, it would seem, but assuredly gathered from what he "heard," that diseases were nothing to Him but occasions wherein to display His absolute authority and His sovereign mercy. He was a stranger, and the Jews were God's people; must not they or their elders be the fittest to bring this wonderful person? For he confided in His mercy as well as His power, and his servant, "dear unto him," was sick and ready to die. He needed Jesus.

"Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself; for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof; wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee; but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed" (Luke 7:6-7). There was surely the deepest personal respect and affection. Untaught as he might be in other things, he strongly felt the excellency of Christ's person, and here again with humility correspondent to the measure in which His glory was seen. This message of the centurion's friends admirably depicts his character and feeling. He told nothing to Jesus of his service to the Jews, spoke of nothing personal save his unworthiness, and this so consistently, that he begged Jesus not to come to his house, as unworthy to receive Him. There was in this soul the exact opposite of doing Christ an honor, by believing on Him, and far from him was the pretense of receiving Christ to set himself up; both alas! found often elsewhere. The simplicity of his heart is as apparent as his strong faith. There was none such in Israel,

and yet it was in one who loved Israel. It was a lesson of grace, in every way, for the crowd that followed Jesus—for us too most surely.

Along with grace to the Gentiles came the evidence of power to raise the dead, but here it was manifested in human sympathies, in witness that God had visited His people (vss. 11-17). It was the power of resurrection, a power which was yet to be shown more gloriously, and to be the source of that which is new for man according to God—the God who raiseth the dead. It was another and wondrous proof that He is here going, in the character of His action, without the sphere of the law and its ordinances. For “the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth” (Rom. 7:1); what can it avail for one who is dead? “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3). It was grace, indeed, and divine energy, but withal displayed in One who was touched with the feeling of our infirmities. And how astonishingly all the details bring this out! The dead man was “the only son of his mother, and she was a widow” (Luke 7:10). “And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not... And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother” (Luke 7:13,15). How exquisitely human, and withal how unmistakably divine!

It is manifest that these two cases illustrate the change which the Spirit is attesting in this part of Luke. Nor is it otherwise with the scene that follows, which brings out in fact the hinge of the dispensation. The Lord bears witness to John Baptist, not John to the Lord. John sends two of his disciples, on the report of the Lord’s miracles,

to learn from Himself who He is. Are we surprised? He had preached and baptized in the confession of sins and in faith of the coming Messiah. But now all was changed. John was in prison, not delivered, and it was no longer a people preparing for the Lord. Was it not strange? At any rate John sought a plain answer, and well could he trust the word of One who did such mighty and holy works. But what a comment upon the marvelous change was this very inquiry! It was a sort of turning over the disciples of John to the Lord. "And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight. Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John" (Luke 7:21-22). At the same time, if He receives no longer testimony from John, He bears it to him, owning John and his work. But they were owned from a higher ground where the Lord in grace and resurrection power had placed Himself; and this was based on entire rejection in and by the world, so that, though He was doing all good, still it was "blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me" (Luke 7:23). Hence in the very verse where the Lord recognizes in the fullest way John the Baptist, He marks the change about to take place—"he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he" (Luke 7:28). Happy they who justified God in being baptized of John—wretched the self-righteous who rejected His counsel against themselves. Wisdom is justified of all her children. They understand the ways of God, whether in the servant or the Lord. The ways are quite different, but understood in grace. This generation alas! understands none, finds fault with all. John is too righteous for them, Jesus is too gracious. The mourning of the one and the piping of the other are utterly distasteful.

Such is man's wisdom before the ways of God. But the children of wisdom justify wisdom notwithstanding.

And in spite of the perverseness of men, our Lord did not stop manifesting Himself to the world. Accordingly a tale follows (Luke 7:36-50) which shows how God's wisdom is justified by and in those who own it in Jesus. It is a tale of grace, of pure, plenary, pardoning grace, which rests not till its object is dismissed in perfect peace. Jesus is in the Pharisee's house, who failed entirely in the essential point: Simon perceived not the glory of Christ. In this the Lord meets him, and shows, in contrast with the woman "which was a sinner," the point where this Pharisee was exercising judgment to be precisely that wherein he failed. God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor His ways as our ways. What if the despised Jesus were not a prophet only, but a Savior of poor lost sinners? Ah, God was unknown—that was the secret. The converted soul sees the glory of the Lord as grace towards itself; he who is unconvinced, however interested humanly, judges according to his own thoughts, and therefore necessarily fails to see the glory which is not according to these thoughts. Man's judgment of the gospel must be wrong therefore; his reception of it, as grace, is alone right, and alone the way of coming to the knowledge of it.

This was, then, a direct and distinct example of God's ways. It was a forgiving of sins in grace, sovereignly and freely, to any poor sinner, manifesting and producing love in the forgiven, who loves God, because God is love, and this in respect of his sins, in Jesus the Lord. It was proper grace—the ground on which any one, a Gentile or not, would be received, and God manifested not in requirement from man (and so making man in the flesh of importance)

but making God all, and His character in sovereign grace, so bringing in blessing and its blessed effect upon the heart, developing the fruits of grace in a heart restored to confidence in God by the sense of His goodness.

What a blessed picture! Goodness known not only in the act, but in Him who did it. The discernment of guilt in its gross forms by man was one thing, but the grace of God which could blot out and forgive all was quite another. It was not Christ there to judge, and to sanction Pharisees, but love to a sinner, manifesting God in this new character of grace, producing thankful holy love to God, and a blessed relationship, sovereign and beyond the reach of man. But how has God always to prove Himself right in His goodness to man! so hard is man's heart. But the Lord identifies Himself with the believer, and vindicates him against the haughty world, and this gives assurance. Perfectly regardless of comments, He applies Himself, not to unbelief, which were useless, but to those who have faith, and having communicated forgiveness, shows the soul his uprightness, that is, the right thoughts of God and self which faith has. The last word settles the whole question. The soul's love was a ground of evidence and reasoning—not, of course, the cause. "Thy faith hath saved thee", said the Lord to the woman, "Go in peace" (Luke 7:50). All is discharged from the conscience, and the heart finds itself infinitely and everlastingly a debtor to the continual fountain of all grace.

Notes on Luke 8

Luke 8.

We have seen, in what has preceded, the Lord presenting Himself, by His words and His work, as a new center, to which and round which His people were gathered. Before this, Jehovah had been the center, when Israel was the gathering point; for Jehovah was among the Jews, and the temple the place where He met with the people. But now the Son is here, "God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16). and He must be the center of everything. But Israel would not be gathered, as the Lord Himself said in Matthew 23:37, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... but ye would not." Again in Isaiah 65:2, "I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people."

Israel could not have the blessing, for the flesh could not hold it. The flesh, simply looked at as such, is "as grass" (Isa. 40:6). "All flesh is grass." We have these two great principles running through the latter chapters of Isaiah; first that flesh, as flesh, could not hold the blessing, and be the depository for the promises. For when all grace came, in the person of the Lord, the people to whom He was sent He found withered down like grass. "Surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand forever" (Luke 8:7-8). But God was not going to give up His purpose. Therefore in Isaiah 49 we find Jehovah says unto Christ, "Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified" (Isa. 49:3). Then Christ says, If God is to be glorified in Israel, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain:

yet surely my judgment is with Jehovah, and my reward with my God.” Then saith Jehovah, “Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorified in the eyes of Jehovah. I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation to the ends of the earth” (Isa. 49:5-6).

This is what Christ is becoming in Luke’s Gospel—“a light to lighten the Gentiles,” and so forth. And afterward we find Paul quoting, with the perfect accuracy of the Spirit, this very scripture, so exactly fitted for them, to the Jews at Antioch. “It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken unto you, but seeing put it from you, and ye judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo! we turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46-47; and again, Acts 28:28). Israel will be gathered afterward, for Christ will hereafter raise up the tribes of Jacob and restore the preserved of Israel; but before this He turns to the Gentiles. All this the Lord pictures to us in Luke. In Luke 7 we see Israel refused both John the Baptist and Christ; but “wisdom is justified of all her children.” The Pharisees and lawyers did not justify God at all, for they saw no beauty in Jesus, whereas the publicans did; and thus the poor woman, “who was a sinner,” whose heart was touched by the grace of God, is the true child of wisdom, and is brought in here as an illustration of Christ being the new center of blessing, “though Israel be not gathered” (Isa. 49:5).

The Lord then goes on with His testimony, gathering by the word, first, by parables, as in chapter 8, and then in chapter 9 sending forth His disciples to preach, with this commission, to shake off the dust from their feet, if they are not received, a token of the last testimony being rendered, when they are given up.

Here are two classes of persons gathered round Christ. First, the twelve apostles were public witnesses, fitted by divine grace to be the vessels of testimony, manifesting the electing power of God in calling them, and sending them forth in all the energy of ministry; Christ's apostles, sent out by Himself. "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21)—His chosen ones. "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you" (John 15:16). Then, secondly, there were others who were gathered by affection round Him, having no place of office in the church, but those whose hearts were touched and drawn round Him, not sent out like the first class, but not less devoted in heart than the apostles, for they followed Him and ministered to Him of their substance.

In Luke 8:4-8 we have the parable of the sower; and here, as previously remarked, it is not the kingdom brought out as in Matthew, but the testimony as to what and whom Christ was gathering, and not as to the form the kingdom would take afterward. The very fact of Christ coming as the sower proved that Israel was set aside; for had it been now to Israel as His vineyard, He must have come seeking fruit from the vine He had long before planted. He had come to Israel previously, seeking fruit and finding none. He now comes in the new character of the sower, which is quite another thing. He comes into a waste world, where there was nothing, and He begins a fresh work. God is not now looking for fruit from man in one sense, because man has been proved to be a bad tree: and the more you dig about and dung a bad tree, the more bad fruit it produces. "Every tree is known by its fruits" (Luke 6:44). Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. God is now going to produce the fruit He requires. He is not now looking for

man to produce anything, for John the Baptist said, "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Matt. 7:19). Therefore the Lord now comes as sower, not looking for fruit, but doing that which will produce it.

He then goes on to describe the character and effect of the sowing, and the disciples ask the meaning of the parable (vss. 9-15). Israel, as such, had forfeited its place, and therefore was "a people of no understanding" (Isa. 27:11). Long patience had waited on Israel. Seven hundred years had passed since the word was given to Isaiah, "Go, tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not" (Isa. 6:9). As individuals they might be drawn round the person of the Lord, but as a nation they were blinded. The disciples had an explanation of the parable, but as a nation the Lord speaks to them in parables (see vs. 10), thus fulfilling to the nation the very words spoken by the prophet so long before. Now the testimony is closed as to Israel, though not as to God's final purpose respecting them.

The seed is sown indiscriminately, and although man rejects it, because his will is opposed, nevertheless it is sown in his heart; for this parable shows how the word of God is perfectly adapted to the need of man, meeting his conscience and heart. "Never man spake like this man" (John 7:46). Christ's word came with a power that reached the heart and affections; the will is corrupt and therefore resists it. It is not abstract grace here, but the condition of man that is recognized; therefore we find the word so perfectly suited to the need, not claiming righteousness from man, but coming in with power to show him that he is a sinner, and laying open the thoughts and intents of the heart. When the heart is thus detected, the word

comes, with all gentleness and comfort, for healing and rest, because there is grace to meet a soul in whatever state it may be found. The heart is spoken to, and therefore the gospel leaves man without excuse.

Some too received the word with joy (vs. 13). This was a proof that the conscience was untouched; for when that is reached it is anything but joy, until forgiveness is known. The feelings may be moved for a time, and the word be listened to with a joy which will give place to sorrow. The reason truth is thus flippantly taken up with joy is because there is no root, and so it is received in joy, and given up in trouble.

Another class is where thorns spring up and choke the word. The understanding may be convinced and receive the truth; but the cares, pleasures, and riches of this world come in and choke the word. Now these “cares” (Luke 8:14) are most subtle things, because they enter as necessary duties, and there is no sin in doing one’s duty. Nay, it is right that a man should do his duty in his daily calling. But if these duties choke the word, and a man loses his soul through it, what then? The natural tendency of the heart often needs to be met with that word, “Take heed, and beware of covetousness” (Luke 12:15). It is the love of possession. One came to the Lord, saying, “Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me” (Luke 12:15). The heart wanted to keep it. If love of the world or covetousness gets in amongst the saints, it is an insidious thing and most difficult to meet, because it is often not open to discipline; and yet, if covetousness slips into the heart, it checks the power of Christ over the soul and conscience, and eats out the practical life of the Christian, and his soul is withered, withered, withered. It may be checked by the power of

God coming in; but this covetous care about earthy things is so subtle that, while there is nothing on which to lay the hand, the practical power of Christian life in the soul is gone, though of course, I need hardly say, eternal life can never be lost in those who once had it.

“That on the good ground are they which, in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience” (Luke 8:15). They may seem to the world to be fruits bright and blessed, but if people have not got Christ they tire. There will be no enduring, unless Christ has possession of the soul; but if He has, there will be an abiding motive, and people will go on, and “bring forth fruit with patience.” They that hear and keep it go steadily on, having their motive for action in the Lord. Trouble may come in, in the church; disappointment may arise, even from brethren; but they go on just the same, because they have got Christ before them: for the word they have heard and keep connects them with Christ, and He is more than anything else.

This is a question, not of eternal salvation, but of the practical effect of the word as seen in this world (Luke 8:16-18)—the growth of the word in the soul, and that will not be hidden under a bushel. “Ye are the light of the world” and “the salt of the earth” (Matt. 5:13). In those who only appear to be Christians it soon comes to nothing. “Whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have” (Luke 8:18). But those in whom the word works effectually are to be as a “candle” set on a candlestick. Israel being set aside for a season, God sets up a new light in the world; a light lit up by God because of the world’s darkness. When Christ was here He was the light of the world, because of its darkness, and now

we should be a light in the world, as we are “light in the Lord” (Eph. 5:8). The light is here set up by Christ’s word, and people are responsible for the word received. Suppose you have heard the word and bring forth no fruit, it will all come out, by-and-by, that you have heard the word and lost it, and the spiritual power accompanying it. For, even if you are saints, all that you have heard without fruit or power resulting there from, it will come out; for nothing is hid that shall not be known or come abroad. “Take heed therefore how ye hear” (Luke 8:18).

Christ is looking for the results of His sowing. There must be not only the hearing, but the possessing, and in this rests the responsibility; for if you keep the word which you have heard, more shall be given you. If, on hearing, I possess that which I hear, not merely have joy in receiving it, but possess it as my own, then it becomes a part of the substance of my soul, and I shall get more; for when the truth has become a substance in my soul, there is a capacity for receiving more. Suppose, for example, you hear the truth of the Lord’s second coming and see your portion in the bride of Christ, and you do not lay hold of it practically, so as to possess it (have communion with God about it, which is possession); you will presently lose the expectation of His coming and forget your place of separation from the world, and the truth will gradually slip away, because you are not holding it in your soul before God. Consequently your soul becomes dead and dull, and you lose the very truth you have received.

Thus, if one lives daily as waiting for the Lord from heaven, there will be no planning for the future, no laying up for the morrow; such a man will learn more and more, as other truths will open round this one grand central one,

and he will be kept in the truth. If, on the other hand, he drops this center truth by saying, "He cannot come yet; so many things must happen first," then is the progress of such an one's communion with God hindered, for, as we have said, it is according to what a man has heard and holds with God that there can be any growth; for what is the use of teaching me that the Lord may come tomorrow, if I am going on living as though He were not coming for a hundred years? Or where is the comfort and blessedness of the truth to my soul, if I am saying in my heart, "My Lord delayeth his coming?" Though I cannot lose my eternal life, yet if I am losing the truth and light I have had, I shall be merely floating on in the current of life, half world and half Christ, and all power of Christian life will be dimmed in my soul. If the truth is held in communion with God, it separates to Himself. Truth is to produce fruit, and you have no truth that does not bear fruit. Truth must build up the soul. "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth" (John 17:17). Christ becomes precious in and by the truth that I learn; and if it has not that power, it all drops out, comes to nothing, and is taken away. If Christ is precious to me, I shall be waiting for Him with affection, and if it is not so, the bare truth will soon be given up.

Luke 8:19-21. Here He closes up His connection with Israel after the flesh, for the relations of mother and brethren put Him into connection with Israel after the flesh. Observe, He here distinguishes the remnant by the word "these," as He did in chapter 6 by the word "ye." His mother and His brethren came to Him on the ground of natural relationship only; and there was all natural affection in the Lord, as on the cross we find Him remembering His mother, and commending her to the care of John. But He

replies here, as much as to say, I am not on that ground now—"my mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it" (Luke 8:21). Israel was now given up as to that position, the Lord owning and acknowledging only those to be His relations on whose hearts and consciences the word of God had taken effect. It was not what was found in nature, but what was produced by grace, and, being thus produced by power through the word, the principle is hereby established, that it might go out to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews, although not fully brought out until after His resurrection. In these three verses we have a judicial sentence on Israel, which closes in verse 21.

In Luke 8:22-26 it is a parabolical display of what we may expect if we follow the Lord, and the opening out of what the Lord would be to those tried by such circumstances. The consequence of being the disciples and companions of Jesus is that they get into jeopardy every hour—they are not on *terra firma*, but are tossed about on the troubled sea, and Christ Himself absent ("asleep"). There came down a storm of wind on the lake, the ship was filled with water, and they filled with fear were in jeopardy. But the fact was, Christ was in the same boat with them. He who made the worlds, the Son of God, was with them, and yet they are afraid! and cry out, "we perish," as though He could be drowned, thus showing they had no sense of who He was that was with them in the boat. To us, now calmly reading the circumstances, what absurdity there seems in such unbelief; when alas! is it not just the same with ourselves, spiritually? Have we no sense of jeopardy, when tossed about, and trouble is in the church? In truth we have, for there is many a heart saying, "Who will show

us any good?" forgetting what God is acting and doing, though man is battling to all appearance against God's purposes; but God is not baffled, and He is calmly carrying on His purposes, through all the storms of men's or devils' raising. In John 16 we find the disciples sorrowing because Jesus was going away; and the Lord had said to them (Luke 14), "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father." In Luke 16 Jesus says, "Now I go my way to him that sent me, and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? but because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your hearts" (John 16:5-6). God was accomplishing His blessed purposes in redemption by Christ's going. You forget that God is acting in all this, for you cannot suppose that God is so baffled as to give up His purpose. The disciples thought, when Jesus was crucified, that all their hopes were disappointed; they say, "we thought it had been he that should have redeemed Israel." In fact, in that very act and at that very moment, all was being accomplished for them. Where is the Lord going? should have been their question. It is not now that there seems no jeopardy, no confusion, no sorrow; but faith looks at and through it all to God, and asks, What is the Lord doing? Where is the Lord going?

In and through all the trouble the Lord has not turned a hair's breadth out of His way. We may be in distress, but faith will not say the Lord is far away, but will know Him nigh at hand. The Lord let them be in jeopardy, the ship filled with water, and Himself asleep, on purpose to put their faith to the test, to prove if they were really trusting Him; and that it might be seen if such foolish thoughts would arise, when they were put into jeopardy. They say, "Lord, we perish," but they were in the ship with Christ,

and could they be drowned? He said to them, Where is your faith? Well might He say thus to them, for though the water was in the boat, He was there too, and could sleep through it all. It was not so much of Him they were thinking as of themselves. "We perish" (said they), and it is just the same now; for the fact of being in danger with Christ in the boat is the same at one time as at another—just as impossible now as then; and in truth Christ is much more with us now, being more perfectly revealed to us, and we are united to Him, one with Him, so that He is with us every moment in the power of the Spirit.

However high the waves may rise, there is no drowning His love and thoughts towards us. The test is to our faith. The question is, Have we that faith which so realizes Christ's presence as to keep us as calm and composed in the rough sea as the smooth? It was not really a question of the rough or the smooth sea, when Peter was sinking in the water, for he would have sunk without Christ, just as much in the smooth as in the rough sea. The fact was, the eye was off Jesus on the wave, and that made him sink. If we go on with Christ, we shall get into all kinds of difficulty, many a boisterous sea; but being one with Him, His safety is ours. The eye should be off events, although they be ever so solemn, and surely they are so at this present time, and I feel them to be so; for none perhaps has a deeper sense than I of the growth of evil, and of the solemn state of things; but I know all is as settled and secure as if the whole world were favorable. I quite dread the way many dear saints are looking at events, and not looking at Christ and for Christ. The Lord Himself is the security of His people, and, let the world go on as it may, no events can touch Christ. We are safe on the sea if only we have the eye off the waves, with

the heart concentrated on Christ and on the interests of Christ. Then the devil himself cannot touch us.

Luke 8:26. We have a solemn picture of the consequence of Christ's rejection by the world! Christ comes and finds them utterly under the power of the devil. A man of the Gadarenes was possessed, but He delivers him, thus showing that the Lord had complete power over the enemy. With a word from Christ the demons were off. "The Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). What was the effect of His thus casting out Satan? Why, the whole multitude of the country round about "besought him [Christ] to depart from them" (Luke 8:37). These Gadarenes, who had borne with the demons because they could not help it, will not bear with Christ, and they beg Him to depart! Man would be glad to bind Legion if he could, for he does not like the effects of the devil's power; but man's will is against Christ; he has a deliberate determined hatred to Christ. The Lord came to the world full of love and power, to deliver from the consequences of sin; but man rejected Him, cast Him out; and God will not stay where the will is determined against Him. When the Gadarenes request Christ to depart, He immediately went up into a ship and returned back again. And mark, the world in which we live is just going on as having quietly rejected Christ. But does God give them up, though Christ is gone away for a season? No, He did not give them up, but sent amongst them this man, whom He had healed, to tell them what great things God had done for him. This is what the disciples did in the world, and the delivered remnant also are to tell the world what great things God has done for them.

The swine appear to represent the state of the Jews after their rejection of Christ. The Lord, doubtless, permitted the demons to enter the swine (as the swine having no passions of their own, it was their being possessed with these demons which made them run violently to destruction), showing it was not merely the evil passions in the men, but their being possessed by wicked spirits, which hurried them on to destruction. And we know historically, from Josephus and others, that one can hardly conceive the infatuation with which the Jews rushed on to their own destruction, when those Gentile powers went and plowed up the holy city. This is just a consequence of Israel's rejecting the Lord.

Then the Lord gives us two other pictures, through the medium of real events, of His dealings in deliverance. In verse 41 we have Jairus' daughter, who lay dying; and here is a picture (dispensationally) of Israel. The Lord was going to heal Israel, who was just like one dying, but while in the way the people throng Him. What He came to do He did, for the world crowded Him while on the way to heal the sick "daughter of my people" (Isa. 22:4); whosoever could touch Him by faith got healing, the activities of grace going forth from Him.

Jairus' daughter lay dying. Man was not pronounced to be dead until Christ was killed. Before Christ came, there was no healing for man. Abraham longed for the day of Christ. There were prophets who spoke of Christ as a healer, blessing was promised, but there was no physician. "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?" (Isa. 6:1). There was none; for no physician could be found to heal man's condition until Christ came, and Him they put to death. In Him there was living power, for when the people thronged Him, a woman does but touch the border

of His garment, and virtue goes out of Him to heal her. Healing depended not on the condition of those who were healed, but in the power of the healer.

Physicians might apply remedy after remedy, but it is of no avail, until One came who could impart life; then the case was changed.

When the multitude press upon Him, and He recognizes the touch of one to have been the touch of faith, He says, "somebody has touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me" (Luke 8:46). And now, before the Lord comes forth in resurrection power and glory, to bring life from the dead in Israel, there is perfect healing where there is faith; for the Lord is always alive to the exercise of faith. The woman hid herself, for there was shame in her, because of the consciousness she felt of the disease which had needed to be healed. But she could not be hid (Luke 8:27). The heart always shrinks from opening itself, when within itself; but when it looks at Christ, it is opened to Him; for that is always the effect of being in the presence of Jesus. Shame, reputation, character, all give way before the sense of what He is. When grace gets to the bottom of the heart, all else is easily set aside. A link was formed between this woman's soul and Christ. "Thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace" (Luke 8:48). He brings perfect peace and comfort into her heart, for His way is not only to heal, but to make Himself known. She is not only to be cured, but to have the assurance of peace from His own mouth.

Meanwhile they come, saying that Jairus' daughter was dead; "Trouble not the master." They thought He might possibly heal her, while she was living; but now she is dead, they supposed He could do nothing. This is a picture of Israel, who are dead before God (as are Gentiles too, of

course). But Jesus encourages them, and says, Only believe “and she shall be made whole” (Luke 8:50). When He came to the house, He suffered no man to go in, save Peter and James and John (the pillars of the future glory, when He will come forth as the resurrection and the life to the dead nation), and the father and the mother of the maiden.

In this chapter we get a picture of what was then doing, and what will come to pass. We have the seed, the word sown, and the effect of it, the use man made of it. We have God’s explanation of all that was going on, as being all known and settled in His mind; and if a storm arise, and if Christ appear asleep and insensible to the danger—though “He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep” (Psa. 121:4)—as disciples we are in the same boat with Him. The Lord gives us to rest on that with undivided undistracted hearts: for Christ is in the boat, as well as the water. Only let the eye of faith rest on Christ, then come what may, we shall say, “Who shall separate us” (Rom. 8:35)—nay, in all, “more than conquerors.” Then the more the trouble, the more the blessing, because of the exercise of faith.

Notes on Luke 9

Luke 9.

After the Lord had given a picture, as it were, of all that was going on in chapter 8, He raises the question in chapter 9 as to who He was, and He tells His disciples some should see His glory; for the mount of transfiguration shows what the glory of the kingdom would be. Peter speaks of the power and coming, "when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory ... when we were with him in the holy mount" (2 Tim. 1:17-18). But it is a closing testimony at that time, though the glory would come; and as a signal that it was, the disciples were to shake off the dust from their feet, when they were not received. It is interesting to mark all the circumstances which bring out the fact of its being the Lord Himself there, and a test to Israel. He worked miracles, and could confer on others the power, as we have seen. Now we find another thing—He is committing the power to several together, giving to those men, a number of them together, power and authority over the demons, and not only entrusting it to whom He pleases individually.

Three things we have noticed in connection with the testimony of the Son of man; 1, the testimony of God to Him; 2, the misery of man set aside by Him; and 3, demons cast out, so proving that it was really the Lord visiting this world in grace and power. There will be the display of power by-and-by; but He was bringing in, in His own person, the manifestation of that which will be then full and perfect, so being an earnest of the powers of the world to come, alluded to in Hebrews. This was not

redemption, but the exercise of power in dealing with the enmity of man against Himself, and they would not have Him in this way.

Luke 9:3 and so forth. He is sending out His disciples, and in so doing He disposes of all their circumstances. While He was with them, He supplied them with everything—they lacked nothing. The power of the Lord was there to take care of them, wherever they were. Afterward, when He was going to leave them, He tells them to take a sword. They would have to shift for themselves, as it were: but while He was with them He was their shelter. As in the demand for the ass to ride into Jerusalem, He proves His authority royal and divine altogether—“the Lord hath need of him” (Luke 19:31). The disciples depart, preaching the gospel, and healing everywhere. Then comes the question of who He was: He would have the conscience awakened about Him. There are two things in man brought out by the question—curiosity is excited on the one hand, and perplexity and dismay on the other.

Luke 9:7-9. He goes on, and wherever there is an ear to hear, He ministers to them according to the grace of the kingdom.

Luke 9:11-12. The disciples ask Him to send the multitude away. Let them go and get lodging. No, says the Lord, “give ye them to eat.” He does not now say He would feed them, but He is committing to others the same power as He had Himself, and He would exercise their faith in what He could do by them. This applies to the church now. Faith uses the power that is in the Head. “Give ye them to eat.” What He expected was for faith to exercise His divine power, that which they saw in Him. We should be so reckoning on the power in the Head. The Lord was trying

their faith in Him, "Give ye them to eat." But no; they had no faith; they began to reckon on their resources. "We have no more but five loaves and two fishes." So it is with us. No faith! Memory is not faith. "He smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed. Can he give bread also? "He gave us water, but can He give us food? We know He has done that one thing, but can He do this other thing today? We want to count on the energy of the Lord's love, and expect Him to be interested for us. When He said, "Give ye them to eat," they should have expected He would give them the power. Jehovah was amongst them, exercising His own power; but we see in their answer the horrid principle of unbelief. Unbelief shuts out God, and limits itself to what it sees—"except we should go and buy meat." He made "them sit down by fifties in a company. And they did eat and were filled" (Luke 9:14,17). It was said in Psalm 132, "I will satisfy her poor with bread," and here He was doing it. This was said of their King, and He had chosen Zion; He had desired it for His habitation. He was *here* giving a sign that He was the One to accomplish this blessing, for He was feeding their poor with bread. He was not only sending out the power through His disciples, but Himself among them; not only as a man, a messenger, but as it is said in Hebrews, the word "began to be spoken by the Lord" (Heb. 2:3). He was the Apostle. There were others sent afterward, but He Himself was there first as their Apostle. It is a solemn thing to think that the Lord has really visited this world! He has come and presented Himself first to His people Israel, but they would not have Him. It shows us what the world is we are in. God is now dealing with it in grace, though His Son has been rejected. "Twelve baskets" of fragments. Just observe, in passing, that

the number twelve is significant of power exercised in the way of government—twelve apostles, twelve gates to the city in Revelation.

Hitherto we have been looking at Christ presenting Himself among the people as Jehovah, the Messiah; we now see Him as the dependent man praying. He was Immanuel, God with us; Son of David; Son of man. He was to be all. Then the question is started among the disciples, who He was. Some said one thing, and some another; but Peter said, “the Christ of God” (Luke 9:20). Upon this, He charges them to tell no man that thing. There was faith, however feeble, dictating this answer, and therefore there is no thinking about it. With perfect certainty, Peter says, “The Christ of God.” So it always is with faith. When the Spirit of God brings home the truth with power, there is no uncertainty about it. A man may not doubt whether Christ is the Son of God, or not; but the mind may work upon it, and think perhaps, I do not love Him enough to be saved? then there is uncertainty. But when the Spirit, with power, shows whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him; then I believe it, and I see that my sins and my iniquities He will “remember no more” (Heb. 10:17). It may set a man thinking about the consequences of a truth.

Luke 9:22. He now passes by the thing that has been already brought out, and He presents Himself to them as the Son of man, and He is going to suffer—to be crucified. They must therefore be content to take up their cross. A new thing was coming in; He was going to *be* rejected, and to be slain, and the third day rise again. It is no longer Messianic ground, but in another sphere altogether beyond this their hopes must lie. “If any man will come after me,

let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily" (Luke 9:23). "Daily"—this is the trial. A man might heroically do it once for all, and he would have plenty of people to honor him, and have books written about him; but it is terribly difficult to go on every day denying oneself, and no one knowing anything about it. It came to this that, if you spare the flesh in this life, you will lose your life in the next; and what if a man gain the whole world and lose his own soul; what should a man give in exchange for his soul? It is not a question of bringing life down to the flesh; but if you lose your life here, you will get it elsewhere—above and beyond this world: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it" (Luke 9:24). It is giving up the world for eternal life, or for eternal misery, that is the real question. "What is a man advantaged?" You must give it up; you cannot keep it.

There is the glory of the kingdom; there is the manifestation of glory coming. Those tastes and dispositions which are attracted by Jesus cannot find their portion here. "They declare plainly that they seek a country; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God" (Heb. 11:14,16). "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me" "of him shall the Son of man be ashamed," when He comes in the display of His own glory. (See Dan. 7:13.) One like to the Son of man came to the Ancient of days, and there was given Him dominion, etc. Then He comes too in the glory of the Son of God—His Father's glory, and in the glory of the angels. The angels are waiting upon Him who created them, for they were created for Him as well as by Him, and thus give glory to Him as Son of man; giving Him His proper glory, for He has not lost a tittle of His glory; "Thou hast set him

over the works of thy hands" (Heb. 2:7). "Let all the angels of God worship him" (Heb. 1:6). There was the same thing at Sinai. "The law was ordained by angels." "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels" (Psa. 68:17).

We are now finding the displayed glory in this triple character spoken of (Luke 9:26). It is that glory when He appears; and it is a question of His being ashamed of those who have been ashamed of Him; they could not deny themselves present advantage. I do not here allude to the Father's house, which of course has another character. Here it is the kingdom manifested in its glory to the earth (Luke 9:28). "He went...to pray." This is not mentioned in the other Gospels. He was going to show His disciples His glory, to give the declaration of His power and coming. From the other Gospels we find that, a week after this, He went up to Jerusalem where He was to be crucified. "The fashion of his countenance was changed" (Luke 9:29). An entire change of things is here. He talks of His decease, which He should accomplish at Jerusalem, where He ought to have been crowned; but there He is going to be crucified. There, where this horn of David was to bud, shall this root of David be taken, and by wicked hands be crucified and slain. This is the deep center of all the change.

Luke 9:30. "There talked with him two men which were Moses and Elias." This we may look at in two ways; dispensationally, as representing the law and the prophets; and in this way Moses held a very peculiar place, for it was through Him the law was given; Elijah had nearly as important a place also, for though the Jews were in a right position, they had failed in it, and he goes back to Horeb. The other prophets were never called to work miracles.

Except the account of the dial of Ahaz, we hear of no miracle in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Habakkuk, etc. Those prophets, sent of God, gave proof that He was caring for Israel; but there was nothing like the calling back in Elijah, who stood as the maintainer of the law, when the people had departed from it most grossly, though all the prophets, even to Malachi, called back to law.

Moses and Elias were taken away, and Jesus is left alone. Law was gone, prophecy gone, and Christ is alone, and He was going to be crucified. All the fabric built up by law and prophets (not the testimony given by them, but law as given to man in the flesh) is broken up, because man ended by killing the Lord come in the flesh; therefore all is gone. Peter would have had the three established together, taken all alike, "Let us build three tabernacles." But that moment Moses and Elias disappear, and the voice is heard, "This is my beloved Son, hear him" (Luke 9:35). It is now the righteousness of God, without law, in Jesus. Law did not send Christ. What law could have been put upon God to do it? Nothing but divine love could have originated such a thought. "Grace reigns through righteousness" (Rom. 5:21). The law was good and perfect, but Christ was far beyond the law. Moses and Elias, therefore, were not to have any place with Him. God the Father put them aside, when Peter wishes to put them in connection. They disappear immediately. This is the important thing for us. Every word of law and prophets is the truth of God, but these were until John. Now the Son of God is the messenger of the Father's love, and the accomplisher of divine righteousness. When He is there, the voice says, "This is my beloved Son: hear him" (Luke 9:35) — and He is left alone.

Mark, too, that they were occupied with His death, while talking with Him. One thing occupies the minds of heaven and earth. He was going to be crucified where He ought to have been King. Under such circumstances, there was nothing for heaven or earth to talk about but His death. And so for us, the great thing to talk about Messiah is, that He died. Though He could destroy all the evil that had come in, He must die—in grace of course. It must all end in death, because the carnal mind is not only under Satan's power, but enmity against God; therefore heaven has to speak.

Zion, the very place He had chosen, where He had been and is to be—the special place of God's favor, is to be the scene of His death. There they cast Him out of the world He came to save. The One in whom all human and divine righteousness and perfections were centered must die there. All man's nature, under the most advantageous circumstances: all man's wickedness, spite of the public and patient and varied ways of God in government, are brought out here.

Moses could deal with man as man; and bring water from the rock for them, in answer to their murmurings; the prophet the same, "Plead with me," "Put me in remembrance, let us plead together" (Isa. 43:26). But now, all this was gone. God had cultivated the vineyard—done all that could be done for it. There was yet one thing; His Son—the best of all. Him He sent, and they cast Him out and slew Him. And now the testimony concerning man is, that he has "killed the Prince of life," and "denied the Holy One and the Just" (Acts 5:14). We never can have peace then, till we get pardon through Christ on the cross. Then we see a true picture of heaven: but all the intermediate

dealings of testimony are entirely short of what we have in Christ on the cross, because short of the ground of what man actually is, which fully came out only when he “killed the Prince of life.”

When the Lord’s Messiah-ship was given up, we have seen He takes the place of translation from earth to heaven. He, being rejected, was no longer to be looked upon as the Head of Israel down here, but as the heavenly Christ; for He takes His place on high, when cast out by man, and this fact was to give a character to the path of those who follow Him. The two things go together—rejection on earth and a heavenly place. “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23). The Lord shows them that this heavenly calling involves the cross down here, as it was with Christ Himself. The peculiar place given Him in heaven was, in God’s counsels, dependent on the cross which He bore as the Man. “He humbled himself and became obedient unto death,” etc.; “wherefore God also hath highly exalted him” (Phil 2:9). It was through the cross that He went there: and, if we are to have a place in heaven, we must have it too. The cross was for the destruction of sin and for the destruction of self, in which sin dwells. We have the same place; therefore He says, “Let these sayings sink down into your ears, for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men” (Luke 9:44).

We want the heavenly calling to give power to take up the cross; and it is at the same time in proportion as we are dead to things down here, that the heavenly things are realized. When the blood was taken within the veil, the sacrifice was taken without the gate: so we are to go “without the camp, bearing his reproach” (Heb. 13:13); and

if we apprehend the value of the blood, and go within the veil, we get to the place of being where the burning outside the camp was; for while we are in spirit where His blood has been carried in, our bodies are where His body was burned. Judaism only put men between the two: for they did not go in within the veil, His blood not having been shed; and they never went without the camp (vss. 18-22). He is going to take another place, and they are to follow Him in it; and then, in order to strengthen them for it, He shows them what the heavenly place was. "He took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray" (vs. 28). The heavenly part of the kingdom is here represented by Christ, Moses, and Elias—the earthly part by the disciples (and there is one part in which the church on earth is alluded to as down here). Peter speaks of this scene as the power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ Himself, in the position of the dependent man (praying), takes them up into a mountain. "Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep" (Luke 9:32) asleep in the presence of the glory, just as in Gethsemane, showing what human nature is. There is no power in it, in suffering or glory, to fix the attention on Christ and His interest.

Moses and Elias were in the same glory (vss. 30-32), and we are made the associates of Christ in the same glory (the glory of the kingdom in its broad character), not of course, the essential glory. "As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly" (1 Cor. 15:49) even of God's Son in glory. "We know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him" (1 John 3:2). When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we shall appear with him in glory (Col. 3:4). The portion is not to be under Christ, but with Christ. "We shall appear with him

in glory”—with Him in the same glory. We look for the Lord from heaven, “who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned” (Phil 4:21). We shall be with Him and like Him, and this we shall all alike share, though there will be different degrees of glory for one and another: for example, Paul’s measure will not be mine. What we speak of now is all the same glory, and we are predestinated “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom. 8:29). “The glory thou hast given me I have given them.”

The next thing that we see is the perfect familiarity in this glory. They are talking with Him—not presenting a petition—not at His feet (though this is our blessed place too); but this part of the scene represents communion, familiarity of closeness, the same as that of the disciples on earth, though better of course. On the holy mount they had a higher understanding about it, but it was the same subject occupied them. This shows us the kind of intercourse we have with Jesus now, for we belong to the heavenly part of the kingdom.

A third point to mark is the subject they talked of. This is quite a new thing, for He ought to have been a king. But man was a sinner, and there was the determinate counsel of God to be fulfilled—redemption. Jerusalem was the place of royalty, and His decease was to be accomplished there, where He ought to have been acknowledged king. There was full intimacy on the theme which occupied His heart, for they talked on this, His decease. Then He told His disciples afterward the consequences of it to them. They must deny themselves. “Let these sayings sink down into your ears” (Luke 9:44). The great subject on God’s heart should be that for us.

Another thing is, it is the glory which enables us to talk on this subject. We cannot talk of it until we have peace with God through the knowledge of forgiven sin. When a man has not this, he has to come in his need and get it: but when he is in it, he can contemplate and enjoy it. Besides this, God saw all that was passing in Christ's soul as to obedience unto death. We shall never cease having interest in this subject: when with the Father in the glory, it will be the absorbing theme. He said Himself, "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life" (John 10:17). How much more shall we not love Him for the same cause? Think what it must have been to be occupied with Christ about His decease! What His knowledge was, of what He was going to do! He knew what man was, what the counsel of God was. He came to "reconcile all things unto himself" (Col. 1:20). It was so effectually done that the eye of God could only see the effect of that blood in what was washed away. The rejected Christ a Savior! and this the subject of conversation with Christ Himself! "They spake of his decease" (Luke 9:31). Peter says, "Master, it is good for us to be here." Then immediately there was a voice from the cloud: "This is my beloved Son; hear him" (Luke 9:35). The effect on Peter's mind is a wish to put Moses and Elias on a level with Christ.

We have spoken of this, viewing it dispensationally, law and prophecy mixed with Him; but there is another thing to be noticed in it; namely, that which characterized the Son was peculiar. Nothing could be put on a level with Him. There necessarily comes out, therefore, the Father's testimony to the Son. "This is my beloved Son," etc. When a saint knows Jesus, though he also knows he will be like Him hereafter, and that all the saints will be like Him too,

yet Christ has the supremacy in his heart. He is single and alone in blessedness, having supremacy in the heart, as well as being the object of faith. I delight in the saints, but Christ is the alone object of faith. Then I get into this fellowship with the Father. I have the Father's thoughts about the Son, as well as the Son's thoughts about the work. I have fellowship with the Father and the Son. We cannot have communion with the Father about redemption work because He has not been made a man. Notice, the Father does not say, This is the Son whom you ought to adore and admire, but He tells us His own thoughts about Him. "This is my beloved Son" (Luke 9:35). Wherefore "beloved!" "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life"; thus I know that I have one thought with the Father, in delighting in the Son and in His death. The Father communicates His own thoughts about the Son, and by the power of the Holy Spirit they are put into my heart, and I have fellowship; and as a consequence I know that he that hath everlasting life shall never come into judgment.

Mark, further, how they came into the excellent glory. There came a cloud and overshadowed them. The cloud is the Shechinah, the dwelling-place of God, which the people had to guide them through the wilderness, and they were to stay or move according to it. It was the divine presence, and "they feared as they entered into the cloud" (Luke 9:34). They were not protected by the cloud, as Israel were, and as they will be by-and-by. "Upon all the glory shall be a defence" (Isa. 4:5); but here they enter into the cloud. The fact was, coming into the cloud was coming into the presence of the Father now, a dwelling-place for us. It was thence the Father's voice was heard. "This is my beloved Son" (Luke 9:35). Thence they were told who this

Son was. He had been with them as one of them. He was the Father's beloved Son, in a place worthy of adoration, but the companion of their hearts. He brought them to the Father, the only place into which redemption brings us (as to our relationship). Until a man knows redemption and is brought into His *presence*, *he* can never know the Father's love: but when there, he can never know the end of it. It is the kind of love the prodigal never knew till he was in his father's arms. He had doubts and fears as he went on, and thoughts about the hired servants, but none when he was in his father's house. It is known only by the teaching of the Holy Spirit in us—in the cloud—God in us. It is in the presence of the glory, realized by faith now, we know the power of redemption; and by its brightness and its truth, it blots out all other relationship.

Notice who are learning this glory. Saints walking on the earth—Peter, James, and John; and so with us. The truths written in this book are not for us to know in heaven. Is the Father's love not to be known till we are in heaven? Is redemption only to be known there? Was God less intimate with those on earth than with those in heaven? Not at all. It was to Peter, James, and John this was communicated, not to Moses and Elias. The Father's voice was to men on earth. We learn the rejection of man here and the grace which has brought us to share in the glory.

In what follows we find the Lord coming down into the crowd of this world, not remaining on the mount. We may listen and enjoy, but we have to come down and pass through this world. The Lord comes down and meets three things—a throng of men, Satan's power, and the disciples' unbelief. There was no seclusion here for Him, but He comes to a crowd. What a picture of distress this is! The

son of one, possessed with a devil (vs. 39); and the father's heart racked more than the son's body. The world will weep till they are tired of weeping, and then go on with the same thing again.

We have seen before how the Lord was come in the display of His power and bound the strong man. The disciples could not do it. The power of Satan remains the same unto this day. He is not literally cast out, but remains the "prince of this world," the character he has gained, not lost, by Christianity. He will be bound; his power will be overthrown as a fact, and not to faith only. The question was to be settled about Satan's right, and what did the Lord say of him?

"Now is the judgment of this world" (John 12:31)—"Now shall the prince of this world be cast out." His title is "cast out," but Christ has not yet exerted this power. Therefore in the epistles we find him spoken of as still ruling in this world. In Ephesians he is called, "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2), "the spirit that now worketh." Then we hear of the "rulers of the darkness of this world." When "the powers of the world to come" (Heb. 6:5), are in their full display, Satan will be cast out entirely; but these instances and more show he was here then as he is still. "How long shall I be with you" (Luke 9:41). It was not because Satan was here that Christ said this, but because the disciples could not use the power He had brought in; and that closed the dispensation. So it will be in this. The power and goodness of God brought Christ into the world, but the incapacity of man to believe, so as to use that power, will close it. So we read in Romans 11:22, "Toward thee [the professing body now], goodness, if thou continue in his goodness; otherwise thou also shalt be cut

off”; but until His grace ceases, there is refuge for us to go to Him. While He was here, the moment the father of the child sought to Him, He cast out the spirit. As long as Christ’s grace is at work, if there is only one saint on the earth and everything else failed around, he would find the power of Christ ready to be exercised on his behalf. There can be no failing in meeting the need of a soul, because as there is Christ to go to, there is help in Him. However dark the dispensation may be, there is exactly the grace that is needed for the position. Not that God would have our eyes blinded to the darkness around, for if we do not take heed to the ruinous state, conscience is not in its right place. If I am ready to say, Why should He not stay? when He says, How long shall I be with you? I am insensible to the state of things around me, and I am not awake to the response that Christ’s love to the church demands; but, on the other hand, if I am not able to look up and count on the grace of Christ to meet that state, however bad it may be, I am powerless.

Luke 9:43. “They were all amazed at the mighty power of God.” It is very humbling to see how amazed they were about this power. They did not wonder at the power of the evil. But they ought so to have counted on His power as to have been amazed if the power were not exerted. Christ brings them back to the cross. “Let these sayings sink down into your ears, for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men” (Luke 9:44). You ought to have been able to get this power; but you must now know not only the power of Christ, but the cross of the rejected One. “Rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you, but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). We have more to be rejoiced at in this than if a miracle

were to be performed tomorrow. It is more blessed to know the cross. It was as though He had said, "I had rather you should come now to own the rejected One than be looking for this power even." Beloved friends, you are not thinking of what God is doing at this present time, if you do not see that now it is not power on the earth, but rejection.

Luke 9:46. "There arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be the greatest." What a tale this tells! What a selfishness runs through and through! Even at the Lord's supper it was the same thing. In Luke we find it, where there is so much of what man is brought out.

We see then, from what we have been tracing, that we need to come down from the hill; not to be without Jesus, but to learn what man is. It is not necessary to come down from the mount, as some people say, lest we should be puffed up there; for we shall never be puffed up while on the mount. Like Peter we may be afraid, but we are never puffed up in the presence of God. It is when we quit it that we are in danger. Paul was not exalted above measure when in the third heaven; but after he came down, he needed the thorn in the flesh to prevent it.

Besides, there is an historical necessity for us to get through this world. But Jesus was as much with His disciples when they came down as while they were on the mount, and that is our comfort. Do not let us suppose we have lost Christ. We have to serve Him, walk with Him, learn from Him, and mark His patient grace towards us in and through all circumstances. The Lord give us to know, while passing through this world, what a Christ we have, taking our hearts clean out of the defiling circumstances around, so that, whether we get a taste of the glory, or

are passing through the crowd of this world, He may be everything to us, as He is everything for us.

Luke 9:46 and so forth. The Lord is now showing His disciples the place they are to take upon earth. They are not to be in a position connected with Him as Messiah in earthly glory—heavenly glory they could not have till the end. In the meantime they have to take their place with Him in rejection, and this put them to the test, for they were to give up things right enough in themselves, for example, to hate father, mother, wife, and so forth, all which earthly relationships had a claim upon them, and especially so upon the Jew. “Honor thy father and mother,” and so forth. But all these relationships would not stand in association with the cross. Everything must be sacrificed, everything that linked man with the earth must be snapped asunder to faith, when Christ was rejected.

The character of the world was fully manifested in His rejection: its deeds were evil and it rejected the light. The incarnation, which should have been the link to man’s blessing, is rejected. He accomplishes redemption by His rejection on earth, and He has a place in heaven. This alters the character of everything. It brings in the judging of self. There never would have been this if Christ had been crowned on earth. He was “delivered into the hands of men,” (Luke 9:44). He whose very name carried power and authority is to be delivered up. If Christ had had His place on earth, the heart of man would never have been put to the test. Why? Because, if men had seen all the dignity and glory displayed on earth which was His right, it would have gratified their flesh with its greatness. But flesh cannot inherit heaven, and what place has it on the cross? There they go together so blessedly—the cross and

heaven; and for the flesh there is no place in either. There was a terrible breach between man and God, and the One who would have healed it they crucified. Then every carnal thought that was in accordance with such an act must be judged.

The disciples were disputing who should be the greatest—not the greatest in the world, but the greatest in the glory. It is self after all. They have not to tell Him much, but their thoughts are judged. When in the light, everything is judged. Jacob had the word from God to go to Bethel (Gen. 35:2), and he immediately says to his household, “Put away the strange gods that are among you.” And why so? Everything is detected when getting into the presence of God. Jacob could get the blessing before he went to Bethel; but when he goes into God’s presence, the idols are judged. When he has got rid of the idols, it is “El-bethel,” the God of Bethel. The disciples were reasoning which should be the greatest, and when He detected their thoughts He “took a child and set him by him” (Luke 9:47). This shows us our place: we ought to seek the lowest place. We never can have it, because Christ has taken it. He went down under sin, wrath, death. He took the lowest place, because the servant of all. This is the truly happy place for us, but how it judges self! This is what the cross does. Not only are the idols judged, but self is judged.

It is a blessed thing to have done with self. When there is room for God, we can be full of joy and happiness. We are not humble, even when we are occupied with our own nothingness, or how bad we are; but we are humble when we do not think of ourselves at all. When we have to learn our nothingness and badness, that is being humbled. If we get away from the Lord, we have to be brought back, and

that is a humbling process. We want to judge the flesh in ourselves. It is pretty easy to judge it in another, but it is in ourselves we miss it (vs. 50). Things are brought to a crisis. "He that is not against us is for us."

Mark how conscious the Lord was of His utter rejection by man; so utter that He said, he that is not against us is proved to be for us. Christ was perfect; therefore He was a perfect test to men's consciences; and, as far as He is manifested in us, we shall be so also. Paul could say, "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost" (2 Cor. 4:3). Why could he say so? Because it went out from him as pure as it went in. John said, "We forbid him, because he followeth not with us" (Luke 9:49). That tells the whole tale. They were thinking of themselves, not of Christ; of their own importance, and not His honor. If it had been His importance, they would have thought how blessed it was to find the effect of His name, and rejoiced to know how His power was being exercised by man. But no; they were looking at themselves as well as at the Messiah. Even John was thus using Christ Himself to further his own importance. And is there not something in us of the same thing, a satisfaction at that which aggrandizes self as well as Christ, instead of seeking the honor of Christ alone? The Lord takes him up and answers him on the ground of His utter rejection, which was coming. "He that is not against us is for us" (Luke 9:50). And mark that the very selfishness of John brings out the grace of Christ. He says "us." You do not know the lot you have with Me. If you find one who can use the power of My name, rejoice in it.

Luke 9:51. "It cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem" (Luke 13:33). I am going to get a portion in heaven, and you are to have the same portion, but it

must be through rejection here. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily." "When the time was come that he should be received up, he set his face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem." In Isaiah 50:7, "I set my face as a flint." He was accomplishing His Father's will here, as in all His course. Redemption must be accomplished through the cross. He "learned obedience by the things which he suffered." It was the same obedience as at the beginning, when He was coming amongst them with "Blessed are the poor," and so forth — more painful, and of course, He felt the difference; but still He goes in the same blessed spirit and earnestness. Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, etc. He had found it His meat to do the will of Him that sent Him. There was joy to Him in this; but in the cup of wrath which He was going to drink there was no joy. He had met with scorn here, smiting there, rejection all through, but nothing like this cup, and therefore He cried, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me," etc. Christ proved His perfectness, for He felt what it was to be "made sin." His holy nature shrank from it, yet there was the same quiet, steady, patient obedience, for "He steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem," as all through. He knows His Father's will and He does it. He sets His face there, where His Father's will is to be done, not looking to this side or to that, but there — Jerusalem.

We, according to the measure we have of the single eye, shall be following in the same course, going to the cross steadily, with one purpose: and, in proportion as we do so, will those who do not so set their face oppose us. But the Lord says, "If any man serve me, let him follow me" (John 12:26). Service is not doing a great deal, but following the

Master, and the world and half-hearted Christians do not like that. There is plenty of doing in the world, but “if any man serve me, let him follow me.” Paul wanted to serve every way, but we find the Spirit forbidding him to go into Bithynia or Troas, and yet two years afterward we read that all “Asia heard the word” (Acts 19:10). God’s work was to be done, but it was to be in His time and of His ordering. His servant had only to follow in obedience. It was the same with Moses. Nature would say of him, Why not stay in Pharaoh’s court that the people there may be converted, instead of leaving it? Flesh cannot understand what faith leads to. Afterward he goes out in all the earnestness of his spirit, natural energy comes in, but then there is no deliverance. Moses has to go and keep sheep, for forty years, to be broken down, and made nothing of, and what were Israel to do all that time? To wait. Then when he comes back to serve them, how is it done? There is the flesh appearing in another way. “Lord, I am not eloquent” (Ex. 4:10). Then Aaron is sent back with him, and the work is done in the power of God.

Luke 9:52. “They went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans.” (vs. 53). We see the reason why they did not receive Him was because His face was set towards Jerusalem. His obedience and singleness of eye, going to do God’s will without honor or attractiveness or repute, going to Jerusalem, is the very reason they would have nothing to do with Him (Luke 9:54). See the religious opposition of the disciples to them. The Samaritans would not submit to God’s way: Christ did. That is the difference; and the disciples want to command fire to come out of heaven as Elias did, and at the very place where Elias worked the miracle. In fleshly reasoning they think Christ was as

worthy as Elias to call down fire. This is a more subtle kind of self than the other. It seemed like direct zeal for Christ, but they did not understand the zeal of Christ. He was not come for judgment nor to destroy men's lives, but to suffer Himself for them. If they had known God's thoughts, they would have submitted quietly. Peter again understood not the Lord's mind when he drew his sword and smote the servant of the high priest. All the miracles of Elias were characterized by the spirit of judgment, not like Elisha who had his commission from heaven. Elijah stood in the place of judgment and righteousness, like John the Baptist who came in the spirit and power of Elias, saying, "Every tree that bringeth not forth fruit shall be hewn down," etc., and "the ax is laid to the root of the trees." Elisha had life-giving power, on the contrary, and was a type of grace. Elijah passed through Jordan (death in type), while Elisha starts from the other side of Jordan in resurrection.

Luke 9:56. He turned round and went to another village. It is not pleasant to be trodden upon in this world, but Christ was. To do well, suffer for it, and take it patiently, is what we have; and is it to end there? Yes, and that is "acceptable with God." Christ came to suffer, to bear anything for the sake of others; and He would not have been doing this, if He had called down fire from heaven upon the Samaritans. We have to follow Christ in carrying the testimony of God's love into the world in all our walk through it. The world needs it. We must not be seeking for ourselves, but have Christ the object. At the end of the chapter He goes on to show how the links with this world are to be broken.

Luke 9:57-58. One says, "Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest," but Christ puts him to the test.

You cannot go if you do not take up your lot with One who had not where to lay His head; for you may sooner go to the birds of the air for a nest, or to the foxes for a hole, than to the Son of man for a home in this world. They were not now to come to Him as the One who had the promises, and so forth, but to One whose portion was utter and entire rejection. Following Him could not be accompanied with ease and comfort here. He was to be delivered into the hands of men. At His birth we see the same thing. Every one found room in the inn save He, but any who wanted to find Him whom angels celebrate must go to the manger!

Luke 9:59. He says to one, "Follow me." The first one wanted something with Christ; but here where He says, "Follow me," then immediately a difficulty is started; and it is when He calls a man that difficulties are felt. There was no sense of the difficulties of the one who said, "Lord, I will follow thee" (Luke 9:57), without His call. But this man who is called says, "Let me first go and bury my father." He is going presently, but there is a link felt. Jesus says, "Let the dead bury their dead"; you must leave them to follow Me. You may be ready to say, the things of the earth have no power over you; but just try what it is to have them, and you will learn the extent of their power. A man may go to the length of his cord, but when he gets to the end he is checked. A father had the first claim in nature, and especially to a Jew, but Christ says, I am calling you out in the power of life; I am putting in My claim for the life I give you, and it breaks every bond here. It is a question of life in the midst of death. The word "first" (let me first go and bury my father) shows something put before Christ, as though the man said, There is something I put before

Your calling. Death had come in, and this very plea told Christ they were all under death. It was quite a right thing for the man to bury his father; but if life has come in, and the question is one of redemption, to be lost or saved, you must give yourself up to it. In the divine light which is in the cross, He saw all dead, and therefore He said, "Let the dead bury their dead" (Luke 9:60). The one thing to be done now is to follow Christ. The question is, Death in the world or life in Christ? Where are the affections?

Luke 9:61. "Another also said, Lord, I will follow thee, but let me first go bid them farewell which are at home at my house." In the previous case it was just this: When my first affections are settled, then will I come and follow Thee. There is no good in that: the Lord says, "Let the dead bury their dead." But this case shows that those at home were not left in heart. He felt he had to break with them, and yet his heart lingered. "No man looking back is fit for the kingdom of God." "Remember Lot's wife." "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways" (James 1:8). If Christ be not first and last, He will always be last, for faith is not in exercise. The question is, whether we are walking as seeing what the cross tells us. The cross lifts the veil, showing the skeleton of the world, and when I see this sentence on all that is in the world, on self as well as what is outside, and our links of affection with it, I learn that all is to be given up: but there is Christ Himself and the love which is in Him to meet it. It will and must judge self: and it brings out the will too, for there is a great deal of will in all this shunning of the cross. People may speak of the claims of affection, yet it is not really and only family affection, and so forth, but the end which connects with self is felt. Natural affection there should be—indeed it is one

of the signs of the last evil days to be without it; but if you have power to judge yourselves, you will find that many an excuse you make has this secret at the end. So in affliction, bereavement, etc., it is not only the affection that is touched, but the will. There is sweetness in the sorrow, so long as we realize Christ in it, and affection only is sorrowing. But if the will is touched, there is rebellion, resistance, struggling; and all this the Lord must judge, for a mass of flesh and self can never follow Christ. What a wonderful detail all this is! It is God going through our hearts entering into every corner and crevice. Why? Because of the constant undeviating steadfastness of His love; and as a father loves his child when it is naughty, as well as when it is good, so our God takes pains, as it were, with us all, even when so bad.

The effect of all is not only to make us practically righteous, but happy—imitators “of God, as dear children” (Eph. 5:1). It is well, on the one hand, for us to judge ourselves and see what there is to detect in us, and, on the other, to see the fullness of His grace in Christ.

May the Lord give us to feel more and more that “the friendship of the world is enmity with God” (James 4:4), and that the energy of the flesh cannot accomplish the work of God, so that we may learn to work from God, for God, and with God.

Notes on Luke 10

Luke 10.

The Lord pursues the subject we have been looking at in the preceding chapter, connected with the change that has taken place in His own position amongst them. It is no longer the Messiah on earth, but the heavenly Christ, they are to look to. There is another thing brought out here in the amazing importance attached to that moment, the last testimony being applied to them: and those who heard it would be more the subject of judgment than Tiro and Sidon. Any among them would have repented with the truth you have, but they had it not. The blessing now was the Lord Himself being there; and He was so glorious and excellent that to hear Him was the prime source of blessing. All hung upon their reception or rejection of Him. In the sending out of these seventy, we see the same patient grace at work as when He sent out twelve. If they were not received, they were to shake off the dust from their feet, etc. God's love never stops, whatever the wickedness of man, until His work is done. His grace never fails. Christ looks at the power of grace in God, more than at the wickedness of men, and He went patiently on, and said, "the harvest is truly great," though knowing what there was all around Him. The Lord was not like Elijah who needed to be reminded of the seven thousand, who, as God knew, had not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. He came in by the door, and went through everything with God. Nothing stopped Him from seeking out His sheep, scattered on the dark mountains. He laid down His life to save His sheep,

and not one should be lost. To gather them, He went on in the power of grace. Paul was of this spirit when he says, "I endure all things for the elect's sakes" (2 Tim. 2:10).

Did Christ suffer nothing in it? Look at Him, weary with His journey, sitting at the well, and a poor wretched vile sinner coming to meet Him, to whom He gives the water of life. There He finds meat to eat that they know not of; and He says, "the fields are white unto harvest" (John 4:35). He was as fresh and happy in His testimony, while sitting at the well with this poor woman, as if all Jerusalem had received Him; because the fountain was within. In Him was "a well of water, springing up" (John 4:14). So with us. If we are going on with Him, we shall be "troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; cast down, but not destroyed" (2 Cor. 4:8-9). The testimony is in the earthen vessel, it is true, but the fountain is within; and they were to be perfectly dependent on God, and independent of everything else. They were to expect to meet enemies, wolves. "Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves." You cannot turn a lamb into a wolf to defend itself. Peter was for taking a sword to smite off the servant's right ear, but the Lord forbids him, and says, "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matt. 26:52). It is difficult to receive everything and do nothing, to be a lamb among wolves—like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, in prospect of the fiery furnace, saying, "we are not careful, O king, to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver" (Dan 3:16-17).

"Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes; and salute no man by the way." Not be uncourteous, but waste not time in useless ceremonies, etc. When in God's service,

and among God's enemies, God must be everything. It needs concentration of heart in Him, as knowing that the world has rejected your Master, and will reject you, if you are faithful to Him. Faith knows this, and goes on, not with carnal prudence and worldly wisdom, but as knowing what to do and going on to do it. Faith always carries peace to the house; it produces enmity—two against three, and three against two—because some will receive it, and some not; but the thing brought is always peace (vss. 7-9). "The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you." Not merely such and such a thing is God's will, but whatever you do, whether you receive or reject it, "the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you." The condition of the world now is, that it has rejected Christ. The Son of God, the King, has come into the world, put it to the test, and it says, We will not have Him. This fact has not lost its solemnity now, for we are walking through the world that has rejected Christ; we bring the testimony of peace to it—peace that has been made, for the sacrifice has been offered. It is also true that the testimony has been rejected. "Notwithstanding, be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you" (vss. 10-11). Faith carries things in its own sphere, needing nothing but God's word. The sight of the eyes is constantly tending to dim the estimate which faith forms; and if faith is not nourished by the word, it sinks down and fades away. If I am not feeding on the word, faith is not fed, for it cannot be fed by sight of things all around. When the Lord spoke to Jerusalem, saying, Their house shall be left unto them desolate, and there should not be one stone left upon another, they could not actually see the stones then falling, but it was Christ's word for them to believe.

Natural reasoning is fed by what we see, but faith is fed by what God has revealed to the soul.

Luke 10:15. "Thou, Capernaum, shalt be thrust down to hell"—in God's eye, not man's. In man's eye it might be exalted to heaven. So with this world. And what does that prove? That it may last as long as God permits, but that His word will be fulfilled, "the earth and the works that are therein shall be burnt up" (2 Peter 3:10). There is nothing stable here. When God comes in, where will it all be? though there are scoffers who say, "Where is the promise of his coming?" (2 Peter 3:4).

Luke 10:16. "He that heareth you heareth me." That is where faith has its resource. In hearing the word the disciples spoke, I am hearing Christ Himself. That is where faith walks. I know it must be true, for Christ has said it. Everything may go wrong, the world, Jews, the church, etc., but God's word never. And it has been given. It never changes, for it has been given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, etc. The church, as ground of confidence in testimony, is gone (though we know it is founded upon a rock, and as to its security, it can never be destroyed), but God's word will not fail. Whatever we see tends to weaken and deface faith puts to the test what the affections of the soul are, because it is not to be what I like, but what God says.

Luke 10:17-20. "Rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven." This shows the change of everything. Demons may be subject to you, but the Lord says, That is not the portion for you to rejoice in; I am now showing My power in another way. This word, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven," alludes to the time when Satan the "accuser of the brethren," will be cast down. Now he

is in heaven, not in God's presence, in light inaccessible, but before the throne of judgment—two different things. "Hast thou considered my servant Job?" It proves that when others came before the throne, Satan came also. Contrast verses 19 and 20. The one speaks of what can be seen, the other of what could be known only to faith. The unseen thoughts of your heart are much more important than what can be seen. The invisible is always more important than the visible.

In this world, it is not merely that man is a sinner, but there is the introduction into it of the power of evil. Satan has got hold of this world through man's sin. So in the case of the poor woman it is said, "whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years" (Luke 13:16). But when the church has been caught up, Satan will be cast down. There was war in heaven; but when he is on the earth, he will for three and a half years be raising up the man of the earth against the Lord from heaven. When He comes, Satan's power will be put away. He is not put into the "lake of fire" until the close of the thousand years, but into "the bottomless pit." That is just what the demons asked to be saved from when cast out of the man whose name was Legion (Luke 8: 31); "deep" meaning "bottomless pit." The Lord did not cast them down to it, because the time was not then come.

This ability to cast out demons was a great thing. The communicating of the power by the Lord was a power above the immediate working of the miracles themselves. It required divine power, and none but that could give the power to others. In the millennium there will not be the power of good and evil together; the latter will be cast out. "Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee?" (Psa. 94:20). The pit shall be digged for the wicked. Satan

must be cast out. And when Christ was upon earth, He was presenting Himself in the power of God to bind the strong man, and spoil his goods. It was a wonderful thing to meet a man under the power of Satan, and to cast Satan out. It was an earnest of the “powers of the world to come” (Heb. 6:5); “the world to come” referring, not to heaven, but to this earth being renewed. He was then putting forth the same power that He will exercise fully in the coming kingdom.

Luke 10:19. “Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents,” etc.; and it was at the point when He was rejected that He says this. He knew what was really going on, and though He said peace, they did not say peace to Him. “I give you power” over all the power of the enemy. “Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.” That is the church’s place. When Christ was manifested on earth, it was a blessed thing; but it is better to be His companion in heaven, as we shall be when He comes to take us. Far better to be with Himself and as Himself in the Father’s house. We have nothing to do with earth—our names are not written in the earth—kings in it indeed, but our portion is not in it. He “hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places” (Eph. 1:3). We shall have the inheritance with Him, but it is below us; our hope is to be with Himself above it. The inheritance is the consequence of having this place with Him (Eph. 1). We are children of the Father, to be “holy and without blame before him in love.” Now we have our portion according to the riches of His grace, of poor sinners whom He has saved; and we shall be to the glory of His grace in the manifestation of it. The inheritance comes in afterward.

“Rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.” As though He would say to them, Do not let your minds be filled with things down here, but think of what you have in Me and with Me. We find two things brought before us in God’s ways; first, the government of this world—that which is still prophetic, connected with the kingdom; and then the church up in heaven. When the inheritance is spoken of, it is always future: but when our place is spoken of, it is always up in heaven. The Lord saw that the present setting up of the kingdom would all fail, and He was bringing in a better thing than any kingdom, and He rejoiced in that; for when He gives joy to another, He cannot help having it also Himself. When the thief on the cross asked Him to remember him in His kingdom, He said, “this day shalt thou be with me,” etc. He was gratifying the thief and also Himself. So with these disciples. He would have them not be rejoicing in the good down here, for it is not good enough. Not only do not be troubled with the bad, but rejoice not in the best thing in this world. “In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit.” “Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.” He felt the circumstances deeply, but His soul was up to the source, and He would say, It is quite right that these proud and haughty ones should see they are nothing, and that these poor despised lambs should get the glory. “Even so, Father.” He must bow to the evil, because the time to judge it was not yet come. Evil is going on; people are saying, Where is the God of the earth? We have to bear it—the Lord did. We must get our thoughts away from the expectation of having things better down here. The soul that enters into God’s thoughts and purposes bows to His will. “Even so, Father.”

Then He, as it were, retires into the glory of His own person. The Son has to reveal the Father. The world rejects Him, and He submits to the rejection of the kingdom, and brings out, instead of it, the blessedness of the heavenly thing, and now speaks of Himself as the Son, and glories in that. The present result of His coming is the Son revealing the Father; and this is even better than the kingdom. The testimony is brighter as to what God is about, when I take things quietly and submit, not desiring to be a wolf among the wolves. It is exceedingly difficult for one's heart to bow and say, "I will be nothing but a lamb"; but that is our place, for the Lord says, "Vengeance is mine"; "rather give place unto wrath" (Rom. 12:19); and "neither give place to to the devil" (Eph. 4:27). But if you do not give place to wrath, you will give place to the devil. Shall we lose anything by being quiet, and taking things patiently? No, "all power," He says, "is given unto me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18). We must bow to what it is, without, and be satisfied with what is written. If not we shall be only wearing ourselves in the greatness of our way. May we be satisfied to have our "names written in heaven!"

Luke 10:23-24. He "said to them privately." These things could only be enjoyed by faith. He would have them in consciousness of present blessing.

Luke 10:25. Now that the Lord has shown out the dispensational change, He shows the moral change. A lawyer comes and asks how he is to get eternal life. The Lord brings him to the law—Keep the law, and you shall live. But he is stopped directly with the simplicity of this, "thou shalt love...thy neighbor as thyself." He does not love his neighbor as himself! He asks, "Who is my neighbor? ...This do and thou shalt live." Who does love

his neighbor as himself? The good Samaritan is the one who does not ask who the neighbor is, but acts in grace, without asking what title the other had. Christ has the title of doing good to him that is in need and misery. This is grace that gives without a title.

See how thoughtful this grace and love is. He went to him—did not send someone else, but went, bound up his wounds, poured in oil and wine, set him on his own beast, brought him to an inn, took care of him, gave him in charge to the host, and said, “When I come again, I will repay thee.” How beautiful are all the details of the actings of this love which flows from what is within, and acts according to what is working there, and not according to the claims upon it!

In the closing part of chapter 10 (vss. 38-42), we see the one great thing was to hear Jesus’ word. Hence the approval given to Mary above Martha, who, in a certain sense, was doing a very good work. She received Him into her house and served Him; but there is something better than this: “Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” He wanted His words to enter and to have power in the heart. The only thing that endures forever is the word of the Lord. The wisdom of this world is against it, and so is human reasoning; but it is the only thing worth waiting upon diligently; and if Christians reason about the things of God instead of appealing to the word, they are sure to be going down. We want to have the word in our hearts, to sit at Christ’s feet that we may understand and treasure it up. To hear Jesus is the “one thing” needful. No attention, even to Himself in the flesh, though it were from one who loved Him and whom He loved, could replace this. The “many things” end only in disappointment and

death, instead of leading into life eternal, as did the words of Jesus, issuing from a heart broken, that it might let forth the stream of life. The hearing ear for His word delighted Him. He was bringing in truth to people's souls.

"Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). "Of his own will begat he us by the word of truth" (James 1:18). "Now are ye clean through the word which I have spoken to you" (John 15:3). Truth sets everything to rights; it sets God and man in their place, or it is not truth. Sin, and righteousness, and love—these never came out fully by the law; but "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." Everything was set morally in perfect light by Him: but men saw it not, because they knew Him not. The word now is the instrument of revealing truth. The law was perfect because it was of God, but it did not tell what man was, much less what God was—it told what man ought to be. Christ comes in as the light and says, You are all dead, but I can give you life. His coming into the world showed out everything exactly as it was. As the living Word He came and revealed to those who could see God—not at first in redemption, but in testimony. What value to Him was it that Martha cumbered herself about serving, in comparison to a soul listening to His word!

It is the same now to a Christian. When God's word comes with nothing else, it has a right to have power over the soul. It makes its way by its own authority and its attractive grace to the hearts, and where received it gives life in Christ. There is no living power in a miracle to quicken a soul, but there is living power in the word. It is by the word that any soul can get into heaven. We are begotten by the word. If the word cannot do it, it will never be done. There are three things constantly pressed

in connection with the power of the word. 1. The words spoken will all come up against them another day (John 12:37-41). 2. Though perilous times come (2 Tim. 3:15), the word is “able to make wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” 3. There is another thing also. When a soul is quickened by the word, the moral effect is to make it dependent and obedient—“sanctified... obedience” (1 Peter 1:2). Such is the character of the new man, as the old man would be independent.

Notes on Luke 11

Luke 11.

Luke 11:1. At the beginning of this chapter we have another instance of our Lord praying, the expression of dependence. And there the disciples ask Him to teach them to pray. They had not learned the simple confidence in the Father that would go up naturally to Him and tell Him all. There may not always be wisdom in asking, but there should be confidence of communion by the Holy Spirit. Even Paul had not always intelligence of God's mind, or he would not have asked to have the thorn in the flesh taken away; but he was not afraid to make his request. The disciples had not this simple hearted confidence. They understood not their place as children of the Father. He condescends to teach them when in this condition and gives them this prayer. The Lord teaches them to pray for things about which His own heart was occupied. "Father, glorify thy name" (John 12:28), was expressive of the grand desire of His heart. "Hallowed be thy name." He first tells them of Him with whom they are brought into relationship. Not that they had the present power of the Holy Spirit, giving them the consciousness of their relationship—this they did not get till the day of Pentecost; but He teaches them to say, "Father...hallowed be thy name." There we have perfection. It is the desire for Him to be glorified, though I cannot tell what it may involve me in. There will be the desire not to sin, etc. This was the expression of the perfect desire that was in Christ Himself—"Hallowed be thy name."

“Thy kingdom come.” There will be the removing of those things that are made, that, “those things which cannot be shaken may remain” (Heb. 12:27). Are you quite sure that you would like Him to come in this kingdom that will involve the shaking out of everything that may not remain? Surely that will wrench the heart from a quantity of things that are attaching you to that which does not belong to the kingdom to come. There may be the desire for these things, while at the same time the consciousness that I have not the sense of the object, but a sense of distance from it which hinders my enjoyment, though I know Him to be “the chiefest among ten thousand,” and the “altogether lovely.” There are often complaining prayers, because there is not the present enjoyment of seeing Him in the sanctuary, though the remembrance of it. We may have the hope of the Lord’s coming, being glad to get to the end of this desert, because it is a desert; or we may long to get out, because Canaan is at the end. If it is not the latter, we shall be in danger of being tired with running, which is always wrong. We should be in the spirit of waiting pilgrims, not weary ones. We ought not to be weary; I do not say we are not, but we ought to be ever desiring His coming, because He is precious. In Revelation 22:17, the bride says “come,” in answer to what He is, when He says, “I am...the bright and morning star” (Rev. 22:16). God does not reject the cry which comes to Him as “out of the depths” (Psa. 130:1); but there is a difference between the cry of distress and the cry of desire.

When Christ was on earth, there was an answer in Him to all God’s will, for He always did the things which pleased His Father. He did it as no angel ever could. Then He comes down to notice our daily need, and there is

dependence, indeed, in this. "Give us day by day our daily bread."

"Forgive us our sins," etc. This chapter does not go into what we may call proper church privileges; the desires are perfect, but the place is not known. The Lord touches upon all the circumstances down here. Man is looking up from the earth, he is walking there, and needs his feet washed. There are trespasses to be forgiven, and the spirit of grace is wanted. There is no sin imputed to us now; it is all put away. But will that make me hard when others fail? No; my seeing that Christ has agonized on the cross for me, will give me a sense of my freedom, but not indifference about sin. Instead of hardness, it will give us tenderness and softness of spirit.

"Lead us not into temptation." Why should God ever lead us into temptation? it may be asked. Sometimes the Lord has need to put us through a certain process to make us learn our weakness. Look at Peter. The Lord saw he needed to be sifted, or He could have prayed for him to be saved from that fall. A soul would always desire that he may not have this sifting. Christ Himself, though it was a different thing for Him, desired to be delivered from it when bearing sin. Paul prayed for the thorn to be removed. But Paul did not get a fourth heaven—that would have made him worse, but a "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7); something to make him despicable in preaching (otherwise people might have come to him and said, Paul, you must be better than anyone else, for you have been to the third heaven), to prevent his being puffed up, and to keep him even. It was a gracious provision for him, though it is a right thing for the soul to desire not to be led into temptation, but to be delivered from the evil.

Luke 11:5. "Which of you shall have a friend," etc. This is another character of prayer—earnest waiting upon God. There is majesty in God's goodness, and yet He takes knowledge of all our wants, and we must await His will and pleasure. Suppose one asks his father for anything, and he says, "you must wait five minutes," is the child to say, "No, I cannot; I must have it directly?" Meantime, while waiting, faith is exercised, and the spirit broken down in the sense of need. Look at Daniel, and see another thing. God gave him a deep sense of his identification with Himself in what he was doing; so He must make him pray three weeks before he has his request granted. This is a great privilege, for it is to have fellowship with God. In the case of this friend, there is a depth of interest excited in desire for the thing, and because of his importunity he gains it. There is a certainty of God's answering in blessing, though He delay.

Luke 11:9-13. This is prayer for the Holy Spirit, whom they, though believers, had not then received. In one sense a man may pray for this now, when he has not the Spirit of adoption, like the disciples then. But now the Holy Spirit has been given, consequent upon the Lord's ascension to the right hand of the Father (Acts 2:33). There could be no union with the man Christ on earth. It is as a heavenly people that there is union with Him. Christ was looked upon alone until His work was done. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone" (John 12:24). The Holy Spirit was the seal of Christ's work, not of John's preaching righteousness. The second time He received the Holy Spirit was for the church.

He received for Himself (Matt. 3) at His baptism, but for us when He ascended, having finished the work of our salvation. The fruits of the Spirit in us are the consequences

of the grace and righteousness in Him, He being the only righteous man. The firstfruits of the Spirit in us are love, joy, peace—then come the practical fruits toward men. The first—named fruits are toward God, then patience, temperance, etc., towards men. The Holy Spirit cannot be the subject for the church, as such, to ask for now, seeing He has thus been given. Christ received Him for us. We pray by or in the Holy Spirit, not for Him now. We should pray for more of the working of the Spirit in us, and desire to be filled with the Spirit—poor little hearts indeed, but they may be filled. It does not at all follow that we are filled with the Spirit because sealed with the Spirit. To be filled with the Spirit would keep out evil thoughts. It will not take away the evil nature, which ever remains, but thereby that will be kept down.

Luke 11:14, etc. See the dreadful opposition of man's heart against Him, which brings out a very important test. "He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth." When Christ is manifested, it is for or against Him that people take their stand. We have spiritual enemies to contend with, and Joshua leading the people in conflict was figurative of the Spirit leading the soul against our spiritual enemies. It is not Christians but Christ who is become God's center. We may gather Christians together, but if it is not Christ in one's own spirit, it is scattering. God knows no center of union but the Lord Jesus Christ. It is Himself the object, and nothing but Christ can be the center. Whatever is not gathering round that center, for Him and from Him, is scattering. There may be gathering, but, if not "with Me," it is scattering. We are by nature so essentially sectarian, that we have need to watch against this. I cannot make Christ the center of

my efforts, if He is not the center of my thoughts. It is a great thing for a man to say, I have no other object but Christ—no other activity in my heart but for Christ; not only that He is the chief object at bottom—every Christian has that—but there may be a quantity of middle things in our hearts between the inside and the outside. These must be judged in the soul. Besides love to Christ, there may be love of company, etc.; and we must judge all that is between Christ, the root, and the offspring.

Luke 11:27, etc. “Blessed is the womb that bare thee,” etc. They speak of the honor of being His mother. No, we would say, that has nothing to do with it. The closest connection with the Son of man is not equal to keeping the word of God. Religionists make a great deal of natural affection, but, though blessed in its way, it is nothing to the life of God in my soul. Of course it was a blessed thing to be the mother of the Lord; yet it was but a natural relationship, though a miracle; nor could it have been a light thing to her heart. Still, it was not equal to the blessing of the word of God bringing a soul to Himself. O! beloved friends, if you will only let the pure word of God abide in your hearts, you will find that it will sweep away all the cobwebs of the flesh.

Luke 11:29. They are seeking a sign, another natural thing; but He says, “There shall no sign be given.” Jonah is a sign; he preached, and they repented. Now My word has come to you, and that is the test to you. “The queen of the south,” etc. The word of God is so perfectly suited to man’s heart, even the natural feelings are touched by it. The word is sown in the heart, though it may bring forth no fruit.

Luke 11:33-36. Light is there, and the question is about the man’s eye. If a man has bad eyes, the light is painful.

So the word to one who has not clear eyesight or the eye single. This is a solemn word; but if a person was converted only yesterday, it might be true of him; he might be full of light. It applies as much to the babe in Christ as to the grown man. Where God is in the soul, His light is seen. "If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not." "When thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light, having no part dark," etc. When the candle is there, we see all around. It shows itself and thus shows all around. The eye receives the light, single or evil. It is not single or double, but single or evil. If Christ is not the object, there is some evil object. If the eye be single, it is all simple, though there will be difficulties in the path, as with Paul. The light is set on a candlestick, that all who come in "may see the light." The man is forced to the question, Do you see it or not? Christ has set up the light in the world. God has displayed Himself in Him, and the effect of that is to show your condition. Do you say, "Suffer me first to go and bury my father?" Ah, you have something first. If my body is not full of light, there is something not single in my eye—something has not given way before the power of Christ—something not given up. People say, I cannot see. No, of course you cannot; you have some other light. Further, what you do see now will presently be given up if you do not walk in the power of what you have.

"Take heed that the light that is in thee be not darkness." Our manner of judging may be wrong, because the standard is not Christ, and then the light becomes darkness: we are guided wrong and mistaken in our path. If the eye be full of Christ, and we judge everything by that light, when I see anything that would not glorify Christ, I say, That will not do for me. I may be a little vessel, but I must be wholly

for Christ. May we be walking in the power of the Holy Spirit, and by the divine teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, content to follow Him, and desire no other path, having the *eye* upon Him, and only upon Him, so that when other objects are put before us, we may be able to say, "This one thing I do!" (Phil 3:13). While walking through the world, may we be occupied with Christ, not making it our business to judge evil, but simple concerning it.

From verse 37 we have the sure judgment of the Lord on the various forms which the lifeless religion of those who led the people took up, expressed in different ways, but His constant and unmingled judgment upon it all. The first ground of condemnation is the substitution of outward cleansings and services, which the flesh can render, for purity of heart and the spirit of love: where these last are, external things are clean. Thus money occupies the heart, where there is only a religious form, for it represents the world; and preeminence is another expression of the same thing. Next (vs. 45, and so forth), the doctors of the law are sentenced, and with them the imposing of burdens on others, while they spared themselves from the trouble. It might not at first appear why building the sepulcher of the prophets showed approval of those who killed them; but the truth was that the lawyers sought in this their own honor, instead of receiving the testimony of the prophets, which would have humbled them, for the moral and utter ruin of the nation. But they were adorning, as if all were right, the tombs of the righteous and good. It was the spirit of the world, arrogating credit to itself for piety to the dead, not holy fear at the prophet's rebukes. But a clearer proof should be in the wisdom of God that they sympathized not with the word of the prophets, but with the works of their

fathers. Prophets and apostles would be sent, and once more be slain and persecuted. The Pharisees were hypocrites, and so judged; the expositors of the law perverted their nearness to scripture in their hatred of any real testimony to their own conscience. These could, least of all bear, what detected their evil. Hence, in pride and fear, they took to themselves all the springs of knowledge, neither entering themselves (for they must do that as learners, and needy, and lost), nor allowing those to enter who would (lest they should condemn themselves, and besides, their honor and characters go for nothing). The closing verses show us the invariable conduct of false religionists. Having no answer of moral truth to the evidence of deceit and evil exhibited in their ways, their effort was to perplex and to entrap. Convicted of sin, and incapable of truth, they sought to make void God's goodness in accusing even Christ of error. It was mercy toward others to be plain as to these false guides, and therefore the Lord denounced them unsparingly.

Notes on Luke 12

Luke 12.

The last section of this gospel (Luke 10:38; 11) showed the two great means of blessing to the soul—namely the word of God and prayer, the precious gift of God, and the true need of man in the presence of a rejected Messiah. It showed withal the doom of the people who refused every testimony of God. Luke 12 presents the disciples carrying on their testimony in the midst of hypocrisy and opposition, but in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Lord addressed His disciples first of all; but fearlessly, and without compromise, before a vast throng, as one who acted in the spirit of what He taught. He warns them against that religious formalism which consists of what could be presented to man, and insists strongly and explicitly upon the sure bringing of all things into the light (vss. 1-3).

But just as the breaking down of forms and the revelation of the full light of God had its highest operation and effect in His own death, so the disciples must look for the world's hostility, must be prepared for it in their own case, it might be up to death itself. If Messiah were rejected and slain, what could they look for in the same scene, while Satan's power is not set aside? Hence, also, in these chapters it is a question of the soul's relationship with God. It was not the unfolding of the church yet, but the kingdom in its Jewish application is set aside, and the consequence is that the disciples are to look for the Lord's coming again, and until then, trial and violence. His return would have two aspects: one for such as are in relationship with Himself, and the

other for the world; and both are taken up here. They were to beware of hypocrisy, and to remember God's necessary determination to bring everything to light. "For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops" (Luke 12:2-3).

Luke 12:4-5. Next, as to the importance of walking in the light. They were not to fear them who kill the body but God, who could cast into hell. Jesus perfectly feared God, and called on His friends to fear none but Him. "Yea, I say unto you, fear him." But further (vss. 6-8), not even a sparrow is forgotten before God; and the very hairs of their head were all numbered. Therefore they were not to fear. Our God has made it of faith to be assured that He cares much for us.

On the other hand, they were not to trust in themselves—in their own courage or their own wisdom, but to confess Christ. There was the result in relation with the humbled, but yet to be exalted, Son of man. There would be a return of love or shame before the angels of God, according as He should be confessed or denied before men (vss. 8-9). He had hidden His glory to effect grace. He had come among men and into the midst of evil, that God might be fully glorified in His humiliation. This was the patience of God, for Christ claimed nothing. But the Holy Spirit would come asserting the glory of God, and claiming subjection to it, witnessing the grace, and proving the glory in power. Hence a word spoken against the Holy Spirit would not be forgiven. Wonderful to say, this is attached to the disciples (vs. 10) to console and strengthen them in

their weakness. The Son of man might be slighted, and yet there was forgiveness; but if He by whom they would speak was blasphemed, it would be unpardonable. Further (vss. 11-12), the Holy Spirit would speak by them, whatever the power, ecclesiastical or civil, that arraigned them. Such were the principles, the warnings, the motives, and the encouragements the Lord attached to a mission which, rejected by and outside Judaism, was the introduction of light by grace into a world of sin and darkness.

Thereupon in verses 13-14, the Lord, by positively refusing to adjudge in Israel, shows that Jewish blessing had lost its place. It was no longer a question of dividing the inheritance, but of the soul in its position before God. Only He warns against the folly of loving the things which gave occasion to such disputes. Righteousness on earth is not looked for now: Jesus declines the place of regulating it, and proceeds to show the inward principle of the kingdom in contrast with the world. Hence He told the multitude to beware of covetousness, for a man's life is not in what he possesses, adding a most solemn parable as to the doom of the rich man, who was not rich toward God. Whatever he might say to his soul, God required it that night. "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself" (vss. 16-21).

Luke 12:22-31. If it be thus with the world, do you who have a father, even the Father, not be anxious for your soul or body. Food and clothing were not just objects for disciples' care, but rather to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Their thoughts should be in another channel, rising above a mere natural view of the life and the body. But He proceeds to assign positive grounds operative upon them as believers. Needful things were subsidiary which God provided, for they were His and under His ordering. He

cared for much less than they were. The fowls of heaven and the grass of the field read them no un-instructive lesson, as interpreted of Christ. And if there was, on the one side, God's provident care for the least of His creatures, on the other side let them bear in mind the utter weakness of their anxieties. Whatever might be natural to those who knew not God, they were not to be seeking what to eat or drink: their Father knew they wanted such things. Let them seek the kingdom of God, and all the rest should be added.

Luke 12:32-40. The Lord now takes higher ground for them. "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Therefore were they rather to get rid of what they had as men, and to provide things such as the Father gives to the heirs of the kingdom. They were to act the part of kings called to and having an higher inheritance. The heart follows the treasure. Let them provide a treasure in the heavens, and their heart will be there also. To be great saints is not by the value of what they gave meritoriously, but the effect internally suitable to their position and their calling. God is not ashamed to be called their God. Further (vs. 35, etc.), they were to wait for their Lord. This was especially to form their character, and to be continually and outwardly expressed—the habitual expectancy of the Lord. Their loins were girded, and their lights burning, as if Christ was actually on His way. And He that shall come will come; and "blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them."

They were now associated with the heavenly character of the kingdom. This world was naught; what they had of it

they could turn into the privilege of doing good unselfishly, and have their treasure above, where there would be no losing it, and so their hearts would be kept there. Thus their character would be heavenly. Meanwhile they were to be as men who waited their Lord returning from the wedding. The general aim of the heavenly effect of the calling is here in question. They were to be on the watch. It is not prophecy, but character and position. There are no signs or historical circumstances, as in chapters 17 and 21, for people on earth; here there is heavenly separation from it. For those who thus wait Jesus is still a servant. He will make them sit down to meat, and come forth and serve them. Girded to serve as man, His ear bored in death, in joy He comes forth delighting in disciples so walking. Gladly He releases them from their endurance and watching and service; He sets them at the feast, and honors their faithfulness thus. They were therefore left in uncertainty; and so the church, when formed, was left. The church is always to wait for Christ, having no special time: every moment is its time in desire and duty, as alas! it is the world's for negligence. The Jews have a time; days, years, and earth computations belong to them, and therefore signs. To us it may be second watch or third watch; blessed only if we are found watching!

Luke 12:41-48. Peter puts the question of the application of what goes before, which brings out the portion of those who serve faithfully. They will be set over all the Lord's goods when He returns to take possession of all He made and will inherit; a very encouraging thought, though not the highest.

On the other hand Christendom apostatizes by putting off in heart the Lord's coming. The great stay of heavenly-mindedness is lost thereby, and so our peculiar calling and

hope. To expect the Lord detaches from the world; putting it off left the servant to his own will. It is not doctrinal denial; but he says in his heart, "My Lord delayeth his coming"; and then he acts with violence towards the fellow-servants, and his fellowship is with the world. But that servant has a Lord, let him act ever so independently; and He will come when not expected, and set that servant's portion with the unbelievers, whatever may have been his boasted rights and privileges. Further in detail there would be a righteous adjudgment (vss. 47-48); for here we have the principles of service, as before of position. The ignorance of heathenism will not be spared, but far more tremendous will be the doom of Christendom. Most righteous, but oh, how solemn!

Luke 12:49. There is another thing to be noted—the import of our Lord's coming then into the world. Had man been what he ought, peace would have been the result; but man saw no beauty in Christ to desire Him, and the effect was hatred—not peace, but a sword. The nearer the relation, the deeper the grievance. The will of man comes out, and is utterly opposed to God. They would not endure to be told that they were under God's judgment. But there is this peculiarity in the character of division which the entrance of grace makes. He who is converted in a family becomes generally, and at once, the slave of the rest. Nature even is subverted in such cases. How often thus a husband or parent loses his authority! There is a fire kindled before Christ comes again in judgment to kindle it. He was not then come to judge, but they, by their rejection of Him, kindled the fire of judgment.

Now look at the Lord's part. "I have a baptism" (Luke 12:50). What could straiten the Lord's heart? The perfect

infinite love of God in Him was, as it were, shut up. If He spoke to His disciples of His death, "Be it far from thee, Lord" (Matt. 16:22) was all the response He met with even in Peter. How painfully was He thus shut up into Himself! But on He went in His service of living love through the world, looking forward to the baptism of His death; and His being straitened showed the fullness and strength of His love. Till then there could be no letting out of heart; for who understood Him? The Jews said, "Behold a gluttonous man, and a wine bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!" They were shut up within the walls of Judaism; so that, though One was there with a flowing river of blessing, they would not receive Him. Divine love was, we may say, pent up and driven back into the heart of God. But all is met. "How am I straitened till it be accomplished?" He is not straitened now. The barrier is broken in His death.

How could they as sinners have communion with Christ? There could be none. When He came to meet man's need, they hated and rejected Him. But on the cross He has put away sin, and now grace can flow out without hindrance or measure: "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20). Man is not changed, but God can act in His own way through redemption. Christ's love and glory did come out in a measure before, for "He could not be hid" (Mark 7:24). But at the cross all overflowed; and looking back from that over His life, we see what infinite love, and sorrow, and suffering, filled it up.

In Luke 12:54-57 the multitude are addressed on the principle of personal responsibility — first, upon the evident signs of God's dealing with the world, and next, from their moral judgment of what was right. The conclusion was, that God was in the way with the Jewish people; and if they

did not agree with Him then, they would turn Him into a judge, and must incur the full penalty of their iniquities. In human affairs man would be prudent enough to come to terms with his adversary, knowing himself wrong and anticipating the judgment. If they did not submit and be reconciled to the Lord now in the way, they would soon be delivered to His judicial dealings and not cease from them till they had received of His hand double for all their sins.

Notes on Luke 13

Luke 13.

There are two great principles or subjects in connection with man on the earth—the church of God as such, and the government of God in the world; and these are very distinct. In the church the riches of His grace are manifested. In His governmental dealings we see the display of His justice, mercy, and goodness. An example of God's governmental power as to Israel we have in Exodus 34:5-7. This is not sovereign grace, bringing a soul to eternal life, but government of the same character as we may see every day around us. If a man wastes his fortune or ruins his health by intemperance of any kind, his children suffer for it. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). See God's dealings with David, because of the matter of Uriah. "The sword shall never depart from thine house... Thou didst it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel... Because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of Jehovah to blaspheme, the child that is born unto thee shall surely die" (2 Sam. 12:10). And we know that this judgment for his sin was accomplished in David's after-history. This is not grace, but government. God deals in the same way with a saint now—that is, both in grace and righteousness.

In Luke 13 we see the Jews had this thought of government in their minds, nor was it wrong in itself. They thought that God could not let such a guilty fellow live as this Pilate, who had been mingling the blood of the Galileans with their sacrifices. But Christ brings them to a

new principle by which to judge, and tells them judgment was coming upon themselves if impenitent. "Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners" and so forth? "I tell ye nay, but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." It refers to judgment in the government of this world, which would overtake all who repented not. They had God's Son there, and they were practically rejecting Him; and how many of the Jews had their blood mingled by Titus? Christ had said to the Jews at the close of Luke 12, "When thou goest with thine adversary to the magistrate...give diligence that thou mayest be delivered from him; lest he hale thee to the judge," etc.; but of the state of the Jews, who were under God's dealings and would not escape till the chastenings of the Lord upon them are complete. Thus it is very evident that this passage refers simply to God's government of His people. Natural conscience ought to have told these Jews not to reject the Messiah, for God was going all the way along with them to the magistrate, dealing with them in patient grace, and He would say to them, If you do not repent and be reconciled, judgment must come upon you, when it will be the same with you as with those whom ye think to be such sinners.

Luke 13:6. The Lord is dealing here with the same state of things. The fig-tree is Israel, and God comes seeking fruit in them and finding none. In the gospel there is this difference, that grace, instead of seeking, sows in order to produce fruit. He found none, and the sentence therefore upon it is, "Cut it down." He not only found it useless, but His vineyard was encumbered by it. "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you." Then comes in Christ's mission. Last of all He "sent his Son." God had planted a vineyard and pruned it, but there was no fruit.

Then a new gardener comes in, and He says, "Spare it this year also, till I shall dig about it," etc. It must bring forth fruit then, or be digged up. He has done as He said, but still there is no fruit.

Luke 13:11. The woman with an infirmity, whom Jesus heals on the sabbath day, brings out another thing that was working in their hearts, in the place of the law which left room for hypocrisy. They would lead an ox or an ass from the stall on the sabbath, but they would not bear that a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan had bound these eighteen years, should be loosed on that day. One of the infirmities of man's mind is to use possessed truth to resist revealed truth. Paul was an example of this—as "touching the righteousness of the law, blameless"; still he thought he "ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9). So also Christ says of the Jews in John 16, "These things will they do unto you," etc. They were using the name of the one true God, which had been given them ("Jehovah thy God is one God") to reject the Son; for when Christ came in humiliation, they would not receive Him. Orthodoxy is used to stop the reception of truth. When truth is the ground of a man's standing, it gains him credit; but when a new truth comes in, it puts faith to the test. Truth that requires faith to walk by is resisted by the natural heart; and the root of this is hypocrisy. The ruler of the synagogue said, "There are six days in which men ought to work; in them come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day." But he ought to have known that the Lord of the sabbath was there; for that single word "daughter of Abraham" ought to have told him who He was that stood there. The Lord answered him, "Thou hypocrite!" A solemn word this!

Luke 13:18. He goes on to show what the kingdom will be like when the king is rejected and gone away. A kingdom without a king! who is sitting on His Father's throne, until He comes to take His own throne. The kingdom is like a little seed thrown into the ground, which springs up and becomes a great tree—just what we call Christendom. This fills up the gap between His rejection and His coming again. There is no power exercised while the King is away; as in Mark's Gospel it sprang up, men knew not how. When the harvest is ripe, He will come again. He sowed the first time, but He will put in the sickle the second time. He is looking for heavenly fruit now; but when He comes, He will find Christendom a great tree with the fowls of the air lodging in its branches. Pharaoh was a great tree; Nebuchadnezzar a greater still: they were the high and mighty ones of the earth, representatives of worldly power. Even Israel, which had been planted a noble vine, wholly a right seed, was bearing no fruit. Therefore, as it is said in Ezekiel 15, "what is the vine-tree more than any tree," if it bears no fruit? It is only fit to be burned. Otherwise useless if it does not bear fruit, it only makes the best firewood.

Luke 13:21. Here the kingdom is likened unto leaven, and leaven is that which spreads throughout the whole mass, and also gives a character to that in which it works. It is nominal profession of Christianity which is spread into a vast system. There is not a word here about the Holy Spirit, but about the effect in the world. In Matthew 13, in the first parable, there is individual result, and not the kingdom spoken of. In the first three of the six similitudes, it is the public appearance; in the last three, the inward character is described.

Luke 13:23. "Are there few that be saved?" The word used here is the same word that through the LXX signifies a remnant, or "such as should be saved" (Acts 4:47). The question really was as to whether this remnant would be few or many, who were to be spared when the judgment came; but, this being a mere idle question, the Lord does not answer it, but says to them:—

Luke 13:24. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." The strait gate was receiving Christ at that time—the real but narrow entrance of faith in Him and conversion to God. There will be some to come and knock when the door is closed, to whom He will say, "I know you not whence ye are"; you are not changed, Strive to enter in at the strait gate, through which Christ goes before you—that is, rejection. "Many shall seek to enter in [not at the strait gate], and shall not be able."

It is most simple when we see the rejection of Christ. Those who reject Him in the day of His humiliation will themselves be rejected in the day of His glory; and, instead of being His companions in the kingdom, they will be thrust out. The unbelieving Jews will see the Gentiles come into the glory of the kingdom, while they, remaining in unbelief, will be cast out.

Verse 31. The Pharisees say to Him, "Get thee out, and depart hence, for Herod will kill thee." Now Herod was an Idumæan, and what right had such a stranger to be their king? What had he to do with the promises to Israel? Nothing. In Herod we have a figure of the willful king. He tried to kill Christ, and therefore the character of opposition—king belongs to him. He had no faith in God's purposes or in Christ's glory; and the Lord says, "Go ye and tell that fox." I shall do My Father's will till the

moment come for Me to be glorified. I am here as long as My Father wills, and then I shall be perfected. The power of God must be fully known. What divine contempt for the apostate king, but what perfect human obedience combined! "Nevertheless I must walk today, and tomorrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets," etc. After all, Jerusalem is the guilty place. Let the Edomite king do and say what he will, it is "the holy city" that is guilty, for it was nearest to Himself. The nearer I am to God, if I reject Him, the worse is the sin and the more dreadful the judgment. See Psalm 132:13, "The Lord hath chosen Zion," etc., and Psalm 78:65-68, the same election of Zion. Christ does not put the sin upon them till they have rejected both Him and His Father. He brings out a purpose of grace in these closing verses. The old man is condemned and profitless—I Israel and all of us. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" (Jer. 13:23). The gospel begins with seeking and saving that which was lost. Here we see that, though they have rejected Him in responsibility, He has not rejected them in the day of His grace. Grace shines out in His yet choosing Judah.

Notice how the divine person of the Lord comes out here. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...how often would I have gathered," etc. A prophet could not say this, and He was a prophet too, and more than a prophet: He was Jehovah, for none but Jehovah could gather Israel; as "He that scattered Israel will gather him" (Jer. 31:10). Israel under responsibility had rejected Jehovah; but Jehovah will own them when He comes in sovereign grace. How blessed is the way! The circumstances through which He passed in

His path down here did bring out in a far brighter way *who He was* than any text to prove it, important as that is in its place. For suppose you believed there was a God, yet if He were to come down by your very side and say I am, would not this be a very different thing? Christ was the humbled man all through His path down here, for He was ever the servant of all; yet when the service was done, and rejected as of no use, His glory shines out. "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). See in this chapter of Luke the connection between verses 33-35 as illustrative of this. "How often would I have gathered thy children...your house is left unto you desolate...when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

The complaint in the Psalms is, that there is none to say "How long"—none to count on the faithfulness of God to His people. See Psalm 74:9. This expression is often used in the Psalms and in Isaiah 6 and refers to chastening, not retribution. How long is Israel to stumble and fall? (Rom. 11:11). In Isaiah 6:11 the prophet, having uttered these words, "Make the heart of this people fat," taken up by the Lord in John 12, then says, "how long?" He waits in faith, and reckons upon God, and having God's mind, he cannot believe that God will give them up, and therefore asks, "how long" is the chastening to continue? To which the Lord answers, "There shall be a great forsaking in the midst of the land, but in it there shall be a tenth, and the holy seed shall be the substance therefore" (Isa. 6:12-13). The sap is still there, though there are no leaves. So in Psalm 118, "He hath chastened me sore, but he hath not given me over unto death." In the same way the Lord does not say, "Your house is left unto you desolate, and therefore you shall not see me again." No; but He says, "Ye shall not see me until ye shall

say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.” He can give, as Jehovah, the answer in grace, and when He gives repentance to Israel, then He will send Jesus, whom until that day the heavens have received. Meanwhile *our* connection with Him comes in. The prophet spake only of earthly things, though divine; but to the church it is, “Holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling” (Heb. 3:11), and “hath made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6); that gives security. How did I get there? By virtue of Christ. He is my title. My desire is to be acquainted with this, that I am one with Christ in heaven—an everlasting portion. This the Holy Spirit seals upon my soul, and would have me enjoy more and more.

When Israel is brought to repentance, “the stone which the builders rejected” (Luke 20:17) will be “the head of the corner,” and owned of them. They will say, “O give thanks unto the Lord, for his mercy endureth forever” (Psa. 136:26). Alas! they will receive another first; but when their hearts are turned, and grace works, they will use the language of Psalm 119 and find the expression of the law within their hearts; and when faith is thus exercised, and their hearts are broken, and open to receive Him, then He Himself will come to them. If there is not a prophet to say “How long?” Jehovah will give the answer. He never changes; and though He executes judgment and righteousness, grace is found in Him still. “When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8). Well, if there be not faith to be found, or a prophet to say “How long?” there is One who will lay up, in His treasures, something for faith to lay hold on, in the sovereignty of His own grace.

Thus we see Jehovah in that humbled One, and how He is able to rise above all iniquity. How precious does all this

make Jesus to us! and we are one with Him. May we learn of Him, and so follow Him, remembering that all that is left outside the narrow way is the flesh and evil.

Notes on Luke 14

Luke 14.

This chapter shows out the distributive justice of God. First, it is toward His saints, the consequence of conduct with God, and the place a man will take in view of that. Next, we have responsibility connected with grace, the moral position of the soul, because of having grace presented to it. Slighting God's grace fills up the measure of man's sin. But here it is the presentation, which is a different thing from the possession, of grace. This is brought out in those who refused to come to the Supper.

Luke 14:1-6. The Lord, in bringing the dispensation to a close, constantly brings before Israel the sabbath. The question was, Could man, as man, find rest with God? Could man ever enter into God's rest? We know man broke God's rest directly—how soon we are not told: but, perhaps the very day he ought to have rested, he ate the forbidden fruit. Man never entered into God's rest; and now the question was, how to enter in—by his own work or Christ's? It was essential to the rest after creation, to have it at the end of the six days of work, and therefore it was on the seventh day. So afterward, when the legal ordinances were given, the sabbath became a sign of the covenant. The Lord, when here, constantly trenched on the sabbath, to show that, sin being unremoved, He must work. He could not rest, the sabbath being a sign of man's getting rest after work, and the law showing that man constantly broke that covenant. The Lord presses home to their consciences their sin, by showing them that He must work if they were to have rest.

“My Father worketh hitherto, and I work” (John 5:17). If man had kept the law, he was entitled to the rest, but he neither did nor could keep it. All that was the sign of God’s rest, for man, after work done, failed; but “there remaineth a rest for the people of God” (Heb. 4:9). The sabbath continued as a sign; and all through the prophets, we find it insisted on, but they did not get rest. Paul, reasoning upon it in Heb. 4:3, says, “We which have believed, do enter into rest.” But Canaan, the nominal rest, they of old did not enter, save the few faithful ones, and these did not get rest, for if they had, another day would not have been spoken of; and so it is said by the Psalmist, and quoted in Hebrews, “*If* they shall enter into my rest.” “If” means “they shall not.” This being the sabbath was no rest to them. The sabbath was still the sign, but no real rest. The whole thing being therefore gone as to man’s getting into God’s rest, it must be now on an entirely new principle, by faith and not by works. When Messiah came, He would have been rest to the people, but man would not have Him, as we find it here. Man could not have God’s rest by law, and they would not have it by grace, and this proves man has altogether broken with God. If I have got to God, I have rest, and need not journey farther for it. I have my rest in Himself; for grace, not law, has given me a capacity to enjoy what God is. But when the creature had broken the rest of his Creator, there could be no relationship between them. Sin has come in and caused God to be towards me as a judge, and there can be no link of heart between a judge and a criminal. If God judges me as a sinner, the only word I can have from Him is, “Depart from me, ye cursed.” Therefore all that man can say is, “Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord” (Matt. 25:41). There is a link between a father and a child

that brings them into relationship; but it is a new thing. All must be put on a new footing, for there is no rest in the old creation.

In chapter 15 we have grace at work to give rest, the Shepherd bringing the sheep home, etc.; and in this chapter we have a case of misery brought out in the man who had the dropsy. Christ said, "Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day? And they held their peace." He puts the case to themselves. "If you shall have an ox or an ass fallen into a pit...and they could not answer him." There was no present rest, no hope of rest, no possibility of rest for man as a sinner, and there could be no rest for God, for God could not rest where sin was. There was no sabbath for righteousness, for man had no righteousness. There was no sabbath for love, for love could not rest where judgment must be exercised. Love might come in and work, but work is not rest. Man has lost his communion with God, through his sin; and this is a solemn thing, for he has made God a judge through his sin. The very thought of judgment connected with God shows man a sinner, for there was no necessary association of judgment with God; but when sin came in, judgment must follow, for God is holy. If brought to the consciousness of there being no relationship between us as sinners and God, we learn what a place becomes us, when once we have faith in His grace.

Verses 7-11. "And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms." It is just the place that nature likes. The world which has no relations with God delights in exalting self and shutting Him out. Self gets for self what it likes and forgets God. Man is always setting up self, pushing for self, against God. He does not think so, for he says he is only

using his faculties. But so Adam did to hide himself from God. Do not we use our faculties to please ourselves, rather than for God? While the master is away, the servants go on their own way and do their own will. A man is naturally hurt when he is put down in a corner and despised. Flesh does not relish being thrust aside, but this seeking for a place is to seek for it where Christ had none. "Therefore," He says, "when thou art bidden to a wedding, sit down in the lowest room."

The point of this parable is seen in verses 8-11; it refers the heart to the Master, to "him that bade thee." If I am conscious of being a sinner, and therefore deserving no place, I shall take none, but wait till God bestows one on me. I shall have honor indeed, when God gives me a place. The point is, What does He bestow upon me? Having the eye upon God, and referring to Him, seek for the lowest place as Christ did. It will not do to say, I will not have a place in the world; the great thing is, the heart resting on God's place in the world. When the eye is thus upon God, self is forgotten; if not, I am thinking of the slights I receive, and neither faith nor grace are in exercise. If I could think nothing of myself, I should be perfect. The man who bade the guests has the right estimate of each and the honor due to them. The evangelist's place, the pastor's, the apostle's, etc., will all be appointed by God. When God gives me a place, it is one of power and nighness to Himself; but when a man takes a place for himself, it is one of weakness and alienation from God, because self is the object.

Then, again, we must guard against the mere refusing to take a place in the world, because we know it is wrong, as followers of Him who has been rejected. A mere legal estimate of what is, right can never last. A thing may be

very right; but there is no stability in pursuing it, because there is no power to subdue the flesh in merely doing what one knows to be right. There was the sense of obligation with the law, but the law did not set an object before me to attract my heart; it did not bring God to me nor me to God. That lasts which feels that we are nothing and that God is everything. Many have begun very energetically, and taken a certain place, right in itself; but if legality be the source of it, there will be no power of perseverance, for that which is taken up under law will be sure to be lost in the flesh. When God is the object, the low place here is sufficient. He Himself carries me on; and whatever it be, if the mind and, affections are upon Him, what was hard at first is no effort as I proceed. His love, which attracted and gave me power at first to take such a position, becomes brighter and brighter when better and longer known; and what was done, at first tremblingly, is easy with increasing courage. The only thing which can enable me thus to go on is to have CHRIST the object before me, and just in proportion as it is so can I be happy. There may be a thousand and one things to vex me, if self is of importance; they will not vex me at all, if self is not there to *be* vexed. The passions of the flesh will not harass us, if we are walking with God. What rubs we get when not walking with God, and thinking only of self! There is no such deliverance as that of having no importance in one's own eyes. Then one may be happy indeed before God.

If we look at Christ, we learn two principles: first, that He humbled Himself, because of the sin of the world all around Him; second, the world did all they could to humble Him, for the more He went down, so much the more they sought to pull Him down.

No one cares for another; so that if a man does not care for himself, he will be sure to be pushed down low enough. Then again, so deceitful are our hearts that it is possible we should be willing to humble ourselves, if we could get anything by it, even the approbation of men. On the other hand, if we, in the usual sense of men, merely seek to imitate Christ in this, it will be but legal effort. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). He humbled Himself. First, He "made himself of no reputation"; that is, He emptied Himself of His glory to become a man. In doing this, He left the Father's glory to become a man. This was a great descent (though we think a great deal of ourselves). But was that all? No. He humbled Himself to death, even the death of the cross. It is the same principle which is put before us in this chapter in Luke. "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 14:11). Real lowliness is being ready to serve any and everybody: and though it may to the eye of man look low, it is in reality very high, being the fruit of divine love working in our hearts. God, operating in our hearts, makes us unselfish. The only thing worth doing in the world is this service, except it be enjoying God. We should be ready to serve our enemies. "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." This is not only being humbled but humbling one's self, and not doing it before those who would honor us all the more for being humble. Paul could say of himself and others, "ourselves your servants for Christ's sake" (2 Cor. 4:5). He felt they had a title to serve in grace; and in proportion as he took the humble place, he will be exalted in the day that is coming.

Luke 14:12-14. The next statement in the chapter goes on to speak of him who bade. Before, it was about

the guest; but here it is the principle on which feasts are made. "Call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: and thou shalt be blessed, for they cannot recompense thee, but thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." Thus He takes them all out of the world again, to the time when they shall meet God, and makes it a present guide for action. They must not act on the principle of getting reward here, but must wait for the time when they are to meet the Lord, as it is not till the Master of the house returns that the servants receive their wages. This is not a question of salvation, but of reward for service. "Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just."

Mark how the Lord brings out the JUST as a separate class. The resurrection is not a common one; there is no such thing in Scripture. There is no thought of confounding in another world what God has separated in this. Grace has separated the believer, so that he is risen in his soul now; but he does not get the reward of his service till "the resurrection of the just." A sinner is quickened here, though not judicially manifested here; because we are in a dispensation of faith, and the portion is in glory. There is no "general" resurrection to good and bad alike; but there is the "first resurrection," which is God separating in power those whom in grace He has made His own. It was the "resurrection from among" or "out of the dead" that awakened such wonder among the Jews. The Pharisees could teach resurrection though the Sadducees denied it. A resurrection was commonly believed, as Martha said, "I know that he shall rise again at the last day." But they could not comprehend divine power coming in to Satan's house, and taking the righteous dead out from among the rest of the dead. Jesus replied to Martha, "I am the resurrection

and the life”—speaking of the living power that visits a man when he is in a state of death, and takes him out of it. They knew nothing of the discriminating process of the one to life, and the other to judgment (John 5).

The Master of the house will show His approval of the faithful servant. There will be degrees of glory given according to the service done. Not that I shall be saved for what I have done; but my service will be rewarded, whatever may have been produced by the Holy Spirit answering the desire of Christ in working in me; for it is service of which I could not do an atom without His power. It is likewise the answer of God according to His counsels; as we may see in the reply to the mother of Zebedee's children, "It shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father" (Matt. 20:23). The service of love is never influenced by recompense. Reward is not set before the soul as the motive for doing anything; but when we find difficulties in treading the path of service, then the crown is set before us to encourage us to go on. So, even Christ, for the joy that was set before Him, "endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2). So also Moses, while esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, had respect unto the recompense of the reward. If the recompense and not love be the spring of our service, it would just amount to this, "Take thy penny, and go thy way." But if the world is broken with, no recompense can be looked for from that source, which is as great a deliverance as the deliverance from self.

Now (vss. 15-24) see how grace, when brought in, is rejected. The Supper was ready; the guests were bidden, but they would not come. The Lord had before spoken of the kingdom, and here He shows what the reception of

the kingdom would cost. All things are now ready; but they all make excuses. They do not care enough for the Supper to leave their yoke of oxen, the piece of ground, and so forth. The Supper was in God's thoughts from the beginning, and it was to be when He came to the Jews, as their Messiah, at the close of the day; but they rejected Him—they did not want Him. It does not say that their sins shut them out from the Supper, for God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. Neither was it the piece of ground, the oxen, or the wife that were in themselves the evil; but in their case they became so, because their minds were intent on them to the slighting of the Supper. And is it not just the same now? What harm is there in these things, do you say? If they have occupied your heart, and made you slight God, that is the harm. In the kingdom of God where are you? There was not one link of heart between Christ and the people He came to, and therefore they rejected the Supper. This is also a test to our souls all through the day. It is not a question of whether a thing be right or wrong, but what savor have the things of Christ to our souls in it? It may be a very small thing. If we find the reading of a book makes the manifestation of Christ to become less precious to us, we have got away from God, and we cannot tell where the next step may take us. Satan often cheats us in this way. The soul is put to the test day by day, whether the things that are revealed by God in Christ have so much power over us as to engage the heart; but if other things have come in between when we want the enjoyment of the things of Christ, we shall not have it, and this will show us how far we have got away. If anything comes in and takes the freshness of Christ from your soul, take heed! for, if

the oxen, and so forth, are thus cared for, when you have opportunity for the things of Christ, you will have no taste for them.

In Luke 14:21 the Lord turns to “the poor” of the flock, those who have no yoke of oxen, and are glad of the feast. The priests and chiefs of the Jews had the first invitation, but, they rejecting it, the Master of the house sends out into the streets and lanes of the city, to bring in the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind of the people. Still the house is not filled; and then He sends outside the city, into the highways and hedges, and compels them to come in, that the house may be filled. These are the Gentiles. In this Gospel the poor of the flock and the Gentiles are distinguished from each other. But in Matthew, whose aim is Jewish, there is no mention made of both classes as distinct. “The wedding was furnished with guests” (Matt. 22:10) includes the Gentiles, gathered in after the Jews are brought into the blessing. Then mark the lowliness of the servant and the patient grace of the Master; that goes right on to the end. He cannot rest till He gets His house filled with guests.

What perseverance there is on the part of God! and we are called to go on in the same spirit. It does cost a great deal, to go on, and on, and on, in spite of everybody and everything; and for us to do so, marks the presence of divine power in us, for God’s grace is unwearied. There is indeed judgment at the same time, for it is said, “None of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper” (Luke 12:24). But God’s acting thus shows us what lowliness there should be in us, as regards self, and grace as regards everyone else, and all grounded on this one fact, that all man’s relationships with God are morally broken; and if

you are really going to take such a path as that of following Christ, you must count the cost. It is all very well to see such grace and admire it; but there is no power to persevere in it, without such love in the heart as the establishment of a new relationship with God gives. There must be a link in the heart with the new thing; and Christ must have such strength in the heart as to give power to break with old things.

Verses 25-33. Multitudes were attracted by the hearing of such grace: so in verse 26 He tells them what discipleship will involve. There may be an allusion here to Micah 7:5-6. Friends must be given up for Christ. A man may have to leave everything else, but the question is, Am I to leave God? What! life too? Yes—no matter. In that life you are linked with the world, and that must be given up too, if I am in question: you cannot have two hearts—a heart for the world, and a heart for Me—Christ would say. I tremble when I see people who have not counted the cost, setting out in the profession of following Christ. It is God's way to put the barrier at the first start. If you can leap that, you will do. Legal obedience will not stand, but following Christ. If He is in the path, it is happy and easy; but it is a path between two hedges. If Christ is not with you in it, there will be nothing but trouble and difficulty.

Verses 34, 35. "Salt" is grace in spiritual energy; that is, the saints being witnesses in the world of the power of holy love, instead of selfishness. Salt is the consecrating principle of grace: if that is gone, what is to preserve? Salt is rather grace in the aspect of holy separateness unto God, than in that of kindness and meekness, though of course these are also inseparable from grace. If the salt has lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? If I have meat without salt, I

can salt it; but if there is no saltness in salt, what can I do? What a character we have here of an unspiritual church, or an unspiritual saint! Like the vine which represented Israel, good for nothing at all but to dishonor the Lord its owner and be destroyed. Mercy, it is true, may recover us; but as saints we should have the savor of Christ. Whatever enfeebles attachment to Christ destroys power. It is not gross sin that does it, which of course will be met and judged; but it is the little things of everyday life which are apt to be chosen before Christ. When the world creeps in, the salt has lost its savor and we show that a rejected Christ has little power in our eyes.

The Lord keep us in the path with Christ, where all is bright and blessed. If the film of this world has been drawn over our spiritual vision, hiding Christ from us, He alone can remove it.

Notes on Luke 15-16

Luke 15-16.

We have seen the Lord showing out His own rejection, in grace, followed by an entirely new order of things. The church, brought in subsequently, is not an age, properly so called, but a heavenly episode between the ages. There are three ages spoken of in Scripture: the age before the law, the age under the law, and the millennial age. Christ was "made under the law" (Gal. 4:4), and that age is not finished yet. The disciples said to Him, "What shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the age?" (Matt. 24:3). That was the age when He was there, but when they rejected Him, the age was suspended. As He straitly charged Peter to tell no man He was the Christ, saying, "the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected" (Mark 8:31). Therefore He says to them, "Ye shall not see me, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." We, who form a part of the church of God, and not having anything to do with the earth, are in no sense an age, but are a heavenly people united to Christ above, during the suspension of this age, filling up the gap between the Lord's leaving the Jews, and His return to them again. So in Romans 11 we have the olive tree with some of the branches broken off, and others grafted in. This is the tree with its root in the earth, and consequently it could have nothing directly to do with the church in heaven. Some of the branches were broken off, and some left; but this could never be said of the church, the body united to its head, at the right hand of God. The church, of course, does fill up a certain place and

time, but it is during the suspension of the age to which Christ came. Characteristically we belong to that which is above and beyond anything connected with this world. It is grace that has set us there, and that is not of earth but of heaven.

In chapter 15 we find the Lord rising above Jewish dispensation altogether, to the full display of God's own nature—love in the gospel. At the close of chapter 14 He takes up the professing system in its responsibility. "Salt is good, but if the salt have lost its savor," it is good for nothing. Thus He shows what man is. Then in chapter 15 come publicans and sinners, and we have the display of what God is. Here God is dealing with lost man, in grace. Sinners, who owned their sins and came to repentance, were those who justified God. "Wisdom is justified of her children" (Luke 7:35). God is vindicated in His ways, whether in the condemnation or salvation of a sinner. The publicans and sinners justified God, being baptized of John, while the Pharisees rejected His counsel against themselves. All that is wanted to justify God is that He should show Himself; and this is what the Lord now does. He manifests what God is in grace, and this it is which makes the chapter ever so fresh and full to our souls; the heart that has been awakened never tires of such a chapter.

Then, in chapter 16, He shows the responsibility of those who are thus dealt with. The earth was given to the children of men, and God looked for fruit. He first dealt with man as to what he ought to have been on the earth, but there was entire failure. Now there comes out another thing, entire grace, which is irrespective of all that man was, and takes an absolutely heavenly character. Divine love is its source, and its character is heavenly. Revealing

heaven, it puts man into connection with it; and the people so put must be a heavenly people. Why so? Because this world is all gone wrong; it has fallen from God, and is become the "far country." Hence, its riches are of no value, but a great hindrance, unless used in a heavenly way; and chapter 16 shows how they should be used. Chapter 15 shows the sinner called out by grace; that which follows shows what he, who is called out, is to be as a heavenly man. This world is a scene of evil, and that which attaches to it is now ruin and not blessedness. (See the rich man and Lazarus.) Adam had a place in this world, and Israel had a place in it; but now that is all gone, and grace has come in, lifting those who are the subjects of it into another state of things altogether. Christ is justifying God. His nature being love, it was His joy to manifest grace to sinners. It is not here the joy of those brought back, but God's own joy in bringing the sinner back to Himself. This gives the tone to heaven. "There is joy" above in the poor wretched sinner brought back.

I have no doubt we have, in these three parables, the unfolding of the ways of the Trinity. In the first is shown the Son, as the Good Shepherd, going after the sheep. In the second, the woman lighting a candle, and searching diligently till she find the piece of silver, we have the painstaking work of the Holy Spirit, lighting up a testimony in this dark world. The third is the Father's reception of the returning sinner, when brought back. In this, the prodigal son, we find the work in the sinner; but in the two previous ones, it is the sovereignty and the activity of grace, which goes out in love to find that which was lost, and brings the sinner back without his having anything to do in it. This persevering energy of love is in

the Shepherd Himself—the Good Shepherd cares for the sheep, and gives it no trouble in getting home; He carries it on His shoulders. Herein is seen the perfect grace in which the Lord Jesus has so charged Himself with bearing our every burden, our every trial and difficulty all along the road. Christ is thus the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. Then mark, in verse 6, the peculiar character of this joy. “He calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them; Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.” There could not be a more genuine picture, or a fuller expression of a person being happy than this. Joy always speaks out.

In the second parable we have the same general principle. The painstaking of the Holy Spirit is shown in the acting of the woman who sought the lost piece of silver; the piece of silver could have neither trouble nor joy itself. The difference in the two is, that in the first, the Shepherd bears all the burden; in the second, it is the pains taken in finding the lost piece, proving the woman cared enough for it to take all this trouble to search it out. Thus does God’s love act towards us, to bring us out of the dark world to Himself. What a work it is to bring man’s heart back to God!

“’Twas great to speak a world from naught; ’Twas greater to redeem.”

If we look at man, as he is in himself, he could never get back to God. But look at what God is in Himself, and who or what can resist His grace! Still it is the joy of the finder, and not of the thing found: Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep—my piece—that was lost. And in the case of the returning prodigal, who made the feast? Not the young man, but the father, saying to those in the

house, "Let us eat and be merry, for this my son was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:23-24). All caught the joy of the Father's heart, the servants, etc., all except the unhappy self-righteous elder brother (the Pharisee, the Jew), to whom the father replied, "It was meet that we should make merry and be glad, for this thy brother was dead and is *alive* again," etc.

It is the joy God has in receiving a sinner back to Himself. In the parable of the prodigal son, by itself, the full glory of grace is not seen, as these three parables set it forth together. The case of the sheep is the Shepherd charging Himself with the whole burden of the sheep; the silver is the painstaking of the Holy Spirit. Before actual departure there was moral departure. When the young man left his father's house, it was but a display of the evil in his heart. He was just as wicked when he asked for his portion of goods, and crossed his father's threshold, as when he ate husks with the swine in the far country; he was doubtless, more miserable then, but his heart was gone before. One man may run farther into riot than another, but if we have turned our backs upon God, we are utterly bad. In this sense there is no difference.

The moral evil was just the same with Eve. She gave up God for forbidden fruit. She virtually thought the devil a much better friend to her than God, and took his word instead of God's. Satan is a liar from the beginning, and at the cross the Lord proved this. It cost the Lord His life to prove that God was good. Christ came to contradict the devil's lie, which man believed, and under which the whole world is lying. Grace and truth came by Christ, and at all cost were set up by Him on the cross. Man can do without God, and from the beginning the whole world has been a

public lie against God. Who could un-riddle it? Look at creation, how it groans under the bondage of corruption. Look at providence—how can I account for the goodness of God when I see an infant writhing with pain? How can I reconcile the two things? The villain prospers—the good man suffers. When I see Christ on the cross, I see what God is. Death came on man by reason of sin. But Christ takes my sin on His own sinless person, bows His head in death upon the cross, and thus sets aside that lie of Satan, “Ye shall not surely die” (Gen. 3:4). Thus was God’s truth re-established here below in the work and person of the Lord Jesus, and nowhere else. In Him I see holiness, truth, and love, no matter at what cost.

The natural man is just like this prodigal, he spends his substance in the far country, and ruins himself. A man having £5,000 a year, and spending £20,000, will seem very rich for the time; but look at the results. He is a ruined man. The moment man departed from God, he sold himself to Satan, and is spending his soul, his heart, away from God; he even spends what God has given him against God, and when he is thoroughly spent, and has nothing to live on, he begins to be in want. “There arose a mighty famine in that land,” and all the world feels that. Every sinner does not go to the same lengths of eating the swine’s husks, but all are in the same condition of ruin. Every man has turned his back upon God, though all have not run to the same excess of riot, nor fallen into the same degradation. The famine never draws back to the Father’s house.

The prodigal joined himself to a citizen of that country—not his father’s country. “He would fain have filled his belly” (Luke 15:16), and “no man gave to him.” Satan never gives; that is found where God’s love is, who

spared not His own Son. When the prodigal thinks of his father's house, the whole work is morally done, though he is not back there yet. He turns, his heart was changed, and thus his whole desire was to get back to his father's house, from whence he had departed. He was not yet in the full liberty of grace, so as to have peace and happiness, and he says to himself, "make me as one of thy hired servants." He is brought to a sense of his guilt; and what was it? feeding with the swine? No, this was the fruit of it; but his guilt was in leaving his father's house, turning away from God. When he came to himself, he desired to return. This was truly a right wish, but the form it took in his mind, from his not yet knowing grace, was a legal one. "I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." But the father does not give him time for that. We hear nothing more about hired servants; for when he was "yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." He could not have been a servant with the father's arms round his neck. It would have spoiled the father's feelings, if not the son's.

It was the joy of Him who was receiving back the sinner to Himself; and it is the knowledge of this which gives peace to the soul: nothing else does. If a man does not know love, he does not know God, for God is love. The full revelation of God is what we have in Christ. "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me?" (John 14:9). God acts from the joy and delight He has in Himself, in receiving back the sinner, and therefore He does not think of the rags but of the child He has got back again. What right has man to call God in question, when He indulges His own heart in the outflow of love

to the sinner? You will never get peace by the mere act of coming back, but by learning the Father's mind about you. Could the prodigal get peace as he was coming back if the father had not met him? No, all along the road he would be questioning, how will he receive me? — will he be angry with me? will he spurn me from his presence? And if he does, what will become of me? "But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." If not so, he would have trembled even to knock at the door.

When the father's arms were on the son's neck, was he deified by the rags? No; and he will not have the son bring rags into the house, but orders the best robe to be brought out of it. God sends His own Son out of heaven, and clothes the sinner; and, thus arrayed, the young man could bring credit to his father's house. And, surely, if we are so clothed with Christ, we shall do credit to God; and, in the ages to come, He will show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us through Christ Jesus.

"Let *us* eat, and be merry." It is not, Let him eat and be merry. Again, he says, "It was meet that we should make merry and be glad." There was but one exception to the delight in the house. The elder brother (the self-righteous person) was angry, and would not go in. God had shown what He was in Himself, by His Son, in thus receiving the prodigal: and now He would show what they were in themselves. We know the Pharisees murmured from the beginning, and the elder brother had no communion with his father: for if the father was happy, why was not he happy too? "He was angry, and would not go in." If such a vile person as the publican gets in, this makes my righteousness go for nothing! It is truly so; for where God's

happiness is, there self-righteousness cannot come. If God is good to the sinner, what avails my righteousness? He had no sympathy with his father. He ought to have said, "My father is happy, so I must be." There should have been communion in the joy. "Thy brother is back." That ought to have rung on his heart, but no.

Then see the perfect patience of God's grace: the father goes out and entreats him. And do we not, all through the Acts, see God entreating the Jews to be reconciled, although they had crucified His Son? So Paul, in 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16, says that the Jews filled up the measure of their sins by forbidding the apostles to speak to the Gentiles, that they might be saved. It is all selfishness in the elder son. "Thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends" (Luke 15:29). To which the father replies, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." The oracles of God, the covenants, the promises, God gave to the Jews; but He will not give up the right to show His grace to sinners, because of the self-righteous selfishness of the Jews, or of anyone else.

Luke 16. "There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him, that he had wasted his goods." Man, generally, is God's steward: and in another sense and in another way, Israel was God's steward, put into God's vineyard, and entrusted with law, promises, covenants, worship, etc. But in all, Israel was found to have wasted His goods. Man, looked at as a steward, has been found to be entirely unfaithful. Now, what is to be done? God appears, and in the sovereignty of His grace, turns that which man has abused on the earth, into a means of heavenly fruit. The things of this world being in the hands of man he is not to be using them for the present enjoyment

of this world, which is altogether apart from God, but with a view to the future. We are not to seek to possess the things now, but, by the right use of these things, to make a provision for other times. "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness" (Luke 16:9). It is better to turn all into a friend for another day than to have money now. Man here is gone to destruction. Therefore now man is a steward out of place. "Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward." He is discharged from stewardship—has lost his place, but not the things of which he has the administration. Here is something far better than the alchemy which would turn all into gold. For this is grace, turning even gold itself, that vile thing which enslaves men's hearts, into a means of showing love and getting riches for heaven.

To Israel, God is saying, You have failed in the stewardship; therefore now I am going to put you out. In chapter 15 the elder brother, the Jew, would not go in; and here, in chapter 16, God is putting the Jew out of the stewardship. With Adam, all is over; but we have a title in grace to use, in a heavenly way, that to which we have no title at all as man. "If, therefore, ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?" "If ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?" Our own things are the heavenly things; the earthly things are another's; and if you do not use your title in grace in devoting in love these earthly temporal goods, which are not your own, how can God trust you with the spiritual things which are "your own"? Our own things are all the glories of Christ—all that is Christ's is ours, for "ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver

and gold.” We were bought with a price, it is true, not with money, but “with the precious blood of Christ.” (1 Peter 1:28). God has not given us eternal life in order that we might be getting money. “No man can serve two masters” (Matt. 6:24), and if you want to be rich, you cannot be seeking to serve God. We may have to do our duty in this world, but it is never our duty to serve mammon and desire riches.

Now He goes on to show that there are these everlasting habitations, when the grand results will appear of what has been done here. The old thing is fleeting away, and the new coming in. The Jew, who refused to come to the feast, is loosening the law, while rejecting grace. See chapter 14:18-19.

Luke 16:19. “A certain rich man, which was clothed in purple,” etc. The thought here is Jewish, and the great principle is that all God’s dealings, as to the distributive justice on the earth, were no longer in force, and that now He only deals in grace. He draws aside the veil to show the result in another world. The rich man had his good things here—he belonged to the earth, and the basket and the store belonged to him—his treasure was on earth, and his heart there too. But look into the other world and see the result—“torment.” The good things have changed now. “The rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torment.” “And there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores ... and the beggar died.” Was he buried? Not a word about it, for he belonged not to the earth. He “was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom.” He who had the “evil things” down here, “was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom.” He who have the “evil things” down

here, was carried to the best place in heaven. Then mark, it was not the affliction, sores, and so forth, of Lazarus made him righteous, any more than the riches of the rich man made him unrighteous. God having done with the earthly things, no earthly circumstances are a mark of God's present favor, or the reverse: though, no doubt; God's dealings with Lazarus were the means of bringing down his pride, breaking the will, etc., and so preparing him for the place He was going to take him to.

Verse 31. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets," etc. Here this solemn truth comes out, that even the resurrection of Christ will not convince them; for if they refuse to hear God's word as they have it, they will not hear the testimony of God, even though one rose from the dead; and we know they did not.

This chapter 16 is to let in the light of another world upon God's ways and dealings in this. The whole world is bankrupt before God; so that man is now trading with another's goods. When man rejected Christ he was turned out of his stewardship. This is man's position. We should therefore, dispose of everything now, in reference to the world to come, according to this permission in grace revealed in chapter 16, to use the things of which we have the administration. If we are serving mammon, we shall not get the blessing of serving God, in the sense of God's gifts; for it is retributive justice here, in a sense. If you are not faithful in another man's, who will give you that which is your own? If you have not been faithful to the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? If you are loving money, you cannot have your heart filled with Christ. We are not to be "slothful in business," but "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord" (Rom.

12:11); and for this He opens heaven to us. Not as He said to Abraham, “Unto a land that I will show thee.” He has shown heaven unto us, having opened it to us in grace. It is the revelation of grace that gives power over earthly things. May the Lord keep before us a living Christ, as our light for guidance and salvation to walk and trust in!

Notes on Luke 17

Luke 17.

We have seen the great principle of divine grace in contrast with self-righteousness, and the Jewish economy, which refused its Messiah, the Son of God, set aside to make way for bringing to light life and incorruption through the gospel.

“Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offenses will come; but woe unto him through whom they come” (vs. 1). We enter here on the spirit and way of serving, now that the world to come was let in upon the conduct and faith of the disciples in this world, for none could serve two masters. God is carrying on a work—in a little child perhaps—but it is His own work and individual faith is needed in the path of a rejected Christ. Among those who professed to follow Him and His glory on the principles of faith, there would be alas! many scandals. It was not now, nor yet to be, a reign of judicial power when the Son of man would gather out of His kingdom all scandals and them which do iniquity. Satan’s power is permitted, the exercise of faith is required. It is a time of proving, by the prevalence of evil, that which lasts because of God. The cross must be taken and self denied. It is a hard lesson, but blessed when learned. The cross and the glory are always connected. The cross must be on the natural man, not on sin merely, so as to break the will. Christ had no will, showing perfectness; but we need the cross practically, as the means of communion by breaking down that which hinders.

Then, again, the whole system of the world is a stumbling block: there is not one thing in it which is not calculated to turn the heart from God. Take the merest trifle—dress, vanities in the street, flattery of man, of brethren, perhaps, and so forth—all tend to elevate the flesh. What a different thing is heaven opening on a rejected Savior! And this is our light and pathway through the world, for now the heavens are open to faith, as we pass through it to Him whom we see in glory. There is an active energetic flow of God's love in carrying on souls. Is our walk a witness? Take care you are not a stumbling-block. You may say, A person must be very weak to feel such or such a thing, but it is the very reason why he is to be cared for. The Lord give us never to hinder but to help the weak! These things are the stumbling-block of the enemy, and the man by whom they come is so far an instrument of Satan. The Lord loves His little ones. Better for that man that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of them.

Luke 17:3. But suppose a person does something to stumble you, what then? "Take heed to yourselves." Your part is to forgive. Take heed to yourselves, jealous and self-judging. "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him." What! if he trespass often—"seven times in a day?" Yes, if he "seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent, thou shalt forgive him." Watch incessantly yourselves and see to it that the spirit of love (the power of unity and the bond of perfectness, as we know from elsewhere) be not broken, nor the spirit of holiness, that the peace be not false. Blessed path! what condescension to our weakness and danger in the introduction of grace, and the moral judgment of

present things, which are the aliment of the flesh and the domain of the world! Watchfulness against self and grace to others bring us through, rising like a life-boat above all breakers.

Luke 17:5-10. In such a position there would be need of faith and the energy proper to it. The apostles (led of God, though perhaps seeing but a petty part of the difficulty and with a confused sense of this new position) pray for an increase of faith. The Lord answers by setting forth the fullness of its energy: for faith realizes a power which is not in the person and thus acts without limit. He applies it also, though in general terms, to the removal of the obstacles of a system, which might present the form of what was good and great, but fruitless. In every need we may draw upon God. All consists in looking simply to Him. All things are possible to him that believes. For it is God accomplishing His will, and He has willed to accomplish it by man and to honor Himself in man, after being dishonored of Satan in and by man; but this in faith according to His will, till the Lord Jesus returns in power and glory. God is at work, and if you are co-workers under Him, you could believe that He is and say, Let this be done and this. Is it nothing to wield God's power? If you know what it is to be opposed by Satan, you will feel how blessed it is to call in the power of God. Your place and work may be very humble—outside—no matter what: still you need God's power to be little. What the Lord says in verses 7-10 is not applicable to a careless servant. If he has neglected his work, he is a slothful one. But I am an unprofitable servant when I have done all that I am commanded. Am I neglected? It is to try me. Something needs it. Perhaps I want to learn that God can do without me. Now that

Christ is rejected, God is at work. If He uses me, it is a great honor; if He lays me by because self was elated, it is a great mercy. He is saying, as it were, Be satisfied with Myself, be content to know I love thee. Are you content with His love? Do you want man's honor or your own? Remember that when you have done all, it is the time to say, "unprofitable servant!"

Luke 17:11-19. The history which follows shows that when God brings in new power, those who have had the previous privileges are the last to rise above them into what is better. But there is a faith wrought of God in the heart which sets free from the subsidiary forms thrown around God's will in the past economy. Thus, recognizing God in Jesus, it carries the soul beyond the law of a carnal commandment and associates it with Him in whom is the power of an endless life. It occupies us with His person who is above all, planting us not in dishonor of the law ("yea, we establish the law" through faith), but in the liberty wherewith the truth—the Son—makes free. All were cleansed by the word of divine power. The nine went on to show themselves to the priests, acting on the word of Jesus and thus far in faith. But the Samaritan stranger perceived God's glory in what had taken place, and so turned back to Jesus and aloud glorified God. The others owned the power which had come, but remained in their religious habits and associations. He, less pre-occupied with outward institutions, returned to the source of power, not to its shadow and witness, which nature always uses to hide God. He had experienced divine power in Jesus, and instead of merely enjoying the gift, he most humbly, but in the boldness and propriety of faith, went back to own the Giver. He "fell down on his face at his feet,

giving him thanks" (Luke 17:16). He wanted no priest. The priest did not, could not cleanse, but only discern and pronounce a man clean. Evil had leveled the Jew and the Samaritan. They were alike cast out of the presence of divine communion by the leprosy which afflicted them. But He who healed lepers under the law was He who gave the law, and the word of Jesus at once recognized the law and manifested the Jehovah who gave it. The gratitude of faith was a readier reasoner than the instruction of the law; for the blessing afforded by the work and presence of Jesus was to the nine the means of keeping up Jewish distinction, to the tenth it was the evidence of divine goodness. To him, therefore, it was complete deliverance. He was by faith arrived in grace at the fountain-head from which the law itself proceeded, and was let go in peace, made whole by his faith, having liberty from God and with God, giving thanks and glorifying Him, and withal knowing how acceptable it was in His sight.

How many reasons might have been pleaded for going on and not returning to Jesus! How might the nine Jews have said, You are ordered to go and show yourself to the priest! But faith goes straight to the heart of God, and there finds all grace and a dismissal in the liberty of grace. To him who returned to Jesus, cleansed and with heart-felt thanks, the priests were left behind. In spirit and figure the healed Samaritan was passed into another system by faith—the grace and liberty of the gospel. It is blessed thus to be at the source of power and goodness, and there only does God put now those who believe. If under the law before, we are become dead to it by the body of Christ that we should belong to another—to Him who is raised from the dead. It is this way alone that glorifies God, however men may

plead the letter. Thus only can we joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received (not the law, but) the reconciliation. In Him, thus known and enjoyed, we have all and more than all then the priests ever conceived. We have communion with the Father and the Son by faith in God fully revealed. We have to do with Him in heaven now, not with a temple and priests on earth. "Arise, go thy way." You have found the person and glory of the Lord. You are beyond the priests and the temple, your faith has pierced the veil and found One greater than both. The rest went their way, cleansed, to be under the law. Stupefied by Judaism, they did not return to glorify God. All this, at the point of the gospel we are arrived at, is full of importance. It is another light thrown on the passing away of the law and of that dispensation.

In the next verses, from verse 20 to 37, the question was actually raised as to the coming of God's kingdom. The Pharisees asked when it should come, and the Lord places them on their plain responsibility. "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation" (Luke 17:20), or outward show. It should not be said, Lo here! or Lo there! for that kingdom then was there among them. The King was speaking to them. Ought they not to have known Him because He came in grace? If He had humbled Himself to know their sorrows and to die for their sins, was that a reason for not discerning His greatness and moral perfection manifested in ten thousand ways? Did not His holy love to the poor and guilty prove, plainly enough, who He was? If man's heart had not been opposed to all that was the delight of God in the kingdom, if his eye had not been blind to all that was lovely and of good report, he

would have felt that the lower Christ stooped, the more wonderful were His works.

To His disciples He had other things to say. He was rejected and leaving them. Suffering awaited them. Trying as their position might now be as the companions of His rejection, the days would come when they would long in vain for one of those days when they had enjoyed blessed and sweet intercourse with the Son of man. They would, as Jews in the land, feel the difference. Then Satan, to allure and deceive in that day, would lead men to say, "Lo here," or "Lo there"; but the disciples would know its falsehood. There was no hope for the nation which rejected Christ. The King had been there but refused; He was no longer "here" or "there." This day the Son of man would be as the lightning flashing from one quarter under heaven to another. But first He must suffer many things and be rejected of this generation, that is, the unbelieving Jews.

It is evident that while the Lord takes this name of Son of man to His disciples as revealing a relation higher and wider than that of Messiah (the link of which was broken and gone in the nation's ruinous rejection of Him), the whole of this instruction is Jewish and shall find its accomplishment properly in a godly remnant of the latter day. The Christian part is not spoken of here, for that is association after a heavenly sort with Christ, and we have its great moral outlines, at least in Luke 12. Here we are on the ground of responsibility, not of heavenly grace. We must separate the church's place with Christ from the government of the world by Christ. The very character of the predicted delusion confirms this distinction. For if men said to the Christian, "Here is Christ," he would instantly know that it was of Satan, because we are to meet Him,

not here or there on earth, but in the air (1 Thess. 4). But this is not the case when you come to the government of the world. There the hope rests on Jewish ground, and then the witnesses for God must go through tribulation such as has never been. Now, unless expressly forewarned, they would naturally look here or there for the Deliverer: for in that character His feet shall stand upon the Mount of Olives, and He shall come to Zion and shall come out of it. "Jehovah shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion; rule thou in the midst of thine enemies" (Psa. 110:2). All this differs from the Christian's hope and his desire meanwhile; for we do not want our enemies destroyed, but converted, and we are looking to be taken from them all to heaven with the Savior, instead of waiting for Him to join and exalt us under His reign upon the earth.

But, again, the subject here is neither the past siege of Jerusalem nor the future judgment of the dead. Titus's capture of the city was not like the lightning, but a long, fierce, hardly-contested struggle. Nor were the Jews, up to the moment of the final stroke, in a state of ease and carnal security, resting on the continuance of things as they were, as in the days of Noah and Lot. Suddenness of judgment is its first feature, certainty is the next, discriminating certainty, neither of which things could be fairly said of the Romans. Without or within, at rest or at work, men or women, it mattered not, God would burn up the chaff and preserve the wheat: the one should be taken, and the other be left. Next, there is a local and earthly stamp, which excludes the scene from that of the great white-throne judgment. For there is no resemblance between the judgment of the dead and the deluge or the fate of Sodom. It is the end of the age, not of the world, and is

a judgment on a temporal people, and more especially on their city; for they were not to return into the house, if on the housetop; and if in the field, they were not to turn back. None of these things could be said of the dead, any more than the bed or the mill. It would be no time for human motives, artifices, or concessions (vs. 33). Faithfulness to the Lord and His testimony would be the true and saving wisdom. The day of the Son of man's revelation was in question—His judgment of the quick, and especially of a generation which has rejected and caused Him to suffer. If they asked, "where?" the solemn word for conscience was, where the body, the corpse, was, the swift inevitable judgments of God would fall.

Notes on Luke 18

Luke 18.

We saw, from verse 20 to the end of the last chapter, that the kingdom of God was presented, first, in the person of Jesus, as a question of faith, not of outward show, nor of a Lo, here! or lo, there! and, secondly, in the way of judgment, which should deliver the remnant by the execution of divine vengeance on their enemies.

Luke 18:1-8. The first eight verses of our chapter complete the prophetic warning, and show that the resource of the righteous in the last days will be prayer. Nevertheless, though the parable has the special application to the future oppression of God's witnesses who will then be found in Jerusalem, the instruction, as usual with this gospel, is made general so as to suit any or all kinds of difficulty by which men might be tried. "And he speaks a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." Faith would be put to the test. If God were looked to, and not merely the blessing, men would not faint, though there was no answer. They would go on, always looking up, though all seemed against them. The widow represents those who have no human resource: their resource would be constancy in prayer. Such will be the godly seed in Israel, for it is the remnant, not the church which is here meant. They will plead with the judge to avenge them of their adversary. Their patience and confidence may be sorely tried, but they will not cry in vain. "And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him" (Luke 18:6-7).

He may be slow in taking up their cause; but when once He shall rise up, a short work will He make on the earth. Meanwhile, patience must have its perfect work. In Jesus it had its full perfection. There was the rejection and the reproach of men, the forsaking of disciples, the power of Satan, the cup of God's wrath; but He went through all to the glory of God. In detail, we too have to *be* sifted, and to find all circumstances against us but God for us, yet more than if we had outward help, miraculous power, the church all right, etc. Even joy may hinder our entire dependence on God, making us forget, practically, that the flesh profits nothing. When no circumstances lead you to have any hope, is your hope then in Him? The flesh may get on for a long while, as in Saul; but faith only can wait with all against it. It is then the divine life depending on divine power. Thus it was in Christ pre-eminently. "I believed, therefore have I spoken" (2 Cor. 4:18). He went down into the dust of death, and has introduced a wholly new order of things. And we, having the same spirit of faith—we also believe, and therefore speak. "Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh; yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:16-17). Christ is dead, risen, and now set down at the right hand of God. Having this life, we are put to the test practically to learn the lesson of death and resurrection, where nothing but God can sustain.

In the parable there are two considerations. If the unjust judge hear and act for the defenseless, be the motive what it may, will not God? But this is far from all. God has His affections, not only His character, but objects of His delight. "And shall not God avenge his own elect?"

(Luke 18:7). It never can become the righteous God, who taketh vengeance to make light of evil or let the wicked go unpunished. For then how shall He judge the world? He notices the cry from the oppressed day and night, and it is the cry of His own elect. "I tell you that he will avenge them speedily." But will there be the faith that expects His interference? They will cry from distress and God will hear. Nevertheless, the question is raised, Will there be, when the Son of man cometh, that faith on the earth, which is founded on God known in peaceful communion? Will it not rather be the cry of the righteous, in bitterness of spirit, a cry forced out of them, and not the cry of desire?

Luke 18:9. We have next, the moral features of, and suited to, the kingdom, the characters which are in harmony or discord with the state of things introduced by grace. The Pharisee and publican set forth, not the doctrine of atonement or of justification by faith, but the certainty that self-righteousness is displeasing to God, and that lowliness because of our sin is most acceptable in His sight. The Pharisee does not set God aside. He "stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee." But then he thanks God for what he is, not for what God is. The only hope of the publican was in God Himself. He was very ignorant, no doubt, but he had the right spirit to get at God. Light had broken in and shown he was a sinner, and he submitted to the painful conviction, and confessed the truth of his state to God. He was cast on God's mercy to his soul. He dared not appeal to justice, he did not ask indifference, but that mercy which measures the sin and forgives it. The revelation of grace had not yet come in, the work of reconciliation was not yet done, so that the publican stood "afar off," but his heart was touched, and God was what he

wanted. If a soul is brought to a sense of sin now, it need not, and ought not, to stand afar off. The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared. Nevertheless, though he did and could not thus know grace, the publican gives God and himself their true character. It was not full knowledge, but the knowledge, as far as it went was true. "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 18:14). Universal truth! but where so shown as in Jesus? For if the first man, exalting himself, was abased to hell, He who was God, made Himself of no reputation, humbled Himself to the death of the cross. "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him" (Phil 2:9).

In one sense men cannot humble themselves, because they are sinners already, and cannot go lower; a saint may. True humility is forgetfulness of self.

This is illustrated yet more by the incident that follows (vss. 15-17), where they brought infants to Jesus, that He would touch them. It is the lowliness of real insignificance, as the former was because of sinfulness. Who would be troubled with beings of such little consequence? Not the disciples, but Jesus. The Lord delighted in them, and that is the spirit of the kingdom of God. And here too a general moral maxim comes out. If a man is to enter that kingdom, all confidence in self must be broken down, and the truth be received simply, as a little child hears its mother. If it is not so, God and man have not their place. When He speaks, all I have to do is to listen. This is the humility of nothingness, as the other was on account of sin.

Next, in verses 18 to 27 comes the question of doing in order to eternal life, not salvation for a lost one, but that

which searches the heart to the bottom. The young man was a lovely character, looked at as a creature. For if there are the ravages of sin in the world, there are traces of God there too. This ruler did not see God in Christ. Morally attracted, he came to learn to do good, without a doubt of his own competence. In Jesus he only saw a perfectly good man, and one therefore eminently able to advise and direct him in the same path. Sin, on the one hand, and grace, on the other, were altogether ignored by him. He knew neither himself nor God. There is no man good. All are gone astray. Man is a sinner, and needs God to be good to him: he is incompetent to do the good which satisfies God.

The Lord took up the young ruler on his own assumption that he could do good, for the purpose of bringing out what he was. The good Master that he had appealed to puts to the test what his heart really is. "Yet lackest thou one thing; sell all that thou hast ... and come, follow me." Would he give up self-importance? After all, he loved his riches too well. "He was very sorrowful; for he was very rich" (Luke 18:23). Had not such things been promised as a blessing to the Jews? Christ shows them to be a snare. But then they do much good! Nay, are they good for your heart? It is not that they may not be used in grace; but the man did not know his own heart. Good is not there, nor the strength to produce it. Every motive which governs man is rooted up by the cross. But all within is bad, and I can never work a thing fit for God out of bad material. I need God therefore, who can give me a new and holy nature, who can be merciful to me because He is above all sin. The spring of all good is, that it flows from God and not man. It is an impossibility, as far as man is concerned, that any should be saved. Sin has ruined man and all his hopes. If one looks at

the means he can avail himself of, they are wholly useless to save him. But "the things which are impossible with men," said the Savior, "are possible with God." Such is the sole foundation for the sinner.

On the other hand (vss. 28-30), if Peter is quick to speak of the devotedness of the disciples, in leaving all and following Jesus, the Lord shows the certainty that every loss, for the kingdom's sake, will turn into manifold gain, both now and in the world to come.

But He binds it all up (vss. 31-33) with what was coming on His own person. They were going up to Jerusalem; but for what? He, the Messiah, "shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on; and they shall scourge him, and put him to death." All hopes must end here: "Yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more" (2 Cor. 5:16). Even He, if He is to deliver the lost, must come down to the dust of death. Christ has no association with sinful man. How then can He deliver? He must die for us; He cannot take corruption into union with Himself. A living Christ, we may reverently say, could not deliver us, consistently with God's nature and character; redemption was a necessity. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:24).

But it was the only means of a holy salvation; man's full wickedness came out in the rejection and death of Christ. He hated what is in God and Him who is God-hated both the Son and the Father. All question of human justice is settled and negatived forever. Alas! the disciples understood none of these things, neither His shame and death, nor His resurrection. It was the accomplishment of

what the prophets had written concerning the Son of man. But they knew not what He said nor what they wrote. The death of Christ would manifest what man was, and what God was; His resurrection would evince the power of life that can deliver the dead. But He was not understood.

Luke 18:34 closed that part of our Gospel which shows the bringing in of the new and heavenly dispensation. With verse 35 we enter on the historical account of the Lord's final interaction with the Jews. "Son of man" was the general character of the Gospel, but now, in the midst of Israel, He takes up that of Son of David. Jericho was the first place Israel had to say to when they crossed the Jordan, and a special curse was pronounced against it. But Israel had not walked in obedience, and the Messiah enters not as the king in outward glory, but as the rejected Jesus of Nazareth, with blessing for the remnant that received Him in faith.

"And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho" (Luke 18:35). It is not "came nigh," as if it were necessarily His first approach, but a general expression, just as applicable to His being nigh on His leaving the city. (Compare Matthew and Mark.) "A certain blind man sat by the way side, begging... and he cried, saying, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me" (Luke 18:35,38). He was rebuked by many, but there was the perseverance of faith, and he cried so much the more, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me." Here was a sample of the power of the Name that Israel rejected. The *eye* of the blind was opened then, as it will be in the remnant by-and-by.

Notes on Luke 19

Luke 19.

Next, we have the account of Zacchæus (Luke 19:1-10), for the Spirit of God did not tie Luke to the mere order of time; and morally viewed, it was the fitting sequel to the healing of the blind man. Found only in this Gospel, it is a striking illustration of the grace which receives a man, no matter how low, and in the face of Jewish prejudices. For a publican, a rich chief of the publicans, was justly an object of abhorrence to those who regarded him as the expression of Gentile dominion. All was wrong through sin, and Israel was not humbled. Still it was a sad position for an Israelite, however honest and conscientious Zacchæus might be in it. But it was the day of grace, and “he sought to see Jesus.” There were difficulties, hindrances in him and around; but faith perseveres in spite of opposition. As the blind man was bent on his object, so was the rich publican set on seeing Jesus. This marks the working of God’s Spirit—the apprehension of the worth of the object. We want it and more of it; we know enough to want more. It is an appetite produced by the Holy Spirit. It is a terrible thing, if we, as Christians, have not this craving, this hungering and thirsting after a greater enjoyment of God; for where this is not, deadness and apathy of soul have come in.

Jesus came to the place, and saw him and said unto him, “Zacchæus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at thy house. And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully” (Luke 19:5-6). He had not yet the full knowledge of Jesus, but his desire had been met, and he

had joy. It was neither law nor glory, but a hidden Messiah come in full grace. There was abundant evidence who He was, but in grace He was come down where they were. No matter what people thought. Finding Jesus is everything. Zacchæus had the answer to the want which divine grace had created. Grace does not give at first the knowledge of Christ's work; there may be little or no understanding that we are made the righteousness of God in Him. Hence the first joy often wanes; because, when conscience is accused, I want the consciousness of that righteousness. The first joy is constantly that of discovering that we possess the felt need of the soul for Christ; but the full question as to righteousness may still have to be met in the conscience, though of course every believer in possessing Christ does possess divine righteousness. Nevertheless, much as there is to learn, there is joy. New interests are awakened, new desires arise, a new insight is obtained into good and evil. When there is a deep sense of what it is to be lost and saved, the world (man) is a light matter. But when the pressure on the conscience is removed, too often nature resumes a sort of place, and Christ is not all and everything to the saint.

Zacchæus' heart is opened. There is confidence, which tells itself out. There might be ever so much honest effort to satisfy conscience in his false position; but after all what a place it was! Men murmured. The Lord passed all over. Self-defense was needless. The Lord did not accuse, and speaks of nothing but the salvation which was that day come to the house. Zacchæus was a son of Abraham, and the Son of man was come to seek and to save that which was lost. What, could a Pharisee object? There had been a work with the conscience of Zacchæus, but the Son of man was come and salvation was the word. He brings it. He

gave what Zacchæus had little thought of. He was come to meet the need He had created. He was come to seek, that is, to produce the desire; and to save, that is, to meet the desire.

The Lord was now nigh to Jerusalem, and so He added a parable to correct the thought that the kingdom of God was immediately to appear; for Jerusalem is the city of the great King, and the question of His rejection would be closed there. He shows, on the contrary, that He was going away—going to a far country, to heaven, where He was to receive the kingdom and to return. The time was not come to set up the kingdom on earth. Meanwhile, the business of His servants was to trade with the money He delivered them. When returned, having received the kingdom, He assigns them places according to their faithfulness; for in Luke it is a question of man's responsibility; in the corresponding parable of Matthew God's sovereignty is the point. Difference of gifts appears in Matthew, difference of rewards in Luke. In Luke each servant receives a mina from the Lord; in Matthew all who gained in trading enter alike the joy of their Lord. Here the whole force is, occupy. "Occupy till I come" (Luke 19:13). Our position is serving a rejected Savior till He comes again. We are not yet to share in the glory of the kingdom. When He returns, all will be disposed of impartially, and there will be that which answers to authority over ten cities and over five. The righteousness of God is the same for us as for Paul; but as there is very different service, and different measures of fidelity, so there will be specialty of reward. No doubt it is grace that works, still here there is reward of faithful service. The secret of all service is the due appreciation of

the Master's grace. If one fears Him as "an austere man," there is unfaithfulness too, even on one's own principles.

Luke 19:26 is a universal principle. When through grace there is the realization in our souls of the truth presented to us, we are of those "who have." But if a truth comes before a man, and he talks about it without its being mixed with faith in the heart, even that he hath shall be taken away from him. Truth, if it reveals Christ, humbles me and deals with the evil within. Then it is not only Christ as an object outside me, but a living Christ in my soul. Knowledge, which has not power over the conscience, only puffs up. If truth be not acted on, it troubles the conscience. But how often one sees a conscience, having lost the light, quite easy at a lower standard than before, rejoicing that it has lost its trouble, though the light of truth be lost with it! The soul has sunk below that which had exercised the conscience, and thus the whole standard, principle, and life are lowered, and opportunities of winning Christ lost forever.

Holding fast the truth — Christ — I have Him as it were a part of myself, and learn to hate the evil and to delight in the good; so that I get more, till I grow up into Christ, into the measure of the stature of His fullness. Common duties do not rob us of Him: from these the heart returns with fresh delight into its own center. It is the heart clinging to vanity that spoils our joy; it is anything which exalts self and lowers Christ — an idle thought even, if allowed in the heart. As to the citizens, the Jews on whom He had rights as king, their will was against Him, not only hating Him there while among them, but above all, sending the message after Him, We will not have this man to reign over us. Unsparing vengeance must take its course on them in His presence.

Luke 19:28. Jesus enters Jerusalem as Messiah. His rights as Lord of all were to be asserted and acted on (vss. 29-36). He presents Himself for the last time to Israel, in the lowliness of grace, which was of far greater importance than the kingdom.

This gives rise to the most marked contrast between the disciples and the Pharisees. The whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with loud voice, saying "Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest" (Luke 19:38). Some of the Pharisees appeal to Him to rebuke the disciples, but learn from His lips that if these were silent, the very stones would cry out. There must be a testimony to His glory (Luke 19:37-40).

When Jesus was born, angels announced it to the poor of the flock, and the heavenly host praised God, saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace—good pleasure in men. Such will be the result, and the angels anticipate it, without reference to the hindrances, or to the means. But Christ was rejected here below; and now the disciples say, "Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest." When the question of power is raised, in order to establish the kingdom, there will be war then (Rev. 12). In fact there can be no peace in heaven till Satan and his host are cast out. Then will the King be established in power, when the obstacles shall be taken out of the way. Psalm 118 celebrates this, His mercy enduring forever, spite of all the people's sins. It is the song of the latter day. If God sends peace to the earth in the person of His Son, it is in vain, not as to the accomplishment, but as to present effect. Meanwhile, to faith there is peace in heaven, and when this is asserted in power against the evil spirits in the

heavenly places, there will be blessing indeed. O, what a time will it be! What a relief to the working of God's grace! For now it is ever toil and watching. What, always? Yes, always; and that is not the rest. But then it will be, as sure as God takes His great power and reigns. The Lord shall "hear the heavens," and so forth (Hos. 2:21). There will be an unbroken chain of blessing, and that too on earth. It will not be one "building, and another inhabiting," but blessing flowing down and around to the lowest and the least. Till then, as now, the word is suffering in grace, not victorious power. Never fear persecution: it will make your face shine as an angel's. But God could not be silent if His own Son were cast out. He might leave Him to suffer, but not without a testimony. If there were no others, the stones would speak. And so if we are faithful and near to Christ, this will turn for a testimony.

Next (Luke 19:41-44) we have, not the cursing of the fig-tree, but the spirit of grace in the Lord's weeping over the city. The counsels of God will surely be accomplished, but we ought also to know His real tenderness in Jesus. Those tears were not in vain, whatever the appearances. It was the time of Jerusalem's visitation, but she knew it not. We ought, as having the mind of Christ, to know when and how to interfere spiritually. We are the epistle of Christ, whereby the world should be able to read what God is. Christ manifested Him perfectly. But what did He find in the people? See Luke 19:45-46. God declares His house to be one of prayer: *menthe* Jews—had made it a den of thieves. It was a terrible moral estimate, but this is the true way to judge; that is, having God's word, to take facts as they are. We are ignorant and morally incapable of judging without the word of God. Let the eye be fixed on

Christ and our judgment be formed on things around by the word.

Notes on Luke 20

Luke 20.

The first question raised was by the scribes, as to the authority of Christ and its source. Jesus questions them about the baptism of John: Was it from heaven or of man? They reasoned without conscience. They owned their incompetency, rather than acknowledge His Messiah-ship. The simple child of God receives the word as certainly as Christ gives it. Reliance on God's word is the only sure ground. How can you be certain? God has said it. If God's speaking requires proof, I must have something more sure and true than God. Is the church? Alas! alas!... If God cannot speak so as to claim authority, without another to accredit what He says, there is no such thing as faith.

The parable of the husbandmen (Luke 20:9-18) sets forth the Lord's dealings with Israel, to whom the vineyard was first let, and, upon the rejection of "the Heir," the gift of it to others. Nor was this all. The rejected stone becomes the head of the corner. Whosoever fell on that stone should be broken; but on whomsoever it fell, utter destruction would be the result. The past sins of Jerusalem illustrate the first; for the second we must wait for the execution of judgment when the Lord appears.

Luke 20:19. The question of tribute to Caesar was very subtle. They used the effect of their own wickedness to tempt the Lord. Abstractedly the Jews ought not to have been subject to the Gentiles. And, moreover, the Messiah was come, the Deliverer of Israel. If He said, Obey the Gentiles, where was His delivering power? If He said,

Rebel, they would have had an excuse to deliver Him to Pilate. Because of Israel's sin, God has broken down the keystone of nations, and given power to the Gentile. The Jew has been rebellious under the sentence, and ever craving deliverance from their thralldom. But the Lord answered with divine wisdom. He put them exactly in the place where their sin had put them: Caesar's things are to be rendered to Caesar, and God's things to God.

After settling the question as to this world between God and the people, He next meets the Sadducean or skeptical difficulty as to the next world (Luke 20:27-38). The Lord shows the place of the risen saints in entire contrast with the world. The idea of a general resurrection is set aside. If all rise together, there is uncertainty, a common judgment, etc.; but if the saints are raised by themselves because they are children of God, leaving the rest of the dead for another and distinctive resurrection—a resurrection of judgment, all is changed. No passage of scripture speaks of both rising together. The resurrection is that which most of all distinguishes, and this forever. It is the grand testimony to the difference between good and bad. The saint will be raised because of the Spirit of Christ that dwells in him—the application to his body of that power of life in Christ which has already quickened his soul. It is a resurrection from among the dead, as was Christ's. So here, "they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that age," for such it is, "and the resurrection from the dead." "They are equal to the angels, and are the children of God." Luke adds another characteristic point omitted elsewhere; "all live unto him." It is the present blessed living unto God of those who have died, and await the resurrection from among the dead.

Then in Luke 20:41-44 the Lord puts His question, How is David's Son, David's Lord? This was just what the Jews could not understand. It was the hinge on which turned the change in the whole moral system. He had taken the place of the holy dependent One, a pilgrim as others, and He had drunk of the brook by the way. He was going on in meekness and quietness, but living by the refreshments which came from God His Father. Thus having emptied Himself, humbled Himself, He is now exalted by God. This great universal principle, "he that humbleth himself shall be exalted, and he that exalteth himself shall be abased" (Matt. 23:12) is fully exemplified in the two Adams. The first Adam, man's nature, would exalt itself to be "as God," until in its full ripeness Antichrist will exalt himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped.

Satan tempted man at the beginning to make himself like God, and at the end God shall send them strong delusion to believe a lie. Satan, not being able to exalt himself in heaven, will attempt to do it through the seed of man; but in the end shall be abased (Isa. 14:12-15). In the last Adam we have Him who was God humbling Himself, going down, becoming obedient unto death, even the vilest, and then we see that humbled One going back to the place of power at God's right hand, but as man as well as God. God highly exalted Him, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow. Having been obedient all through, in humiliation, He is exalted to be David's Lord. This took Him out of the line of Jewish promises, though as David's Son of course He had them.

The Jews did not understand the Scriptures, and fulfilled them through not understanding them. God's ways have gone on through all, manifesting His grace and patience

towards man. He placed man on the earth, and then sent law, prophets, and so forth, until man gets to the end in rejecting all. God tries man and then brings in the new man, who is the fulfillment of all His blessed counsels—the second Man. Then He takes up the last Adam as the heavenly man into a heavenly place and all now depends not on the responsibility of man, but on the stability of God. Life, righteousness, and glory descend from heaven. Is it life that is needed? God gives the life of Christ in resurrection. Is it righteousness? It is a divine righteousness that God gives. Is it a kingdom? It is the kingdom of heaven. All flows down not simply from God in grace, but from the place which man has in glory, from the counsels of God about the heavenly man in glory. He has first taken Him up, and thence the blessing flows down. The man Christ Jesus has fully met all man's responsibilities. This is the reason of the fullness of the blessing of the gospel, and also that of the kingdom to come. The gospel is the power of God, and the kingdom is to be set up in heaven. The king is gone into the far country; and when He returns, it will be to bring in the kingdom of heaven. All the counsels of God now take their center and seat in heaven. Thus, in the largest way, the turning-point in all the plans and counsels of God is Jesus being set at the right hand of God. All the character, the stability, and the perfectness of our blessing takes its source from the exalted Jesus. The character of it is heavenly; the stability is what God has done; and the righteousness that fits me for it is God's.

The Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, has come down to bear witness to Him, on whom peace of the soul rests, even on the accomplished righteousness of Him who is taken up into glory. His office is to work within, and make us

down here manifest what God is. All this we have as the result of Christ, instead of accomplishing the promises as David's Son, bringing them in as David's Lord.

Mark the moral blessedness of this general principle: "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Christ humbled Himself—not was humbled, that is another thing. "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." That is what we are to do—take the lowest place. We cannot do this till we are Christians; but it is our glory to take the lowest, and hear Him say, "Come up higher." He hath left "us an example that we should follow his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). The Lord Jesus has been rejected as David's Son; He will come forth as David's Lord.

Now, while He is thus hidden, we see the church's place. We are "hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3), and have our portion by faith, as united to Him, while He is out of sight. The Holy Spirit, having come down, gives us a place as associated with Him in all the blessedness of the Father's house, and in all the glory which He has to be displayed by-and-by.

The place of Eve was one of union with Adam in the dominion over all things (Gen. 1:26-28; 5:2). We find the church in the display of Christ's glory, only as by grace, the bride and companion of Christ, never as part of the inheritance. Viewed even individually, we are "joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17). It is of the last importance to the saints in these days to apprehend the distinct place which we have, as one with Christ, the heavenly Man.

Notes on Luke 21

Luke 21.

At the close of Luke 20 and the beginning of Luke 21 we have a most instructive, though painful, contrast between the selfish hypocrisy of the scribes, whom He condemns before the people, and the real devoted love of the widow, whom He singles out for honor. Remark also that the Lord knows how to separate the intention of a sincere soul from the system that surrounds it, judging the whole state of that with which the individual is associated. Observe, further, the difference of giving one's living and one's superfluity. It is easy to compliment God with presents, and thus really minister to self; but she who gives her living gives herself in devotedness to God, and proves her dependence on God. Thus, the two mites of her who had these only expressed all this perfectly: for there was need and everything else to hinder, while the applause of men and the pride of the donor found no place here. For Jewish splendor the act had little worth; but the Lord saw, and bore witness of, the poor widow, blessed in her deed.

Luke 21:5 and following. The account which the Lord gives in this Gospel of the sorrows of Jerusalem is also, like the preceding, much more allied to the simple fact of the judgment on the nation and the change of dispensation. It differs much from Matthew 24, which fully refers to what is to arrive at the end; while our Gospel bears, more than the first two, on the then present time and setting aside of Jerusalem. Hence, Luke plainly sets forth the siege and destruction by Titus, and the times of the Gentiles. Let it

be observed also that the question in verse 7 extends only to the predicted destruction. Consequently, in what follows, we have the judgment on the nation taken as a whole, from its then destruction till the times of the Gentiles (with whose economy this Gospel is so much occupied) be fulfilled. Nation should rise against nation, signs from heaven and sorrows on earth follow. And before all these the disciples would be objects of hostility, but this would turn for a testimony instead of destroying theirs. They were to go on testifying, while the unhappy devoted city where they were filled up its iniquity. The Lord would permit trial, but not a hair of their head would be lost. But this would close. The sign given here is in no wise the abomination of desolation, but an historical fact—Jerusalem encompassed with armies. Its desolation now approached. They were then to flee, not to return. These were days of vengeance (it is not said of the unprecedented tribulation, as in Matthew, which is only in the latter day). All that was written was to be fulfilled. Great distress there was in the land, and wrath on this people. Slaughter first and captivity afterward wrought their cruel work of devastation, and Jerusalem till this hour abides, the boast and prey of Gentile lords, and so must it be till their day is over.

In these earlier verses (8-19) the Lord dwells on the dangers, duties, and trials of the disciples before the sack of Titus. Specially were they to beware of a pretended deliverer, and of the cry that the time (that is, of deliverance) was at hand. Neither were they to be terrified by wars or commotions, any more than seduced by fair promises. These things must first be, but the end not immediately. Besides, it was not only confusion and woes and signs of coming

change and evil outside. Before all these they themselves were to be in affliction and persecution for Christ's sake.

Then in Luke 21:20-24, comes the actual judgment of the city and people, already judged virtually by His rejection. This extends down to our own days in principle. But all is not yet fulfilled. For in verse 25 begins the Lord's description of the closing scene—a judgment not on the Jews merely, but on the Gentiles also; for the powers of the heavens, the source of authority, shall be shaken, as in Haggai 2 and Hebrews 12. This is not said to be immediately after the siege of Titus, but on the contrary, room is left for the long course of treading down of Jerusalem under Gentiles, till their times are run out. It is in Matthew that we must look for the great tribulation of the last days, occupied as the first evangelist is with the consequences of Messiah's rejection, especially to Israel. Therefore it is said there, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days" (Matt. 24:29), that is, the short crisis of "Jacob's trouble" yet to come. Here, however, after mention of the times of the Gentiles, it is said that "there shall be signs in the sun and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and waves roaring, men's hearts failing them" (Luke 21:25-26). Men were astounded because they saw not the end, and trembled as they were dragged along to some unknown awful conclusion. For principles were at work, they knew not how, dragging them along whether or no. The coming of the Son of man disclosed all the scene to the disciples. But it is clear from the circumstances, and especially from the character of the redemption spoken of (vs. 28), that it is a question, not of Christians, but of earthly disciples, and of an earthly deliverance by judgment here below. The Lord in mercy

turns the terror of man into a sign of deliverance for the remnant of that day.

Verses 31, 32 are interesting in this point of view here, because they furnish remarkable evidence, first, that the kingdom of God does not mean the gospel of His grace; and, secondly, that this generation cannot refer to the space of time from the prophecy to the destruction of Jerusalem. 1. For when they see these things coming to pass (and He had spoken of the final, universal trouble for the whole habitable earth, and not merely of what has befallen the Jews), they are to conclude that the kingdom of God is nigh. Now, even if it were only the Romans taking away their place and nation, and still more if it include the latter-day trouble, it is undeniable that the gospel had extended far and wide before the first. In fact, the manifestation of its influence was declining rather before that time, as we see in the later epistles. But the things here seen were signs like the budding of the trees, and the kingdom of God is evidently to be at the coming of the King, when the Lord God Almighty takes His great power and reigns. That there was a partial analogous judgment, when Jerusalem fell, is true, but verses 25-28 ought to leave no doubt of a wider subsequent judgment, with signs which introduce, not the sorrows of the Jews, but the Son of man coming in His kingdom. 2. For a similar reason, "this generation" does not apply to a mere lifetime, but is viewed morally, as in Deuteronomy 32, Psalm 12, and many other scriptures. It is here expressly put at the close, after not only the fall of Jerusalem, but the totally distinct scene of Christ's coming in power and glory. The expression in verse 33 is very solemn. Deeper interests were involved than a casual change as to

Jerusalem. The time was wrapped up in purposed obscurity, but nothing more sure than the facts predicted.

The Lord has provided for His then disciples what was needful, but also in the written word for the like times to come. Still, though the principle be always true, verse 34 clearly applies to a day to come on the earth. The privilege is to escape the judgments, and stand before the Son of man. This again is earthly, not the rapture to heaven. The great moral principles, of course, remain true for all; specially indeed for those who, by virtue of a higher calling, can enjoy them in a more excellent way.

Luke 21:37-38. The Lord yet returned to give testimony, walking and working in the day; but His resting-place was there, whence He did depart, and where His feet shall stand in that day. Patient in service, He taught daily and early in the temple; at night He was separate from the judged city. His time was now come.

Notes on Luke 22

Luke 22.

How the carnal mind was shown to be enmity against God in the rejection of Christ! Wickedness was summed up and brought out in all—people, priests, rulers. If a friend, he is a traitor; if disciples, they either fled when danger approached, or denied Him when near. The religious chiefs who ought to have owned the Messiah took Him to the infidel power of the world. He who was in the place of judgment washed his hands, owning Christ's innocence, but gives Him up to man's will and rage. Thus man's evil was brought into complete juxtaposition with that which was perfect, and this in putting Him to death. It is no use to look for good in man. Not that there are no amiable traits of nature, but God has no place at all if man is put to the test.

Along with this is the picture of the Lord's perfect patience through it all. Not man only, but Satan was there in temptation. It was the power of darkness, as well as man's hour. And the Lord Jesus passes through this scene of men's wickedness and Satan's power; His heart melted like wax, but the effect always being the manifestation of perfectness. An angel strengthens Him; for He was really man, but perfect man, enduring all that could try Him, and nothing brought out but perfect grace and perfect obedience. Whenever there was sorrow, His love surmounts the suffering to help and comfort others.

Luke 22:3-6. It is a solemn thought that the nearer to Jesus, if there is not spiritual life, the more a man resists

God, and the more sure and sad an instrument of the enemy he becomes.

If truth has been resented and not received, nowhere has Satan so much power.⁶ Covetousness was the means used; but though they plotted to betray and crucify Him in a corner, this could not be; they were obliged to accomplish it according to God's purposes.

Then the light from behind the scene (vss. 8-13) makes a passage. It is the Lord; and no matter what He suffers, or what is before Him, yet we find the divine knowledge and power. There is the chamber! What calm and peaceful dignity! It is no effort, nothing to display a character. All yields before the un-witnessed authority of this rejected Savior—all but that to which it had been most manifested, the un-renewed heart of man. To the householder, unknown it seems to every eye but one, it is enough to hear, "The Master saith unto thee."

Luke 22:14-15. How blessed to see such perfect human affections combined with His divine knowledge of all things! "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer"—like one leaving his family and first desiring a farewell meeting. When we see the divine glory in the person of Christ, we find the human affections shining out. (Compare Matt. 17:27.) It is this which gives Him a power and charm which no object else has: so that God can delight in man and man can delight in God. The Lord breaks every link with the old thing (vs. 16). It is not setting up the kingdom here, but setting up man with God when the old connection was impossible. He was taking a

6 This is a sample of Luke's manner as to dates. The entrance of Satan into Judas was what was morally necessary to present here; not so the particulars. Strictly, he put it into Judas' heart then, and entered after the sop was received.

new place where flesh and blood could not enter. His death and resurrection introduce a new relation with God.

The Lord distinguishes here between the paschal lamb and the wine, and both from the institution of His supper. He entered in the fullest way into all the feelings of Israel—the Israel of God, into the interests of the people as such, till His rejection put them on other ground, and divine favor passed into another scene by the resurrection, becoming Himself the Substitute, the true Paschal Lamb. His disciples held the foremost rank as to this fellowship, as we have Hushai the king's friend. With them He desired the last testimony of parting and love. But while thus expressing His affection to them, He assumes manifestly (vs. 18) the Nazarite character, which was always His morally, but now externally and painfully: "I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come." He postpones His joy with them as in the common enjoyment of the kingdom, till then.

Then (Luke 22:19-20) He institutes the memorial of His better redemption, of His self-sacrificing dying love. If He separated Himself now to God in His joy, it was not want of love to His disciples, but its fullest display. It was to be done "in remembrance" of Him. We remember Him suffering, dead, absent; we know Him as a present living Savior. The new covenant is established in His blood. We cannot, in all the joy of fellowship with Christ above, forget what brought us into it. On one side, it is a body broken and blood shed; on the other, it is Himself and all the perfectness of love in dying for us. We are united to Him as a risen Christ, but He calls us to remember Him as a dead Christ. The blessedness of this last is in the work He did alone, by virtue of which I am put in union with

Himself, alive again for evermore. As to man's part in it (Luke 22:21-23), it was treachery and wickedness.

The Lord then distinctly sets forth this calling to walk in His own lowliness and not as the world. Earthly grandeur was recognized among the Jews, but now it was sentenced, like all their system, as the rudiments of the world. All other greatness, though under the form of being benefactors, was worldly. He was one that served. The grace of His heart sets them right without a reproach. He lets them know that whatever high place they sought, He took a low one. He might have said, Nothing will break down this horrid selfishness; yet says He, "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations." And He is the same now. What we should seek is to have as much of the burden of the church as we can. Suffering thus with Him, His heart goes on with us.

Luke 22:31. Peter was bold enough in the flesh to enter temptation. But it is impossible for man to stand where it is a question of good and evil. He is a sinner and cannot go through that trial. If God judges, flesh comes to nothing. There is the weakness of human nature, but, besides, Satan's title and power over man, who had brought out his own condition in God's presence, and come under death as the judgment of God. I may have learned in grace that the flesh is thus profitless, but it must be learned by intercourse with the enemy, if not with God. For Simon, the Lord prayed that his faith should not fail; all his self-confidence must perish. Nor did he distrust Christ like Judas, who had no faith. What enabled him afterward to strengthen his brethren? He discovered that there is perfect grace in Christ even when he did worst.

Luke 22:35-38 show an entire change of circumstances. Previously He had protected them and supplied all, as Messiah disposing of everything here. That was now gone, since the Righteous One was being more and more rejected. He had come, able to destroy Satan's power, but it was the Lord, and man would not have Him; that is the condition the world is in. He must be reckoned among the transgressors! What link could there be between God and man? Humanity is a condemned thing, because it refused Christ. You may find a scrupulous conscience as to putting the money in the treasury, but no conscience in betraying and crucifying Him. But it is in a rejected, dead Christ that faith delights. The Christ that man scorns, it requires faith and grace to own. But the disciples still rested on man's strength, not on Messiah crucified in weakness, and said "Here are two swords." The Lord in saying "It is enough," alludes to their words, and implies that they did not enter into His mind. He did not want to say more.

Luke 22:39-46. There are siftings needed to exercise us and to judge flesh. Christ, of course, did not need this, but dealt with all in communion with His Father. To Him it was a path of obedience, a blessed opportunity of doing God's will; to Peter it was Satan's power Christ did not speak of the wickedness of the priests, the will of the people, or the injustice of Pilate, but of the cup His Father gave Him. There was positive intercourse with God about the trial, before the time came. And so it must ever be. It is late to put the armor on when we ought to be in the battle. A man living with God, when he gets into trial, goes through it, in his measure, as Christ did. He stands in the evil day, because he has been with God when there was no evil day. On the cross it was not a question of

communion; in the garden Christ is in communion with the Father, as to Satan's power, which was about to fall on Him. He felt all, but succumbed under nothing. Thus, instead of entering into temptation, He was in the highest exercise of spirituality, accomplishing the will of God in the most difficult circumstances, and the most perfect submission where it cost everything. Our Father never can lead us into sin, but He may into temptation, that is, into the place of sifting, where the flesh is exposed, when this is needful, because hardness, or levity, or inattention to His patient warnings, has come in. It is the last, and often necessary, means of self-knowledge and discipline. Though it is great grace that He should take such pains, yet seeing our weakness, and the terribleness of the conflict with the enemy, it will become us to pray that we may not be cast into the furnace. In such times a bad conscience drives to despair. The flesh, in its undiscerning carelessness, meets the trial in uncertainty, or carnal opposition, and falls. If, on the other hand, trial comes, we learn our position before God — watching, prayer, entreaty, spreading all before Him in child-like confidence, but submissive desire that His will be done.

The Lord was thoroughly man in this, for an angel appears and ministers, strengthening Him; for the conflict of His soul was great; but it urged Him, in the realization of the trial, to pray more earnestly. The effect of this is to see more clearly the power of evil and the sorrow; and that so as to act on the very body. He was in agony Himself, but always says "Father." He is, and speaks, in His relationship as Son; not yet the victim before God, but the sufferer in spirit, feeling all the depths of the waters He is passing through, but crying out of them to His Father. Satan tried

to stop Christ with the difficulty, when he could not beguile Him with the pleasure. But He went through all with His Father. At the cross was another thing—the power of God against sin.

Luke 22:47-53. It is blessed to see these two things brought together—patience with men, and yet power to stop everything. Having been in agony with God, He is calm before man. When the servant's ear was cut off, He puts forth His hand to heal. What a picture of man, what a picture of God, if we look here at Christ!

Luke 22:54-62. When we tremble before men, it is when we have not been with God. Peter breaks down, proving the deceitfulness of the flesh. In Jesus suffering as He was, there was naught to disable the perfect and simple action of grace at each moment required. When the cock crew, He turned and looked on Peter, who remembered His word, went out and wept bitterly.

Luke 22:63-71. The Lord spent the night, not before His judges, who took their ease till morning, before they judged the Lord of glory, but with the men whom they employed, the object of all injury and insult. Then, when it suited the convenience of the Jewish rulers, they brought Him to their council; but the Lord knew it was not the time of testimony, and left them to their weakness. The presenting of Messiah to the Jews was finished; from this the Son of man was to be seated at the right hand of God. All was settled with God—they could go on. They draw the right conclusion, and He conceals nothing. He was the Son of God. They must be guilty, not of mistake, but of condemning Him because He was the Son of God and owned it.

Notes on Luke 23

Luke 23.

Luke 23:1-25. Religious iniquity had now only to lead on the world to finish the wickedness in which itself had taken the lead. The civil power must give in to the willful evil of the apostate people of God. This is the history of the world, and of the two, the religious side is always nearest to Satan. The chief priests manifested their enmity by their accusation, which was calculated to arouse the jealousy of the governor; charging, on Christ what was entirely false as to Caesar, but with the subtle groundwork of that which they knew (reckoning on His truth) He could not deny. The guilt of the Jews was complete, as was also that of the Gentiles, for Pontius Pilate declared Him innocent, and desired to release Him. Cruel enough himself, the Roman governor disliked cruelty in others, but he would not go so far as to save Him from the malice of His enemies: it would have cost something to do this; it threatened his interest, and Pilate gave way. The one thing that is strong in the world is enmity against Christ.

But there was another form of evil to be introduced, to wit, Herod, the apostate king of apostate Israel; and in rejecting Jesus all are friends, however jealous and divided. How terrible the union between the fourth beast and God's external people! But if the Gentiles failed shamefully in protecting the just and hence fell into basely unrighteous judgment, the activity of an evil will was with the Jews. Three times the opportunity of a relenting voice was given; but while the governor's indifference was as plain as the

disappointed insolence of Herod, every time the cry of the people increased in ardor for the death of the Messiah. Pilate, therefore, released the guilty Barabbas, whom they desired, to appease the Jews, and delivered Jesus to their will.

Luke 23:26-31. It was a terrible time and full of violence. It mattered little whom they met, if they could only force them to help in their iniquity. Their hour was struck, and all fell into the same mass of rejection and insult of Christ, save that the Jews acted with more knowledge. The forms of privilege became sorrows and harbingers of terror; they must be laid low, for all was untrue now. The natural feelings, touched by affecting circumstances, as we see in the weeping daughters of Jerusalem, did not change this. They understood neither the cross of Christ nor the ruin which awaited themselves. One may be affected with comparison, as if one were superior to Christ, and fall under the judgment consequent on His rejection and death. No humiliation of Jesus put Him out of His place of perfect capability of dealing with all others from God. Alas! it was not only on Pilate and Herod, nor on the chief priests, that judgment was coming, but on the women that lamented Him, unconscious of their own state, which was under condemnation. Neither natural conscience, nor natural religiousness, nor natural feelings will do—nothing short of the glory of God in Jesus. And if He, the living and true vine, who indeed bore fruit to God, was thus dealt with, what must be the lot of the fruitless and unprofitable, for such branches were they? Where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Man rejects the green tree, and God rejects the dry. Life was there in the person of Jesus, and they

would not have it, and are therefore given up; it cannot be had now but through a dead and risen Christ.

Luke 23:32-43. There is the setting aside of all they looked for here in present deliverance, for Christ must die. But if we are also to see how low man can go morally, we learn, at the same time, that Christ in His grace can go lower still. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone" (John 12:24). Therefore, whenever you see an attempt (and it is the attempt of man's religion) to connect a living Christ, before death and resurrection, with living sinners, be sure there is error. It unites sin with the Lord from heaven, and it denies that its wages is death. Had Christ delivered Himself, as the rulers, with the people, said in derision, He would not have delivered us. He must pass through death, and take a higher place, even in resurrection, and there He takes us. By itself, the incarnation cannot bring life and redemption to those who are dead in trespasses and sins. We need to be set beyond all in resurrection-life in Christ.

Thus, then, in spite of the grace of Jesus in intercession, Jews and Gentiles joined in mockery of the crucified; yet God had prepared, even here, the consolation of His mercy for Jesus in a poor sinner. But no sorrow, no shame, no suffering brings the heart too low to scorn Jesus; a gibbeted robber despises Him! There is an instinct, so to speak, in every un-renewed heart, against Jesus, which was not quelled even by that power of love in which He was going down into the deepest humiliation, to suffer the wrath due to sin. Say not that you are one whit better than this wretched man. "There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth; there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are

altogether become unprofitable” (Rom. 3:10-12). In two words, there is *no difference*. You are as bad, in God’s sight, as the railing impenitent thief. See now the fruit of grace in the other. Grace works in a man who was in as low a condition as he who, notwithstanding his own dying agony and disgrace, had pleasure in outraging the Lord of glory; indeed both had done it (Mark 15:32). But what more blessed and certain than the salvation of this thief, now that he bows to the name of Jesus? He is going to Paradise in companionship with the Lord whom he owned.

It is often idly said, that there was one saved in this way, that none might despair, and but one, that none might presume. The truth is, that this is the only way whereby any poor sinner can be saved. There is but one and the same salvation for all. There was evidently no time for him to do anything, had this been the way; but all is done for him. That very day his knees were to be broken. But how could he get into Paradise! Christ wrought his deliverance through His own death, and his eye was opened in faith to what Christ was doing.

Nor was it only that Christ’s work was wrought for him—the ground on which his soul rested for salvation. There was a mighty moral work wrought in him through the revelation of Christ to his soul by the Spirit who convinced him of his utter sinfulness. “Dost not thou fear God” (Luke 23:40), is his rebuke to his railing fellow, “seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we, indeed, justly.” It was not all joy. Conscience had its place. There is a real sense of good and evil; for he has got in spirit into God’s presence, and this, making him forget circumstances, elevates him into a preacher of righteousness. And if he owns the rightness of his own punishment in honest confession of

sin, what a wonderful testimony he bears to Christ! "This man hath done nothing amiss." It was just as if he had known Christ all his life. He had a divine perception of His character; and so with the Christian now. Have you such jealousy about the spotlessness and glory of Christ, that you cannot help crying out when you hear Him slighted? He believed that He was the Lord, the Son of God, and so could answer with assurance for what He had been as a man. As completely a man as any other, the holy obedience of Christ was divine. "This man hath done nothing amiss." What a response in the renewed heart to the delight of sinlessness! His *eye* glances, as it were, over the whole life of Christ; he could answer for Christ anywhere, because he has learned to know himself.

Then he says, turning to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom" (Luke 23: 42). As soon as he can get rid of what was sad, when he has done with his testimony to the other thief, his heart turns to Christ instinctively. How undistracted he was! Was he thinking of his pain? or of the people around the cross? As is always the case, where God's presence is realized, he was absorbed. In the extremity of helplessness, as to outward appearance, he hears the Shepherd's voice, and recognized Him as the Savior and King. He wants Christ to think of him. The judgment of men was that Christ was a malefactor. The weeping women saw not who He was. But no degradation of circumstances could hide the glory of the Person who hung by his side. He owned Jesus as the Lord, and knows that His kingdom will certainly come. The other malefactor thought only, if he thought at all, of present deliverance; but this one saw the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. His mind was set, not on being free

from bodily pain, but on the loving recognition of Christ in glory. He looks not to earth, nor nature, but to another kingdom, where death could not come. There was not a cloud, not a doubt, but the peaceful settled assurance that the Lord would come in His kingdom.

And the Lord gave him more than his faith asked. There was the answer of present peace. It was not only the kingdom by-and-by, but "Verily, I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). As if He said, You shall have the kingdom when it comes, but I am giving now soul-salvation; you are to be associated at once with Me in a way far better and more than the kingdom, blessed and true as it is. For indeed the work was accomplished on the cross, which could transport a soul into Paradise. If the Savior had taken the sinner's place, the sinner is by grace entitled to take the place of the Savior. The poor thief might know but little of Christ's work and its effect, but the Holy Spirit had fixed his heart on the person of Christ. The words of the Lord (vs. 43) imply the atonement, by virtue of which we are made fit to be His companions in the presence of God. The work of Christ is as perfect now for us, as then for him; it is as much accomplished for us as if we were already caught up into Paradise. How distinct this is from anything like progress of the soul to fit it for heaven! And how wonderful that such a soul should be a comfort to the Savior! He had come into the condemnation; yea, and wrath was on Him to the uttermost. And now the converted thief was a bright witness of perfect grace and eternal salvation through His blood.

Verses 44-49. The scene was closed which let in the light beyond through the portals of a heart now purged by faith, and the darkness proper, to the hour took now its

suiting course — specially over Israel, it would seem; “and the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst” (Luke 23:45). Thus the way into the holiest was made manifest by the act which had its place in this darkness, and God in the grace of Christ’s sacrifice shone forth upon the world. Darkness of judgment as it was to one, the light broke through, and access was opened within the veil. All was finished, and the Lord with no hesitating voice but aloud cried, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46). This was not Jewish blessing, (for the living, the living, they shall praise Thee), but it was much higher; it was sonship, death overcome, and the occasion merely of presenting the spirit, safe, happy, confident, notwithstanding death, into the Father’s care and presence. This is an immense principle, and, short of resurrection, of the highest possible importance. Death in the hands of Jesus—what a fact! The centurion, in the course of duty, struck at least in natural conscience, glorified God and owned a righteous man on the cross. The masses were troubled and went away, auguring no good. Those who knew Him, and the women from Galilee, were more nearly interested, but in fear stood afar off.

Luke 23:50-56. But the providence and operation of God, the righteous Judge, took measures for the body of the Holy One. If the more prominent witnesses were set aside, others feeble in the faith are found active and faithful in the post of danger, confession, and attachment to the Lord. How often the difficulties which frighten those force these forward! So was it with Joseph of Arimathea, for Jesus must be “with the rich in his death” (Isa. 53:9). The women too, in true but ignorant affection, make useless preparation, awaiting the just Jewish time for a Lord who

had passed far beyond their faith. The resurrection was soon to usher in the dawn of a bright morrow: for the honor of the grave, like the intentions of the women from Galilee, was of a Jewish character, and all this was now closed in death.

Notes on Luke 24

Luke 24.

What now occupies our evangelist is the Risen Man again with His disciples and the testimony to the world founded on the resurrection—this new truth and power above all the principles of natural life. The door of the cross is shut on all that man in the flesh is, and the new thing is introduced in this risen Christ. Resurrection is an entirely new condition; but even the Jew could not have the sure mercies of David without it. Man, lawless and under law, has had the sentence of death pronounced on him. He may pride himself on his natural powers, but he is without God. He has rejected the One who came to him, a man in perfect divine grace, and in so doing has fully shown what he is. Therefore says the Lord, “Now is the judgment of this world” (John 12:31).

An entirely new ground appears, and this is here brought out in Christ Himself. Our bodies are still the same, but the life, character, motive, means, end are altogether new in the Christian. “Old things are passed away, behold all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). The women, pre-occupied with their own thoughts and affections, come with their spices to anoint the dead body of Jesus, while He was already living in the perfume of His work and offering before God, having effected all that placed man anew before God the Father, the last Adam in living acceptance. Then they were thrown into an unlooked-for difficulty at first, for they did not find the Lord’s body. Neither did they know He was risen. They understood not that there was

neither judgment nor sin remaining. There may be real and great love to Jesus without understanding this. But soon the question was put which involved the answer to all. "Why seek ye the living One among the dead?" These women, faithful if ignorant, were not forgotten of the Lord; and He whose ways are grace has preserved their memorial and their early seeking of the Lord, thence to bear the message to the apostles themselves, but to them the words were as idle tales. Peter's heart, broken and contrite, was the more affected by what he heard, and ran to the sepulcher, and having seen the linen clothes laid aside there, went away wondering. Surely it was a marvelous secret, baffling and rising above all human thought! (Luke 24:1-42).

Luke's statements of circumstances are always general. In John we have more details, especially developing Mary Magdalene's devoted affection to His person, but showing also how little she as yet knew of the power of God in resurrection.

Luke 24:13-27. The touchingness of this interview with the Lord on the journey to Emmaus need not be spoken of. How the Lord draws out all their thoughts! But He is here altogether as a man, and presenting the truth they speak of Jewishly. How naturally their minds rested always in the same circle! He was a prophet, and they hoped He might redeem Israel. The fact of the resurrection occupied their attention, but it had no link with the counsels of God. They were astonished, and, like others before them, there they rested. Christ takes up quite other ground, though it was only in the way of intelligence and not yet the power of the Holy Spirit. "O fools," says He, "and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken" (Luke 24:25). These He expounds, and opens their understanding to

them; for though viewed completely as man, He operates divinely and spiritually on their mind. "Ought not," said He—was it not the counsel of God plainly revealed in His word? What He presses is the mind of God in the scriptures relative to the Christ. This was an immense step; it took them out of their egotism and the egoistical character of Judaism. Their thought was of the redemption of Israel by power. They had no idea of a new and heavenly life, though of course they had it. Even as to the Christ, death must come in if God were to be vindicated and man really blessed, and so Moses and all the prophets had taught. "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?"—not set up His kingdom down here, but "enter into his glory."

Luke 24:28-35. Then we have a most graphic account of the scene at Emmaus. "He made as though he would have gone further." Why should He, to their eye "a stranger," intrude? "But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent....And it came to pass, as they sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him, and he vanished out of their sight."

This was not celebrating the Lord's supper with them; yet was it taking up that part of it—the act of breaking the bread—which was the sign of His death. He was not now merely as the living Bread that came down from heaven, but as He had said, this "is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6:51)—not which I will take, but give. He did take flesh, of course, in order to give it; but it was His death that became the life of the world. For Jew or Gentile there was no other way. The condition of man

was such that he could *be* quickened only in connection with the cross. All that was in man, as a child of Adam, was under sentence of death and judgment. Christ, by grace, entered into the place of man—came where I am, that I might be on equal terms with Him, as far as acceptance with God; His broken body shows me that I have got that which brings me to God. A dead sinner can find life and divine favor only in a dead Christ. So the Lord had taught in John 6. To eat His flesh and drink His blood must be in order to have life.

It was not any longer a question of His bodily presence merely as incarnate. Redemption was absolutely necessary, and faith in it. Christ is to be fed upon, not alone as a living Messiah, nor only as One alive again for evermore in resurrection; but, besides that, as He who died, His body broken and blood shed in atonement. Thus it was the Lord was known to the disciples at Emmaus, though it was not the Lord's supper. Their hearts had been opened by what encouraged them in connecting the truth of God with the facts of human unbelief and Christ's rejection, and thus turning the cause of their despair into joy and peace by the sight of the counsels of God in it. But His actual revelation was by the affecting circumstance of personal association in the breaking of bread. It was Himself who broke the bread. There could be no mistake. He was gone in a moment—"vanished out of their sight" (Luke 24:31). But His object was gained. They had *life* through His death.

And He was risen. The body was a spiritual body, and had flesh and bones, which a spirit has not. He had shown them not only the fact, but its necessity. Why does He not say "did," but "must rise again from the dead?" (John 20:9). Because all the sentence must be passed on the first Adam.

All that I have now is in the last Adam: I am not only quickened, but quickened together with Christ, having all trespasses forgiven. Christ, by His death, put them away for all who believe, and for such, all that belonged to the first Adam is clean gone. This is power over the principle of sin, which as a fact is still within. And hence the apostle bids the believers reckon themselves dead to sin. In the power of the Holy Spirit, giving me the consciousness of new life in Christ, I am to mortify my members here below, because I have to apply the death of Christ to my old nature. The monkish principle tries to kill sin in order to get life, but the apostle shows that we must have life by faith in Christ in order to treat sin as a dead thing. See Romans 6-8.

The holding of the disciples' eyes was of importance. To have recognized Jesus would have been in their state to have satisfied their thoughts. The Lord, on the other hand, engaging their hearts by all God said of Him, furnished them with scriptural intelligence; and then in the act of intimate friendship, which recalled the great truth of His death, brought to mind His great deliverance. "We walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). Filled with the concentrating event which began a new world, they hastened back to Jerusalem, where the eleven and others were occupied. "The Lord," said the latter, "is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon." Then the two told the tale of their wondrous journey, and still more wondrous recognition of Jesus in breaking of bread. The Lord was proving that there should be independent witnesses.

Luke 24:36-53. Thus their hearts were prepared. Yet in the fact of this new thing, "the beginning, the firstborn from the dead" (Col. 1:18), there was that to which earthly hearts could ill assort themselves. The Lord presents Himself as

the very same man, all through and in every way. In His conversation with the two, it had been just the same; all was human, though what no man ever was, and what none but God could be, was shown in and through it. Here also His hands, His feet, His previous wounds are presented. He takes of fish and of an honey-comb, and eats before them. Two sentiments had overpowering possession of the disciples—joy to see Himself again, and astonishment. The Lord presents the truth of resurrection, not as a doctrine, but in living reality, thus restoring their souls and making them know Him most familiarly, risen indeed, but yet a man properly and truly. “And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures” (Luke 24:44-45).

This showed the standing before God in justification of life and liberty. But another thing was wanted before men—power. This is not the question before God, where the Christian stands as Christ stands, “accepted in the beloved” (Eph. 1:6). But the testimony of the Christian here below, whether preaching or anything else, needs power to be given. This power was promised to the disciples, but even yet they must wait for it. We must not confound service of any kind with standing. The power of the Spirit is requisite to live before man—power over and above the new birth, and distinct from spiritual understanding. This last is needed to give us the apprehension of our standing in Christ; and when He opens our understandings to understand the Scriptures, it does not puff up. It is a revelation of Himself and leads to communion with Him.

Yet the other want still remains. Even this knowledge is not necessarily power. The testimony and purpose of God in the word has to be fulfilled.

The great truth of a suffering and risen Christ reaches out to the Gentiles. In Matthew His association with the Jewish remnant is taken up. Consequently He meets them in Galilee after, as before, His resurrection; and thence flows the commission to go and disciple all the Gentiles. But all this is dropped in Luke. Jerusalem, Emmaus, and Bethany, above all, are prominent; from thence He ascends to heaven, where He has to do with poor sinners. The testimony was to begin at Jerusalem expressly: the riches of His grace must be shown first where there was the deepest guilt. The cross broke this link with the Jews as a Jewish Messiah, but opened the door of repentance and remission of sins, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. "And ye are witnesses." Then came in the need of power. "And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). This all-important sign of Christ's exaltation could only be obtained for man by the reception of Jesus in heaven when redemption was effected. The Holy Spirit had ever acted in creation, in providence, in revelation, in regeneration, and in every good thing, but He had never been given before. It hung on the glory of Jesus: to this the Holy Spirit could become a servant in man; for it was the divine counsel and the perfection of love.

Meanwhile, before this endowment, they returned with great joy to the city which their Lord had left. Their hearts were filled with the influence of the great fact, that their Master was glorified, though it was still associated with Jewish thoughts. And these two elements reproduce

themselves in the Acts of the Apostles, particularly in the earlier part.

On the Gospel of Luke

Luke 4-5.

I hardly know whether the thoughts I send you suit your little journal;⁷ but I trust that all that unfolds the way the blessed Lord presented Himself on the earth, the connection of the Old Testament with the New, and the revealing of God in man upon the earth, will be profitable to some of your readers at least.

I forward to you therefore some remarks on the Gospel of Luke, flowing from thoughts which have arisen in my mind while lately reading it. There are two great subjects in the life of the blessed Lord which Luke brings out: the fulfillment of promise; and the revelation of God in grace in the "Son of man." These are presented to us in the history in a very interesting way. I will notice this as displayed in chapters 4 and 5.

In chapter 4 the Spirit of God has shown us the blessed One led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, victorious in trial, as the first man had failed in it. He returns in the power of the Spirit into Galilee, having first bound the strong man.

Let me remark here, in passing, how faithfulness in trial and temptation shows the power of the Spirit as much as the energy of action. Jesus was led by the Spirit to be tempted, overcame Satan by the word through the Spirit, and returned in its power, working miracles and casting out devils. But the power had been exercised all through the temptation, only in standing fast. See Ephesians 6. Therein

7 This was a contribution to the Girdle of Truth. Ed.

He had overcome Satan, baffled his power, really bound the strong man, and then had only to spoil his goods. He used too the weapon we have to use, the word of God: only we must remark, as we learn from Ephesians 6, that, to use the word, we must first have all the defensive armors, that is, the state of the soul must be right. Christ, of course, was perfect and used it perfectly. In the measure of our spirituality and uprightness we shall be able to wield this blessed weapon. But here even the sword was a defensive weapon. He met the wiles of Satan by it. Whatever reasonings or scriptures Satan may use, if we are spiritual enough to use it, the word of God suffices to confound him.

But to turn to my more direct subject. The Lord now stood as man, anointed of the Holy Spirit, having overcome Satan, to make good divine grace and goodness amongst men, and specially first amongst the Jews; but the glory of His divine person was not to be hid. But first He presents Himself as the anointed Man, fulfilling all that has been promised in grace.

I must remark another point. The Lord looks for rejection; and this, it will be seen, is the case in both the characters in which He presents Himself. First, then, as the anointed Man. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18-19). Thus He presents Himself as the fulfiller of promise, announcing the favorable and gracious time of God's mercy in His own person. "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21). But at the same time He tells them that He will be rejected. A

prophet has not honor in his own country. But He adds that grace, as grace, passed beyond the limits of the Jews; that God was sovereign in His goodness, and of old had sent help to two Gentiles, while many remained in sorrow in rebellious Israel. This the haughty Jews would not bear, and, gracious as His words had been, they are now ready to destroy Him for preaching a grace which Israel might lose all part in, as rejecting Him, and the Gentile get blessing by. They are ready to destroy Him; but it was not the time, and He passed through the midst of them.

Now see the character in which the demons own Him: how it meets this character in which He was really come. How sad a picture! Demons perforce own Him; men reject Him with hatred. It is remarkable how these evil spirits own Him according to the truth (as we may remember the spirit of divination did Paul), but surely only as dreading, and, if they could have done so, avoiding His power. "Let us alone: what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God" (Luke 4:34). It was the reluctant owning of a power they could not avoid. The time was not come to cast them into the pit, but to deliver man. The demon came out of the man at Jesus' word.

But it is well to note that this title was a prophetic one of Jesus; and His title as summing up all the mercies of God. It is unfolded in Psalm 89 The word "mercies," in the first verse of that psalm, is the same as "Holy One" in verse 19; "Holy One" in verse 18 is quite different. Mercy was to be built up forever, the psalm declares. How? "Thou spakest in vision of [not "to," I think, but about, as we see that of the prophecy in Psalm 72, "A Psalm about Solomon"] thy holy One," thy gracious One, in whom help

and mercy is summed up. "I have laid help upon One that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people. I have found David my servant," (Psa. 72:20). Here, no doubt, the immediate subject is David: but in the mind of God a greater, even Christ, is here. The evil spirit owns that this Holy One is there in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Help was indeed laid upon the Mighty One, who, having overcome Satan wholly, could have delivered man from all the miserable fruits of his power, even death itself; but man would have none of Him. He must be redeemed or lost.

Next, in this fourth chapter, when healing many, the demons who are cast out own Him as the Christ the Son of God. This was owning His title as promised to Israel in Psalm 2; but which also witnessed to His rejection. Thus the power of present delivering goodness, in the promised One, was there. He is owned the Holy One of God, in whom mercies came to Israel; as the Christ and Son of God spoken of in Psalm 2. But in His own country He is not received. The prejudices and passions of man rise up against grace and this gracious One, while the demons own Him, but through dread; a strange but solemn picture! They could not but know Him. But what is knowledge when only such? Those He really came to would not receive Him.

In Luke 5 He is seen in another character. He reveals, and is, Jehovah. In the miraculous draft of fishes He makes Himself known to the conscience of Peter, who sees the Lord in it, and acknowledges himself a sinful man unfit for His presence. This is always the effect of the revelation of God to us, and indeed of nothing else. Jesus speaks words of grace, "Fear not." From henceforth he should catch men. In what follows He heals the leper, which was Jehovah's work alone. But there was a special circumstance

connected with this, full of blessed significance. The leper recognized His power, but was not sure of His goodness or willingness to help him. "Lord," he says, "if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." The Lord does not merely say He is willing, He puts forth His hand and touches him. Now, if a man touched a leper he too was unclean, and must be put out of the camp. But here was a divine person come down, Jehovah, who could cleanse. One who could say, "*I will*"; "*be thou*."—One who could not be defiled, but had for that very reason come down to touch the defiled one, and remove the defilement. He was Jehovah, come as man, to touch, so to speak, the sinner in grace. Jesus was one whose holiness was so perfect, as God become man, that He could carry divine love to the vilest—carry it wherever a need or a sorrow was, and as love touch the defiled, not to become so, but to heal. It is a wonderful picture of what Christ, Jehovah, present to heal was in this world. Thus revealing Himself to the conscience, and doing a divine work in love, in what was a figure of cleansing from sin, mark Him out as Jehovah in the world in grace.

He withdraws Himself into the wilderness and prays; ever the dependent, as the obedient and victorious, man. But other elements of divine grace are yet to be observed here. He was sitting with doctors of the law, ready to object to grace, and ignorant of how the Son of God had in manhood visited this sinful world in the power and title of divine grace. One sick of the palsy is brought to Him by faith. He goes to the root of all sorrow, and says, "Thy sins be forgiven thee" (Luke 5:20). The question is not here how through the precious death of Christ forgiveness was consistent with divine righteousness and glorified it. What is here revealed is Jehovah present in unmingled

grace. As the testimony and witness of this, the Lord does what is ascribed to Jehovah in Psalm 103:3, along with the forgiveness of sins. "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; and healeth all thy diseases."

Lastly, the Lord shows, as the friend of publicans and sinners, that He had come in sovereign grace to gather, in the power of good, not looking for it in man. But thus also He must be rejected. This new wine, for it was so, could not be put into old bottles; Judaism could not receive and be the vessel of sovereign grace; nor could those who were used to Judaism easily receive the new wine of the gospel and Spirit of God. And so it ever is in all ages.

Luke 7.

I do not for the present make any remark on chapter 6. Only we may note that the Lord is gathering distinctly around Himself, apart from the nation, and that He addresses His disciples as thus separated—as those already called to possess the kingdom. But in chapter 7 we have the Lord brought out in a far greater character, and more fully revealed, than as the fulfiller of promise. He is entirely a divine person, and consequently reaches out beyond Judaism, and even human life, in this world. Still the Jews are recognized by the Gentile whom the Lord blesses; and this was right. The Lord did the same. It was the lowliness and submission to God's ways which the knowledge of God, true faith, always produces.

Remark here, too, a principle which will be found to shine forth through all the Gospels, namely, that whenever Christ was manifested as God, it was impossible that He could be confined to His relationship to the Jews. God present in His own nature, as love, cannot be confined to the special relationships to a nation to whom He has made

promises: although He may, and surely will, faithfully meet them according to promise. This is largely and specially brought out in John: where, indeed, however, the principle reaches further, and thereby assumes another character. The Jews are there looked at, already, in the first chapter, as reprobate, and so treated; though dealt with, still, all through the Gospel. "He came to his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11). The world, too, is viewed as blind. "The world knew him not." It was that phenomenon known only in morals, the light shining in darkness. The effect of this is to bring out the Lord in two characters in that Gospel—first, as God, as light in the world, and as such, when forcing the conscience to attend to Him, bringing out the terrible truth that men love darkness rather than light—that they will not have God such as He is: this especially, and formally, in chapter 8, when His word is rejected, as His work is in the ninth. But this makes a turning-point in the Gospel after the first three chapters, which are preface. The first, Christ in nature—Christ incarnate—Christ in work of blessing on earth—Christ (as John Baptist also) calling and gathering on the earth; which reaches on, by His servants, to His millennial presence on earth; in all which, note, no heavenly character or office of Christ is given, as is ever the case in John's writings. The second gives the millennial kingdom. The third what is needed for the kingdom, and heavenly things: where John also brings out His full person and glory in grace. Then being driven out of Judea, the new order of things is intimated, from God's nature and the Father's love, in the fourth chapter. Thereon, to the end of the seventh, Christ is presented as the divine life-giving Son of God; in incarnation, and as the dying Son of man; the

Giver of the Spirit, as the feast of tabernacles, the figure of earthly rest, could not yet be kept by Him. Then, His word being rejected in the eighth, in the ninth He gives sight, and this brings in effectual grace; and, rejected though He be, He will have His sheep. Here we have not simply God, who is light in darkness, revealed, but the Father sending the Son in grace. This distinction is always kept up in John. When grace is spoken of it is the Father and the Son! the Father sending the Son; while as mere light, it is God. But this expression of Father and Son refers to grace revealed and effectual, not to the love of God in His nature and character. Where this is spoken of, it is still God. "God so loved the world." I may follow this Gospel and its character more in detail, if it suit you and the Lord so will, another time; but this leads me back to the general truth that Christ as revealing God shines necessarily out beyond Israel.

Thus, in a very striking and beautiful example, the Syrophenician woman. There the Lord seems to hold back and confine Himself to Israel. "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24). "It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs" (Matt. 15:26). The poor woman says, "Truth, Lord, but the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." Could He say, God is not so good as you suppose? He has no crumbs for the wretched, who even look to Him through grace? Impossible. It would have been denying, not revealing, God; and her faith is at once met. Remark, too, again here, how lowly faith is, and how it submits to God's sovereign will! She owns herself a dog, and the privilege of being near God, as Israel was, as a nation. But her faith pierces through the difficulty, with a want, to Him who revealed God in love; and divine goodness, which had

taught her to trust in it, met, and could not but meet, that confiding trust.

Now in the Luke 7 the Lord fully takes the divine place. He is owned by the Gentile as One who can dispose of all, as he himself ordered his soldiers about; and the Lord owns his faith. "I have not found so great faith; no, not in Israel" (Matt. 8:10). In the next recorded event He goes farther in the display of divine power and goodness. "When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her" (Luke 7:13). That was His first thought; and to the bereaved widow He spoke first, and this was God too, though as man near to her sorrow. But divine power was there too; and a word from Him woke up to conscious life the young man they were about to bury. But power, the fullest, divine power, did not obliterate goodness, and cannot. God *uses* power, but He *is* love. He delivered him to his mother.

This reaches the ears of John. The very dead are raised, and he remained in prison! He sends to know, Is the promised One come? He trusts the word of Him of whom he had heard such things, but he wants to know if He be the One that should come. John is to believe in Christ, not Christ receive testimony from men. But "He that should come" is the promised One. And John is to receive Him, as others, by the testimony which He gave of Himself, as setting right all the sorrows that sin and Satan had brought into the world, and in grace caring for the poor. But this was more than promise, though it witnessed to the promised One. It proved the presence of One who was love and had all power. But because He manifested God, He was the rejected One; and blessed was he who should not be offended in Him. If He *came* in promise, as man expected Him, it would not have been in the grace

of divine power come down in love to every want. But because He did, though His arm was not shortened, "He was despised and rejected of men" (Isa. 53:3).

However, when John's messengers were gone, the Lord bears testimony to the captive one. He was Jehovah's messenger, sent before His face to prepare His way. But it was really Jehovah who was come. But he who mourned to them, and He who piped to them, were alike rejected by that generation. One class alone received the Lord—the humbled ones who had owned their sinfulness. These intelligently justified God's ways in both John and Christ. But it went far beyond a Messiah; they had morally met God. They owned they needed repentance; they had deserved the ax. They owned the suitableness of grace. It was not merely Messiah they received. Perhaps, in some of the happiest cases, they are not much occupied with this, though they may have recognized Him as such. They wanted compassionate grace, and they had found it. They recognized the justice of God in condemning them and calling them to repentance. They acknowledged His sovereign goodness in having to do with and in receiving worthless sinners. They justified God. One who was self-righteous thought John and divine grace alike out of place. Repentance was all well for others; they were the heirs of the kingdom.

Now this is characteristic of Luke. The promised One was there no doubt. But it was in grace to men, grace bringing home to them their moral state. They were meeting God. His way, such as He was in truth, John prepared; Him in His own person and ways Christ fully revealed; God manifest in flesh meeting sorrow, meeting Satan's power, meeting death, meeting sin, in grace. They

who felt all these found God in perfect grace there; the friend, indeed, not of the lame, and blind, and deaf merely, but, more wonderful still, of publicans and sinners. They—oh how willingly!—justified God in His ways; while they did so truly and righteously, in what led them to it, in the mourning testimony of John, who coming in the way of righteousness, went into the desert alone (for there was none righteous; no, not one), and, calling for good fruit, found only that which sinners could, through grace, come with—the confession that they had borne bad fruit. But this gave understanding. The conscience, recognizing the state he who has it is in, finds in the manifestation of God Himself in grace all it wants, and what infinitely attracts the heart. The knowledge of God is found through conscience, not through the understanding.

The convicted *sinner* is wisdom's child; he knows himself—the hardest of all knowledge to acquire. And God in grace meets his state exactly. But such a manifestation of God does not meet the Pharisee. Right and wrong he knows, and can judge of God's dealing in grace; but not the smallest ray of it enters his soul. Yet God can only be so revealed to man who is a sinner, if it be not in eternal judgment; and even so He is not known, for He is love; that is, he does not know God at all. Intellect never knows grace; self-righteousness does not want it. We learn to know God through conscience, when grace has awakened us to feel its need.

Here the child of wisdom is found. The history of the poor woman and the Pharisee is the example of this. The poor sinner was the child of wisdom. She judged her sins with God; she had found Him in grace for her sins. She did not know forgiveness, but she had tasted love. It had won

her confidence, the true divinely—given confidence of an humbled heart. This was Christ's work in the world. At the beginning Satan had gained man to evil and lust by first producing distrust of God. Why had God kept back this one tree? Man would be like Him if he had it. Confidence in God was gone; then lust came in.

The blessed Redeemer, while coming indeed to put away sin, yet in His life as the manifestation of God, had come winning back the confidence of man's heart by perfect love—grace in the midst of sin: humbled to the lowest to bring it wherever there was a want; to win man by his wants, and sorrows, and even his sins, where by grace the true sense of them was, back to God; that he might trust in God, because He was God, in love, when he could trust in none else, and thus know Him as God in the fullest revelation of Him—a child of wisdom, true in heart, and knowing God. Such was this poor sinner; justly feeling her sins, but feeling that being such, and feeling herself such, there was One she could trust. Had He been less than God, she could not—had no right to do so—no profit in doing it. It would not meet her case. What God was had reached her heart. She could not have explained it. But it had met her case.

How lovely is this, and yet how humbling to man! In the Pharisee we have clear intellect—the perception of right and wrong, as far as natural conscience goes. All that was in Christ, all that was in God manifested in grace, he had no perception of, he saw no beauty in it; his *eye* was blind as to God; he says, "If he were a prophet" (Luke 7:39), to say nothing of the promised One. This the Lord showed He was, by exposing his heart, and noting to him

what state he was in; He then leaves him, and the cavers he was surrounded by.

His heart was with the sinner, the humbled one. Her sins, He had declared to all, were forgiven; but to her He turns, to unfold all God's grace, to give rest to a weary heart—"Thy sins are forgiven thee." No concealing, no marring integrity by softening matters with her; though owning all that grace had wrought (she loved much) standing by her, with the heartless. When He notices her sins, she would not have had it otherwise: we never would when grace really works. "Thy sins"—but He notices it as God, which He could, and could righteously, through His coming work—"Thy sins are forgiven thee." Man's cavils do not interrupt His work of grace: "Go in peace; thy faith hath saved thee."

What words from a divine Redeemer! Sins forgiven, faith in divine love owned, and salvation declared to be possessed by it! peace—perfectly divinely—given peace for her! She had not trusted the heart of God in vain. He had revealed Himself that she might trust it. Grace was greater than sin, though it allowed none of it. It wrought conviction, confession, confidence; but it gave forgiveness, salvation, peace: for God, who had restored the soul, and more, by the revelation of Himself, was there. It seems to me, besides this profoundly interesting individual case, instructive to see how, while manifested clearly as the promised One, the Savior in this Gospel passes on, by the way in which He is manifested, into His divine manifestation in grace. It is not followed here as in Matthew, which speaks of dealings with Israel, with woes to Chorazin and Bethsaida, though even there it issues in grace; but in the manifestation of God in grace, and the picture of a poor sinner become the

child of wisdom, as taught her soul's need, and the grace of God to meet it. Observe here, too, how love is known, and brokenness of heart trusts it, before the answer of peace is given by Him who could do so.

Our chapter gives us thus the God of the Gentiles; the God who delivers from death, raises from it; the God who meets the sinner in grace, when all sin is known, and sends him away in peace from Himself. It is well to have to do with such a God!

Luke 12.

In this Gospel we constantly find the Lord going over the same ground again and again, in different aspects; but here He is pressing the rejection of His own person, not in connection with the kingdom, but in connection with men's souls. It is not the kingdom as being set aside by His rejection, nor yet the connection of men's souls and bodies with Him in future earthly glory—such as blessing the basket and the store—but the blessing of their souls forever; therefore what is pressed here is the relationship of the soul with God.

On this ground He says a man is but a “fool,” that “layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” For “what is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:26). He thus takes them off all dispensational teaching, to put them on the broad moral ground of the soul's relationship to God; and then shows them the consequence of discipleship with Himself.

His coming again also is not in its aspect towards the church; but the consequence of His kingdom being set aside for the present is, that His disciples are to look for His coming again. And this also bears two aspects; the one

for those in relationship with God, and the other towards the world. Both are taken up in this chapter.

But first He puts before the disciples some of the motives which should actuate them as His disciples. "Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing hid that shall not be made known" (vss. 1-2). It will all come out before God: whatever is said or done, it will all come out before God. Having made this appeal to their consciences, the next thing is, that He being rejected, power will be on the side of evil. Power would be there, and it would be against them: still not one single hair of their head was unnumbered. This was for their comfort! but as to the government on earth by Christ, that was now closed for the present, and, Christ as Messiah being rejected, they must be rejected too, and bear the cross like their Master, being left down here in the midst of the power of evil unsubdued. So thoroughly indeed was power on the side of evil, that when the Lord was casting out a demon, the people said, "He casteth out demons through Beelzebub the chief of the demons" (Luke 11:15). The principle brought out in this is, that the saints are now down here in conflict with evil, but they are not to be afraid. "Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do; but I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear; fear him which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him." Think of your souls as being connected with God. The hairs of your head are all numbered. If men kill your body, do not be afraid; for they cannot touch your soul; and not a single hair of your head shall perish. You may be cut off by an ignominious death. What then? Why, "not a sparrow falls

to the ground without your Father.” “Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.”

Nothing can possibly separate us from God’s love. *However* hot the persecution may be, confidence in God is all that is needed. As Paul said, “I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39).

In all human efforts to preserve oneself from suffering, there is shown a want of confidence in God. If I am delivered from suffering, I am thankful to God for it; but if it be permitted, I accept suffering as my portion, and trust God in it. Do not seek suffering; but in confessing Christ, you will be sure to get it: and then you should take the suffering and trust God in it. It is a privilege to suffer for the name of Christ. “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matt. 5:11-12). However severe the suffering, let your confidence be in God. Do nothing of yourself, leave everything to God alone; for God may make some man (a Gamaliel it may be) to stand up for you. God may use anything as a means of preserving you which you could not use yourself, even the wickedness of man. So that it is never a question of means, but of who is to use them. It is God Himself, and not you. And mark that this would not be indifference, or haughty defiance; it is simply trusting in God. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, “Our God whom we serve is able to

deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up" (Dan. 3:17-18).

If a man persecute me, I would not say a word; I must be quiet and passive, whatever they may do, referring everything to God. As in the case of Peter and John, when the chief priests "commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye" (Acts 4:18-19).

Then again, in verse 8, "Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God." How thoroughly the Lord is supposing the hostility of man! He expects it, for in truth the gospel sets out with it. "I send you forth as lambs among wolves" (Luke 10:3). He did not say as lambs among lambs: but as lambs among wolves. Therefore, beloved, if you meet with this hostility, "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you" (1 Peter 4:12). For what Christ met with in His own person while down here, He fully anticipates for all His followers; and therefore "rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings" (1 Peter 4:13). But then it is as lambs—not in rashness, but harmless as doves, though wise as serpents. Be prudent in not giving occasion to hostility; but if confessing the name of Christ brings it out, take it patiently, trusting in God.

The Lord sees the difficulties they will have to encounter, and cheers them by saying, "If you confess me before men,

I will confess you before the angels of God" (Luke 12:8). And mark how the Lord knows how to put His finger on the very point of the difficulty; "If you confess me before men." It is not whether they could think of Him in their closets: of course they could do that, if they cared for Him at all; but that is not it. Do they "confess me before men?" Alas! how often we cannot find courage to confess Christ openly "before men," when we can do it in our closets. But this is just a simple test how far the fear of man has more power over our souls than God. Still He would not have us to thrusting ourselves upon people; this would be no good at all. "Be wise as serpents, harmless as doves" (Matt. 10:16). "Be simple concerning evil, and wise concerning good." As they said of Daniel, "We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it in the law of his God." Daniel was simply obeying God, and in thus simply and steadily doing God's will, he had to suffer for it; and so may we. But then let us take care that we are suffering for doing God's will, and not in doing our own will. Not as Moses in his rashness, going and slaying an Egyptian and then running away. There was no good in that. But go on steadily doing God's will, giving Satan no handle: but at the same time having unhesitating boldness in confessing Christ, and in bringing out God's truth; but not anything of the flesh to excite or offend the flesh in another, except it be by the cross, and that will always be an offense. As it is said, "The reproaches of them that reproached thee have fallen upon me" (Rom. 15:3). He took Himself all the rejection of man's wicked heart against God. He set his face "as a flint" (Isa. 50:7); and so must we. But then we are not to fret ourselves by saying anything contrary to the grace of Christ, and thereby bring on us needless hostility.

Then again, it is not sufficient to be right in the thing that we confess, neither to be sincere. It must be God speaking by us. That which flows from me ought to be of the Spirit, in the power of the Spirit, and according to the time of the Spirit, or it is not of the Lord; it is not the manifestation of the grace of Jesus. This requires the will to be mortified, and the flesh crucified; for if it be otherwise, there will be the blustering out of something without any grace. But assuming the will to be mortified, the flesh subdued, and the Spirit of God working, He says (vs. 10), "Whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him." The Lord is here putting them, in a sense, on higher ground than Himself. What an amazing encouragement to our poor hearts! If you speak, they are even more responsible if they reject it than in rejecting Me. This, of course, could only be true but as they spake by the Holy Spirit: there must be no water mixed with the wine.

Paul could say, "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost" (2 Cor. 4:3). I should not venture to say, If *my* gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost. Paul could say so, because he gave it out as pure as he got it in. But it is not always so with us; and therefore we cannot say what the apostle could, because it was the truth and nothing but the truth that was given pure from God. I could say so as to the truth of it; that is, I can say if you reject the truth you will be lost, though I cannot say if you reject the gospel *I* preach you will be lost.

Luke 12:11-12. Here the Lord encourages the disciples for the warfare, supposing the hostility of the world, which must be expected if the gospel is set forth in power, and

guarding them against the fear of man. He says, "When they bring you unto the synagogues, unto magistrates, and unto powers, take ye no thought how, or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say; for the Holy Spirit shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say." When God first sent out the gospel, He took care that it should go out pure. All we speak ought to be by the Spirit, as it is nothing but what is of the Holy Spirit that God can use. But when it is by inspiration, which is nothing but by the Holy Spirit, then God takes care that nothing else but the truth shall be spoken. But when I am speaking it is not necessarily so guarded as that no error is mixed up with it. Of course anything really good that is spoken is in a manner inspired. But when the truth was inspired by the Holy Spirit, God so kept the man that nothing but the truth came out. It is not so now. When God came forth in creation, it was by the Spirit. "The Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:2). Everything was always done by the Spirit. "He that God has sent speaketh the words of God, for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him" (John 3:24). This was spoken of Christ. But now there is no warrant that every man speaks the truth, because there is no man now so qualified, as to leave no doubt whether there is nothing beside the Holy Spirit.

In Luke 12:13 one comes to the Lord, complaining of the injustice of his brother; "Speak to my brother," says he, "that he divide the inheritance with me." And the Lord replied, "Who made me a judge or a divider over you?" He was not come to set things right in this world then; though He will do this when He comes again. Had He been accepted as Messiah, He would have done so then; but the counsels of God were otherwise. It was quite right

that the man should have his inheritance; but as Messiah He was rejected, and therefore could not then set “justice and judgment on the earth.” He was then come about men’s souls; therefore He says to them, “Take heed and beware of covetousness.” For while the one sought to defraud, the other sought to obtain; and it was the same spirit in both. They were both loving the possession of these things, and this was the whole secret; therefore the Lord told them, that “a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15).

He could not be occupied with dividing men’s inheritance, for His whole business was with their souls. The world was going to be set aside, therefore what had the Lord to do with men’s inheritances? His work was to go on with God, doing His will; and His entire business as to men was with their souls; and this ought to *be* our business too, for we are associated with God on new grounds. But if we are seeking the world or riches, the effect will be practically to separate us from God. I always tremble now when I hear of a Christian getting on in the world; for “how hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God?” And who ever escapes the snare of getting on in the world? Generally there is a getting down in spirituality, when there is a getting up in the world. It may all be taken up in service to the Lord, but that is quite another thing; then it would be a bright testimony. A person once said to me, What harm is there in riches? My reply was, Suppose they keep you out of heaven; what then? Oh! said he, I never thought of that! If riches do get possession of the heart, they surely must keep Christ out; and a Christ-less heart never got into heaven yet.

The real mischief is in the riches of this world getting into the heart. Mark that most solemn word in 1 Timothy 6:9-11, "But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness." It is they that have a desire for riches, who fall into "many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition." It is not the question as to whether riches are right or wrong in themselves, but as to riches being the object of the heart. If so, they keep Christ out. A man will then say, But suppose I do not set my heart upon them; but the Lord who knows our hearts better than we do ourselves, does not deal in this way: for He says, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also"; and not as it is often quoted, "Where the heart is, there the treasure will be" (Luke 12:34). It is quite true that, if the Lord give riches, He can give grace to use them; but even then they are a snare. The language of the "certain rich man" to his soul in this chapter is, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry"; but God says, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" (Luke 12:20). So is he that "layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God." Here come in the questions, "What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26).

“Therefore take heed, and beware of covetousness” which is idolatry. For, be it ever remembered, that while riches are a snare to the rich man, to be jealous of a rich man, because of his riches, is as bad or worse in the poor man; for it just shows that he would also have them if he could. It is not a question about riches. The Lord wants to get souls into heaven, and riches will not take them there; that can only be by being rich towards God. The whole question is about Christ; for if Christ has His place in our hearts, the things of this world cease to be temptations to us. The man that is rich towards God has no desire for other riches. But the man that layeth up treasure for himself is not rich towards God; because self is at the bottom. All this has to do with the world.

But now in Luke 12:22 He says unto His disciples, “Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on.” “The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment.” When speaking to the world He takes the lowest ground; but when He turns to His disciples He speaks differently. They may trust in God, for He presses upon them that as His disciples they were of great value in the sight of God. Poor worthless things in themselves, no doubt, still they were of great value to God. Do not you be uneasy, for God has a particular interest in you, and the hairs of your head are all numbered. If God feedeth the fowls, “how much more are ye better than they?” They were all God’s subjects by creation, for He had not given up His title to the world. In the peculiar teaching of the Book of Jonah, when God had given up Israel as an earthly testimony, we learn that God’s character of doing good to all, and caring for all was not at all touched. “Should not

I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left, and also much cattle?" "But does God take care of oxen?" In truth He does, for they are the work of His creative power. But to the disciples He says, You are of such value to God that He would have you reckon yourselves to be of value to Him even in the midst of this hostile world. Do not you be taking thought for the morrow; leave the morrow with God. Do not you be taking thought at all; for if by taking thought ye cannot do that which is least, why take ye thought for the rest? He is urging upon them unlimited confidence in God, who is to them as a tender Father. Therefore He says to them, "Seek not ye what ye shall eat, nor what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after, but your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things" (Luke 12:29-30). "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). Therefore, do not be uneasy in passing through the desert, for the kingdom is at the end. And if God is going to give you the kingdom, though as sheep you may be killed here, still He will give you the kingdom.

Then after showing them what their relationship involved as His disciples, He speaks to them of His coming again.

Luke 12:36. They were to be "like unto men that wait for their Lord." For though rejected for a season on the earth, He will return: and therefore He here tells us of the blessedness of those who will be found waiting for Him.

That which should characterize the saints is, not merely holding the doctrine of the Lord's coming, as that which

they believe, but their souls should *be* in the daily attitude of waiting, expecting, and desire His coming! But why? That they may see Himself and be with Him, and like Him forever—not because the world which has been so hostile to them is going to be judged, though God will smite the wicked.

It is true, there will be mercy to those who are spared. But we have obtained mercy now, and are therefore waiting for Himself, for what He is in Himself to us, and not because of judgment. That would not be joy to me, though it will be to some on the earth; for “In every place where the grounded staff shall pass, which Jehovah shall lay upon him, it shall be with tabrets and harps” (Isa. 30:32). This is not our hope, but simple waiting for Himself. The whole walk and character of a saint depends on this, on his waiting for the Lord. Everyone should be able to read us by this as having nothing to do in this world, but to get through it, and not as having any portion in it; “turned from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven” (1 Thess. 1:9-10). This is thought a strange thing now, but the Thessalonians were converted to this hope, for they belonged to a world which had rejected God’s Son; therefore they had to turn from these idols to serve the true and living God, and to wait for His Son from heaven.

What I desire to press upon you all and myself too is the individual waiting for the Lord; not as a doctrine merely, but as a daily waiting for Himself. Whatever the Lord’s will may be, I should like Him to find me doing it when He comes. But that is not the question, but am I waiting for Himself day by day?

In the second chapter of 1 Thessalonians the hope is connected with ministry, “What is our hope, or joy, or

crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?" (1 Thess. 2:19). Then Paul would get the reward of His service to the saints. Then in the third chapter the hope is connected with our walk, as a motive for holiness, "unblameable in holiness, before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints" (1 Thess. 3:13).

Then in the fourth chapter, the doctrine of the hope is unfolded; the manner of it comes out — "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

Thus we see what a present expectation the coming of the Lord was; therefore Paul says, "WE which are alive and remain." But why does he say "WE"? Because he expected it then. This was Paul's character then, that of waiting for the Lord. And does he lose that character, because he died before He came? No, not at all.

Though Peter had a revelation that he should put off the tabernacle of his body (2 Peter 1:14), yet did he daily wait for the Lord's coming then; and this will be Paul's character when the Lord does come; he will lose nothing by his death. "Be ye like unto men that wait for their Lord." The character of their waiting was to be like servants at the hall-door, that, when the master knocked, they were ready to open to Him immediately. It is a figure of course here; but it is the present power of the expectation that is alluded to. And the ruin of the church has come in by practically saying, "My Lord delayeth his coming." "Blessed

are those servants whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching" (Luke 12:37).

"Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning"—"your loins girt about with truth" (Eph. 6:14) for service. You must not let your garments flow loose; that is, you must not let your thoughts and affections spread abroad, but be ready with your garments well girt up and your lights burning. This is not rest, for it is an exceedingly tiring thing to have to sit up and watch through a long dark night. But in the spirit of service the heart, affections, thoughts, feelings, and desires must all be girt up. And this requires real painstaking not to let the flesh go its own way; for it is a great comfort sometimes to do this, if but for a moment, but if we do we shall surely fall asleep like the virgins. For as the virgins went to sleep with their oil in their lamps, so may we go to sleep with the Holy Spirit in our hearts. But blessed are those servants who are found watching. The Lord says this is the time for you to be girded, to take your turn in love to serve and watch; but when I come again, and have things My own way, then I will take My turn in love, ungird you, and gird Myself, and come forth and serve you. You must be well girt up and watchful in the midst of evil; but when the evil is done with, then you may take your rest. When in the Father's house, you may lie down and be at ease; and then your robes may flow down without any fear of their being soiled. In that blessed place of holiness and purity you may let your affections, thoughts, and desires flow out without the fear of their being defiled.

The Lord does not speak to us, as He does to the remnant on the earth. He does not say to them that He will come as a thief in the night, but He tells them the

tribulation will be so terrible, that He notes how many days it shall last, and says, “For the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened, or no flesh could be saved” (Matt. 24:22). But to us it would be nothing that our flesh should be saved on the earth—we would rather get out of the flesh. To them it would be everything to “fear not them which kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.” They would be amongst those who would not have Christ, and therefore will have Antichrist; and so terrible will be the sorrow, that the Lord comes to cut short those days. They were too late for the other thing, but now, by reason of the sorrow, a short work will the Lord make of it on the earth. The Psalms express a desire for judgment, because those who express it then get their deliverance; but no Christian can claim this. Who could ask, “that thy foot may be dipped in the blood of thine enemies, and that the tongue of thy dogs may be red through the same?” (Psa. 68:23). Judgment will not be our deliverance, but going up to heaven before the judgment begins.

He will come in judgment; as it is said, “Sit thou on my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool” (Luke 20:42-43). But that is not for us—we are not His enemies; for He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified. And we are perfected now, but we wait by the Holy Spirit to have that which is ours by virtue of our union with Him; and when He comes forth to judgment, we shall come with Him. The Lord comes with His saints, when He comes to execute judgment on the earth; but He comes for His saints previously.

I do not desire judgment, but I do desire that which is worthy of being desired, the hope of being with the Lord, as the Lord, and like the Lord forever. It is the end of the

whole thing as regards ourselves. Therefore, as the apostle says, The times and the seasons are nothing to you, for you belong to the day that will come, when the wicked shall be as ashes under the feet of the saints.

Luke 12:40-41. The Lord then goes on to speak of the conduct of the saints while waiting for their Lord; and, "Peter said, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all? And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing." Now observe that the answer of our blessed Lord was most remarkable, and in this way, that those who had the name of waiting for the Lord would become the world. In our country, in England, worldly people are called Christians, and thus they are responsible for the name they bear, and not only for the power. So they that take the name of ministers are responsible for the position they take. For people will be judged, not according to the power they have, but according to the PLACE they have taken. They cannot say, I have taken the place, but have not the power, so you ought not to judge me. But you have taken the place, and therefore are responsible for the power, or you should not have taken the place. If a servant comes into your house and spoils all your goods, you judge him according to the place he has taken. Therefore the professing church or Christendom is responsible for having taken the place of Christianity without the power; and how can there be power where there is not life? If servants, they are to give to the household the portion of meat in due season, because it is a service to be done in the house while the master is away. So that whatever the place,

whether little or great, the servant is to be in service to Christ, while He is away; and if faithful, He will make him ruler over all that He hath at His return.

Luke 12:45. "But and if that servant say in his heart, My Lord delayeth his coming," etc. Mark, he does not say He will not come, but "he delayeth his coming." And the moment the church of God said, My Lord delayeth His coming, it got into the world; and the Lord's coming was counted a heresy. For as soon as the church lost the practical sense of the Lord's coming, it began to decay and decline, and the hope gradually dropped out, until it was entirely lost. What awoke the virgins at first was the cry, "Behold the Bridegroom cometh." But they needed to be called out again from the place where they had gone to make themselves comfortable, although they had been called out before; and that which awakes them again is, "Behold the Bridegroom cometh." It is not that the church had been saying, He will never come again, but "My Lord delayeth his coming," just showing that the hope of His immediate coming had lost its place in her heart. The servant does not say he will be a heathen or a Jew, nor does he leave the other servants; but instead of giving them their meat in due season, he begins to beat them. And when it came to this, they began to eat and drink with the drunken; not that they got drunk, but that they readily went on with the ways, customs, and habits of the world from which they had been redeemed. Is that the wilderness? No. It is getting into the world and setting up a millennium in the continuity and perpetuity of the church down here, which is virtually denying the Lord's coming. How can I make preparation for continuing down here, if I am expecting Him daily? Men tell me that the Lord is providing for the

continuance of the church down here on the earth; but the Lord tells me in His word to expect Him daily to take me up to heaven.

It is a most solemn thing, that this thought of settling in the earth because the Lord delayeth His coming is fast closing in upon the blinded hearts of the professing church, and thus fitting them for the judgment that is fast approaching. The voice then ought now to be lifted up like a trumpet to meet this state of things. "Behold the Bridegroom cometh." This will be the test again by which souls may yet be gathered out to wait for the Lord, and not settle down into the expectation of the perpetuity and continuance of the church down here.

Now mark the result of this (vs. 46). "The lord of that servant cometh in an hour when he looketh not for him, and will cut him in sunder, and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers." He is treated according to the position he has taken.

Luke 12:47. Christendom is in the worst case after all; it will be better even for the poor heathen than for it. "As many as have sinned without law shall perish without law" (Rom. 2:12). That which now boasts itself as the church will then have peculiar judgment; for "it shall be beaten with many stripes."

Luke 12:48. While the heathen who ought to have acted according to the light of conscience "will be beaten with few stripes," God will not go on with evil, though He may bear long with it. And where Satan is working, believers cannot rightly deal with it, but by treating it as what it is. I have no power over it, for it corrupts the principles of the light within me, and brings darkness into my soul.

First, then, there is the waiting for the Lord Himself; and, secondly, the answer to the question, "Speakest thou this unto us, or to all?" is to all that call themselves, and take the place of servants. The Lord make us faithful as those who are waiting for Him! It will be no joy to my soul for Him to find me heaping up riches when He comes; for there should be the testimony to the world that He was coming. Individual faithfulness is first, and then love to Him and to souls will flow out naturally.

Luke 13.

There are two great principles in God's dealings, in connection with man on the earth, which are developed in the church of God, as such, and in the government of God. And these two things are very distinct the one from the other. In the church the riches of God's grace are manifested; but in His governmental dealings, righteousness, and the display of His attributes, as justice, mercy, and goodness. We have an example of God's governmental power in Exodus 34:6-7, "And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation." Here it is in connection with the Jews, and not only among the Jews, but it shows also that which is outside in the world in God's dealings. What we get in Exodus 34 is not sovereign grace bringing a soul to eternal life, but governmental power; the exercise of which we may now mark every day around us. For if a man wastes his fortune, or ruins his health by intemperance of any kind,

his children suffer for it. This is an invariable principle. We see also the exercise of righteous government in God's not clearing the guilty.

See God's dealings with David, because of the matter of Uriah. "The sword shall never depart from thine house...Thou didst it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun...Because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of Jehovah to blaspheme, the child that is born unto thee shall surely die" (2 Sam. 12:10,12,14). Now, here was judgment for David's sin; and we know that in his after life, the "sword did not depart from his house."

This also is true of the Jews for the murder of the Lord; as it is expressed in Galatians: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). This, however, is not grace but government; still it is true of a saint as well as of a sinner. Both kinds of dealing God has with the saints now, that is, in grace, and in righteous government. I shall never reap the reward of my sins in eternal blessedness, for it is infinite grace; but in the way of righteous government I shall reap the reward of my iniquity down here. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked...He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption" (Gal. 6:7-8). It is grace as to sins eternally, but righteous government as to iniquity down here. God never lets go the reins of government, even over the world, although for a season He did not interfere in governmental power. As it is said, "The times of this ignorance God winked at" (Acts 17:30). He did not say there was no sin; therefore they were responsible. So that "death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression" (Rom. 5:14). There was sin and

death, though no transgression, because God had not then come in with law. But Adam had received a positive commandment and had transgressed it. And sin must bear its consequence, which is death. But “in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel” (Rom. 2:16), then all will come out, and both will have their place.

The angels see and understand the government of God in the world; but in the church it is quite another thing, as Peter says, “Which things the angels desire to look into” (1 Peter 1:12). The angels had seen the various wisdom of God in creation, when the morning stars sang together; but here it was quite a new thing; for by the church the manifold wisdom of God is displayed. God is going to have a people not belonging to the earth at all.

In the prophets government on the earth is spoken of, because it is of Messiah’s kingdom that they speak. But God’s government towards Israel in its Messiah-character is now suspended, but it will come out again another day. When the kingdom is spoken of, it is government on the earth; but when the church is spoken of, it is as connected with the Governor Himself. The position of Christians is such, that they have in it a motive for the very commonest affairs of life: so that their daily conduct should be suitable to their high calling of God in Christ Jesus. We are united to Him who will judge the world; and therefore, when the apostle is going to counsel two foolish Christians that are going to law, he says, “what! cannot you settle such a trifling thing as that about money without going to law?” “Know ye not that we shall judge angels?” (1 Cor. 6:3). Could not those who are destined to do such high things settle their own smaller matters, without going to law, and that before

the unbelievers? It is the sense of their high calling that Paul places before them; which he desired might fill their minds as it did his. Therefore, if telling them as servants to be faithful in a house, and not to be guilty of purloining, he says, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:11-14). The grace having appeared, the glory is looked for. Therefore the conclusion is, do you, as subjects of the grace and waiting for the glory, live righteously and suffer wrongfully, rather than avenge yourselves.

We have, then, God's government of this world, and of the Jew in justice, though in patient goodness; and His taking out of the world a people united to Christ in governing. If you look into the prophets, you do not find anything about the church whatever, but about government, whether of the Jew or of the world. But when we come to the church we find a suspension of government, in its outward, visible, and settled order, because the world had rejected Christ, who was their Governor. In the church I get an entirely new thing; for the Son of God, having been rejected in the world, is gone back to the Father, and He now says to us, Ye "are not of this world, even as I am not of this world" (John 17:16). "Now is the judgment of this world, now is the prince of this world cast out" (John 12:31). Christ, who made all things, is also set over all things in government, as Heir of all things; though not yet openly exercising His

power thus. But Christ, who is "Head over all things, is also Head to the church, which is his body" (Eph. 1:22-23); a thing hidden from ages and generations, but now made manifest.

In Ephesians this is fully brought out, but there we have more of the fullness of the body; while in Colossians there is more about the fullness of the Head. This is because the Colossians were in danger of slipping back from the Head into the observance of ordinances; therefore the apostle presses upon them the fullness of the Head to bring them back again. But in Ephesians he dwells on the church, the body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all. The church, as His body, is the completeness of Christ.

In Ephesians 3 we read of the promise in Christ by the gospel given in the eternal purpose of God to the church before the foundation of the world; whereas the promises given to Israel were given to them on the earth and not before the world was. The church was called in the eternal purpose of God before time; while the Jew was called out in time. In Colossians 1:23-25 we read, "Be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I, Paul, am made a minister; who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ, in my flesh, for His body's sake, which is the church; whereof I am made a minister according to the dispensation of God, which is given to me for you, to fulfill [or, more properly, to complete] the word of God." That which still remained for God to give, and which we now have, is the revelation of the church; for until the church was revealed, the word of God was not

complete. But now that which for ages and generations was hid in God is fully told out.

Here we see Paul's two ministries, first, that of the gospel, and then that of the church. And the form which a believer's life now takes is, "Christ in you the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). A Christ in heaven, and at the same time dwelling in the saints now on the earth, is a thing which was hid in God before the foundation of the world. Unto the Jews had been committed the oracles of God; but they knew nothing of a body on the earth united to a Head in heaven, even to the man Christ Jesus, as members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. Until the church was revealed to Paul, this was still hid in God's eternal purpose. As soon as all God's dealings, in the sense of proving man, were closed with the earth, by the rejection of His Son ("This is the heir, come let us kill him"), all was closed to men in the flesh, and the church is brought out in connection with a Man in heaven.

God sent His only Son, and Him they crucified. He had no other messenger. Christ was rejected as Prophet, as Messiah, as Son of man, and as Son of God; and when man, as man, was thus fully shown out, God comes in and acts for Himself. Him, whom man had put to death, God raises from the dead, and sets Him down at His own right hand in heaven; in virtue of which the Holy Spirit comes down and unites a people on the earth to this risen Man in glory. This is quite a distinct thing, and therefore it is that in Scripture we constantly find a gap, as it were, leaving space for the mystery of the church, "which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God" (Eph. 3:9), to be brought out.

Therefore, as we have previously remarked, the church is not found in the Old Testament; but Christ's coming in humiliation, and His coming in judgment, are spoken of close together, without saying a word about the church coming in between the two events. So, in Luke 4 when the Lord was in the synagogue at Nazareth, after preaching from Isaiah what referred to His then mission of healing the brokenhearted and preaching the acceptable year of the Lord, He closed the book and sat down, saying not a word about "the days of vengeance"—that being deferred until the mystery which had been hid from ages and generations had been manifest to the saints; or, in other words, until after the church had been brought out.

It is of immense importance, for the steadiness of the soul, to keep these two principles quite distinct; for what often confounds people in the study of prophecy is their not seeing the distinctive place which the church of God holds apart from God's government of the world, or of Israel. But the very essence of the church is, that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile. They are all sinners alike; but, when reached by God's grace, are all brought into one body. The very principle on which the church is based, would have destroyed the whole basis of the Jewish system. All along in the Jewish system their righteousness consisted in maintaining a distinct separation between themselves and the Gentiles; but now "there is no difference"; for both Jew and Gentile are made one in Christ. If the barrier which God Himself had originally set up had been broken down before Christ was crucified and risen, it would have been sin: therefore the church could never have been even hinted at in the Jewish scriptures. The principle of the church could not be brought in, while the "handwriting

of ordinances” remained. But this being “blotted out” in Christ, the two, Jew and Gentile, are made “one new man” (Eph. 2:15).

In going back to our chapter (Luke 13), we see the Jews had the thought of God’s government in their minds. Nor was it wrong in itself. They thought that God could not let such a guilty wretch as this Pilate live, who had been mingling the blood of the Galileans with their sacrifices. But Christ brings them to a new principle by which to judge of things, and tells them that Pilate is but a mere instrument in the governmental dealings of God with the nation. Judgment was going on in this present evil world. “Suppose ye,” says the Lord, “that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans? ...I tell you nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” It is not that they were finally condemned as sinners here, but it was governmental judgment in this world which would overtake them all unless they repented. God had sent forth His judgment and caught these Galileans, and would catch the Jews also unless they repented. For not only Pilate but God’s Son was there, and they were practically rejecting Him. And how many of the Jews had their blood mingled with their sacrifices by Titus in the destruction of Jerusalem!

Christ had said to the Jews in the close of chapter 12, “When thou goest with thine adversary to the magistrate, as thou art in the way, give diligence that thou mayest be delivered from him; lest he hale thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and the officer cast thee into prison. I tell thee, thou shalt not depart thence, till thou hast paid the very last mite.” This is not a question of eternal salvation, but it simply refers to the state of the Jews: that is, the Jews will not come out till they have paid

the very last mite. Jerusalem will not get out till she has received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins. But she will get out from the chastenings of the Lord when they are complete. It is very evident that this passage refers simply to God's government of His people.

In Luke 12:56 of the preceding chapter the Lord asks in the way of reproach, "How is it that ye do not discern this time?" And ought not we always to discern the time? Surely the Lord might often reproach us by saying, "How is it that ye do not discern this time? All the world is rejecting Me, and if they do not repent before they get to the judgment, there is no hope. Natural conscience ought to tell you Jews not to reject your Messiah, for God is going all the way along with you to the magistrate, dealing with you in patient grace; and if you do not repent and be reconciled, judgment must come upon you; and then it will be the same with you, as with those whom you think to be such sinners."

"I am come to send fire on the earth,"—(the fire of judgment) "and what will I if it be already kindled?" (Luke 12:49). The Lord is here dealing with the same state of things. The fig-tree also is Israel; for God came seeking fruit in them, but He found none. In the gospel there is this difference, that grace sows in order to produce fruit; but in connection with Israel's responsibility, He came seeking fruit and found none.

The sentence upon the fig-tree then is, "cut it down" (Luke 13:7). He not only found it useless, but His vineyard was cumbered by it. "The name of God is blasphemed through you among the Gentiles." Then comes in Christ's mission. "Last of all he sent his Son" (Matt. 21:37). God had planted a vineyard and pruned it, but found no fruit.

Then a new Gardener comes in to try what He can do, and He said, "Let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it" (Luke 13:8). This was all done, but still there was no fruit. All was useless, as far as Israel was concerned. Then God says, I will get rid of the whole thing: "cut it down."

The woman with an infirmity (Luke 13:11), whom Jesus heals on the sabbath day, brings out another thing that was working in their hearts, that is, the abuse of the law, which brought in hypocrisy. They would lead an ox or an ass from the stall to water on the sabbath day, but they could not bear that a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan had bound eighteen years, should be loosed on the sabbath day. One of the infirmities of man's mind is to use possessed truth to resist revealed truth. Paul was an example of this. As "touching the righteousness which is in the law" he was blameless; still Paul thought he ought to do many things contrary to Jesus of Nazareth. And so also Christ says of them in John 16:2-3: "These things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor Me." They were using the name of the Godhead which had been given them ("Hear, O Israel, Jehovah our God is one Jehovah") to reject the Son; for when Christ came in humiliation, they would not receive Him. Orthodoxy is used to stop the reception of truth. When truth is the ground of a man's standing, it gains him credit; but when a new truth comes in, it puts faith to the test. So the unity of the Godhead was used by the Jews to resist the reception of Christ.

The ruler of the synagogue said, "There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day" (Luke 13:14). But he ought to have known that the Lord of the sabbath was

there. That single word “daughter of Abraham” ought to have told him who He was that stood there. And the Lord answered him and said, “Thou hypocrite,” and so forth.

In verse 18 the Lord goes on to say what the kingdom will be like, while the king is rejected and away. While the king is sitting on His Father’s throne, until He comes to take His own throne, the kingdom is like a little seed thrown into the ground which springs up and becomes a great tree; just what we see in Christendom. This fills up the gap between Christ’s rejection and His coming again. There is no royal power exercised while the king is away; as it is said in Mark’s Gospel, “It springs up men know not how.” But when the harvest is ripe He will come again. He sowed the first time, and the second time He will put in His sickle. He does not, however, come looking for a great tree, but for heavenly fruit; though, instead of the fruit He expected, He will find the seed has become a great tree, with the fowls of the air lodging in the branches. Pharaoh was a great tree; Nebuchadnezzar was a great tree; the high and great ones of the earth, the representatives of earthly power. Even Israel, who had been planted “a noble vine, wholly a right seed” (Jer. 2:21), was bearing no fruit. Therefore, as it is said in Ezekiel is, “What is the vine-tree more than any other tree” (Ezek. 15:2), if it bears no fruit? It is only fit to be burned. We all know that the vine is the most fruitful thing that grows upon the face of the earth, and that the branches when cut off and withered make the best firewood; but they are useless for anything else. It was not a question of the kingdom here, but of fruit-bearing. The word sown in the heart does not come to a great tree, but produces fruit.

In Luke 13:21 the kingdom is likened unto leaven; and leaven is just that which spreads throughout the whole mass in which it is placed, and also gives a character to the thing in which it is. It is the nominal profession of Christianity which is spread into a great mass—a great system. Looked at as a doctrine it has leavened whole countries. Still it is not what the Lord could own; as leaven in Scripture is never used in a good sense. The idea is, the spreading of the doctrine while the king is away.

It should be observed that there is not a word here about the power of the Holy Spirit in connection with the spread of Christian doctrine. He is simply speaking about the effect produced in the world.

In the question of the disciples (Luke 13:23), “Are there few that be saved?” the word “saved” is the same as that which all through the Old Testament signifies the remnant spared. Therefore the question really was as to whether this remnant that would be spared would be few or many, when the judgment came. But, this being a mere idle question, the Lord does not answer it, but says to them (Luke 13:24), “Strive to enter in at the strait gate.” Those who would get in may. The strait gate was receiving Christ at that time. Some however would come and knock when the door is closed, to whom He will say, “I know ye not whence ye are.” Strive to enter in at the strait gate, through which Christ goes before you—that is, rejection. “For many [all Israel] shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able” (Luke 13:24). For, inasmuch as they did not receive Christ in humiliation, He says, “Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity” (Luke 13:27). It is all most simple when we see the rejection of Christ. For those who reject Christ in the day of His humiliation will themselves be rejected in the

day of His glory; and, instead of being His companions in the kingdom, will be thrust out. The unbelieving Jews shall see the Gentiles come into the glory of the kingdom, while they remaining in unbelief will be cast out.

The Pharisees came and said to Him, "Get thee out, and depart hence, for Herod will kill thee" (Luke 13:31). Now Herod was an Idumean and became their king; but what had this Idumean king to do with God's promises to Israel? Nothing whatever. In Herod we have a kind of figure of the willful king, first in his trying to kill Christ, and then in his having no faith in God's purposes or Christ's glory. But Christ answers, "Go ye and tell that fox" I shall do my Father's will till the moment come, for I am come to show divine power, and when rejected here shall be perfected in glory. What divine contempt for the apostate king was here combined with the most perfect human obedience! "Nevertheless I must walk today, and tomorrow, and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet perish OUT of Jerusalem." "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!" (Luke 13:34). After all, Jerusalem is the guilty place. Let the Idumean king say and do what he will, it is Jerusalem that is guilty; for Jerusalem was nearest to Himself. And the nearer I am to God, if I reject Him, the worse is the rejection, and the more dreadful the judgment, because it is the place of love. Look at Psalm 132, "The Lord hath chosen Zion, he hath desired it for his habitation," etc., and at the end of Psalm 78 it is the same election of Zion from verses 65-68. "But chose the tribe of Judah, the Mount Zion which he loved." And in Psalm 87, "What is Rahab

and Babylon?" I am not ashamed of Zion to compete with them. But Christ does not put the sin upon them until they have rejected both Him and His Father.

But before bringing out this purpose of grace, God dealt all through with man on the ground of responsibility, and the last effort He made was in sending His Son. The fig-tree yielded nothing—responsibility was fully put to the test, when the soil itself was found to be bad. I have tried the chosen portion, says God, and find the whole thing so worthless that nothing can be done with it. It is as though one had taken the sand of the sea and found it so impregnated with salt that nothing could be done with it; and, the more digging and pruning that was given to it, the more bad fruit it produced. And we all are no better than the Jews were, for we were, by nature, children of wrath even as others. What! condemn everybody? Yes, to be sure, but then I condemn myself! Man's "carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7). And the more pains God has taken, it has only brought out the more hatred. The old man is condemned, and the gospel begins with seeking and saving that which was lost. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" (Jer. 13:32). And do we not find the truth of all this in ourselves?

But notice how the divine person of the Lord comes out here, "O! Jerusalem, Jerusalem...how often would I have gathered...and ye would not!" (Luke 13:34). Now a prophet could not say this. Though Christ was a prophet, it is true, still He was more than a prophet. He was Jehovah; for none but Jehovah could gather Israel. As it is said, "He that scattered Israel will gather him" (Jer. 31:10). Israel had rejected Jehovah, when under responsibility; but Jehovah will own them when He comes in grace. The church will go

up to heaven, and the kingdom will be set up on the earth. And mark how the deity of our blessed Lord shines out again and again in the Gospels, while at the same moment the humanity remained so perfect. And here I would say a word or two as to the way of bringing this blessed fact out. For surely the circumstances through which the Lord passed in His path down here did bring out in a far brighter way WHO HE WAS, than any text that could be adduced to prove it. Not that I would set aside any text, but suppose you believed there was a God as a truth; if He were to come down by your very side and say, Here I AM, would not that be a very different thing? And though Christ was the humbled Man all through His path here (for He was ever the servant of all), yet when the service was of no use, then it *was* that God shone out. "Before Abraham was, I AM." See Luke 13:33-34. The moment He said, I must die, since you reject Me, immediately Jehovah shone out. "O! Jerusalem, Jerusalem...how often would I have gathered thee"—and who could gather ISRAEL but Jehovah Himself? but "ye would not," therefore "your house is left unto you desolate *until* the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Luke 13:35).

The complaint in the Psalms is, that there is none to say, "How long?"—none to count upon the faithfulness of Jehovah to His people. (See Psa. 74) The expression, "How long?" is often used in the Psalms, and in Isaiah 6 it refers to chastening, and not retribution. How long is Israel to stumble or fall? (Rom. 11). In Isaiah 6 the prophet having uttered those words, "Make the heart of this people fat," etc., taken up by the Lord in John 12, the prophet then says, "How long?" He was in the faith of God and reckoning upon God, and having God's mind, he cannot believe that

God will give them up, and therefore asks, “how long” the chastening is to continue. To which the Lord God answers, “There shall be a great forsaking in the midst of the land, but yet in it there shall be a tenth...so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof” (Isa. 6:12-13). The sap is still there, though there be no leaves.

So in Psalm 118:18, “Jehovah hath chastened me sore, but he hath not given me over unto death.” In the same way, the Lord does not say, Your house is left unto you desolate, and therefore you shall not see me again. No, but He says, “Ye shall not see me, *until* ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of Jehovah.” He can give as Jehovah, in grace, the answer, and when He gives repentance to Israel, then He will send Jesus—whom, until then, the heavens have received—and then our connection with Him comes in. The prophets spoke only of earthly things, though divine; but to the church it is “Holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling!” (Heb. 13:1). You hath He made to sit together with Him in the heavenly places, and that gives security. How did I get in there? By virtue of Christ; He is my title and is He not a good title? My desires are to be acquainted with this, that I am one with Christ in heaven. And these are my desires in fact, and that is what the Holy Spirit seals upon my soul, and we get it as our everlasting portion. When Israel is brought to repentance, then “the stone which the builders rejected will be the head of the corner,” and owned of them. They will say, “Oh give thanks unto Jehovah, for his mercy endureth forever.” Alas, they will receive another first! But when their hearts are turned and grace works, then they will use the language of Psalm 119, and find the expression of the law within their hearts, and when faith is thus exercised, and their hearts

are broken and open to receive Him, then He Himself will come to them. If there is not a prophet to say, "How long?" then Jehovah Himself will give the answer.

And though applied to Israel here, yet we may learn what the Lord is, for He never changes, and though He executes judgment in righteousness, grace is found in His heart for faith to lay hold of. "When the Son of man cometh shall he find faith on the earth?" "Well, if there be not faith to be found, or a prophet to be found, there is One who will lay up in His treasures something for faith to lay hold of in the sovereignty of His grace. We see Jehovah in that humble one, that Nazarene, and see how He is able to rise above all iniquity; and thus to see Jehovah shining out through it all, how precious He becomes to us! That we are one with Him should endear Him to our hearts, and in learning Him may He give us to follow Him.

On the Gospel According to John⁸

There is a general remark as to John's Gospel which will astonish some perhaps; that, except in three cases, John has nothing to do with heaven. In these alone you have heaven. "What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?" (John 6:62). "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2), and "Those whom thou hast given me be with me where I am," in chapters 6, 14 and 17; and in these it is only thrown out in a way. John's Gospel is really the manifestation of God to men down here in the person of Christ, and the coming of the Holy Spirit, with the declaration of Christ's coming again. I merely indicate the character of the Gospel in saying so: you do not get any ascension either at the end of it. Let me first give you a summary of it.

In John 1 you get Christ's person, and incarnation and work, or rather, perhaps, what He does than His work. All His essential names are there, not His relative ones. You do not get Him as Head of the church, or as High Priest, nor as the Christ, which are His relationships; for He is not revealed as Christ in verse 41.

In John 2, having His title as Son of man at the close of the first, we hear of His millennial work in the marriage, and the clearing of the temple, up to the end of verse 22. Verses 23 and 24 are connected with John 3, where we see

8 Notes of remarks made partly in reply to questions at a conference.

not only Christ's total rejection by man, but the setting aside of the natural man, the new birth and the cross.

These three chapters are before His entry on His public ministry. We know this, because John was not yet cast into prison, and from the other Gospels we learn it was after John was cast into prison, that He went out into His public ministry. In John 4 He leaves Judaea, the place of promise, of the temple, and all that, and sets aside Jerusalem and Samaria, bringing the gift of God down to the earth in grace. He sets up spiritual worship, and the old thing is set aside altogether. Then, in Galilee, He brings the power of life to man where he is, and heals the nobleman's son. In John 5 He is the quickening Son of God along with the Father, and the judging Son of man alone. He is Son of God in judging too. In John 6, He is the humbled Son of man incarnate and dying, and the food of the saints while He is away.

In John 7 the Holy Spirit is substituted for His manifestation to the world. Of course it is only the main idea I am giving you now. In John 8 His word is rejected. In John 9 His work is rejected. In John 10 He has His sheep in spite of all. In John 11 being rejected and having His sheep, God bears testimony to Him as Son of God in the power of resurrection. In John 12 He is owned by spiritual intelligence as the dying one (which comes in most beautifully in a little parenthesis), and then as Son of David, King of Israel, and Son of man; you get the three here, Son of God, Son of David, and Son of man. In John 13 He still remains the servant. As He cannot remain with His disciples here, He abides a servant, though gone to God, to fit them to be with Him there. At the end you have the last supper, and Judas, and then the cross, but in

the character of His glorifying God there. In John 14 He is telling them that He would come again to receive them, and He gives them what would be their comfort, while He was away; having revealed the Father in His own person, and then they in Him and He in them, known by them through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

In John 15 He is Himself the true vine on the earth, Israel is not; and He sends the Comforter to reveal His heavenly glory while His disciples bear witness, through the Comforter, of what He had been on earth. In John 16 we have the action of the Comforter on earth towards the world and in the church; they were to ask in His name which they had not done yet. In John 17 to the end of verse 23 He puts them completely into His own place on earth toward the Father, and towards the world, He being glorified; and in the last verses He wills that they should be brought into the same place with Him in heaven. In John 18 you begin the last history of Gethsemane, and so on. In John 19 remark that you have no human suffering, but divine power in it all; they scourge Him and you get all the facts about it, not that He did not suffer, but it is not that part that is brought out: people fall back to the ground instead of His sweating great drops of blood; you have the divine side, I mean. In John 20 you have the whole condition of believers from the first revelation of the fact of His resurrection and ascension until the remnant believe by seeing. In John 21 you get Christ ministerially represented as come again in the millennial times and the services of Peter and John until then, Peter to be cut off, but John to go on. It is the beginning of the millennium and of the history of Peter and John in the interval from Christ's death. Paul's ministry is not found there. Now let us go back.

In the very outset Christ came to the world, and the world knew him not, and He came to His own and His own received Him not; consequently the Jews are treated as reprobates; but He has come from the Father into the world. It is what some might call a Calvinistic gospel; consequently it shows the sovereign grace which leads anybody to receive Christ or own Him at all. They are born of God, not of the will of man. Therefore, too, He has His sheep; and this characterizes the Gospel.

The truth is entirely abstract in the first five verses except five words. The Gospel itself begins before Genesis. In Genesis you have the responsible creation; but here “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” a very distinct statement of the eternity of Christ. There is the being of the Word, He is the Word, the *Logos*, the expression of God’s mind, for Word is both—it is what we were speaking of once before as the intelligent and the intelligible. Christ is the expression, and the *Logos* too, because He is God. When the expression only is meant it is *rheema*, not *logos*. But *logos* takes up what the mind is as having a thought, or it expresses the mind. All the wisdom of God is in Christ, He is it, and besides He is the expression of it. Then you get another thing, and that is, personal distinction—“the Word was with God”—something in a personal sense distinct. And then “the Word was God,” and that is the nature. It is very full, though brief.

John 1:2 meets what was a common difficulty that He only became into personal distinctness when God began to act. Of course it is a mere notion, but it is met here: “The same was in the beginning with God.” Then in verse 3, I come to the beginning of Genesis. “All things were made

by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." He is Creator as to things outside Himself. And then I get what is inside Himself, "in him was life." Very full all this, as to the divine person and glory of the Lord. And another thing, "and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). God is light in His nature, but here is specific appropriation in the second person.

It is in form too a reciprocal expression. Wisdom always had man in its thoughts; the angels come into creation, but the life was the light of men, and therefore He became a man.

Then I get the judgment of the world, and of "his own," "the light shineth in darkness"—a thing impossible in nature, for if the light there shone in darkness, there would be no darkness for it to shine in. The judgment of the world is the consequence, for "the darkness comprehended it not." "The light shineth in darkness" is abstract too; He does not say "shone."

Then comes another truth of immense import. "There was a man sent from God," that is, God took pains with men to bring them to apprehend this light. He sends this messenger to draw people's attention; "the same came for a witness to bear witness of the light, that all men through him might believe" (John 1:7). All to no purpose it might be, but still there was the painstaking of God. "He was not that light, but was sent to bear witness of that light." Here we get this name of light (we have nothing of love yet), the purest thing we have any idea of, and which manifests everything else. It is light that makes all things manifest; but it is a thing too which is perfect purity. That is the true light which, on coming into the world, lights every man. It was not a mere Jewish thing; we have got far away

out of that now, but it comes into the world; it is not a question of promises here, but of nature and counsels. God in His counsels had to say to men, and light comes into the world; He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. Man had not the sense to see that the person who made him was in the world, and its light. And He came to the Jews, and they would not receive Him either. So there was the judgment of everything. You have got the world, and its pitch-darkness; and the Jews—His own—will not have Him: “there is none that understandeth” or “that seeketh after God.” (Rom. 3:11). Job 38:1-7 refers to the same: only that these very singers were created too; so that Job does not go quite so wide. John 1:3 is before the beginning of Genesis when you think of the angels.

We have got what Christ was, abstractly, and the result was that nobody received Him. They had no understanding, and no will; and now, consequently, we get grace working, “but as many as received Him, to them gave He power⁹ to become children of God.” It is not merely that they got light and blessing, but He gave them a place, “children of God,” “born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor the will of man, but of God.” I have the action of grace, and, where the action of grace is, they do receive Him.

If we are to distinguish the phrases in verse 13, “of flesh,” is the nature more; “of man” is the being; “flesh” is the characteristic, “man” is general. “Not of blood.” A Jew was born of blood and thought himself a son of the kingdom; but it was not of the will of the flesh either—Gentile, if you please. This closes on God’s part what He was; and it

9 Authority to take that place which the saints had not before.

closes on man's part too; and then there is the grace that comes in.

Now the Word is looked at as become flesh. In verse 14 a new part commences. Before, it was what He was; now, what He became (*what He began to be*). The Word became flesh and dwelt among us; it was a real thing, not like God visiting Abraham; but He dwelt among us, tabernacled there "and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, and of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace." His own incarnate character and our connection with it. The part about John the Baptist comes in, in the middle. But there is the statement, "the Word was made flesh"; and then you get the aspect He had. We beheld His glory, not of the Son as such, but as of an only-begotten with a Father. He had all the title of that excellency and value in everything. All that that was to the Father was with Him. It is His personal glory made visible in flesh. When He was made flesh, we get a witness of John (vs. 15), just as before, saying, "This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me, for he was before me."

The difference between only-begotten (*monogenees*) and first-born (*prototokos*), is that the first is His relationship to God eternally; the second is His relationship to other things. Thus, "I will make him my first-born, higher than the kings of the earth," in Psalm 89:27: This is not what He is essentially. He was light—the revealer of the Father. "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." "The light shineth in darkness" is real, and it is by incarnation; but John is not taking it up in an historical way, only the fact of light and *life*. "The law was given by

Moses, but grace and truth,” he does not say were given, but “came by Jesus Christ”—they were in His person.

He was the truth. The truth never was in the world till then. Bits of truth there were; prophecy was true, and people tell the truth to one another; but the truth was only now. Christ alone is the truth. The truth itself had never come. The law is not the truth; it is not its object. The law tells me what I ought to be; truth tells a fact that is. The law never told anything about truth, but gave a perfect rule, and showed what man ought to be—“Thou shalt not do this and that.” I might draw conclusions from it and say, I am not this or that; whereas, Christ was this and that; He was God and was man, a holy being, and love itself; and all that man without sin was; and the effect was, that He showed not what things ought to be, but what they were. This world is all very fine, but it is the mere tool and instrument of the devil. Christ tells the truth about everything, evil and good alike—just as light manifests everything; and, more, grace came by Him too; and I know not only what I am, but what God is, and, whatever I am, He is grace to me. Of course Christ had to die to fit us to be with God, but as regards testimony, everything is told out by Christ’s coming—what we are, what God is, what the devil is, and what the world is, and everything. The light shines in it, that is Christ’s nature; and then he comes down to the fact, that the “darkness comprehended it not” (John 1:5). That is the moral statement as to it.

As to the force of the use of the names “God” and “Father” in the Gospel of John, and pretty much in his Epistle, as a general rule, when you speak of our responsibility or the nature of things, you get “God.” But when the ways of grace are unfolded, you get the Father and the Son; there are

certain exceptions which only confirm it. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). It was essential to put "God" in there, because it was as God He did it. "The Father sent the Son to be Savior of the world" (1 John 4:17). "And this is life eternal that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." That is a most blessed sentence; though the word "love" is not there, it is the perfection of it. We cannot know God by seeing Him; but the only-begotten Son, in whom is concentrated all the Father's delight, and who is in the bosom of the Father, hath declared Him. The Son comes and declares the Father as He knows Him in His bosom, just as the Father enjoys the Son as the object of His delight and love. If I were to tell you what my father was in his love, I should tell you what he was to me; and Christ comes and tells us all this Himself, and therefore He could say, "He hath that seen me hath seen the Father." In another sense He came forth from the Father and came into the world.

There never was a time when the Son was so dear to the Father as on the cross. "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again" (John 10:17). That is, if you look at Him as a Son with His Father. If you take Him as actually suffering being made sin, He could as such have no joy in God. He was forsaken in His soul of God. That is quite true, if you are looking at judicial action in respect of sin. He could not then have any enjoyment of communion with God. The principal part of the cross was the interruption of the communion, but the

complacency of the Father in the Son was never so great. It is a misapprehension of relationships which has made confusion here. My father is a man; but suppose I were to go and say to him “my man, so-and-so,” it would deny the relationship between us; but if he says to me “my boy,” it is very natural, because it is the expression of the relationship. You will never get the value of such things by putting them into a cut-and-dry form. Suppose I were to try to act the son to somebody, I should in that case slip out something all wrong as sure as possible. If the judge were my father, and I go into court, there I should say to him, “my lord”; but this would not be to deny him as my father.

Verse 18 is the revelation of the Father in the world, and it is striking, if we compare it with John’s first epistle. In that he says, “No man hath seen God at any time; if we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us!” (1 John 4:12). We know that by the Holy Spirit. Here the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father He hath declared Him.

But I think that very often there is defect among Christians as to relationship, and their apprehension of it; that is, they do not live in the present consciousness of it; they come even in worship in a certain sense through Christ—no man ever came in any other way—but there is not the sense of what the Lord means when He says the “Father himself loveth you” (John 16:27). There is no consciousness of that; it is rather persons outside, conscious they can get in. Of course they never could get in but by Christ.

Then comes John’s mission, preparing the way before Him. He says, “I baptize you with water, but there standeth one among you whom ye know not; he it is who coming

after me is preferred before me.” John gives the divine person of Christ and bears testimony to Him. So that we now have had three things: the abstract nature of Christ; then Christ incarnate; then as the revealer of the Father. And we have John’s testimony to these; and He who was divine and incarnate, and the revealer of the Father, dwelt among us “full of grace and truth.”

Then in John 1:29 we come to His work. He is “the Lamb of God,” and He “baptizes with the Holy Ghost” (John 1:33). Those are the two parts of His work; He is not only a Lamb, who takes away the sin of the world, but He gathers a peculiar people by the Holy Spirit too. You notice it is not “taketh away the sins,” nor “has taken” away the sin; you never get either. Often people say Christ has taken away original sin and so on; here it simply says He is the doer of it. It points Him out as such. He is in every sense God’s Lamb, He is of God and suited to God, and the effect of the work of this Lamb is the removal of all sin totally out of the world, away from God’s sight; He takes it clean away. The first Adam was set up an innocent man; but the moment he became a sinful man, all that God did and does now as to the world He does in respect of sin. If He judges, it is for sins; if He forgives and shows grace it refers to sin, whatever He does in government must have reference to that. There is sin, and God must act in respect of it now; when the new heavens come and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness, then the ground of relationship between God and the world will be righteousness instead of sin, or indeed instead of innocence either. It is based upon accomplished redemption which never can lose its value, and therefore the ground of relationship is immutable in the nature of things. And that ground is

already laid, though the thing itself has not yet come. We have justification and peace and reconciliation. This is however only one particular part of the result; in the new heavens and new earth the whole result will be completely fulfilled. The result is not produced in manifestation at all as yet.

Thus John 1:29 has no reference to time. Christ is the taker away of sin. It is just the same as in Hebrews 2, "He that sanctifieth, and they who are sanctified, are all of one." It is not there that they are going to be sanctified, or that they have been sanctified, but simply those are the people.

Thus we have His work as the Lamb of God, and the next thing is John bearing record, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him." And then follows the great fact that, besides accomplishing redemption, He is the baptizer with the Holy Spirit. The first thing is, He is the one who takes sin clean out of the world, and then His work being accomplished brings the redeemed into the full blessing of sons. He first, note, takes His place among men and receives the Holy Spirit before He becomes the giver of it to others. And He is marked as Son of God in that place. It is a beautiful expression of the way in which Christ found Himself among us. And then heaven was opened the moment He took His place with the remnant and was baptized—the Holy Spirit comes down on Him, and the Father says, That is My Son.

It was the Son that created in Hebrews 1 and in Colossians 1; and as to being Son in the eternal state, He says, "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world"; again, "I leave the world and go to the Father"; and you have no Father if you have no Son. If I do not know Him as Son when He came into the world, I have

no mission from God at all. And you get too the Father sent the Son.

“Son of the Father” and “Son of God” are the same essentially, only one is personal relationship, the other nature. But there are persons who take it that Christ was only Son as come into the world. The positive answer is given to this in Hebrews and Colossians, that by Him, the Son, the world was made. He is also called Son as born into this world. There is “This day have I begotten thee” (Psa. 2:7). That is not quite the same thing, though the same person, of course. He was begotten in time, which is true as to His human estate.

But Hebrews and Colossians are conclusive. It is of immense import, because I have not the Father’s love sending the Son out of heaven, if I have not Him as Son before born into the world. The Son gives up the kingdom to the Father in 1 Corinthians 15. I lose all that the Son is, if He is only so as incarnate, and you have lost all the love of the Father in sending the Son as well. “I have declared unto them thy name and will declare it,” will declare it is now. He did it on earth, and does still, and I believe will do it to all eternity if you take the general statement of Scripture.

In Acts 13 you will find Paul, after speaking of other things, says in verse 33, “God hath raised up Jesus” (not “again”; which ought not to be there), and so in Acts 3:26, “God having raised up his Servant Jesus” (not Son; Peter never states that Jesus is the Son of God); so in John 13, “he hath raised him up,” as it is written in Psalm 2:7, “Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee”; and then he goes on to prove resurrection by quoting another text: “I will give you the sure mercies of David” (Acts 13:34). The

sureness of them is the proof they were in resurrection not dependent on failing man, and then by resurrection He was declared to be the Son of God with power.

Then in John 1:35-36 you get again, "The next day after John stood and two of his disciples, and looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God." In this we have not John's public ministry that had not produced the effect; but the going out of his own heart at the sight of the Lamb of God." And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus." And then Christ—which to me is most important—Christ accepts the being a center. He "saith unto them, What seek ye? "They said unto Him, "Where dwellest thou?" "He saith unto them, Come and see." Christ becomes a center.

Again in John 1:43 Christ says to Philip, "Follow me"; and this intimates another thing to me, which is, the only right path through the world where there is no path and nothing right. We are accustomed to think we have a way to trace; but a way to trace proves the world is in ruin and nothing right with us. If a man is in a right place, he has no way to find out; but if I am in a wrong place, there is no right way there. Suppose my son scampers off away from me to Brazil, there is no right way for him until he comes back; for all he is doing does but carry on his error of being away from his father. In Eden and in heaven there is no way to find. If I have got to find a way, it is because I am in a wrong place; but here I find Christ is the way, and Christ is the center, and He accepts it too. The days are numbered from verse 34 when the gathering of the godly remnant around Jesus begins. First through John the Baptist's ministry, and the day following Jesus Himself gathers; and this takes up all the time right on to the remnant at the end represented

by Nathanael, a remnant then and a remnant to the end. Philip found Nathanael and said unto him, "We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth the son of Joseph." There is the greatest prejudice in Nathanael, but there is uprightness. "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" "Come and see." Nathanael asks, "Whence knowest thou me?" "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree; I saw thee." Nathanael answers, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel." This is the confession of Psalm 2; that is Christ's Jewish place. Jesus answered and said, "Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these." And He said unto him, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Thou shalt see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." This is Psalm 8. I get Nathanael as a remnant owning Christ in His place there, and then comes "Ye shall see greater things than these"—ye shall see all creation—the angels—subject to the Son of man. "Under the fig tree" was really the Jew, and God knew him there. The fig tree is symbolic of Judaism. That gives us the whole, the abstract nature of Christ, His incarnation, His work, gathering others, and calling by John the Baptist and by Christ; then the owning of Him as in Psalm 2, and finally His place in Psalm 8.

Then in John 2 you get the third day. John's ministry is one day, Christ's ministry is a second day, and then "the third day" in John 2 is the millennium, the marriage, and water of purification of the Jews. All among the Jews.

Thus John 1: 35 is the first day. The third day is when the remnant is all called in. You get no church here at all.

John the Baptist's ministry was preparatory; then Christ gathers by His own ministry, and gathers to the kingdom, and revealing of the Son of man; and then the millennium. It is in Psalm 2 we hear of Christ set King of Zion; then the trials of the remnant, and in Psalm 8 everything is put under Him. Here it is the highest creature that is put under Him. When I get Him Son of man, He is Lord of all. There is nothing of the church, unless it would be in baptizing with the Holy Spirit.

The marriage in John 2 is all a picture of millennial joy. The time of the second day would have commenced when the Lord was on earth, and it will be resumed again; but it is in abeyance now. What was to go on till the destruction of Jerusalem you get in Matthew 10:10 the end of verse 15. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was at Pentecost. There will be a latter rain when the Holy Spirit will come down, though you do not get exactly a baptism of the Holy Spirit in the millennium.

John 3 is immensely important; for you get in it a complete judgment of human nature, the absolute testimony to what man is, but the bringing in of the complete grace that meets it too. The last three verses of John 2 belong really to John 3; and there you get that men could believe in Christ in a certain kind of way, and yet it is good for nothing. It was not insincerity, nor is it so now, often; but it is a human conviction there justly drawn from His miracles now. That has arisen perhaps from education or human causes, but it was all in man and of man. The moment other motives and stronger came before them, they cry out, "Crucify him."

In Nicodemus we find a want that is something more than that. The moment a want is thus felt, there is a

consciousness that the world will be against you; and so he goes by night. There is a real want in his soul. He goes to Christ and follows up the impression. What the Holy Spirit produces is always a want, though the want is met. Nicodemus owns Christ to be a teacher that comes from God; but he did not know that the old nature was good for nothing, and that he must be born again. Thus it is the Lord meets him: "I am not going to teach flesh: you must have a new nature; the old cannot be taught at all, except outwardly, and this is worthless." The special case for a Jew is that he could not enter the earthly kingdom, except he were born again. Therefore the Lord says, "Marvel not that I said unto you, Ye must be born again."

Then you come to the principle of sovereign grace, "the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth; so is everyone that is born of the Spirit." This can reach a Gentile; and that is grace. Do not be astonished that I say, you Jews must be born again, flesh is but flesh, and then the Holy Spirit goes where it lists. The Spirit of God goes where He pleases; God is sovereign.

Nicodemus ought to have known it from the Old Testament prophecies, say Ezekiel 36 That was for the Jews, and in the millennium they must be born again, and they must be so even to get into the kingdom on earth. But the moment you get the cross, the whole thing is carried farther; if you look at it, you will see the Lord's own statement. The water of Ezekiel refers not to baptism, but to the word of God exclusively. Baptism refers to it; and so here. Puseyites and others refer these words to sacraments, but it is the word. Baptism may be its symbol; the symbol refers to the truth, of course. It is not that such words

misplace the symbol; people do that; but the symbol is one way of teaching the truth. You have a similar thing in John 6: we must eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of man, or else we have no life in us. People apply that to the Lord's supper, and there we have a symbol again; for it is a symbolic statement of these truths; and we have the written statement of them too in the word; and both these refer to death, Christ's death, and that brought home to us when you come to look into them.

It does not say in terms, you cannot enter heaven except you are born again, though it would be perfectly true; but you cannot enter the kingdom of God. These chapters and the sacraments refer to the same thing, but these chapters do not refer to the sacraments.

Then the Lord says, "we speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness." In John 3:32 John says the same thing, "and what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony." If you get man as man in the presence of Christ Himself telling these heavenly things, man's heart will not have one of them. A man would have nothing to do with them; if you were to put a natural man in heaven, he would get out as fast as ever he could, he would not find a single thing there that he likes.

We have had the rejection of the Lord's testimony, and also the fact that an entirely new nature is brought in, "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." The cross must be there, but it goes on to the millennium on the earth, and there you must get men born again to have part in the kingdom.

"Again" means "anew, completely, from the beginning," not a modification of the old thing. In Luke 1:3 it is "from

the very first.” It is the same word. I know many think the new birth is an action of the Holy Spirit on man as he is, especially where there are no decided views of truth; as if the Spirit of God found a man, body, soul, and spirit, in a bad state, and then put him, body, soul, and spirit, in a good state. But the testimony as brought here is received of nobody: “wherefore, when I came, was there no man? when I called, was there none to answer” (Isa. 50:2); that is the condition, and then what is done is that they are born of God. Then we come to the second great truth, the Lord comes revealing things from heaven, and also doing that which was needed to take us up there. We see the two sides of the cross, the Son of man must be lifted up (and that carries a great deal with it), and then the source of it is that “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” This same person comes on man’s behalf, and on God’s side God gave Him. On the one side, it is Son of man; and on the other side, it is Son of God. Then the lifting up of the Son of man you will see in two connections, as the rejected of man, and as “made sin.” A living Messiah is for the Jews according to promise, but He must be lifted up, rejected by the world, cast out of it, and made sin before He could draw all men.

But God gave His only-begotten Son, and that brings everything to a test. He was not sent to judge, but save, and he that believeth not is judged already because he has not believed. “And this is the judgment that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil.” He came into the world to die, and verses 16-17 refer to Him as the lifted-up Son of man. I should not say in the same absolute way now,

that God loves the world. God *was* in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. But this has not stopped His grace, but laid the ground for the testimony of it in the whole creation under heaven by His ambassadors. I suppose it is the characteristic of God, and no time is in the statement. Still there is the accepted time and the day of salvation, though that depends on resurrection. It is in full view of the cross that the Lord said, "God so loved the world." God is now beseeching men to be reconciled, He is acting on that ground now. He gave His Son, and that is done and finished; but it is on that He is now acting.

The casting away of the Jews did put the world in a different position before God; and the cross put the world in a different position of responsibility as to grace and the saint as delivered from it. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32). The cross gave a righteous outlet to God's love. The strongest scripture as to this change is, "for if the casting away of them," the Jews, "be the reconciling of the world" (Rom 11:15).

We get a very distinct character given to Christ's testimony, and one that made a total breach with the world; "he that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthy, and speaketh of the earth," that is John the Baptist's testimony; the setting up of the kingdom on earth has its place and character, but all that is gone now, and it is the setting up of the kingdom of heaven. "He that hath received his [Christ's] testimony hath set to his seal that God is true." That is the true reception of the word.

It may be John the Baptist's testimony to the end of verse 32, and John the Evangelist's in verse 33. There may be some doubt about it. The last verse certainly looks like

John the Evangelist's line of things more than John the Baptist's.

The force of "the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36) is that he has deserved it; and that if he rejects Christ, he lies under it still. But we must not forget that this wrath applies to all sins and uncleanness, not merely to unbelief: "for which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience" (Col. 3:6). In this last verse of the chapter "the wrath of God abideth" if they do not bow to Christ's authority; it is not, disobey Him in the details of precept, or anything of that sort; the "believeth not" means "is not subject to" Him. In "He that believeth not is judged already," it takes him as not believing. If he has been inattentive, it is not condemnation that he cannot escape from as yet. John is not speaking about attention or inattention, but about not believing or being subject to Christ.

What is so striking is the entire setting aside of man. The Son of God comes with His testimony, and nobody receives it. God sent His Son that the world through Him might be saved, and that is what the world will not receive. In a sense the object of the gospel now is that men through Him may be saved, though it is also to gather out a people. It is a different thing—God's mind and the absolute state of things. You read in 1 Timothy 2:4, "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth"; it is not "will" in the sense of purpose and desire, but it is good will as to His own nature and love. It is the character of God, not His purpose; and the two are very distinct, what God is, and the way He deals. But there is the activity of His love, "As though God did beseech you by us" (2 Cor. 5:20); and, as one result of that, even the

condemnation becomes more terrible if the riches of His goodness are despised, “not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Rom. 2:4-5); that increases the condemnation.

When grace had been offered to man and rejected, man was set aside, and a new thing altogether brought in. And so in John 4, Christ being set aside by the Jews, He leaves Judea and goes to Galilee. In John 4:4, “He must needs go through Samaria,” and then follows the character of His ministry. Wearied with His journey He sits on the well. A woman comes to draw water, and He says to her, “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water” (John 4:10). If you did but know that God was giving, and had come down so low as to ask a drink of water of you, if you but knew that, who it is, and in what character He has come down, you would have asked and He would have given, and what He would have given would have been in you a well of water springing up into everlasting life. Then you find all that is to no purpose directly, and the way the Lord gets at the woman is by her conscience; and understanding comes in by conscience. She is a poor wretched soul, but a very interesting woman, and a great deal going on in her heart though a vile creature. It is a beautiful picture, wonderfully distinct and definite, of how the Lord deals with her heart. The woman is astonished that He has anything to say to her, and the disciples that he had to say to a woman. But the Lord’s action towards her is very distinct, getting intelligence in by the conscience. “Go, call

thy husband and come hither.” “I have no husband.” “Thou hast had five husbands, and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband.” “Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet.” She had got totally alone through her restless search for happiness and willful ways, she does not go to the well at the time when the women usually went to draw water; she was tired of her life, for she says, “That I thirst not, neither come hither to draw” (John 4:15). The Lord was weary too in His lonely path of grace, and more isolated than she, and sat at the well, and the woman was weary and utterly isolated by sin, but her conscience is reached, and note here the effect. She recognizes the word of God that had reached her, its authority not merely the truth of what was said: “I perceive that thou art a prophet”; and then the Lord points out to her that God must be worshipped in spirit because He is a Spirit, and that the Father seeketh worshippers in spirit and in truth. His nature required it, His grace sought it. She says she knows that, when Messiah comes, He will tell us all things. But He replies, You have got Him already. Where the heart has been visited really, there Christ has already come. Then you see the effect; she is entirely delivered from care; she leaves her water-pot and goes after other people. “He that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal.” We do not get the kingdom here exactly, though it was here I have no doubt.

The “needs,” in John 4:4, is a material one. The straight way was through Samaria; the Jews went that way generally, though they did not stop at Samaria on the way. I would not say it was on purpose to meet this woman, though God’s purpose that He should. The sixth hour was our noon—at least so I have always reckoned it here. At the end of the chapter we see the character of the ministry of

Christ in anticipating death, symbolical of the death that was coming on Israel. In point of fact, He had to make him alive: "Come down ere my child die," said the man.

The Samaritans were a mixed people. After Israel was carried captive, the king of Assyria sent people to live in the land who did not fear the Lord; and the Lord sent lions and slew some of them. So one of the priests was sent back to teach them the manner of the God of the land, and then when Nehemiah came back, Sanballat and these people wanted to join him, and he would not let them. Mount Gerizim was the place where Joshua pronounced the blessings, and so they said that would be the proper place for worship, and a temple was built at Gerizim by them. The high priest's daughter was married to a prince of these people; and they built a temple for themselves.

As to the temple in the millennium, there is a square in the midst of the land, and the city is one side of the square, and the temple is on the other. The portion allotted to the temple seems to be separated from Jerusalem by some distance.

In John 3 Christ takes them out of flesh; and in John 4 He tells what worship is outside of flesh. In John 5 we get the great principle of life, but He does not begin with life. There is instruction connected with it that carries us farther in it as to the character of sin when He comes to the doctrine that men are dead. A man lay at Bethesda, where there were some remains of Jewish blessing. Jehovah had said, "I am Jehovah that healeth thee" (Ex. 15:26); and the Jehovah that healeth was yet there. In the case of this man, the means were there; but the disease he had had taken away the power of using the means; the effect of sin is to make us incapable of using the means afforded

to flesh under the old covenant. To use the pool, he must have the power to get in, and it was just what the disease he had to be healed of had taken away, and such even if willing, as this man was, is man's state under the law. The Lord brings power with Him. The Jews reproach Him when the man is healed, with breaking the sabbath, and then He gives that beautiful answer ("Father" being the name of grace), "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5:17). God could not have His rest where sin and misery are. The law tested man and said, "Do your duty and enjoy my sabbath of rest here below"; but the fact was, they did not do the duty; they were all sinners, and, instead of there being the rest of God, the Father works and the Son works, and brings in divine life where sin and death are; but in this world as such one can have no rest. God at least can have none.

I do not believe a word of what they say about leaving out verse 4 of this chapter. These learned Germans leave anything out. It is just the same with the opening of John 8. You get Augustine in the fourth century, saying some had left that out because it was contrary to morality; and the same language is used by others. In one of the manuscripts of the old Latin translation it was there, and they have deliberately torn it out. But some men take this and that out without the least moral discernment; it is very easy to take it out so, but how did it get in? what should people have put it in for? In other places, as in Acts 8:37, you can account for it in the plainest way. There was a reason for putting in this verse. As for the manuscripts, if not versed in them it is very easy to be entirely misled about them. L is almost always the same as B, and so L is no good as a separate witness. The manuscript E omits the verse, and

the corrector has put it in again. These people did not like the angels, and so they left them out. After all the only question is whether an angel did it—God did it, anyway.

Then you have “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work” (John 5:17). The Lord often did miracles on the sabbath day, taking pains as it were to upset it. You do not find any one institution in the wilderness to which the sabbath is not added. You find the sabbath brought in wherever there was some new expression of God’s will and ways, as obligatory; while you never have the sabbath mentioned in connection with Christ’s working in the New Testament, except to cast a slur upon it; it was a sign of the old covenant and the dispensation was passing away. Now the Lord’s day is a testimony to resurrection, the essential basis of the new creation for man; the sabbath of the rest of God for man on the earth; while in connection with that rest it serves to give man a day’s rest as of God and it will be fulfilled in the millennium: whatever man has a title to in purpose and peace Christ takes the right of it and will make it good. Then when you come to the typical import of it, the seventh day was type or sign of the earth’s rest, and the Lord’s day of heavenly rest. The Lord by His action shows that a power was come in that was paramount to law. It is strikingly significant that Christ lay in His grave on the sabbath day.

Adam takes no share in the sabbath before he fell; he never entered into it according to Hebrews. The Lord took up flesh and its responsibilities, and without slighting what God instituted, man having failed, He died out from under the whole. This is the thing that made such a hubbub in Scotland—this sabbath question. A well-known minister said he found Moses dead and threw him out of the pulpit.

I say no man has died in Christ away from under the law, which has power over a man as long as he lives. I believe it is a very bad sign indeed if a man slights the Lord's day. God has given you a day free to use for Him, and you make light of it or turn it to mere pleasure. I ask, what use do you make of it, for yourself or for Him? It is all connected with the question, Is the law the thing we are still under? It is perfectly true that the Christian by love fulfills the law, but if I have to do with the law as such, I have not died to sin; because the law has power over a man so long as he lives. I remember one, a most blessed man too, who would not wash his hands on the Lord's day; he was acting up to the light he had, I do not doubt.

The "greater works than these, that ye may marvel," are His raising the dead, and many works that He did; He raised Lazarus when he was stinking. They all knew that if the Lord had been there Lazarus would not have died, but He did not go purposely before his death; raising him was more than healing.

Now in the doctrine that follows, Christ does not take up mere weakness, but He goes on to death. We are dead in sin, and He says, "As the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will"; and judgment too is committed to the Son alone, "that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father." Both Father and Son quicken, but judgment against the wicked is committed by the Father to the Son because He is the Son of man. The Father chastens: that is another thing.

I get these two ways in which the Son is honored, quickened souls own Him, and the wicked must, for they are judged by Him. There is no confounding of the two

things, or rather destroying the certain truth of the first by bringing it into question in the second; by bringing all up into a common judgment, as if the thing was not settled already; but you have the two ways through which the Son is honored. Then the heart will ask: which place am I in? "He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment ["condemnation" is not the same word], but is passed from death unto life" I see in that verse the whole system of Romans and Ephesians brought out. He that is under the quickening power will not come into judgment, that is Romans; but, not merely his responsibility is met, he is passed from death unto life and gone over into the new creation; that is Ephesians.

As I said, when you come to the doctrine He goes on beyond the case of the paralytic. Doctrinally, a man is dead in sins, and by grace passes out of death into life, and does not go into judgment at all, so as to raise any question as to his acceptance; though he gives an account of himself. The bringing all men into judgment upsets all the truth of Scripture about it, because saints are raised in glory. What an odd thing it is to talk about raising a man in glory, and then judging him! It is upsetting the whole of grace right on to the glory. Then people say it is done only to declare a man just. But he is declared just already; all that believe are justified from all things, and glorifying declares him just, surely. Take for example; there is Paul who has been these eighteen hundred years in heaven, and you are going to take him out and judge him as to whether he is fit to go there! It is striking folly.

The Son quickeneth whom He will, but when you come to the end of the chapter, you get the responsible side. You

have the testimony of John the Baptist, the testimony of My Father, the testimony of My works, and the testimony of your own scriptures (where you think you have eternal life) which testify of Me, and yet you will not come unto Me that you might have life. I have four witnesses that there is eternal life here for you, and you will not have it. It was the rejection of the One in whom life was present from God.

Now as to responsibility; power is not the question at all. If my will were right, there would soon be power from God. Here is my child tied under the table by the leg, and I say to him, "Come with me"; and he says, "I won't." I say, "You must"; but he will not, and I go to flog him. But then he says, "I was tied by the leg to the table"; but I say, "that makes no difference, I have a knife to cut the cord, for you would not come. It is the will that is the difficulty. I have lent ten thousand pounds to a man; he comes and tells me he is not responsible to me for his debt, for he has not a penny left—all is squandered. He has no power to pay but that does not destroy my claim.

In John 6 we see a beautiful picture of the Son of man in lowliness. In John 5 we have the Jewish means of healing, and here follows the Jewish passover, for which His own sacrifice is substituted. He shows Himself as Jehovah in Psalm 132:15, "I will satisfy her poor with bread," He shows that here, and they own Him for a prophet, and then they are going to take Him by force and make Him a king. That gives two of Christ's titles. But He will not be king in this carnal way, and goes up into the mountain, and takes the place of priest. Here is Christ, who would not be king, was a prophet, and intercedes on high, His people toiling below. Then you get Christ, the food of His

people now while He is away, in a double character; He is the bread that came down from heaven—the incarnation; they reject that, and then He goes farther and says, you must eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood. They say, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” I get the revelation that, if you do not take a dead Christ, you cannot enjoy a living one come down from heaven. You cannot enjoy Christ as bread come down from heaven, unless you come in by atonement. You must come in as a mere sinner, or else you cannot take Him to eat for the maintenance and food of life.

John 6:57 says the living Father had sent Him, and He lived on account of the Father, so we live by reason of Him by eating Him. We have the two things, it is eating both for reception of and for maintenance of life. I remember a person once saying he ate Christ once for all, but it is not so here. In verses 54-56 you have in the Greek, the present participle for “eating,” in the others the aorist tense. I come in by Christ’s death, eat His flesh and drink His blood—that is eating to have life; but I go on eating Him after, though my life is the consequence of eating. Verse 56, “dwelleth in me and in I him,” goes farther than the first statement.

“I will raise him up at the last day” shows perpetual security on into another world. “I bring in death, as the true way and you must come in by death; you cannot have the old thing; nor can you have a living Christ to be your Savior, it is only by death, and then it will be in resurrection, that you get the blessing”; and then you get the statement that it goes right on to the end, and then when the present period is closed “I will have them all up in resurrection.”

There is a distinction between the eatings. It is the aorist tense in verse 51, and in verse 53, "have eaten," which having no present participle, borrows another word in the next verses, 54, 56, 57 and 58; the first (aorist) is the one act eating for life, and the other is now eating for maintenance of life. "The last day" is the last of this period when Christ comes of course. Really this is not a dispensation. The Jews had a "this world" and "a world to come," "this age" and an "age to come." Messiah was to bring in the "age to come." The age of the law went on and Messiah did come, but they would not have Him, and the whole thing stopped; then comes the church between that and His second coming; and this is why I said this is not strictly a dispensation, but when Messiah comes again, it will close this time, and then will be the last day of this age.

The times of the Gentiles in Daniel, and the parenthesis of the church, are not at all contemporaneous; for the times of the Gentiles began in Babylon, being the times of the four Gentiles beasts in Daniel. The times of the Gentiles will not end at the same time with the church, but go on a little after we are caught up. The temple of Jehovah on earth was set aside when the people were carried to Babylon, and they never got the ark again, but a remnant of them was spared to present to them Messiah.

I know what a person means by "the dispensation of the kingdom of heaven," but we belong to a heavenly thing in an interval, and there are no dispensations in heaven. The kingdom of heaven is a dispensation, the dispensation of the gospel is an administration. The "I live by the Father" in verse 57 is the sense of dependence: (*dia* with a genitive is the instrument); with the accusative as this is, it is the

reason. It is not “by,” “through,” or “for the sake of”; but by “reason of,” “on account of,” is right.

We have had that Christ was a prophet, and was not King, and had taken a place on high. He had left the disciples, and while absent they toiled against the sea, and when He rejoined them, they were at the land. He was their food, and in our coming to Him we must come by eating His flesh and drinking His blood; and then we saw that it was completed in resurrection, “I will raise him up at the last day.” You have proof there that it cannot be the Lord’s supper, for whosoever eats Christ will live forever, be raised at the last day according to the life he has received. The aorist, in verses 51 and 53, “has eaten,” is the thing done; where it is “eats,” the participle is used, verses 54, 56, 57 and 58. I am an eater of Christ, I go on eating, I feed on Him. It is first feeding on His death, and then feeding on Him continually. This shows what poor Romanists do in transubstantiation; they deny the whole truth in their doctrine of concomitancy. If the blood be in the body, it is no atonement at all, and therefore you eat the flesh and drink the blood separately. Theirs is a sacrament of non-redemption, instead of a sacrament of redemption.

It was not “old corn” here. It is the Father sending the Son to be the Savior. In the end of Galatians 2 it is faith on Him in heaven, it is not a question of eating there. I prefer “on him” to “in him,” because it is on Him as an object there. “The faith of Christ” is simply that He is the object. “Have faith in God” in Mark 11:22 is in Greek “the faith of God”; that is, has God for its object. What is in Galatians is this, I am dead, and then I get two things, “nevertheless I live,” and “I live by the faith of the Son of God.” But whenever I have Christ as life in me, it is by

faith of Christ as an object; He is my life and makes me live on Him, my eye rests on Him and I live by that. "By faith of Jesus Christ," in Romans 3:22 is the faith which is characterized by that name, so to speak, and the owning of what is in Him.

John 6 refers to communion and feeding. Then the Lord adds "the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life," the mere carnal eating is nothing. Flesh profits nothing—I am speaking in a spiritual sense, that is, not literal—a guard against that, though we eat Him as incarnate. Flesh may take it up in a way, and then it becomes a mere awakening of a sentiment or feeling, just as the daughters of Jerusalem wept for Him at seeing a man carried off to the cross, but there is no conscience in that. But when I go to Him and am cleansed by Him, this is a different thing.

I must "have eaten" in the first instance; verses 51 and 53 are aorists as I was saying; and in some cases of exhortation. It is "He that has eaten"; in verse 53; "Except ye have eaten," etc., and in verse 57; "So he that eateth me [goes on eating] shall live on account of me." In verse 54 the real force of it is, "the eater of my flesh and the drinker of my blood." In the Jewish services the passover in the beginning of the chapter would answer to this. And "Christ our passover was sacrificed for us."

It is striking how the Jews are always viewed as rejected, and uniformly oppose Him in this Gospel. Nor does He say a word to make His words intelligible to them. And the disciples many of them went away, and the branches of the vine were broken off. These were simply professors. Thus a man might be a disciple without being quickened, so far as following after Him goes.

The great thing is death first. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10), and when I come to talk of feeding on Christ, I must first feed on His death. The Lord's supper is a symbol of the same truth of which this chapter speaks; but these words are positively untrue of the Lord's supper. I would not connect the eating of the Supper with this chapter at all, but with the Christ who is spoken of in this chapter. The Supper and the chapter refer to the same thing, but not to one another. This chapter is the word of God about it, and the Lord's supper is the symbol of the same.

In Luke 24, I doubt not, it is the Lord's supper; not actually sitting down for that purpose, but they sat down to a meal, and the Lord took the bread and brake it. The "did eat" in John 6:58 is the aorist tense; "not as your fathers did eat," because they were not eating it now; and He adds, "he that eateth [or the eater — present participle] of this bread shall live forever."

Then He asks, "Doth this offend you, What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before," You have in this chapter the incarnation, the death, and then the ascension suggested, but you do not get the resurrection referred to here. An incarnate and dead Christ are looked at as food of life. Death and resurrection is not the point of view in John; but simply departing out of this world to the Father.

I do not know what is the best reading of verse 69, as I trouble myself little about readings, unless there is something positive in them. Tischendorf's English Testament gives the English text all thrown into doubt, adding readings from three manuscripts for people to decide which is

which, as if they could. The effect on my mind was very unsatisfactory. It is very difficult for people to enter into the merits of these manuscripts. These gentlemen turn up their noses at Alexandrian when they get others on their side; but the Syriac is older still, and it is said more often agrees with Alexandrian. As for leading people to any conclusion by quoting letters, it is no guide whatever unless to those who know the place and character of the various texts. The Alexandrian is of two distinct families in the Gospels and Epistles; and it is perfectly impossible for ninety-nine out of a hundred to know anything about them. Tregelles is very accurate and diligent, but he is one-sided so that you cannot trust him. As for any truth, whether "Son of the living God" be there or not, it makes little difference; no particular truth, I mean, is involved in it here.

To return, many of the disciples go back, but Peter had the consciousness of Christ's person; whatever the degree of his knowledge, he had what held him fast when other people went away, though he knew no better than they did what the eating and drinking was. You cannot take a lower condition of faith than this expresses: "thou hast the words of eternal life, to whom shall we go?" "But Peter had got the person in whom the life was. In point of fact, the less the confession, the more strong would be the instruction of the passage. If I had got hold of Christ at all, I had got what was not to be shaken. Peter was negatively kept; "there is nowhere else to go but to you"; after all it is a great thing to say so; simple souls are often kept when wisecracks fall. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John 10:27-28). But "a stranger will they

not follow, but will flee from him, for they know not the voice of strangers." It is just like a child; a stranger may come, kindness itself, but it is not the voice of its mother; it will not do.

Quickening is the power of the Spirit by the word, of course. The Thomasites take up verse 63, and say it is in the "word" the Spirit is; and Campbellites too. One of them told me they were just as much begotten of Paul, as they were of the Holy Spirit, because they were begotten of him by the gospel. But I get the personality of the Holy Spirit in Scripture very clearly; He wills, distributes, is sent, comes, speaks, works, and so on; and this is somebody.

The business of the Old Testament is to reveal the unity of the Godhead; the business of the New Testament is to reveal the Trinity; and therefore, though you have got at the beginning "the Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:2) and elsewhere, it is not so clear in the Old Testament; there is no personal coming. As to the word "person," use what word may be best, but the testimony of scripture is plain enough that what we mean by a person is said both of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

I do not think the remnant will see anything like so clearly as we do. They will be an earthly people, not a heavenly; they will never get the place we have. But you see we never say a prayer without the Trinity (Eph. 2:18). As far as the remnant take up promise and prophecy as to the church in the then past, they will see it is all over and gone. They will look for Christ, and the strongest expression of their intelligence that I know of is, "Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the Son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself," Psalm 80:17. They will say,

“Here is forgiveness, but the people are all gone that it was for; and I do not know whether it is for me.”

The Spirit of God will not be confined to the remnant, for there will be the everlasting gospel. But the thing now is, the Holy Spirit being come it is the firstfruits that we have got, and we become a kind of firstfruits of His creatures, and that is sanctification to God in a special manner, but it will not be the case with the remnant. And so now we get a far fuller insight into the heavenly things than they will then. God has reserved some better thing for us, than even for the Old Testament saints.

In John 7 comes the feast of tabernacles, and the Spirit instead of it. Of the feast of tabernacles there has been no fulfillment at all. None had then been fulfilled, but we had the passover in the last chapter and the truth connected with it; but the tabernacles Christ could not then have to say to, and He substitutes the gift of the Holy Spirit for the revelation of Christ to the world. That is the grand truth that is in this chapter. The tabernacles came after the harvest and vintage (that is, the double judgment of God) is fulfilled, the separative judgment and the execution of vengeance. Pentecost and passover are over. We have the fulfillment of them in Christ's sacrifice and Pentecost; but at the tabernacles they dwelt in booths, as a sign that they had been strangers, but are so no more. His brethren say to Him, “go and show thyself to the world,” but He says, “I do not go to this feast: your time is always ready.” And, having gone up as it were secretly, on the last day, the eighth day—it was only this feast that had an eighth day to it—He then “stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.” He could not show Himself to the world, for His time was not yet come,

but He does go up in the middle of the feast, though He could take no part in it; but instead of that, there was this eighth day—not one of the seven days of the complete feast—and on it He speaks of the “Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive” (John 7:39). He could not show Himself in the glory then.

The word “yet” in verse 6 is right, but in verse 8 it is doubtful the first time it is used. When you say, “I go not up,” it is different from “I go not yet.” He did go up afterward. The time referred to in verse 6 is the millennium. I believe the Virgin Mary had a family afterward, but “brethren” is used in a large way including relatives.

Christ cannot show Himself to the world, but says, If any man thirst for himself—wants to drink for himself; it is not looking for gifts for others, but if any man is thirsty, let him come unto Me and drink. If he fill his own soul in the power of the Holy Spirit from Christ, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

We had a passover in John 2; in John 5 it was not one of the great feasts. I do not know what feast it was. But now the feasts give a distinctive character to everything.

The aspect of the Holy Spirit in John 4 is communion, as in John 3 life giving; in John 4 springing up into everlasting life and communion; and here, in John 7, it flows out to others, but I get a drink for myself first. In John 20 it is the power of life in resurrection. It is not sending it from heaven, but just as God breathed into Adam’s nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul, so Christ breathes into His disciples the breath of life. It is an immense advance on the Old Testament, but here in John 7 the waters flow forth again from them; it is far more than they had in the wilderness. There they “drank of that

spiritual rock that followed" (1 Cor. 10:4). Here the rivers flow forth from them. This John 7 is immensely important, but not so objective, and therefore simpler.

He could not show Himself, for the feast of Tabernacles will be kept in the millennium, and His time was not yet come. But the seventh day completed the week of the feast properly speaking, and as when Christ rose it was the beginning of a wholly new state, the eighth day was the first day of another week, the beginning of another world for man. The seven days are the figure of the millennium, the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles; the first of the seven was a holy convocation. Only here Christ does not show Himself to the world for the seven days, but at the last He announces the gift of the Holy Spirit to connect us with Himself in heaven. It will be an immense relief to see the world delivered from evil, no doubt; but what you get here is for the meanwhile the Holy Spirit till Christ returns.

Just a word or two back. In verse 17, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." The first "will" is emphatic—if he wills to do it; if he wills, he shall know if the word is right. There is a difference between the people and the Jews. The people in verse 20 ask, "Who goeth about to kill thee?" But in verse 25, "Then said some of them of Jerusalem, Is not this he, whom they seek to kill? "He had gone to Galilee to the poor of the flock, and they did not understand that any were going about to kill Him; but the Jews from Jerusalem knew very well; and the controversy between them and Christ constantly comes out in John. All Christ's work was in Galilee except a very occasional thing, the beginning of Matthew tells you so; but in John

it is nearly all in Jerusalem bringing out His controversy with the Jews. It is very striking that in Matthew in the end of John 4 you get all Christ's ministry in about four verses. "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease among the people, and his fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with demons, and those which were lunatic, those that had the palsy, and he healed them; and there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan" (John 7:23-25); three verses; and then He goes on to tell them in John 5-7 what kind of people were fit for the kingdom. The rest unfolds His person and dispensational ministry as come among the Jews and what took its place.

In the close of the chapter, John 7, poor Nicodemus shows himself, and says a word for Christ, just what he dared. Then in John 8, with other things, you will find His word rejected. Instead of the millennium we have had the Holy Spirit given; the Bread of life had before come down from heaven; and now it is the word in John 8. They bring Him a woman taken in adultery.

The first verse of John 8 should go with John 7. The divisions are of no authority at all. The chapters had been arranged, and verses put in the New Testament in 1551. The first divisions were in 1200 and something for the New Testament. Stephens was the first to issue the text so divided. There were Dutch printers who in 1624 published an emendation of Stephens, calling it the text received by

all, and then people got afraid to change anything. Here and there a word was taken from Beza, but at large the text was from Stephens. In the Apocalypse Erasmus had but one manuscript, and that mingled up with a commentary. Stephens had some thirteen second-rate manuscripts. Erasmus employed a man to cull out the text from the commentary. The last verse he translated into Greek from the Vulgate. We have now a hundred manuscripts of the Apocalypse, with five uncial ones; but the first translations having been all made from the one text, we may say that of Stephens, it looks now as if we were changing what we were all used to. This narrative in John 8 was left out where it was found avowedly for the sake of morality, and this was so stated near as early as we have any copy at all.

The Lord here takes up the law in this way; they bring the letter of it to Him that He may condemn the woman. They thought they had a great advantage against the Lord, for by the law He must say, "Stone her"; but if so, then He was no Savior; and if He said, "You must not stone her," then clearly He had broken the law. Really in them it was no respect for the law, nor compassion for the woman either; but the Lord takes it up and says: Quite right, The law condemns, but I must apply it to all of you: whosoever "is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." And the oldest went out first, because he had the most character to save. So the Lord gives the law all its power, and the woman is spared too. "Hath no man condemned thee?" "No man, Lord." "Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more." The law is not set aside, for if you give it its proper authority, all are condemned together; and that is just where we all are, all gone in the light of the law for Christ to come in. Like a man attempting to conduct

a business; I say to him, You ought to do so-and-so; but he replies, "What is the good of telling me that? for my money is gone already." We have got debts and no capital, counsels for righteousness are of no avail; and what are we to do? Then the Lord says, "I am the light of life." "I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." That is not the law which was death, righteous death to everybody, but it is the person of Christ who is the light of the world, "and the life was the light of men." The writing on the ground was just giving them time for conscience to work.

You have no forgiveness of sins in this gospel unless administrative forgiveness by man. I think this is characteristic. Christ does not here forgive or condemn. It is characteristic, for instead of that He is in constant conflict with these Jews in respect of who He was.

And now follows that which declares this testimony: "I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me." And so He taught in the temple, but "no man laid hands on him, for his hour was not yet come." He tells them, "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." "He that sent me is true, and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him." Some of them believed on Him, and He says to them, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." They say they are Abraham's seed; but if you commit sin, you are the slaves of sin. "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you." This shows that being under law and being under sin are tantamount. The Jews—people

under law—are slaves of sin. The slave does not abide in the house always, but the Son abides ever and He could make free.

There is a mistranslation in verse 25. It should be “Who art thou? Altogether that which I said unto you.” It is His word still. It is the same in verses 32 and 36: the word sets free. But it is the living Son’s act. The passage is important to show how the word and the living person go together. It is not “from the beginning” in verse 25; it is “altogether what I also say to you.” That is true of every honest man in a certain sense; it is not “from the beginning,” but in principle or absolutely. The word that Christ spake was the absolute expression of what He was. I am what I speak, that is the thought expressed.

Then the truth sets free and the Son sets free. There may be this much difference, that you do not connect grace so much with the word as with the Son. When I say the truth, I think of God as coming and judging everything in men by the revelation of truth by the word, bringing what is good and divine by that word. When I say the Son I speak of living power and authority working in love. It does not appear that it was divine faith the Jews had who believed on Him; but it might be in some.

Then comes another principle; our Lord says, “Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word” (John 8:43). They did not understand what He said because they did not take in His thought. In human things you must understand the language, the technical terms, before you understand the thing; but in divine things you must understand the propositions in order to understand the words. If I say, “Ye must be born again,” the words do not give an understanding of what it is. Until I

know the liberty of Christ, until I have the thing in freedom, no words make my understand what “free” really is. Christ has to say to them, “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do; he was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth because there is no truth in him; when he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own, for he is a liar and the father of it. And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not. Which of you convinceth me of sin; and if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? He that is of God, heareth God’s words” (John 8:44-47). And in verse 51 He says, “If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.” The Lord’s words expressed Himself, and these words are the Father’s testimony to Him, and they would not have him. Later on He says “Believe me...or else believe me for the very works’ sake.”

Then they drive Him to say that He is God Himself.

It is the day of His glory, I have no doubt in verse 56. But now, instead of executing judgment on His enemies, He allowed Himself to be executed to save sinners. Abraham in a figure may have seen that day in Isaac. And then He says, “Before Abraham was, I am”—He is God. People may quibble now and again, but the Jews understood it very well, and took up stones to stone Him for it, but He passed away. This is His word rejected.

In John 9 it is Christ’s work. “And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth; and his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned nor his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.” It is not the word now, but the works. I suppose they thought Exosus 34 was being carried out in the man because his parents had

sinned; though that had been abrogated in Jeremiah and Ezekiel really, and it became, "the soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Eze. 18:20), that is, the death of the person himself who had sinned. It is not spiritual death either; it has done a great deal of mischief, using that as spiritual death, it was temporal only. God's governmental dealings with the Jews.

The word "soul," though often used for living person simply, as it is in English yet, in the Old Testament is for soul contrasted with the body. Still "life and incorruptibility are brought to light by the gospel." Life was intimated in a way, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [hades], neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption" (Psa. 16:10). Suffering and disease are the common lot of a poor world, lying in sin and ruin; though they may be special chastisement. But the Lord displays His grace to the man. He spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle; you get what comes from the earth, and what comes from Christ's person. The Lord typified in this clay that the only effect of His presence was, that, if it were possible to make a blind man more blind, it did. The man was blind already, just as the Jews were; but the effect of the presence of Christ was to make them more blind still. Only He goes to the pool of Siloam which is by interpretation "sent"; and the moment anyone saw Him as the sent One of God, they got their sight. You have got Christ there present as a Man before the eyes of the people, and that is not giving them sight at all, but the contrary; but the moment the word in the power of the Spirit of God opened their eyes, it was healing and sight at once.

You have a very distinct principle here, as to the way of the operation of divine grace. When the man is questioned, he says, "Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not; one

thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." And that is the only way of knowing that is worth anything, while the external knowledge of Christ is only double blindness. But the moment there is the power of the Spirit of God giving the knowledge of Christ as the sent One of God, you get eyes then, spiritual eyes of course. The Jews do what they can to confound the man; they bring his parents who are afraid to say a word of who did it, because "if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue"; but the only thing their testimony is worth anything for is, that he was their son, and was born blind—just what the Pharisees did not want. And then the man begins to reason with them, that He has opened my eyes, and you cannot tell whence He is. Himself the subject of divine power He knew it was such. "Oh," say they, "but he does not keep the sabbath," and there was a division among them. Then they tell the man, "Thou wast altogether born in sins," the very thing he was not; it was their blindness that said so.

And now Christ has got a sheep, and He goes before him. The man had said that He was a prophet, and when he was cast out and Jesus found him, He asks him, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God," and he said, "Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?" The word of Christ had already power in his soul, and this leads him directly to the knowledge of Himself as Son of God, as with the Samaritan the reception of the word is really, though only implicitly, the reception of Christ. "And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee." The man gets to know Him as Son of God, and he worships Him; and then Christ has got His sheep with Him. The sign in itself had no effect on the Jews though

the sign was there; there was power in the word spoken which gives the knowledge of the sent One. The clay on his eyes was Christ, and the Jews had the clay, but nothing else morally. The pool, morally, is the word of God in the power of the Spirit of God, and thus Christ known as sent of God.

How these poor Pharisees are baffled! We see again, wherever Christ has visited the soul bringing the word of God, He is owned a prophet; and when the soul owns the prophet, the word of God presents Christ as the Son, and you have the Son too. You cannot separate the word from the person of Christ. If we receive what He says, we receive Himself. We have done with that history now. We have the Lord, His word, and His works rejected, and now therefore He says, "No matter what the opposition, I will have my sheep," and the porter opens the door.

John 9:39 shows the blindness of their judgment, and that looked at as to the effect the Lord came to judge. "When he putteth forth his own sheep"; the blind man was one of them. "I am the door of the sheep." "I am the good shepherd." John 10:14-15 reads, "I am the good shepherd, and I know my sheep and am known of mine, as the Father knoweth me and I know the Father," that is, "As the Father knows me and I know the Father, so I know my sheep and am known of them." He puts His sheep and Himself in the place which He and the Father had been in relatively. The relationship between Himself and the sheep was the same as between Himself and the Father. It is a beautiful expression of Christ in connection with the sheep. He is taking them out of the Jewish fold. You get Christ from the time of His lowest subjection to the will of the Father

entering by the door until He says, I am one with the Father.

The “porter” signifies the power of God by the Spirit of God opening the door to Christ, in spite of the Pharisees and everybody else who would shut Him out. They would have shut Him out if they could, but they could not succeed, and the sheep hear His voice. There had been thieves and robbers who had set up to be Christ before, but “he that cometh in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.”

The door is made for people to come in at, and Christ did not climb over the wall, but came in by the door. Whatever had been appointed to Him, He came in by that, a lowly man. Then we read He “leadeth them out,” that is a new thing; He is taking them out from Judaism. And then He is the door, the appointed way.

“And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice” (John 10:4). It has often been noticed that this is one of the most familiar images in the world, because they never drive sheep except in England, and perhaps in Ireland, but go before them, and the flock follows. And “a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him, for they know not the voice of strangers” (John 10:5).

“I am the door of the sheep” (John 10:7). As He came in by God’s appointed way, He is God’s appointed way for everybody else, and so He is the door. “By me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved”—now He is not taking them out—“and shall go in and out, and find pasture.” What you call, folds are hardly intelligible here; there were wild beasts there, and the fold was many feet high, that animals should not jump over. Now He takes His sheep out of Judaism, and they are saved, and they are free, and they find pasture;

before they were neither safe nor free, nor had they pasture. But if a soul go in by Christ, he gets salvation, liberty, and food. If I am entering, and they say, Where are you going? I do not know, but I am sure it is all right if Christ is the door; like Abraham going forth, not knowing whither he went; it is all right if Christ leads. Further, our safety comes from the personal care of the shepherd, and not from the prison of a fold. With Christ, we have salvation, liberty and pasture.

Then “the thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy; I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” He was going to give it them in all the power of resurrection and ascension. That was the Good Shepherd that gives His life for His sheep. I do not think the object here is so much atonement as devotedness, when He speaks of laying down His life for the sheep, though atonement of course was in laying down His life. At any cost the sheep must be kept. The hireling fleeth and the wolf catcheth and scattereth the sheep. There is an important word there to notice: “catcheth” is the same word as in verse 28 is rendered “pluck.” The wolf can lay hold of them so as to scatter them in this world, but he cannot lay hold of them so as to pluck them out of Christ’s hand.

John 10:15 involves atonement, but it is especially the devotedness with which Christ loves His sheep. The “again” in verse 17 is not connected with “much more...by his life” in Romans 5:10. That is the life that comes after death; here it is the life He lays down in death, and so lives again.

The “other sheep” are Gentiles which are not of this fold. “Them also I must bring and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one flock, and one shepherd.” It

was ecclesiastical feeling put in "one fold," because they understood not one flock. "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it up again" (John 10:8). To me that is a most astonishing testimony to the person of Christ. We love God because He first loved us; but here I find one that would give a motive to the Father for loving Him; it is not merely that the Father is pleased to delight in Him, as in us. We cannot give motives to the Father to love us, but Christ could. In that sense of the word the Father was debtor to Christ for all His own glory. It is the burnt-offering character of Christ in sacrifice. What is tantamount to the meat-offering is found in "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." At the same time the Lord absolutely refuses to go out of the place of obedience, as He says later, "That the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do." He was a divine Person who could give a motive to His Father for loving Him; and at the same time He was a man that was doing all in obedience.

John 10:24. "Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? if thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you." Here again you have the distinct election principle of John "because ye are not of my sheep." I do not know why it is said here "it was winter," except because it was another occasion. The verse shows He had gone up for that feast as He never stayed in Jerusalem.

As to the “more abundantly” of verse 10 it is not only that they should have life as every believer from Adam had life, but the liberty that redemption brought them into, and life in resurrection power and character. Of old, they had differed nothing from a servant, though lords of all.

You never find the Lord saying He is the Christ, except to the woman of Samaria, “I that speak unto thee am he” (John 4:26), and that was to a person who had no right to Christ. He delights to call Himself Son of man. We learn from this that He knew He was come to give His life a ransom for many, and so could not speak of Himself as the Christ. The Gospels are really the history of His rejection. In Samaria it was out of the way to do it, in one sense, because salvation is of the Jews. “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. I and my Father are one.” You get this principle of election; then the character of the elected, they “hear my voice”; what He does for them—gives them eternal life; and then they will not perish, that is, inwardly so to speak; and no man plucks them out of His hand: no inward perishing, and no outward force can destroy.

Then He takes the low place, My Father gave them, and He keeps. And then you come to His glory, “I and my Father are one.” The Jews felt that and took up stones to stone Him. And you see He does not reason with the Jews to convince them, but to silence them. “Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?” In the Pentateuch “then his master shall bring him unto *the judges*” is Elohim, that is,

to God, so that this is literally true in its very letter — “if he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came (and the scripture cannot be broken)...say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest, because I said, I am the Son of God?” (John 10:35-36). And He left them.

In John 5-7, you have Christ revealed and bringing in what grace is, in John 8 and 9 you have the rejection of His word and of His work, but in chapter 10 He will have His sheep and that closes the whole thing. John 1, 2, and 3 are before His public ministry, what you may call introductory. John 4 is a transitional scene. John 5 is the Son of God; John 6 is the crucified Son of man; John 7 the giving of the Holy Spirit instead of the glory. And now what we get is the testimony borne to Christ by God in all His characters. God would not allow Him to be rejected, without giving Him a full testimony to what He is. Then there is the episode of a heart that owned Him in His rejection and death, and His character of Son of David and Son of man; that is in John 12.

John 11 is what He is as Son of God, a testimony to Him as the perfectly obedient One as servant, but still the Son of God with power while death is allowed to come in. That is the character of it here. He was the rejected One, then death is allowed to come in, and He is manifested as having power over all that Satan and death can do; and this shows that He is Son of God. Therefore He says: “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.” You get nature expecting Him to do the old work, that is, to come and heal the sick man, but that could not be here. Of course the miracle came from His divine power, but in that way merely

it was what many a one might have done, and He had done often before, but you find no act of His will merely, nor of human kindness even. We read that He loved Mary and her sister and Lazarus, and they sent unto Him to say, "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." One might have expected that He so full of tenderness would have gone directly; but He said it was not unto death, and abode two days still in the place where He was. He does not stir; He had no expression of His Father's will for Him to go, and so He stayed.

John 11:9 has reference to the Jews seeking to stone Him. He says "it is a question of my Father's will, and so it is all light before me." In the light of God all was plain. He does not go when natural feelings would lead Him, but He does go when it is His Father's will even if death were before Him. And we get the divine object of it—"that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." It is not the Son of David, but the Son of God declared with power by resurrection. He knew that Lazarus was fallen asleep, and says, "I go, that I may awake him out of sleep." The disciples did not understand Him and He says plainly, "Lazarus is dead." Some people talk of the sleep of the soul, whereas the sleep here is simply death itself, the death of the body. A man here goes to sleep—dies; but there is no such thing as a hint of the soul sleeping afterward. He says, "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe" (John 11:15), because He was going to raise him up from the dead. Healing would have been no such proof of His divine sonship. It is just what they all say, "Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?" (John 11:37). But there Lazarus was dead, and the question was,

the power of the Son of God who raises the dead. It is beautiful to see Thomas brought in here (vs. 16), because Thomas was the doubting one after Christ was risen, and his character is given beforehand so far as it shows his attachment to Christ at any rate.

Well, there was to be no mistake about Lazarus being dead. Many of the Jews came there; it became a great public testimony. Then we get the character of Martha and Mary, both in a state of partial unbelief, they could only look for healing; that is, if Christ had only come in time, Lazarus would not have died at all. You have Martha running out uncalled, and Mary sitting in the house till Martha called her; as Jesus Himself did not go until God called Him. It was no harm, as men say, in a certain sense in Martha—no evil intended of course; but she rushes out from her own feelings instead of waiting for the Lord's call.

In John 11:26 the Lord had gone beyond all Martha's faith. Christ begins by resurrection, taking people out of death, and He was there with that power, but she has no idea of that; what the Lord was bringing out she did not understand one bit, and that makes her go and call Mary. Mary had been sitting at Jesus' feet and heard His word. Martha tells her, "The Master is come, and calleth for thee"—like saying, "He is talking about what I do not understand, and you must come." The Lord says to Martha, "thy brother shall rise again." She has the general truth like evangelical Christendom in the present day, but of a special resurrection in power, He being the resurrection and the life, she has no idea at all. But you find the Lord Himself moved and exercised when Mary goes out; she is sent for in a way, and went as called, and she falls at Christ's feet. There is a great deal more feeling as to Christ, than is in Martha,

but she is in much the same state, and has no idea of present power over death; so she says, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died"; no thought of His present power in resurrection; they were all alike as to that. There was no sense of a power that could take away the power of death; and that is what makes the Lord weep—the power of death that He saw lying on all their spirits. When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, He groaned in spirit and was troubled and said, "Where have ye laid him?" There was sympathy there, but it was the full character of the Lord's sympathy that strikes one, that is, His understanding the power of death that lay upon them. It lay on their spirits, but not on His. There was no weeping for Lazarus on His part. It was His full sense of the power of death resting on their hearts, no matter how advanced they were. The groaning was for others—something like the groaning in Romans 8. Then you have Martha's unbelief coming definitely out, "Lord, by this time he stinketh, for he hath been dead four days." The Jews said nothing more, but "behold how he loved him" Again groaning in Himself, "He cometh to the grave: it was a cave, and a stone lay upon it." That groaning is a very strong word; He troubled Himself withal, stirred up His heart in its depths in His sense of man's state under death; His soul went into the power of the death lying on others.

All through this, at the same time, you see the Lord taking distinctly the place of subjection and service both, and so here He says, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me; and I know that thou hearest me always." Then He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." There was the power of the Son of God. Poor Martha! hers was a

positive unbelief, or belief in the power of death, “Lord, by this time he stinketh,” instead of the power of resurrection. Jesus said unto her, full of patience, “Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?” “They took away the stone, and when He cried, “Lazarus, come forth,” “he that was dead came forth.” It was the testimony to the Son of God come amongst us, and His power over death—He is the resurrection and the life—and of His thorough entering into what the power of death was.

He never healed a sick person, I believe, without His heart entering into the power of the evil that was there as distress and sorrow on man. There is another thing to note—what you find in James about Elias. He had said, “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” (1 Kings 17:1). It seemed simple authority and power. But James teaches us how the power of the Lord was in the prophet, for he says, he “prayed earnestly that it might not rain” (James 5:17); that is, where a person acts really in the will and power of God, you constantly find his intercourse with God clear and simple. Paul went up to Jerusalem at the wish of the church, but he tells us in Galatians he went up by revelation. And here Christ had the power in Himself, because He was Son of God, but still He says, “Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.” He never swerved from His place of subjection. The great thing is that He was really Son of God, though rejected. And then He must die; it is desperate, the dreadful hardness of the Jews. Afterward they wanted to kill Lazarus again because he was such a testimony. And we have the utter unbelief of the people—not only unbelief, but positive

hostility; we must get rid of Him [Christ]. "If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him, and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation." But at Christ's death the temple and all connected with it was disowned, high priest and everything. Then Jesus walked no more openly among them, but went to Ephraim and waited for the passover.

The "high priest that same year" is named because the Jewish things continued till Christ died. There were two high priests. The Romans meddled with everything. Large sums of money were given to get to be high priest, and they were changing constantly. As yet things were not altogether gone from the Jews; there was the pool of Bethesda and remnants of blessing one way or another. The opening of Luke gives us a remnant in the midst of the iniquity, Simeon, Anna, Zechariah, and so on; a most lovely picture of how grace was ripening in these poor things whilst the Pharisees were ripening in iniquity.

Now we come to Bethany. There they made Him a supper; Lazarus was there as a man alive through the power of resurrection, but death had come in first. Here we see Mary goes to Christ in the consciousness of the other side of the truth—that He must die. She was not a prophetess at all; but at the hostility of the Jews her heart rises up in love with the instinct of what that hostility sought and meant. She was the opposite of the Jews; it was the fullness of affection that moved her though she was no prophetess.

You may see continually the way in which personal attachment to Christ gets His secret by some means or other. Mary Magdalene was all wrong, seeking the living among the dead, but still her heart was entirely on Christ, and if she did not get Him she got nothing, and she is

the messenger to the apostles themselves of the highest privileges we have. "I ascend unto my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (John 20:17); she is sent with it to the apostles, who learn it through her.

It is the same in other things: the poor woman that was a sinner did not know forgiveness, but she clings to Christ, and there comes out the forgiveness of her sins, "thy faith hath saved thee, go in peace" (Luke 7:50), the fullness of the gospel. So with Mary; she did not understand resurrection and life as she ought to have done, but the thing she does is the thing she ought to have done, and it is what she felt was right. It was from attachment to His person that she comes and anoints Him with her ointment. She might have put it in a bag, and given it to Him, but that would not do. Judas shows how the wrong thing leads people away. It was Judas said, "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?" and they were all led away by it (Matt. 26:8). The disciples did not shine at this time at all. They all ran away too from Him later on, but her heart enters into it all. The Lord gives a voice of intelligence to her act, the wickedness of the Jews was rising up to the point of putting Him to death, and her heart had the sense of it, the Lord leading her no doubt.

"Let her alone," He says: "against the day of my burying hath she kept this; for the poor always ye have with you, but me ye have not always." It was His person He meant there of course. This is a beautiful expression of Mary's heart, and it shows how a heart fixed on Christ gives the right thing; though there may be a want of intelligence, it does the right act. The poor woman in the city acted rightly and confides in Him; though as yet unforgiven, the light and love of God are both in her heart. There was the

confidence that love produces, and the sense of sins that light and love both produced. So with Mary Magdalene; it was the right thing to seek Him among the dead in a sense. And here Mary anoints His feet—His feet were worth it—that is the thought, I think; but generally they would have put ointment on the head.

Mary is a figure of the heavenly remnant in that sense of the word. Martha was one of the heavenly remnant, I suppose, but we do not see much of it in what she did, she had been busied with care. The heavenly remnant belong to heaven, whereas the earthly remnant get their portion on earth. Mary was on the heavenly road, she was entering into the spirit of Christ's death. She anointed Him for His burial, though nobody could die with Him; and her heart went with Him. She could not weep and raise from the dead, but she could weep and anoint. Her heart went with the sense of what was coming; she saw the way in which He was being treated. They had plotted the death already. That is just what we get here, not intelligence, but the heart right, and it does the right thing, that which is intelligent, so to speak. It is, very largely, want of attachment to the person of Christ that keeps people in the systems around us if they have not any particular motive.

Now we get the Son of David sitting on an ass's colt; afterward in verse 12 the Son of man comes out. They go to meet Him and cry, "Hosanna, blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord," taken from Psalm 118:13, which is the introduction of the millennial day. "Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord," and so on.

The Greeks are the nations coming up, or individuals of them. They are Hellenes; Grecian Jews are Hellenists. "Jesus answered them saying, The hour is come that the

Son of man should be glorified." He was Son of God in raising Lazarus; He was Son of God in the world without dying; He was Son of David too, and ought to have been received as such according to Psalm 2, but when He takes His place as Son of man, according to Psalm 8, He must die. He cannot take the heavenly place of glory and be over all the works of God's hand without dying. And then we must follow in that, "he that loveth his life shall lose it, and *he* that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me." A very important word; if you want to serve Christ, you must follow Him. It is not as if you could do so much service in a kind of independent way, but if I serve Him I must follow Him where He is. And then His own soul enters into this death. "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour, but for this cause came I unto this hour." Not so deep, but like Gethsemane. And then you get His perfectness brought out, seeking only His Father's glory, at all cost. He cannot be glorified without thus dying, and on the perfect submission the sense of the glory comes into His own soul. This is very instructive to us. And then comes a voice from heaven, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." You have had the Father's name glorified in the Lord in raising back Lazarus to this world, and He is going to glorify it again in raising Christ from the dead. He was declared the Son of God with power here as given in Romans 1, and raised from the dead by the glory of the Father in Romans 6. Then in verses John 12:31-32 He says, "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out; and I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." Having submitted Himself entirely, and having looked only for His Father's

glory, He says that the thing where He glorifies God is the way to His own glory. Wherever we bow to a dealing of God that brings us down, we find that it is the path of more glory.

As a living Messiah He had to say to the Jews, but as Savior of everybody, He must die—"Will draw all men unto me." It is not the Father drawing to Him here, but the attractive point to which men are drawn.

John 12:32 is the cross, and the effect of it goes on; every soul that is brought in is the effect of it. The drawing goes on, but it is to a crucified Christ they are drawn. A living Christ was for a Jew, but it is by a dying Christ salvation comes to the world. When living, He says, "I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24).

When it says, "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live," He is quickening; it is then, and goes on still. It is the Son of God in power; here it is the Son of man dying. The "lifting up" is lifted out of the world, though not gone to heaven. Here it is the mere fact stated, but it is the atoning Savior.

The character of resurrection answers to the condition in which Christ is. At the grave of Lazarus He raises back to this world; but now He is at the right hand of God, He quickens us into the character of His own place. We have Him only spiritually now, and we only live spiritually. But when He comes back into the world, those who are quickened then will receive a life accordingly. The power of resurrection or of life answers to Christ's position. He raised back Lazarus to the place where He Himself was alive; and so too it is now, to where He is now alive, and when He comes again He will raise up the body or change

it to His own likeness then. Lazarus was merely a restored man.

“Now is the judgment of this world.” That is the consequence of the Lord being lifted up; and the prince of the world is cast out. By death He has destroyed “him that had the power of death”—that is, annulled his power (heb. 2:14). Though it says, “shall be,” his power is *now* destroyed. The sentence is passed, but not carried out. It is the cross that is referred to. The world is a judged world. Satan has led it to crucify the Lord. He is its prince, but by that in which this was fully shown his power was broken. I quite admit that, until Christ comes again, he is not cast into the bottomless pit, but through Christ’s death Satan’s power is annulled, and therefore “now is the prince of this world”; it was “shall be,” but that was then. And he is only called the prince of the power of this world when we come to the cross. To faith his power is annulled now. And so it is as to everything; you will find it is “yes” for faith, and not yet for full accomplishment fact. I have eternal life and yet the end is everlasting life. I am looking for salvation ready to be revealed, yet He has saved us and called us. We are really quickened, and have the Holy Spirit in our souls, we receive the end of our faith, salvation of soul, but not the result. I think it is a great thing to see that Christ is lifted up, and has nothing more to do with this world. That the breach was total and final: “O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee” (John 17:25). Then we get the unbelief: “Who is this Son of man?” and the Lord says, “Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you.”

John 12:34 gives the meaning of “lifting up.” It is contrary to abiding here. Then you have two references to Isaiah, verse 38, (quoting Isa. 53) which is His rejection,

and goes on to death; and verse 40 (quoting Isa. 6), which we are told Isaiah said when he saw His glory.

Then you have another terrible warning. “Many believed on him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue.” Such would be lost. They were convinced, yet would not own Him. The principle is in Romans 10:10, “With the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” That applies now. I do not believe there are many of whom it is true now or ever—that many are ashamed to confess Christ, and yet are truly saved. I could not say they are saved. God knows what is at the bottom of their hearts. Some are afraid, it may be, of acting in certain ways, and yet they confess Christ in a more open manner than we do. We must leave such to God, like Nicodemus who goes secretly by night for fear of the Jews. And the counselor Joseph, who had been hidden, comes out when the disciples have all run away. These two confessed at last, when they said as it were, We cannot go on with all this wickedness, this is too much for us.

By “He that is not with me is against me” (Matt. 12:30) is meant taking the path of faith, you must take your place for Christ, or else you are against Him. The world has manifested itself as entirely against Him. The open breach is come, you must take your place either one way or other. We have Christ practically rejected—“lifted up”—and in John 13 we pass on to His going out of the world altogether.

The Epistle to the Hebrews says He could not be a priest on earth, because there were priests here already. Christ offered Himself; He was kept up three days—three years if you like better—as a pure victim. He offered Himself up on the cross. It is on the cross the Lord lays on Him the iniquity of us all, when He gave Himself a voluntary

offering. But the offering Himself was not a priest's office: the priest only began when He took the blood, he had nothing to say to the offering until he accepted the blood. On the day of atonement the priest put his hand on the head of the scape-goat and confessed the people's sins, but there the whole nation was looked at as separate from God, and for them he confesses, though that was not exactly a priestly thing, though done by the high priest as representing the people. Christ offered Himself through the eternal Spirit without spot to God, but then He so far answered to the priest that He confessed our sins on the cross, and then after that He is properly a priest. Christ as now on high is not a priest for sins, He is an advocate with the Father if we sin. When I look at Him as suffering for sins, His work is done once for all, as in Hebrews 9:12 when we fail, we have an advocate with the Father, for then it is a question of communion with the Father; but His sacrifice was for sins. He was a priest, He stood as priest, but He is not priest for sins now, but for grace to help that we may not sin and ever in God's presence for us the witness that our sins are put away, the reconciliation is made, and this was once done for us, where He stood as our suffering representative.

Christ did not, as the high priest in Israel, confess His own sins, for He had none (I need hardly say that), but the high priest on the day of atonement had his own to confess too, but Christ did only stand there as His people's representative. If He were on earth, He should not be a priest at all, and in the Hebrews you get the exercise of His priesthood now, which does not refer to sins because He has done with that question forever. You get Him as an advocate in John, but there it is dealing with communion,

and hence the question of imputation never comes up, but communion is destroyed for the time.

Looked at as an instrument used, this chapter applies to ministry. The word, in Hebrews 4, detects, and is the means of washing in that way. The word detects that which leads to falling away; the constant tendency to apostasy runs all through Hebrews 1 would not include advocacy in priesthood. Intercession is a general word. He ever lives to make intercession for us. Intercession is commonly used for priesthood; but it is more a question of what is meant by words. Advocacy much more corresponds with Numbers 19.

What we come to in John 13 is that Christ's hour was come to depart out of this world unto the Father; up to this it had been His place and rejection on earth. Only when testimony was given to Him, He had declared He could only take that of Son of man, unless alone by dying. As to Himself there was now an end to all His sorrow and trouble, but His service He now shows us is not over; He goes up into the glory, and is there going to be our servant: "I have loved my own, and I love them through and through," that is the meaning of "to the end." He could not stay with them down here, but did not give them up; but He was now going to God perfect as He came from God, and the Father had given all things into His hand. He was returning spotless to God Himself, the glory being His. He could not stay with them, could they be with Him there? This is the solemn problem in this chapter. He solves it in ineffable grace. He rose up from supper, "and laid aside his garments, and took a towel and girded himself, after that he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith

he was girded" (John 13:4-5). Peter objects, but the Lord says, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me."

Peter says then, "Not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." "Jesus saith to him, He that is washed, needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit." The two words "wash" in verse 10 are different; the first is washing the whole body, "bathed," and the second is washing hands or small objects. And you notice the "hands" are left out, for it does not apply to our works, but to our walk. It is bringing the light of the word to judge inwardly when a man has done wrong. Those who have received the word have been bathed, they are clean as John 15:3. Here not all because Judas was still there. The statement alludes to the priests, who were washed bodily once for all, and afterward whenever they went to any service, washed their hands and feet. The consecrating with water was done once for all. So with us; but we are set to walk through this world, and in danger of defiling our feet as we go.

The words in Hebrews 10:22, "bodies washed with pure water," refer to the first bathing, and not to this action of Christ or what it signifies. It is "bathed" there. And then Christ comes in as an advocate, and cleanses me when defiled in walk, and restores me to communion. It is like the red heifer when a person touched death; there was no fresh death appointed for that, but the application of the word, moral cleansing based on the death already accomplished.

As to the washing of regeneration, the priests were not washed at the laver at their first consecration; but they had to wash their hands and their feet at the laver every time when they came to serve. "Regeneration" in Titus is the same word as in Matthew 19, and not used elsewhere. It is the millennium in Matthew, instead of the present state of

things. It is a change of state in both places. It is connected with what you are brought into, and what you are brought out of; for you are brought out of one, and into the other.

The action is very beautiful as to the Lord's loving and lowly service, and is really the glory of grace in providing for, and meeting moral evil in every shape for us that we might have communion with that which is on high. It is the fruit of the perfect love of Christ whatever is needed, the Lord sets Himself to do it, for love likes to serve: "having loved His own which were in the world He loved them unto the end." "Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hand, and that He was come from God and went to God, He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments, and took a towel and girded Himself." It was with this glory present in spirit though actually future. In all the glory to which I am going, I shall be a servant as much as down here: such is its meaning.

It is "to God" in verse 3, because Christ's returning in the spotless divine perfectness in which He left God is thus affirmed; He is just as perfect as ever, and is going back as such to God—goes back just as He came from. He did not go half way, but came from God and went back to God. And then He must bring us into the same place too; either He must give us up, as He could not stay here where we are, or He must do all for us to fit us to be there where He is. And He will have us have part with Him in everything the Father gives, and be with the Father as He Himself is. So He has washed us and made us partakers of the divine nature.

It is the new birth, only it is looked at in its moral character rather than in the life-giving power of the Spirit's work; though they cannot be separated. In His love He

takes up a slave's work; Peter objects, and the point He insists on is, our having a part with Himself. "Ye are clean, but not all," is because Judas was there. And then He tells us to walk in the same spirit of serving.

Next, He puts the reception of an apostle on the same footing as the reception of Himself. "He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me." It had been already true, even of Judas, but still it is true always practically, and we know it—he that receives Christ's servant receives Him.

Then you find the Lord coming to the time of His betrayal. He is troubled in spirit. It is remarkable to see how the Lord feels everything thoroughly and personally; you never find in Him any failure as to that; but He is always Himself in it, the very opposite of insensibility; circumstances draw out His feelings, but it is what is divinely perfect, which is there to be drawn out. He says He knew who was going to betray Him from the beginning. And who is it? He is to have every sorrow. One of His intimate companions who had been with Him all the time. Through the devoted affection of women, you generally find them clinging to Him and so in the place of confidence, but here you have the one instance where a man comes into that good place. John was sitting close to Christ not from his seeking it then but from habitual nearness to Him, and Peter is obliged to ask John to inquire of Christ, who it was that should betray Him. It is an instance of what I mean; John was not there in order to get the information, but he was in the place to get it, the disciple whom Jesus loved and close to Him in order to be there, but there in the place to know His mind. That is the point; it is of all importance to be in a position so to learn of Him.

Now we get an important statement; after the sop, Satan entered into Judas. There is much in that; there is a familiarity with Christ in an outward way, which where the heart is wrong is a deadly inlet to Satan's power. Satan had already gained Judas's lusts, and suggested the evil; but here he takes possession of him in a personal way, Satan enters into him. He hardens his heart against every natural feeling.

If you take Luke as giving the order of the thing, Judas broke bread; having received the sop, he went immediately out. Luke says, after He had given both the bread and the cup, "the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table" (Luke 22:21). But here in John we have nothing to do with the Lord's supper; I merely get the fact that the sop was given to Judas. I think it has nothing to do with the Supper, whether Judas was there or not. Christ washed his feet, and there was intimacy at the table. It is important to notice that, because of the guilt resulting from it. If anybody quotes it as to fellowship now, then you would have betrayers at the table. Further there was no evil manifested, and you cannot of course put a man out where no evil is manifested. Besides, after all, people do not mean that they would have a table of Judases, and if you put it so to them, they will reject it. The Lord knew it Himself of course divinely, but that is no ground for us to act on and the disciples knew nothing of it, nor was their conscience exercised as to it; nor was the church founded till the Holy Spirit came.

As to Judas you first get the lust, and then the acting on it; he was a thief and had the bag; and then comes an occasion suggested by Satan to gratify the lust, who thereon enters in and hardens the person's heart against even his

natural feelings, for many an unconverted man would not betray a friend with a kiss. It is at this point when all this has come completely forward that you get "Now is the Son of man glorified," that is, in the cross the perfectness of His work was His glory, perfect devotedness and love were in it, and obedience at all cost to His Father, suffering all things where His glory called for it and it was a man's glory to make God's glory good and in such a place, "and God is glorified in him." All that God is in His character is there made good by a man much more than a man, no doubt, but one who was a man" God is glorified in him; if God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and will straightway glorify him" (John 13:21-32). He does not wait for the glory of the kingdom, but goes straight up to God's right hand. God thus is perfectly glorified by man, so that man goes into the glory of God. And that is an immense truth, for the fact of our sins being put away, if it stood alone, would not entitle us to the glory of God. But that which has done it has. But Christ has gone into the glory of God: so Stephen saw and said. But man could not follow before this was all done; you must have the ark in the bottom of Jordan, or the people could not come over. Peter had confidence in himself, and so he denies Christ. If we come in flesh into the place of Christ, it will only be to deny Him there.

The "in himself" in verse 32 is in God, and Christ went straight into the glory of God. It is an immense part of the cross that, the ending of self and all confidence in self. The Lord told Peter he could not follow Him. And now the Lord in a certain sense assumes that He has gone out of the world, and He looks at things in that aspect, but their heart is not to be troubled at it; and in John 14 He gives

them the ground on which it is not to be troubled. In the first place they get the comfort from God by believing in Him; and so would it be with Christ; and the next point is, in Christ's going away: it was not to leave them behind and He go alone, but He is going to prepare a place for them. It is not only a place for me, but there are a number of places, and I am going to prepare one for you, and "I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also." Now that part of the chapter is complete in itself; they believe in Him instead of seeing Him; there are places in the Father's house and He is going to prepare us for them; He cannot stay with them where they are, but He will have them there with Himself.

Now comes, in the body of the chapter, what the comfort is while He has not come back. That is divided into two parts; what they had in His person, and what they would get on having the Comforter. The first part extends to about the end of verse 12. The three or four verses about their doing greater works come in by the bye.

The first part of the chapter is exceedingly beautiful and simple, when once you get at what the Lord is at. The point was "Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know." Thomas answers, "Lord, we know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way?" There was a good bit of unbelief in Thomas, his mind made difficulties, but he loved the Lord; and the Spirit delights to show it (John 11:16); and the answer is this, "I am going to the Father, and you know what He is, because you have seen the Father in me, and therefore you do know where I am going; and you know the way, because having come to Me, you have found Him." Such is what the Lord says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

If he had known me, ye should have known my Father also, and from henceforth ye know him and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father, and how sayest thou then, show us the Father?" (John 14:6-9), and so on. If they had seen the Father (in seeing Christ) and Christ was going to the Father, they both knew where He was going, and they knew that He was the way, because in Him they had found the Father. They had had this upon earth, and they ought to have known where they were.

It is "from henceforth" in verse 7, because He had revealed Himself and told them plainly now; but they did not understand. But they said, "now speakest thou plainly"; but they deceive themselves. He says, "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world, again, I leave the world and go to the Father"; they say, "by this we believe that thou camest forth from God." They had no idea of the Father after all. Still there it was: they had it, though they did not realize it. Then you get the two things He has once or twice insisted upon, as in John 8 and 9, His word and His work, "*Believe* me that I am in the Father and the Father in me, or else believe me for the very works' sake."

Then in the second part (you may connect verse 15 with it if you like) "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter that he may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not neither knoweth him, but ye know him for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you" (John 14:16-17). Now I get a second element, not the Father and the Son, but the Spirit. The Father had been revealed in the

Son, and He had declared the Father's name on earth; but now comes another thing, He was going away, as we know, and the second Comforter was to come. He was not to be sent into the world, the world cannot receive Him. Christ had been presented to the world, and the world would not have Him; but the Spirit is not for the world, the way that He is known shows that the world cannot know Him. He abides with you and shall be in you. The first Comforter, Christ, was neither to abide, nor to be "in." But the second would not go away, He would abide, Christ could not abide. As to whether it should be "dwelleth" or "will dwell," in verse 17, for the Greek, or indeed for the sense, it is just as good in one case as the other; it is a mere question of a Greek accent. The "Comforter" is the character He would have in coming to them, He is the Spirit of truth as well. It is to me evidently the point, the difference of the first Comforter, that is, Christ, that He could not stay with them, and the second could. Christ was not in them either, but with them; the second should dwell in them, and abide forever ("abide" is the same word as "dwell") not be merely with them. In the power of the Spirit of God they should do "greater works," and a glorified Christ should be the source of them. The very shadow of Peter would do; a handkerchief or apron from Paul, and so on; three thousand be converted in one day. But Christ had come in the character of humiliation.

The "I will come to you" is Christ in Spirit now, I believe; Himself in Spirit. It is not merely the Holy Spirit, but what the believer can always count on. There is a particular promise in the case of two or three gathered in Christ's name. There is not only individually dwelling in our hearts

by faith, but the particular way in which He comes to two or three gathered.

The “manifest myself to him,” is where a person walks right; he gets Christ specially revealed to his heart. You have a very great additional fact in this second part of the chapter which you could not have in the first. What is in verse 20 that they could not have known then: “in that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you,” it was only when the Holy Spirit came that they knew that. The person of Christ was in the Father, that they knew; at any rate it was there to be known; but also they were in Christ and He in them: this they could know only by the Holy Spirit. Now you come to Judas—not Iscariot—and the realization of all this. We may look at verse 15 here; “if ye love me, keep my commandments,” if you love me, do not be thinking of keeping Me down here, but do you obey Me. They were sorrowing about His going, and His words are; then, “keep my commandments.” There is a connection here (He is looking at them in the character of obedience, though it is not the motive of His praying in next verse) with Acts 5:32, “and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.”

The difference between “commandments” and “words” is that words go farther rather. In Acts 13:47 you have a quotation from Isaiah, “for so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.” He calls that a commandment, though it was a word of prophecy, but the moment they understood it, it was a commandment. The whole thing is comprised in obedience whether words or commandments, we are “sanctified

to obedience.” If they had words which gave them the knowledge of God’s will, they are commandments really.

You will find in all this part of John the responsibility of the disciples in the first place, and that, in the verse we have just come to. “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.” It is the Father loves us because we love Christ, it is not here, “we love him because he first loved us,” but with disciples, it is “he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him” (John 16:21).

It is no question here whether he is a child of the Father, but what he is to the Father as a child; there is more expression of love and kindness to an obedient child, than to a disobedient one. And He adds “if a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode in him.” That goes farther, the “abode” will be more constant than the “manifestation.” “He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father’s which sent me.” Notice before in verse 21, it is not he that keepeth my commandments when he hath them; but knowing what the commandments of Christ are when we love Him so as to give heed to what He says. This is an important principle. A loving child enters into its father’s mind, and knows what he would like and does it; a careless child will not know a bit what his father’s wishes are.

In John 10:17, “therefore doth my Father love me,” it is not here so much for those for whom He is laying down His life, the motive is rather the immense value of glorifying His Father. Children that are living in their father’s house, might all hear their father’s voice and words,

but there is instructive perception of what he intends on the part of the children that love him best. Which of us would settle quite clearly from Isaiah 49:6, "I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth," that we were to go and preach the grace of God? Paul did in Acts 13:47. It is quite clear we must have the commandments if we are to use them, but the loving attentive person will have ten times more knowledge of them than a careless one. Mary and Martha are a kind of illustration; you get the example of the listening there or the lack of it.

In this chapter the Father sends the Comforter, not Christ; Christ sends Him in the close of the next chapter, and in John 16:7. It is in Christ's name here, but the Father sends Him, and "he shall...bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." The value of sending in His name is seen in this. If you come to me in a person's name now, I should receive according to the value to me of the person in whose name you come. Then He says, "*Peace* I leave with you," and then it is "his own peace." You will find that as to everything. He puts us into His own place. It is His own peace, the peace He had in walking through this world with the Father, as a man with God. Christ says it of "joy," "glory," "peace," "words," "love." The world may give liberally sometimes, but it has another kind and way of giving. It has no longer what it has given. The emphasis is on the word "my," "my joy," "the glory thou gavest me," "the words which thou gavest me." But we find another thing here which I have often referred to, but it is one of the most wonderful things in Scripture as to Christ. He expects us to be interested in His happiness, not merely to trust Him as interested in ourselves; but "if ye loved me,

ye would rejoice because I said, I go unto the Father, for my Father is greater than I." That is, if you love Me, you will rejoice because I am going out of this world into happiness. He expects that His disciples should be really interested in His happiness and glory.

Then we come to verse 30, "hereafter I will not talk much with you, for the prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me." "Prince of this world" is an important expression; it was then that the devil was proved to be the prince of this world, and he is never called so until Christ was rejected, so long as there was a possibility remaining of the world receiving the Son and owning Him; but in the rejection of Christ, the devil was able to raise both Jews and Gentiles against Christ Himself, and even the disciples ran away. His full power was shown. And therefore too now, the devil is a judged being "the prince of this world is judged"—and the world shown to be under Satan's power. He its god and its prince. The opposite is in Christ, "hath nothing in me." And Christ loves the Father, and is obedient (vs. 31).

Satan finds plenty in us. He had the power of death in us, but he had nothing at all in Christ. It is a beautiful expression of Christ's perfectness. He was divine, but He was also man, and perfection as to both comes out so wonderfully. He would not talk much with His disciples, for the time was over. The devil is coming, and I cannot talk with you much more. The thing is all finished. In John 14 we get Christ's person and the Comforter; and now we go on to find the connection of people with Him upon earth, not with the Father.

In John 15 it is His relationship with the disciples on earth, and in the end of the chapter He has gone up on

high, and sends the Comforter Himself, and it closes with the testimony. In John 16 it is the Comforter down here; He is not sent but come, He has been sent. In John 15 you get Christ in the earth, and His people on the earth. There is an analogy to this now, but what He is looking at is His being the real vine Himself in contrast with Israel on earth.

“Now ye are clean” is “already ye are clean.” The “ye are not all clean” in John 13 refers to Judas, here there is no exception for it, Judas had gone out. The point is, Israel was the old vine, and Christ takes the place of Israel, and is the true vine. If you look at Isaiah 49, you will see distinctly how he replaces the nation: “Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.” “And now, saith Jehovah that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, though Israel be not gathered,” and so on. Thus it is Christ is the real servant—Israel a vine, but Christ the true vine. So you get in Matthew, “Out of Egypt have I called my Son.” Hence Christ is the true Man for God—the true Servant—the true Vine. The true Man, God’s Son, has taken up all that in which the first man had failed. Then, when Christ was upon earth, there was no church union; there is no question of planting vines in heaven nor of pruning to get fruit. He says, “Every branch in me that beareth fruit, he purgeth it”; and in John 15:3, “Now ye are already purged”; it is the same word. They were clean in the sense of “purged,” only that the purging continues; like “He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet”; this is the first of these washings. “Ye are already clean”; you are “already.” And then comes, “abide in me.” It is all responsibility here. The person’s conduct is put first, but there is this difference made, when He speaks of ruin and destruction; He turns from “you” and says “a man.” In

the middle of His exhortation He drops the “ye” and says, “If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned”; there it is positive destruction.

In “if ye abide in me,” the “abide” is to “hold fast in dependence and communion.” “Without me [that is the opposite], ye can do nothing.” He does not say, “I will abide in you, and so ye will abide in me.” He puts His people first all through, for it all rests on responsibility. Only in verse 6 it changes to “a man,” and speaks of destruction, which could not be of a true disciple in Christ. Judas was taken away. There they were, all branches in the vine; for I do not think anything of the expression, “men gather them,” because He is speaking of the figure. There is another point in verse 7: “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you” I can dispose of all power, when the words of Christ govern my mind and will. “Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.”

In verse 2 taking away is utter destruction; for He is taking in all there who were associated with Him; they are all branches there till they are broken off. “If ye continue in my word,” He says to the Jews, “then are ye my disciples indeed” (John 8:31); they were His disciples, but did not continue. Hebrews 6 is in analogy with it.

Then I have another point still. I have the service and fruit-bearing, and then, “Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit.” But then, further “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love”—the divine favor of Christ. “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love.” There I get a plain proof that it is no question of divine delight in the

person only, but of the path in which the Son enjoyed the Father's love, and the path in which we shall enjoy it too. Now we have the "joy"; we had the "peace" before; now it is joy walking in His words, and abiding in His love. The love of grace seeks a sinner, but "greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." That is not grace for a sinner; here it is for His friends. It applies to the disciples only, and is not here grace for sinners. "Henceforth 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." A friend is a person with whom I communicate, not because I have business with him, but I tell him my thoughts and feelings as to that with which he himself has nothing to do. He puts them into the place of fruit-bearing, and tell them to ask of the Father whatsoever they would, and He would give it them.

Fruit that "may remain" is fruit to this day, you are it, if you please. We are here part of the fruit, and shall be to eternity, though the fruit is more down in the world in this passage. Now comes a third principle. Abiding in Christ and His word, and abiding in His love; and then "love one another." But now the converse: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you; if ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:18-19). The world never can stand being outside; they will stand your having a religion, but they cannot stand a peculiar people "purified to himself." This puts the disciples in a very blessed place, for it puts them in His place—"If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you."

And then the history of Israel on the ground of their responsibility closes. He being the true vine, the old vine is judged. As long as anything was not done to Him, all was forgivable, as it were; but now “they have both seen and hated both me and my Father.” In verses 22, 24 it is again His word and His works; and then the Son had been manifested, and the Father in Him, so that their conduct had been really hatred of the Son and of the Father, and what was to be done? We have fellowship with the Father, and with the Son, but they had hated both—and that without a cause. It was all gone now, and then you get the Comforter and the disciples in the world. He says now, “The Comforter is come whom I will send unto you,” because He has gone away. The difference is clear; before the Holy Spirit came, they could not tell of Christ’s glory in heaven, but they were to testify what Christ was upon earth. Still it was by the Holy Spirit. He shall “bring all things to your remembrance” (John 14:26), when the Father is spoken of as sending the Comforter; but in this place Christ sends the Comforter, and He is the witness of the glory in which Christ is sitting. You have a humbled Christ, and a glorified Christ, and the disciples bearing witness through the Comforter. But the Comforter Himself brings down the heavenly glory. Then you get in John 16 the Comforter on the earth. Read verses 1-3.

A person may be perfectly sincere, just as Saul was, in trying to blot out the name of Christ from the earth, but it is only proof that they have hated “both me and my Father.” Where there are truths held that go to make part of my religious credit, there I can go on; but the truth that comes to test my heart, to that I object. A person might be a Protestant boasting of justification by faith, and do it to

trample on a Romanist; but if you talk to him of the living presence of the Holy Spirit down here, and of the Lord's coming, he will persecute you from the bottom of his heart. A Jew could boast in the unity of the Godhead, for it was part of his own credit religiously; but the moment he was asked to own the Father and the Son, he would stone you for it. It was the thing that was then testing a man whether he was right or not. The Jews were blind in the darkness of unbelief, yet they held what was very true all the while. Romanists hold the divinity of Christ, and His manhood, and the Trinity, and atonement; they would burn a man if he did not hold them, if they had their way; but if you come and say, A man is not justified by sacraments, they will burn you too, if they can.

Then another thing. He says, "I go my way to him that sent me, and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? but because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart" (John 16:5-6). In one sense it was very natural. God deals with the thing we are resting in; and takes it away, as now His Son from the disciples, it is not a thing that springs from the dust. God must have some intention in it. Christ is going, and they do not ask where; they felt the trouble of their loss and that pressed on them. He was not going to die like an ordinary person put in the grave, but they never asked Him where He was going. God has an intuition of love in our sorrows, our hearts should look beyond our sorrow to His hand and ways in it.

Peter did ask Him at the end of John 13, "Why cannot I follow thee now?" But it was the general state the Lord refers to here. Peter did not think of going through death and up to heaven with Him. He was not thinking of God's mind in Christ's going away, but of some place where he

could follow Him. It is a glorified Christ who has gone on high, and who sends the Holy Spirit to build up the disciples while He is there. Sometimes one is afraid of getting truth through mere feelings. I say merely, that is not power. I do not believe that anybody before, ever got the knowledge of divine truth that the church has now; but if you look at power, it is like none at all. It is right according to God, as God's way with us; but it is only a "little strength" indeed, incomparably less power, though so much truth. The Thessalonians were waiting for God's Son from heaven, which is a very superior state; but they had not the word, as we have it, to study. Certainly they had not got this Gospel, they might have had Matthew's perhaps. I think there is always a danger of awakening and decaying, and that you have to watch. I speak merely of the whole character of the thing; not that I do not believe it is God's mind, for all the evil is seen by Him, but we have to recognize in a certain sense where we are. And even as to truth, we must get it really. I feel the word of God is an immense thing, thou "hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name"—Christ's—the word of His patience too; and there was then the confession of Christ in the midst of a people that would not receive Him, just as in not denying His name when professing Christianity are apostatizing.

Then remark, the coming of the Holy Spirit is a distinct definite thing consequent upon Christ's exaltation. There was no coming of the Son until the incarnation, though He created everything; and the Holy Spirit in the same way, though working, did not come until Pentecost. We were looking a little at that before. All direct action as to the creature was by the Holy Spirit, but He did not come

before Pentecost, unless you except His coming as a dove on Christ. And there it was personally on Him alone. You get Him acting, as at the beginning of creation, but Christ says, "if I go not away, the Comforter will not come." That is of immense import as to the character of His presence. The world is judged, and the Holy Spirit is not sent to the world, "whom the world cannot receive because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him. But ye know him; for he abideth with you and shall be in you." The world ought to have received Christ, the Holy Spirit it cannot; and He comes consequent upon a rejected Christ and a glorified Christ, and it is a Man who sends the Holy Spirit, sends Him from the Father. You get His action when down here. He demonstrates to the world, sin, righteousness and judgment. If He convinces a man, he is a believer; that is not the power of "reprove" here in John 16:8; it is used much to that effect, but it does not suit this place, and there is no English word that has so wide an application as the Greek word has. He does not reprove the world of righteousness. His presence is the demonstration to the world that the whole world is guilty of the death of Christ, just as if God were saying to Cain, "Where is Abel thy brother?" That is to the whole world; this world is a world that has rejected the Son of God. So that it is a very solemn thing to the world that the Holy Spirit is here.

It is the "world," just as "he came into the world" (1 Tim. 1:15). What I see in the history is that God takes out of the nations one man and his family to be a nation for Himself, and He tests them and tries to find any good thing at all in them, as a specimen of the whole, to tell what the mass is, and they are shown by it to be bad altogether. Suppose I find a "slob," as you call it, in Lough Foyle, and

I take out twenty acres, and spend an immense amount of labor upon it, but all to no good; well then, I do not try the rest. So Israel was but a sample of what all were, children of wrath. In saying the Gentiles, which “do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves” (Rom. 2:19), the apostle is reasoning in the first place thus: “if you have the law and do not keep it, the Gentiles who have not the law but keep it, are better than you.” But as Gentiles also they are without excuse upon the ground of the testimony of creation, and the fact that when they had the knowledge of God, they would not retain it. I will tell you the result of a pagan acting up to his conscience, if you first show me such a one. Cornelius was a converted man before Peter saw him. We have the sample of what man is in the Jews.

Let us go back. God calls Abraham when the world would have the devil and idols instead of the one true God. Then comes law, and that was all broken; then Christ and then the testimony of the Holy Spirit as we read in Stephen’s case, and they resisted that. I do not believe a thing about Gentiles, that I do not believe about myself: my flesh would go and do lawlessness. But they are not condemned for not having received Christ when they have not heard of Him. But the Holy Spirit not having been presented to the world, they have not so rejected Him, but the world is convicted and judged because it killed Christ, and in the testimony to Him where that is it now resists the Holy Spirit. The Jews had the law, and the prophets, and the Just one, and Stephen charges them, “ye do always resist the Holy Ghost, as your fathers did, so do ye” (Acts 7:51). That is the demonstration of sin. Then “of righteousness.” If all the world is under sin, where am I to

find righteousness? You will find it in two things, which are, "I go to my Father," and the other ye will "see me no more." Christ's going to the Father is proof of righteousness, for He is the one that deserved to go; and I see Him no more, is proof of righteousness against those who have rejected Him.

In "and ye see me no more," it is you see Me no more in that character of mercy come as a Savior; every eye shall see Him in His new character as Judge. If I receive the demonstration of the Holy Spirit convincing of righteousness because Christ has gone, I have ceased then to belong to the world, and have become a believer. The demonstration of sin may come fully to the conscience, in a certain sense of the word, but if the will is not changed, I gnash my teeth on the man who brings it to my conscience as they did to Stephen. Then there was conscience with a bad will. The sin of Christendom is the practical denial of the Holy Spirit; I say "practical," because orthodox people own Him as to statement. The root of the gospel is here, "righteousness, because I go to my Father." I do not get a man's sins dealt with in this demonstration, that is not the point; but it is the broad general truth of the general standing of the world. The One righteous man having gone to the Father, the world will never have Him here again as such, though believers may go to Him there. The world was judged in John 12, and the prince of the world is judged in this chapter. You do not see righteousness fully displayed anywhere save in the glory. The cross is the declaration, not of righteousness, but of the contrary. It is the ground of righteousness. But if I look no farther than the cross I see the only righteous man that ever lived forsaken of God. The "judgment" is not come. It is not merely Satan

is judged but the world; the whole world, having come up against Christ whom God put at His right hand. But I see Satan the prince of it all, and the whole thing is bad from beginning to end, and the whole is judged.

The judgment was not actually come; there was a demonstration of judgment because the one who had the power of the world had committed himself fatally against Christ; but the presence of the Holy Spirit showed it was against One who had broken his power and gone up to heaven. The presence of the Holy Spirit shows that Christ is in heaven, and righteousness is shown in setting Christ there. The same thing demonstrated that judgment was there; for the one who had allowed it was in direct opposition to the one God had set at His right hand. But it was not the execution of this judgment yet. The prince of the world was cast out, for the world had fatally committed itself against the One whom God had set at His right hand. All this demonstration is in the world; what follows is among the saints. "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now; howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth, for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak, and he will show you things to come; he shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you" (John 16:12-14). We have had the testimony borne by His presence in the world and now His work among the saints. First He guides into all the truth. That is a present thing. Then things to come are shown. In all He glorifies Christ, taking His things, all the Father has, and securing them to them. It is for the world from verse 8. I take it that the expression "because I go to the Father," which He employs everywhere in John, flows from

His speaking everywhere as the divine person who was come and went back, not as the dying man, though going through death, when all was over. He says, I am going away, and to the Father. No man takes My life away, Satan has nothing in Me. I am a divine person going to My Father; and when the proper time has come you will see Me again. They did not understand, and He says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, that ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice, and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy." It is not thus death and going to Him that He sets before them, but seeing Him again, which is a totally different thing.

In John 16:13 "of himself," is "from himself." He will speak from the Father and the Son. The distinction between verses 13 and 14 is that the one is what He does, and the other is the object of it. He does two things—gives you all present truth, and shows you things to come, that is prophecy, of which there is plenty in the epistles and the Revelation, to say nothing of what He explains of earlier writings, and of Christ's teachings, which was more bringing to remembrance, but all part of the truth of course. Verse 14 is what He does: He "shall show it unto you." But it is Christ He glorifies. The Holy Spirit reveals all that the Father has, and that can be, revealed, and all these things are part of Christ's glory. He specially speaks of Christ as gone. "He shall receive of mine," is not Christ's history as on the earth, so much, but all this new scene, though He does the other also. Here it is the new. They were wrought on by the Spirit to remember themselves what had passed on earth. They had seen it all; but here the Holy Spirit comes down, and, coming down brings the things they

had not seen, that is, everything which the Father has and which belongs to Christ.

The point in the "little while" is that the Lord is not going to be lost, but as soon as God's purposes are accomplished He will come again. It is a great thing to take what is in a passage. And it was accomplished as far as resurrection went. The statement is that they would see Him again, for He was not gone and lost. The world rejoiced when He went away, as gone and done with. As far as it went, it was verified when He rose again, His disciples did rejoice greatly then; but it was not confined to that. It says, "your sorrow shall be turned into joy." And it was. In the sense of verse 16 we have seen Him. It does not say, we are sorrowing at His being lost; but they did sorrow, and it speaks of the condition of the disciples in their place. The world was delighted to get rid of Him, but He comes up again, and His disciples see Him and rejoice. We have not got into the one or the other case entirely. Christ is gone in a certain sense, and yet we have seen Him so that we are always rejoicing. The entire fulfillment will not be until Christ returns.

I was referring to verse 22. As to the present they have lost Him again, after they had been glad when they saw the Lord, but they never got back into the sorrow they had had. I think the passage refers mainly to the resurrection, the then present thing, though it is not entirely fulfilled until we see Him. As we were saying before, I have eternal life, and am looking for it, and even for justification in one sense as in Philippians 3:9 that I may "be found in him, not having mine own righteousness." The disciples then were wonderfully dull of heart about it, and they had no understanding because the Holy Spirit was not given. The

point to me is, they would see Him again which they did when He arose. The world would see Him no more, but they see Him again, and have a consciousness that, instead of a lost Savior of Israel, they had got a complete one for the eternal purposes of God.

He is putting them here, as being Himself with the Father and having everything in His hands, in contrast with being a mere rejected dying man on earth as in the other Gospels, and puts them in the presence of the Father in grace, saying, “the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me and have believed that I came out from God. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again, I leave the world, and go to the Father” (John 16:27-28). He is not here a dying man but a divine Person; I come from the Father and go back to the Father, and shall come again. The disciples got that, or part of it, when they saw Him raised from the dead, although the full result will not be until He comes again. They did not understand it then though they professed to do so, for they say, “by this we believe that thou camest forth from God.” From the Father they have not entered into. The Father is looked at as giving Him all things, not merely is it that Christ came from God and went to God — that was the moral connection, He was going back to God in all His perfectness, but now He takes His headship over everything. “Whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name”; we ask the Father as brought into immediate relationship with Him, and in His name, as the one in and through whom we are thus in relationship with the Father. What title else have I to go to God? As to the Lord’s prayer, here is one reason why it should not be used now: it would not be asking in Christ’s name.

There is often great failure in going directly to the Father; it is in Christ's name, but people go not in Christ's name, in the Spirit of adoption, but to Christ if they could not go to the Father, like Martha: "whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, He will give it thee." They go as sinners, but inasmuch as Christ is there, they can go. Now that is not at all where Christ puts them here; "the Father himself loveth you"; all for Christ's sake, it is true.

Then the passage has been used for a very bad purpose indeed, "ye shall ask me nothing," as if you are not to look or pray to Christ Himself, a mere abuse of the words. They were not to come to Him like Martha and say, "I know that, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it Thee." The Lord says, "do you come yourselves to the Father and do not be asking Me that I should go for you." But in all that concerns the administration, of what concerns His lordship on earth, the Christian prays to the Lord, not to the Son in that character. As a child and son I go to the Father, but it is to Christ I go, not to the Father, in matters that relate to His service. If I am a child, I go to the Father, but if I have something of administration in the church, I go to the Lord. It is a definition of a Christian that he calls on the name of the Lord Jesus; and you have Stephen's example, and Paul besought the Lord thrice. You cannot properly address the Spirit, but this is for another reason, the Holy Spirit being the One who is in me, and so He cannot address Himself. It is the different place the Holy Spirit takes in the economy of grace that is the reason of this. He is the agent in us to sustain us in prayer, for by one Spirit we have access unto the Father.

It is not intelligent to use that hymn, "Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly dove." God does not make a man an

offender for a word, but it is not intelligent. "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:35). "In me" not merely, not apart from me, but "in me." Godly persons *have* prayed for an outpouring of the Spirit. It was a mistake in divine knowledge. That was done on the day of Pentecost. But they meant well and earnestly desired really the more abundant action of the Holy Spirit. I have no feeling of attacking what is merely a want of apprehension, though I have no doubt such lose greatly by it. I believe too, it is necessary for the church of God that there should be the clear truth seen.

John 17 is different from all other chapters in Scripture. It is not all a prayer of intercession but the thing that is peculiar, and which there is nothing else like is, that Christ is not speaking to His disciples but to His Father in their hearing. So He opens out all His mind to His Father while they are there to hear it, or, if you please, we are there to hear it. Of course this is a wonderful thing to be admitted to listen while He is unfolding to His Father all He has to say to Him about His disciples. And firstly He lays down the position. "These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come, glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee." Christ always has His Father's glory in view. And when He says, "glorify thy Son," we may remark these two points: He never, though Son of God having become a man, goes out of the place of receiving all from the Father. He does not say, Now I will glorify Myself; but glorify Thou Me. When glorified His object as such is to glorify the Father in that higher place and way though all was perfect here. Then he continues,

“as thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.” He has title over all flesh, but with a special object too in that. He has power over all flesh; but the special intent is that He may give eternal life to as many as have been given to Him of the Father. “And this is life eternal that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” That is, as I was saying, when you come to grace, it is Father and Son; it is the name that eternal life and blessing come in; it is the only full revelation of God Himself.

You get the three names we were speaking of brought together in Corinthians: “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord [that is, Jehovah]—Almighty.” Almighty, Jehovah, and Father. Abraham’s God Almighty, Israel’s Jehovah, Father is God’s name with us. Most High will be millennial. Father comes out in John 17. Almighty did not give eternal life, but kept Abraham from one people to another; and Jehovah was faithful to His promises, making them all good to His people. But this did not give eternal life, nor is it eternal life; but the moment the Father sends the Son, here is the grace that gives eternal life. God sent His only begotten Son that we might live through Him. We do not live through the first Adam. The Almighty watched over Abraham, but that did not give life, nor yet the government of Jehovah, but the name of the Father sending the Son does, and, receiving Him, we get it; that is eternal life. The Most High goes on to the millennium, and we have not come to that yet. “Father” is the special name that we have; it was revealed while Christ was upon earth,

but not understood, because they had not yet the Spirit of adoption. Then comes the position we get this in; that the Father glorifies the Son, all power being given to Him to give eternal life to as many as God gave Him; and that eternal life was in the knowledge of the Father, the true God, and of Jesus Christ as sent.

Then comes another point. His work: "I have glorified thee on earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do, and now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John 17:4-5). He had glorified God down here, and finished the work given Him to do. It is wonderful how the work itself is all passed over, but it is finished and He is looking at the one passing out of the world to the Father; and that is what has made the difficulty of understanding the seeing Him again, for He did not actually go to the Father till the forty days were ended: the work is finished, and then He goes back as Man into the glory of the Father. And then it is He makes us sons, glorifying God by His work, and we have part in the effect of it as sons. So you get the whole framework of grace in this chapter. He takes the glory as man having accomplished the work. "Glorify thou me with thine own self." "With" means "with Himself, along with Himself." He has just the same glory as the Father, but He never goes of Himself out of the place of humiliation. He was with the Father before the world was—one with the Father. You get that equality all through the Gospel. So here, "I have glorified thee," now "glorify thou me"; but He never says, "I have glorified thee, and now I will glorify myself." He receives everything, and will take everything as receiving it from the Father.

As to Isaiah 53:11, "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many," the meaning is very different. Christ does not justify us by His knowledge. The Hebrew word has two meanings. It is to justify; but it is also to "instruct in righteousness," though it goes farther, for He might instruct, and they not learn. But the meaning is they are really instructed. To justify by knowledge is very crooked. "It pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief; when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied; by his knowledge shall my righteous servant instruct the many in righteousness, and he shall bear their iniquities." It is "instruct the many," but in the last verse it is "bare the sin of many," without "the"; there is a "the," or article, when it says, instruct the many in righteousness. (Compare Dan. 11:33; 9:27; and the end of Rom. 5).

Notice now verses 4-5. Christ receives as Man, what He had been in as a divine Person before ever the world was at all, and then you come to the next step, to bring out the part of those who were given Him. "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world." It is the Father giving to Him as Son of man, and He gets the whole place as receiving it of the Father, and having finished the work, He brings us into it, and then He manifests the Father's name to bring us into relationship in which He is as Son. He has communicated to them all the communications of the Father to Him as Man down here, so that they should enjoy the relationship as exercised in these communications. "I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me, and they have received them, and

have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.” Thus we get their place settled. First, He manifests the name; and next, whatever the Father had given Him He passes on to them that they may have the full enjoyment of it.

In verse 26 “thy name” is the Father. “I have declared, and will declare it.” If I think of God as thus revealed, I think of the Father; because that is the name He has taken with me. Christ having become a man, has “emptied himself,” and He looks up to the Father. To deny His deity is to take the opportunity of His having humbled Himself for our sakes and sins to deny the glory due to Him because He laid aside the form of it in love to us. He made Himself of no reputation and then as Man humbled Himself. Still, though He said, Freely do I come; when a body was prepared Him, yet He therein took the place of the sent One. But His moral glory was the greater; therefore doth my Father love me because I lay down My life that I may take it again. Now, He could say, is the Son of man glorified. When I get the perfectness of the love, I find the Father sent the Son forth into the world. If I get a man sent from God, whose name was John, he has a mission; but when I see the Father sent the Son, I get the infiniteness of the Son in love, become a servant. If you go back, you will see the thing the devil sought was to get Christ out of the place of servant, and lead Him to command—“Command that these stones be made bread.” “No”; as it were, He says, “I have taken the place of service, and I will keep it.”

The sent One, as such, is not equal to the one who sends Him. But then you get Him, the Jehovah, and Jehovah says, “I am the first, and I am the last, and beside me there is no God” (Isa. 44:6). Isaiah saw also Jehovah in John 6; and in

John 12, referring to that passage it says, "These things said Esaias when he saw his glory, and spake of him." What he saw was, "Jehovah sitting on the throne, high and lifted up" (Isa. 6:1).

But again, I do not admit that He came merely as man. He undertook to come and do this will of God, a place of distinct service. "Mine ears hast thou opened" ("digged" in margin; Psa. 40:6). He undertook the service freely, and God prepared a body for Him. "He wakeneth mine ear to hear" as the learned, "the Lord God hath opened mine ear," that is, to learn down here (Isaiah 50:4-5). God formed the place of service, and prepared a body, and Christ says, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God." We hear of the undertaking to come when the body was only prepared; He comes to take it and became flesh. Then His ears were opened morning by morning, and finally according to Exodus 21:6, as He who had completed His full service, loving the One whose due service He had performed, His wife, His children, in death He became a servant forever. Compare John 13. His present place, and Luke 12 when He comes and takes those who watch for Him to Himself. I came forth from the Father, and came into the world.

There is no such thing in Scripture as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. It is in Revelation 13, "Whose names are not written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb slain." If people merely mean that the Lamb was slain before the world in the counsels of God, that is all very well, but in no other way.

Then He prays and first for the eleven; further on He says, "I pray not for these only"—all Christians are the gift of the Father to Christ; though the immediate application

is to those brought in by the apostles. "I pray not for the world" stands in a way contrasted with Psalm 2. He leaves the world and does not pray for it. Intercession is only for those who actually believe. "I pray for them; I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me." He will ask for the world hereafter, but He does not occupy Himself with it here. It is in this verse that He begins to pray. "Glorify thou me" in verse 5 is not prayer. "And all mine are thine and thine are mine." It is precious to see these two motives given to the Father to keep us. If thou carest for Thine own thou must keep them, and if thou carest for My glory thou must keep them, for He adds, "and I am glorified in them." This gives two motives for keeping them, they belong to the Father and Christ is glorified in them. "And now I am no more in the world; but these are in the world, and I come to thee." There is His position taken. "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are" (John 17:11). As yet we have only got the disciples—the apostles. "While I was with them in the world I kept them in thy name, those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost." We get the name withal in which they are kept. Kept as by a Father, but as a holy Father, there is all the love and care of their being His own children, but the holiness of God's nature is the character in which He keeps them.

And now I have another thing to mark, and that is the three unities. First, it is the apostles "that they may be one, even as we are," and then the next is "that they all may be one, as thou Father art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us that the world may believe that thou hast sent me," and that is for the others who believe through

their words—communion as 1 John 1. And then there is a third, “And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them, that they may be one even as we are one. I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me” (John 17:22-23). That is the glory. Display of the Father in the Son and of the Son in the saints.

The unity of the apostles was unity by the power of thought and work of the Holy Spirit. They were identical in counsels and purposes, being entirely under the Holy Spirit, they were all of one mind, and it was one thing. Then when the persons who had believed were brought in, they are brought into communion with the Father and the Son which the apostles enjoyed that they might be “one in us” as is said, may have communion with us, and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. The apostles brought such into fellowship with them, and they then had communion with “us.” Those who believed were brought into unity and communion, though they did not go out in action and counsel; but they are brought in to enjoy it in the Father and Son, and have fellowship with them. That would be the same as in John’s first Epistle. It is unity of communion, not of divine action and counsel, and work. The third unity is simple; for there you have the glory, and you get what is descendible, so to speak, “I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that thou hast sent me” (John 17:23).

The first is divine action and counsel and everything, referring to the twelve; the second refers to those who believe through their word, the Holy Spirit working by

them, and these brought into communion, and all one that the world may believe; and then the unity in the glory, the glory given that they may be one even as we are one. The Father, glorified in Christ, and Christ glorified in us, and this glory He gives us that the world may know; for when they come out in glory the world will not “believe,” but will “know” that God sent Christ, and, wondrous word! loved us as He loved Him, for they will see them in the same glory together. It is three steps, the giving out of the testimony by the apostles; the reception of the testimony through their means in the beginning; and the glory. The last is the same as in Thessalonians. “I am glorified in them” is also now, but He will be perfectly glorified in His saints. You get a picture of it in the Acts too. Well these are the three unities. “And now come I to thee, and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.” There you have them put in His own place with the Father “my joy”; nothing less.

“I have manifested thy (the Father’s) name.” I have brought them in here, and I am glorified in them, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. Even then, all the words His Father had given Him, He had given them. He had put them completely in His own place before the Father.

And now He puts them in His own place, not with the Father, but in respect of the world; “I have given them thy word, and the world hath hated them.” It is in the same place of testimony that He had been in. They are in the same place as Himself with the Father to the end of verse 13; and then He begins to put them in the same place as to the world, and He prays, “not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep

them from the evil.” There I learn that He has made their place that which His was, giving them His testimony, the Father’s word, not words here, and the world will not bear it; if you get into this place the world will not stand it. The world will bear a deal of religion, but not the Father. The Father dwells with the Christian; you are all outside, if you belong to the world and not to the Father. The Father has taken His Son up to Himself out of the world; and the Son says, “O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee, but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me.” “I have manifested thy name” and the effect is that I am rejected. The world has not known the Father, but the Father takes up the Son to His right hand, and the world is all left behind; but Christians are put in His place before the Father and before the world.

“Holy Father” is the name He uses in verse 11, where He asks for them to be kept; here it is “righteous Father” in speaking of the world. It is God, of course, but the friendship of the world is enmity against God, and God is righteous in reference to it. In verse 16 He says, “they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world,” and then goes on to how they are practically made not of the world as Christ was not of it. The Father’s truth, and the Son at the right hand of God, these are the two great elements. “Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth.” I want them apart from the evil, they are not of it, as I am not of it; thy word, the divine word, is truth, truth to separate them from it. And then “for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might *be* sanctified through the truth.” It is not only the Father’s truth brought down by the Spirit so as to bring what is in His mind into ours and form us by it judging the evil; but Christ has set Himself apart as the One in whom

all this truth is realized in glory, and as the object of their affections, so that they should be sanctified through the truth. Just as He had said before, “the truth shall make you free,” and “the Son shall make you free” (John 8:36). This is an important sentence; it is the way in which you are morally put in the place in which we are detached from the world. The truth shows us the divine nature, Christ, His death; it is the Father’s word that comes from Christ who is gone on high, and it is with the additional fact that in Christ Himself it is all realized in glory. We have had now their place with the Father, their place in the world.

Then He prays “for them also which shall believe on me through their word, that they all may be one, as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.” And then comes the third position—the glory—“that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me.” The difference between believing and knowing is not sufficiently noticed. When the glory comes the world will know that we have been loved as Christ was, for we appear with Him in the same glory. What a wonderful sentence it is! The Lord delights to show that we are in the same glory with Himself. Like Moses and Elias in the same glory with Him on the mount. In one sense this closes the teaching of the chapter.

The last three verses of the chapter alone refer to heaven. “Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me, for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee, but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me.” He will have His disciples

up there in the glory where He is; but this involves the question between Him and the world. And He appears to His Father to judge between the world and Himself. It is His direct desire for having them in the glory in verse 24, and then the decision as to the world comes in verse 25, and in verse 26 He says, "I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it, that the love wherewith thou hast loved me, may be in them and I in them." That is a present thing. It is not "declaring," as before, that the world should know, but to the disciples; when the glory comes, the world will know that we have been loved as Jesus is loved. But we are to know it now, and for this purpose He has declared it, "that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them and I in them." He has made the Father's name known to us that the love wherewith He was loved may be in us, and He dwells in us as a kind of conductor of this love down to our hearts. There are two kinds of love known in the heart: God's love shed abroad there and the love of relationship in the Father; and different measures of it, according to our spirituality; but the living in it is the place we are in rightly, one child may feel its father's love better and deeper than another, but each is always in it. As a child, he has the Spirit of adoption and cries, Abba, Father; as to righteousness, he has it; and if I speak of a son, he is one. And he is all this through Christ. He has brought us into the same place with Himself. Such is the subject of the chapter. But you never find Christ taking us into the same place with Himself without His divine glory shining out and marking a difference in Him all the while. Still as to us and the ground of the relationship we are all in the same place. It is another thing whether the heart of the Christian in looking up has the consciousness of the

same favor resting on him as rests on Christ; that may vary and in the same person too, but the settled consciousness of the favor is there.

In “He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one” (Heb. 2:11), we have the same thing. Before God we are of one, but He sanctifies, we are sanctified. And the nearer we are to Him the more we shall know it. You always get the difference kept up of the “sanctifier” and they “sanctified”; but He does bring us into His own place, the same place in righteousness and life, and love. It is not merely that my sins are put away, through the work of the cross; that is not relationship, my debts are paid, and I have to be very thankful for it, but it puts me into no relationship with anybody. But Christ bring us into the same place as Himself, and then we come not only into relationship with Him, but also into His relationships.

Then just look a little at this expression—I feel it often in our worship meetings—“in the midst of the assembly will I sing praise unto thee.” Christ is singing the praises, but He raises the song of praise as the consequence of His own place and ours being the same. He comes and brings us into this place and says, I will sing in the midst of the assembly He went down into the place of death and drank the cup of wrath, and comes out into all the blessedness of His Father’s delight, not only as His eternal delight, but as having done the work for God—comes out and tells us His name, and then says, “you must come and sing with me.” It shows how wonderfully He puts us into the place of relationship. And we cannot sing with Him unless we have found that deliverance which put the new song in His mouth. Even the bearing of sins and putting them away, though an everlasting ground of thanksgiving, is not a new

relationship. What we are brought into is what the Father is to Him when He has accomplished the work: “thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns. I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee” (Psa. 22:21-22).

“That the love wherewith thou hast loved me, may be in them, and I in them.” It is a very wonderful scheme of God, to be sure, to bring poor worms, sinners, into the place of His Son; and all His glory is in it, His love, His righteousness, His holiness, His majesty, all are made good in that by which we were; that is what we have here, Christ glorified His Father—things for the angels to look into. “Herein is love with us made perfect that we may have boldness in the day of judgment” (1 John 4:17) is different, in this, that there I have judgment before me, and you cannot have this here. That is the thing as I look at myself as a responsible being: responsibility leads me to judgment, but Christ has come in and cleared me from it all, and I am accepted in Him. But here I have another thing; what is He going to do with these redeemed people? He makes us “sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus,” “and show the exceeding riches of his grace in us” (Eph. 2:7). He must clear them from sins first, that is true, but He had this thought in His counsels to set us before Himself in love, “having predestinated us into the adoption of children (sons) by Jesus Christ to himself” (Eph. 1:5).

John’s epistle is the other aspect of this, from the judgment side of it; it is not the union and relationship side but the other side so that, when I think of judgment, it is no judgment for me. “Boldness in the day of judgment,” is a strong word, but that is what the epistle gives; it is in the aspect of judgment. If I am the same thing as my judge,

I need have no fear of judgment if the judge acts according to what He Himself is, because I am the same thing as Himself. What I feel so important is, that consciousness of relationship should be insisted upon. It is more than that question of judgment, only here it is all the same position as Christ, as well as in the epistle. I find so many brethren who linger round the fact of clearing us from our sins, and do not enter into the consciousness of our relationship in Christ with the Father. Every Christian ought to have a sense of relationship, just as a child has on earth. The moment I take my place in Christ by faith, I say "I am loved as he is loved," and I understand the aspect of the Father's love towards me.

I do not say if we are sealed, that we should not say, "Abba Father," but such an one may not enter into what it is to be loved as Jesus is loved, and that Jesus would have it so, and dwells in him that he might. You will find many brethren who really know they are forgiven, and yet have never thought of being loved as Christ is loved. It is to be known by faith, in the power of the Holy Spirit looking up and being there — through the word of course.

The Lord says at the end, "O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee" (John 1:25). These have come unto Me, they have received the message. There is "the world" on one side, and "these" on the other. "I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me." And then comes what these souls get: "I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it, that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them." Before, it was the righteous Father, and He decides between the world, and Christ, and His disciples; and the love comes in and puts them in His place. He does so now, just as the Father had

said, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again"—as He had done in Lazarus, and would do again in Christ. As to the same glory: there is the divine end of it so to speak, and the other end of it. We are one with Him and He is one with the Father. Christ and His disciples go together, and the Father is to decide between them and the world, "O, righteous Father."

He goes over the brook Cedron, and still you get the same divine character. You have nothing at all, not a word, of what is called Gethsemane, or of the praying and crying to His Father; it is not that side that we get here. They came to take Him, and He puts Himself forward. You get a divine Person who is giving His life, and He says, "Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he. And Judas also which betrayed him stood with them. As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward and fell to the ground" (John 18:4-6).

It is all power. He had only to walk away then. As soon as divine power was manifested, they all fell to the ground. Then He asks again, "Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told you that I am he; if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way" (John 18:7-8). He puts Himself forward, and all the disciples escaped, not in a very grand way, but still they are safe—the Good Shepherd puts Himself in the gap, and the sheep escape.

Now Simon Peter, who had been sleeping when he ought to have been praying, comes forward and resists. He cuts off the right ear of the high priest's servant, but Jesus says, "Put up thy sword into the sheath; the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it" (John 18:11). This is not resisting; and it is all the Gethsemane you get

here—a divine person as man, bowing to whatever is done as the Father's will. The Father has given Him the cup to drink, and He will drink it. He was a divine person, but a servant. Simon Peter denies Him; the high priest asks of His doctrine, and He answers He had ever openly taught in the temple; those who heard knew what He said. There is no recognition of authority anywhere though He submits to all. It is the Son of God who gives Himself. They lead Him to Pilate, and then what this Gospel so brings out is here again shown, and that is perfect contempt for a Jew. Pilate asks, "Am I a Jew?" All through this is so. Our Lord says to the Jews, "Ye are of your father, the devil; ye have not the love of God in you." Pilate had the feeling of utter contempt. When the chief priest wanted to change the title on the cross, he says, utterly despising them, "What I have written I have written."

They claim that He should die. Pilate goes again, and asks, "Whence art thou"; and when He did not answer, he says, "Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above; therefore he that delivereth me unto thee hath the greater sin. And from henceforth Pilate sought to release him" (John 18:10-12). The Jews cry, to work on his fears, "Thou art not Caesar's friend." "Therefore he that delivereth me unto thee hath the greater sin." Pilate had no power against Him really at all. If he believed that He was the Son of God, and there was at any rate fear in his conscience, he was helping on the devil's work against the Son of God, and any way he saw that in the Jews it was hypocrisy and envy.

Pilate's saying, "What is truth?" showed he did not know what truth was. It is just what infidels say now. Their minds are always "open to truth," as they say, and this shows one clear thing—they have not got any. It is an old saying, "A fool can ask a question that nine wise men cannot answer." You will never find them state a truth; at best, everything is hypothetical. One said to me, "How can I get any good from anything I do not understand?" "Do you know how your heart beats?" I asked, "and do you not get any good by it?" He was confounded, but he got some good by it. And if I have truth, my love of truth is shown by keeping it.

We find a complete apostasy of the Jews here. "It was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour; and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your king! But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your king? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar." This was apostasy. It was denial of Messiah, their hope and everything else. That stamps their character.

They had a double council—one at night when He was taken, and then they came to a formal sentence in the morning. The narrative leaves much out *here*, as the interview with Herod, and many details. But it is all Christ in peace, who delivers His mother to the disciple, and then, knowing that all things were accomplished, He received the vinegar, and said, "It is finished." He was crucified at our nine, I suppose, and the darkness was from twelve till three, and then He died. There were six hours from the time when He was crucified, and the darkness was for three of them. Neither in Gethsemane, nor on the cross, have you a word of suffering in this Gospel. He bows His head, and gives up His own spirit.

He says "I thirst," that the scripture might be fulfilled. The suffering was all there of course, only this Gospel does not bring it out. In Matthew you get it all fully. In Luke you see a great deal more suffering in Gethsemane, and none on the cross. "Being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44). There, and all through Luke, we get the Son of man, and not so much His divine person. As Son of man He goes through all sorrow, looked at as a matter of faith, in Gethsemane, and in spirit and heart He drinks the cup, so that, when He comes to die, the whole thing is perfectly calm. You get that side of it in Luke. And that is just what we ought to do—I mean, to go through all the sorrow and trial that is before us with the Father first, and when the sorrow itself comes, go through it in calm. Jordan overflows all its banks, it may be, but it is dry to us. Then in Luke it is simply said He expired.

Matthew gives us the sufferings on the cross fully: there I see the victim and the drinking of the cup. Is it not a wonderful thing to have the Lord brought down to us in this way—as Son of God and Son of man especially, all divinely developed for our souls to see what was going on? The vinegar was a kind of drink the soldiers had. Some have thought it mockery, but this is not the way in which it is presented here.

Certainly this is that death, where God and sin met in the sinless one, and death was what it could be to none but God, and yet He must be a man to die. He looked at it as the cup of the judgment of sin, God hiding His face, and yet there was perfect obedience manifest in man, besides the perfect love of God in it. There is no place like this; even the new heavens and new earth depended upon

the cross, because God was perfectly glorified here as to the whole question of sin, and nowhere else; good and evil met perfectly; hatred against God and the devil's power and all possible evil in man to the highest degree. Christ, man perfect in obedience and love to His Father, having no sin, but made sin for us, while the judgment of God in righteousness against sin, yet in perfect love to the sinner; so that the question of good and evil might be settled and settled forever, and by God Himself, the Son of God giving Himself as man for it.

Unrepentant sinners will be judged of course; will be judged, and justly, according to their works; but the cross has settled a great deal more than that; it has settled all that is in God's character as to evil and as to good. Christ says, "I have overcome the world," but also, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (John 17:4). And that work can never lose its value, and therefore I get the everlasting value of it when I get it at all. It was dealing with sin; but so as to put it away, and thus I get the new heavens and the new earth founded on it. Innocence was in the first earth, or garden of Eden, sin is in this, and righteousness will be in the next. The cross was to put away sin for God, and you get the new heavens and the new earth founded on sin being put away before God; righteousness then comes in. "He appeared once in the end of the world to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." The result is not produced yet at large, though it is in respect of our consciences. Heaven and earth shall bow to Christ, but that is things in heaven and things on earth, and things under the earth too, and that is final. Now God has been glorified finally, and this cannot change; and everything new is based on it.

The Lord's making John the guardian of His mother explains, "what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come." But when His hour was come, and He had done the work, He could turn to recognize the relationship, seeing He was now no longer engaged in serving His Father on earth.

It was the scene that stands by itself. Pilate was alarmed and uneasy all through; his wife came and told him she had suffered many things in a dream because of Him, and he was to have nothing to do with that just man, but the Jews press Him on, though Pilate did it himself. Everything was exactly opposite to God; the disciples that ought to have been faithful to Him, run away, another betrays Him, another denies Him; the chief priests, who ought to have interceded for the guilty, plead against the innocent; Pilate, who ought to have justly acquitted Him and set Him free, condemns Him. Everything was exactly opposite to what ought to have been. The cross being there brought everything to the test.

Pilate represents the power of the world committed against Christ, and that has been fatally compromised there: it was the abuse of the power committed to the Gentiles by God. The Jews were the agents in it all, but Pilate was the government of the world recklessly rejecting Christ at the instigation of wicked men.

When the Lord returns, He will find the beast in power, and the Antichrist there. Evil will have all ripened into some positive shape, but otherwise it will be exactly the same. That is the reason why the Lord, as to circumstances, took the sorrows of the remnant upon Him. He had to do with the apostate nation, with the king Cesar; He had to do with them all, but did he find faith on the earth? The

remnant will have to do both with apostasy and Gentile power, with this immense difference—that Christ went through judgment for them, and they will not have to do it.

The Jews have a tradition that Antichrist is to be of the tribe of Dan; and they look for Messiah Son of Joseph to suffer, and for Messiah Son of David to reign. Many now look for nothing at all. There is a rationalistic movement among them, and an attempt on the part of some to join the Socinians. Some will tell you that Christians have done a great deal of good, and many have read the New Testament, but many are infidels, and this is growing among them—on the one side the Talmudists, and the rationalists on the other, and some few in between these; but they are all uneasy.

In Revelations 13 we have Antichrist with two horns like a lamb, that is his royal character. In the first part of that chapter, the Roman power comes first, and they will both go on together, and play into each other's hands; but then the beast has not as yet actually come into Palestine; when he has, the second beast has truly his prophet character.

John alone of the evangelists mentions the flowing of the blood and water from Christ's side; he alludes to it in his epistle too. It is a beautiful testimony of divine grace, answering the last insult man could heap upon Him. They drove Him outside the camp, put Him to death on a cross, and then, to make assurance doubly sure, the soldier gives Him a blow with his spear. Salvation was God's answer to man's insult, sin in his rejection of Him, for the blood and water were the signs of it.

In John's epistle the water is named first, because, looked at on God's side, water comes first; in the history it cannot: "Forthwith came there out blood and water," in the epistle;

“not by water only, but by water and blood” (1 John 5:6). The point is that eternal life is not found in the first Adam but in the last; the witnesses to this are the water, the blood, and the Spirit. You want purifying to have eternal life; you will get it nowhere but in death, and in that of Christ in grace. You want expiation, and the blood of Christ makes that; you want the Holy Spirit. Christ is not only dead, but glorified, and the Spirit is given, the witness that there is no life in the first Adam but in the Son. Its power is found in that which marks the total breach of the first man with God and of God with him, save in sovereign mercy. In the epistle John is showing that moral cleansing will not be enough. The Spirit is named first when God applies it. The word is the instrument, but it is by death itself: you must have cleansing, but the cleansing is death. The water, coming forth from the side, is purity; and you can have purity by death only, and by His death. Then Joseph comes before us, and Nicodemus too, when the thing comes to a point.

But in John 20 we get the whole picture of the dispensation, from the remnant of Israel that first received Him risen, to the remnant that will know Him when they see Him again, represented by Thomas. Mary comes early to the sepulcher, while it is yet dark; her heart is there, and she has no rest without Him. The others came when it was light—the natural hour to come. When they had been buying spices for the body and what they were going to do next morning, they come at the light. But Mary Magdalene has no heart to be without Him, and, before the light, she is there. The church began by a remnant, but John never gives us the church, but the remnant at the end, and in

verse 17, “My Father and your Father, and to my God and your God”—two dispensations if you call them so.

First, Mary goes to the sepulcher and finds the stone rolled away. She runs and tells Peter and John, and they go to the sepulcher. Peter goes in first as usual; those two constantly go together, they both loved the Lord, but in very different characters. They do not shine in this history. They come and see and believe, and go away to eat their breakfasts, or for something at home. They did not know the scriptures, nor did they stay to be anxious about it at all. They saw and believed, for they knew not the scriptures. It was not faith in God’s word but sight convinced them. The clothes all lay quietly there; there had been no stealing away, and they said He must be risen. Afterward Christ reproaches them for their unbelief. At any rate like Mary, they might have inquired. Mary stays when they have gone off; and there she is weeping, and thinks when she sees Him He is the gardener, and says, “If thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.” She feels she has a right to dispose of His body, and talks to the gardener as if he knows all about it—“Tell me where thou hast laid him”—just as I might go to a house where one is ill, and say, “How is he?” without stating a name, because all hearts are full of the sick one. Then Christ brings out (the angel had done so too) where her heart was; and, when that is done, He calls His own sheep by name, and she turns and says to Him, Rabboni, that is, Master. Then she would have taken Him by the feet, but He anticipates her, for she thought she had got Him back again for the kingdom. You must not touch Me, “but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and my God and your God.” It

is the highest expression of personal relationship, and she is the messenger of it to the apostles themselves. He has accomplished redemption, and they are His brethren, for He has put them into the same place as Himself. The women in Matthew touch Him, but they were no messengers of a higher calling in contrast with the kingdom. They thought nothing about the act save as a mere token of respect and attention, and He let them do it.

The Lord was not seen by Peter first. The women are not named in 1 Corinthians 15, because Paul is speaking of witnesses there; he speaks of Peter, and the twelve, and five hundred, and James, and that was all he wanted. "Then of the twelve"; that marks it.

"It was written in the Book of Psalms...and his bishoprick let another take" (Acts 1:20). That was both reason and authority for choosing another. He has another to witness of His resurrection, because the Psalms said it was to be done. The number "twelve" is the perfection of human things in government; the foundations of the city, new Jerusalem, are twelve; so twelve apostles of the Lord. "Ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28). There must be twelve.

Luke takes them all in a lump — Mary Magdalene and the other women, and puts them together; this is Luke's way — all in a lump together, and then he picks out perhaps a single circumstance in which deep and interesting moral traits are developed and that he gives at length. In verse 18 we get Mary Magdalene's testimony. The seeing and believing left the disciples at home, individually, but through her they receive testimony. Mary Magdalene is the figure of the remnant.

Then another point. We see them gathered, and Christ pronounces peace upon them. He had said before, "Peace I leave with you"—His own peace in the world, but here there is not only resurrection brought in, but the relationship. "My Father and your Father, my God and your God." And then He comes in a sense into the midst of the church gathered together, and, instead of saying, "Fear not," as He was wont while here below, the door was shut for fear of the Jews, and He says now, "Peace be unto you," for He had now made peace by the blood of His cross. As though to say, "I cannot stay with you, but I leave peace with you"; and He breathes on them too, and says, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." "As I cannot stay, here is a provision for you if I go"; such is the force of it. It is the Holy Spirit in the power of life in resurrection, not sent down from heaven. There is nothing special in the "eight" days, in verse 26. In one place you will find "after six days," and in another, eight. John never gives us the church as a doctrine, but we have historically their gathering together and He in their midst.

As to peace He says, "Peace be unto you; as my Father has sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21). It is characteristic now to be so. The word "peace" is an amazing word in scripture. "The God of peace shall be with you" (Phil. 4:9). He is never called the God of joy; it is never given as His character. He is, as God, always in peace, and never up and down as we are. Joy is a feeling that a man has when he is up, and presently it subsides, and he goes down again. Christ now brings peace—He has made absolute peace, perfect peace, and He brings it.

Then comes the breathing on them. It was the figure of the Holy Spirit coming after He had made peace; but

as a fact it was the power of resurrection life. Just as God breathed into Adam's nostrils, so the resurrection Son of God breathes into them the power of the life He gives them as risen. In Acts 1 you get the sending of the Holy Spirit, not the breathing on them, not the power of life, but the Holy Spirit Himself received anew for others from the Father by the Son, and then by Him shed forth.

As to "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them" (John 20:23). They were the administrators of it in the world; first in the preaching of the gospel if you like; but afterward, in the proper administrative sense. Here it is the apostles. But Peter in a sense remitted Cornelius' sins. Paul says, "To whom ye forgive anything, I forgive also" (2 Cor. 2:10). And yet, if such an one is a believer, he has eternal life and forgiveness all the while. That is what I mean by administrative. Not the forgiveness in which the soul is justified, but the present conferring the forgiveness in the ways and government of God. James says, "And if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him" (James 5:15). If discipline is carried out, there the sin is bound upon the person. It is spoken here of the disciples, that is the eleven. The question has been raised, I know, whether there were one hundred and twenty that obtained this power, or only eleven. The great thing is to get what the Spirit of God is at in the passage, and afterward the context as much as you like. Thomas is not there the first time. There might have been more than the eleven present.

As to binding and loosing the only thing that I see it conferred upon, after Peter, is in Matthew 18, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name"; forgiveness of sins is not named here, though this is part of it. The thing He is here speaking of is their administrative capacity. In

those early days there was no such thought as receiving in anyone, and he not having his sins forgiven. It is the very thing, they, the disciples, were “sent” out for—to announce the remission of sins to give knowledge of the salvation of His people by the forgiveness of sins: only He gives the administration of it to them. I believe that any assembly of two or three in Christ’s name (provided they look to Him, and do it in His name) have the power to bind and loose, and forgive sins; only this is not eternal forgiveness.

As to John 18:28, it is a question of whether Christ anticipated the Passover, for they began it in the evening, and among the Jews the evening began the next day, and was reckoned with it. It was dark when they went out. I did look into the thing once, but those things do not occupy me much. “That they might eat the passover,” falls in completely with Christ being sacrificed on the paschal day; it is merely a question of why He ate the supper previously, and still it was on the same day. As to the title on the cross, here we get the whole—“Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews.” One Gospel gives one part, and another, another; but here you get it in full.

To return to the forgiveness of sins in John 20. He says “Peace [be] to you”; first by itself, and next, both on the Lord’s day, says, “Peace [be] to you; as the Father sent me forth, I also send you.” He brought the peace to them, and then He sent them out with the peace. Then He breathes the Holy Spirit into them, which, looked at as figurative teaching, in the dispensational teaching here given, is the same as sending it from heaven; but historically it was the power of life, and not the giving of a person.

When they brought the message of this peace and preached the gospel, that was the character of their mission;

then there was restoring souls in details. The offering once offered, we have absolute remission, when it is a question of our acceptance with God; and then the administrative thing, as “Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins” (Acts 22:16), to Paul. It is well to see that, as to forgiveness, it is not a mere perfect work by which I am to be forgiven, but I *am* forgiven. It is more than mere declaration. The woman in Luke 7 was forgiven in the mind of God, but she herself had it not until the Lord said to her, “Thy faith hath saved thee, go in peace.” I could not say that a person is sealed in the mind of God, because sealing is not a thing in a person’s mind at all, and forgiveness is. I may have forgiven you an offense, but you are not easy until I tell you so; whilst sealing is a different thing in its nature. The woman did not get the forgiveness until He said so, though she saw the grace in Christ that drew her to Him. You find that constantly; you get it in pious souls, the sense of the grace that forgives without the sense of forgiveness. They love the Lord, but if I say, “Are your sins forgiven?” the reply at once is, “Oh, I could not say that.” You find hundreds such. You see it as to salvation in Cornelius. He was to call Peter and hear words, whereby he and his house should be saved. He was safe really already. Justification is in the same way. People talk about eternal justification; but justification is not only what is in the mind of God, but in the man’s receiving it, and therefore you get justification by faith. A person really is accepted, and there is the sense of the forgiving grace in the person of Christ, but the word of known forgiveness is not in the mind of the person himself. The same of justification. That is the force of the word, He “was raised again for our justification” (Rom. 4:24), because justification there is an active word in Greek—for

our justifying—and then it adds, “Having been justified by faith,” and so on. Faith must come in in order to our actually having it, and the man has not got it until faith. Suppose a thousand pounds given to me, I must sign my name for it. Actually I do not get it until I sign my name.

In Matthew 18:15-18, the inheritance of binding and loosing is given to the two or three. Thus the binding and loosing power which is claimed by clergymen and others, and which was given first to Peter, has its succession in the two or three gathered together, and not in clerical successors. And that has its importance in these days. In Matthew it is not absolutely the same as in John 20:23, for it may apply to other things. The main point is the same no doubt, and has always been considered so, though not exclusively that. It is almost always “heavens,” not “heaven.” The place is lost sight of when we say “heaven,” because we talk loosely of going to heaven. It is the “kingdom of the heavens”; that is, belongs to the heavens and not to the earth. “Heavens” is the place more, but “heaven” is characteristic. You may use both so, but I should say, “The heavens are higher than the earth.” We use the heavens more materially in a way. There are habits of that kind in language which are not absolute.

Peter is represented as having “keys,” but it is an important point to notice that there are no keys of the church; that is a mere blunder. “I will build,” says Christ; and Peter had nothing to say to it except the privilege of getting the name “Peter.” The administration of the church was not committed to Peter, but of the kingdom. The church in this sense is not even built yet; whereas the keys of the administration of the kingdom of heaven upon earth were committed to him; and he lets in the Jews and the Gentiles. That is the force of “keys.” “The key of the house

of David will I lay upon his shoulder," Isaiah 22:22, has the same meaning. It is the charge of administering the kingdom of heaven down here. That is where popery has made an immense blunder, though very natural to the state of that church. It has taken Peter instead of Paul; there is no successor to Paul, and they do not attempt it. Peter had to follow Christ, and Judaism came to nothing, and the circumcision church died away at Jerusalem. They take up with Peter because the church dropped into a Judaical state. You never hear of a pope as the successor of Paul. The entire thing is ridiculous, because after all you have no succession of Peter. As to successors to Timothy, whom Paul appointed in a way (but not to be his successor), nobody has thought of that, except in some general idea.

It is curious how and where things come out. There are those now and doctors of divinity too; one of them goes through all this, and declares there is no ordination to the ministry in scripture, and no sacraments in scripture, and that one person is as competent to administer as another, that certain things must be done, but there is no authority in any clergy from scripture. He says there was no such thing in the early church at all. And it is so—there was not. He admits that the apostles appointed elders, as indeed is plain, but it must be taken for granted that they did it with the concurrence of the people, because Clement says so. Clement owns no bishop. Vigilantius was cursed by Jerome in an awful way; but he stopped on his way back and stayed among the Vaudois. Tillemont says of Jerome, "we may learn from this what a church saint is." He is as abusive and vengeful as possible, only he praises celibacy. Chrysostom and Augustine fell under his lash.

But we were at forgiveness: and now we get the remnant in the last days, and the three times that Christ reveals Himself to them, as it says in John 21:14: "This is now the third time." He had seen them ever so many times, but as to this kind of definite public and positive showing Himself, the first time was on the Lord's day (John 20:19); then when Thomas was there eight days after in verse 26; and then in the last chapter picturing the remnant at the end. Calling this the "third time" is a proof that the third time is used with a kind of specific figurative character. Thomas being absent the first time, had no part in this Christian mission, but he comes in afterward, and believes when he sees.

Let us look now at the different missions in the different Gospels. In Matthew you have no ascension, and you get the mission from Galilee. The angels tell the women to "go quickly, and tell his disciples," not "I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God," but "that he is risen from the dead, and behold he goeth before you into Galilee, there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you" (Matt. 28:7). And then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee unto a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him they worshipped, but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth; go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:18-20). There you get the mission in resurrection from Galilee, and from the remnant of Israel looked at as thus gathered, and going out to disciple the nations or Gentiles. And that never was carried out in scripture,

except it be a hint in Mark at the utmost. And not only you do not get it carried out negatively, but you also get positively the going to the Gentiles given up to Paul. The apostles gave it up, and agreed that they should go to the Jews, and “that we should go unto the heathen.” You find it in Galatians 2. And then you get the church an entirely new kind of thing. As Matthew’s mission, everything was provisional, not carried out.

But there is another thing which gives an intimation about it, and that is, when the Lord sends them forth, He tells them (Matthew 10) “If they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another; for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.” But in Acts you find that, on persecution arising, they all *fled, except* the apostles, and that must be taken into account as to the way in which the instruction was practically carried out. For the Gentiles there is an entirely fresh start from Antioch when Paul is sent out by the Holy Spirit. There was then very nearly a split between Jerusalem and Antioch, but they were united and kept together as you find in Acts 15.

Well, the mission in Matthew starts from Christ’s connection with the remnant in Israel. In Mark, it is more general. You get more the service of Christ there; and in Mark 16:15, He said unto them, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature”; that is the largest and most general commission you have, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.” It is the more remarkable because that is the part of Mark which the learned Germans reject from verse 9 to the end. In what precedes you get this Galilee revelation of Himself, but no heavenly revelation, no

Bethany revelation at all. In what they consider genuine in Mark you do not get the ascension; they only go to the instruction in verse 7, and stop with "They were afraid" (vs. 8). But in Mark they are sent to Galilee, and the history is pursued regularly on that basis up to the end of verse 8, but if you stop at verse 8, it stops all of a heap, and you get no mission at all. In these last verses you get His appearings to them, and the facts are what are recounted in Luke and John, and the mission is added in verse 15; it is not said in what connection, and then He is received up into heaven. They go forth, the Lord working with them, so that there you get the mission from heaven with power. It is the Luke commission from verse 9. In Luke you only get the last part of Mark, who gives Matthew up to the sepulcher, and parts of Luke and John. In Luke 24, "It behooved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46-47). He, taking the mission from heaven as Paul did, takes in Jerusalem as much as the nations, "the Jew first, and also the Greek." Then "He led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lift up his hands and blessed them; and it came to pass while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven." So Luke's mission practically comes from heaven, it is in Bethany and not in Galilee. Galilee is the mission to Gentiles only from a risen Savior in the place where He had the poor of the flock; Luke's commission is from heaven, and is Pauline in character. In Mark you have "Go to Galilee," but you have no Galilee mission at all. In John you get no going to heaven, but you get them sent out for the remission of sins: "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." It is a

mission from the divine person, not from a place at all. And then it is by the Holy Spirit: He gives them the Holy Spirit and the forgiveness of sins; and so there is no ascension in John, for this would give a place, though a heavenly one.

And now it is all purposely mysterious in the end of John. It is remarkable—all the puzzling of men's minds about these things, when it is just an inlet into the fullness of truth. "After these things" (Luke 21:1), it is all mysterious. Peter was going back to the old work from which he had been called. Peter might have wanted his dinner. But it was ordered of God for His own purposes. And they went forth, but that night they caught nothing. When the morning came, Jesus stood on the shore, and asks, "Have ye any meat?" They answer "No." He says, "Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find." And they were not able to draw the net for the multitude of fishes. "Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved [the secret of the Lord was still with him who loved and kept close to Him], saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him (for he was naked), and did cast himself into the sea, and the other disciples came in a little ship (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits), dragging the net with fishes."

But the Lord had fish already; He had got the remnant with Him on shore, and then you get the millennial haul. It is all purposely mysterious. Where did He get the fish He had? It does not say. But "Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three; and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken." Now when the gospel haul was depicted (Luke 5:6), the net was broken; but here, the Lord being there,

the net did not break. The gospel net gathered fishes, and does now; but as a whole, the net broke, and they began to sink. Here they haul them in, and the Spirit of God notices that the thing is complete. The fishes gathered out of the sea are the nations; but the Jewish remnant is on the shore already.

We may here remark how Augustine makes a mess when he gets on the unity of the church. It was settled at that time that they should not re-baptize heretics, and so the Donatists say to him, "You do not re-baptize those you call heretics because they have already received the Holy Spirit by our baptism, but how could we give the Holy Ghost if we have not got it?" And Augustine could say nothing, for it was a decided thing already. They confounded the outward thing with the inward. Augustine felt the reality of divine things, and was trying to unite the two—the outward and the inward. He took the outward thing as the union with Christ, and said there was no salvation out of it.

"Jesus then cometh and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead" (John 21:13-14). And now He begins with Simon Peter and the mission He has for him. There is a mission that goes before Christ's coming—a kind of John the Baptist mission; and after that they go out and bring the nations in. The disciples had not yet the Holy Spirit, and understood nothing. Israel will be the head of nations, and the nations will take hold of the skirts of a Jew, saying, "We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you" (Zech. 8:23).

The unbelieving Jews before that will join the Gentiles in total unbelief. Any who are converted will be persecuted

horribly, and their blood will be shed like water. The Gentile haul will be for the millennium. Compare Revelation 7. The Jews will understand it, as everybody will then.

The net *full* is the millennium all through; it is merely a general idea of a whole body of people, but these passages refer to the beginning of it all. In the last of Isaiah you find the Gentiles will bring the Jews all in. Matthew 25 is the judgment on the nations. But the remnant, you remember, is distinct from the haul. Matthew 25 is at the beginning, and so is Revelation 7, where they come out of the great tribulation; both these speak of the beginning, but in the haul, the net not being broken the effect goes on. The gospel net is going on now. The net breaking is simply that the system gave way. Then we see the Lord and the disciples eating together. This completes the picture.

Then Simon Peter comes, and the Lord takes him and tests him as to his fall. "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" (John 21:15). That is what he pretended to do. "He saith unto him, Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love [am attached to] thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs." He asks a second time, and Simon replies the same, but the Lord changes the words then into "Feed my sheep," or properly, "Shepherd my sheep," not "feed." It is one of the defects of the English translation, that they have put the same word where the original has different ones, and different words where the original has the same. Then the third time, instead of using the same Greek word for "*lovest*," as in the first two questions, the Lord changes the word, and uses the same word [*phileo*] that Peter had used in his two answers. He took Peter up as it were on his own expression, and asks him, "Art thou attached to me"; Peter

answers, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love [am attached to] thee."

The Lord never reproaches Peter for the fault, but He probes him—probes the root that produced it; and when He has thoroughly humbled him so that he is obliged to appeal to divine knowledge that he did love, then He commits all that is dearest to Himself to Peter. He had said to him before (Luke 22) that He had prayed for him, "that thy faith fail not, and when thou art converted [brought back], strengthen thy brethren. And he saith unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison and to death. And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me"; and now, when Peter is broken down and the flesh proved, can He say, as it were, "you are fit to serve." You see how He takes that up, "when thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest," there is human will; "but when thou shalt be old thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me." That is exactly what Peter had pretended to do; he had said, "I will follow thee to prison and death." Now He says, Of your own will you cannot. It is a beautiful expression of the Lord's love and a pattern of the Lord's restoring grace.

Everyone has to go through that, though you see many a person serving sincerely who has not been broken down yet. Yet I believe it must be got; if one does go and make messes, he gets it afterward. There is a positive breaking down of flesh, and then when you know it can do nothing but mischief, which is all it can do, there is still the watching

of it after its back is broken, so to speak. Peter's mission to the circumcision comes to nothing in the outward sense, and he follows Christ. As to outward work for the Jews, Christ's mission had come to nothing, and so had Peter's: Jerusalem was taken, the Jews were rejected, and the church as Peter had it was altogether nothing, being supplanted, as you may say, by Paul's. So with Paul himself, when Jesus spoke to him, and he fell to the earth, he asks; "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). Before, in his own energy, he had had no hesitation what to do, and went very vigorously about it. And afterward he was away for three years to learn, though he was first allowed to give a full testimony at Damascus; "And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God." In that way Moses needed to have forty years in the desert before leading out the people.

Then Peter asks about John, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" and Jesus says, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me" (John 21:22). John does not come under "Follow thou me," but has to continue until Christ comes, and not be cut off as it were. John always speaks so of himself; there is a fitness for John's ministry in it. It shows a complete attachment to Christ personally. You never get the church in John's ministry; it is always the individual; and, Christ being personally the thing he clings to, all that is vital and essential to souls (supposing the church goes to the winds) is there still. And John was just the one to hang over the ruin of the church and carry out the essential of Christianity. John's ministry did tarry till Christ came, next the Antichrist in his epistle, and then the church spued out of Christ's mouth, and so on. The other disciples took the words as if John would not die, but

this was not said. Then you have no Paul, no founding of the church, as a distinct thing, no ascension here: we are in Galilee with a mysterious intimation of what was going to happen, and Christ is in Galilee, not in Bethany when it ends, but He here gives no mission from Galilee; we have Peter following Him, and John tarrying till He came again, mysteriously, and meant to be so.

But Peter in his second epistle gets beyond this into new heavens and new earth. And you have the day of the Lord in which “the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat” (2 Peter 3:10). Peter’s epistles are the government of the Lord, the first being the government of the saints in the world, and the second more the government of the world—its judgment. And therefore he carries this on to the new heavens and new earth. But you have nothing of the Lord’s coming except that the wicked despise it.

The first epistle is government for, and the second is government against; the first is taking care of the saints, the second is power over, and judgment on, the wicked. Peter forms in that way a connecting link. We are not of the world at all, but there is an application of the government of God while we are passing through it. We find the saints suffering for righteousness’ sake, and suffering for Christ’s sake, and God’s care of them in it all. That is in the first epistle. The second is government in respect of evil. John’s ministry was different; his life hung as it were over the seven churches.

“Whither thou wouldest not” means against Peter’s will. With his flesh unbroken he could not follow Christ at all, but afterward he would. It is in the fullest contrast with Paul in Philippians, a totally different kind of thing.

It is just the opposite to Mark 10. The young man is righteous according to law, and, instead of counting all dross and dung, he goes away sorrowful because he has great possessions. Instead of the righteousness of faith, the young man was looking how he was to be righteous in his own way. It is a wonderful thing—God’s mind being all brought before us in this way. The leaving out of Paul and all that belongs to his ministry strictly is very striking here. His was an extra mission, being “one born out of due time”; and even Peter speaks of him as writing “things hard to be understood” (2 Peter 3:16) in his epistles. There is nothing about demons in John’s Gospel: “ye are of your father the devil” (John 8:44) you get, but no demons possessing men. You have the Lord in His own divine person, and the devil is the adversary.

Meditations on the Acts of the Apostles

Introduction.

The Acts of the Apostles are a continuation of the Gospel of Luke, and are written by the same Evangelist. The discourses, whether of Peter or of Paul, have their source in the heavenly commission which is found at the end of that Gospel. It is not necessary, I hope, to say that the whole is given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, because each of the evangelists has been employed by God to present us with a different aspect of the history of the Lord; and each has accomplished, with the help of the Spirit, the work assigned to him by God. For example, in Matthew we find much more the dispensations of God, and the Lord as Emmanuel in the midst of Israel on the earth. In Luke, after the first two chapters, we have the Son of man, and the ways of God in grace and the blessings of the present time. Then again, in Matthew, the ascension of the Lord is not recounted, and the commission given to the apostles comes from a risen Jesus, and is addressed to the Gentiles as though the residue of the Jews were already received in grace. The Lord, in Luke, is about to ascend into heaven, and goes there while speaking to them, blessing them with a heavenly blessing; and the commission is addressed to all—first to the Jews, then to the Gentiles. The disciples were to begin in Jerusalem; and this work—the accomplishment of their mission—is what is found recounted in Acts.

Let us follow the course of this story, which is essentially the history of the activity of the apostles Peter and Paul: the first among the Jews, and in the foundation of the church at Jerusalem; and the other among the Gentiles, although he always addressed himself first to the Jews. The first was one of His eleven disciples who had followed the Lord on the earth, till the cloud received Him and took Him from their sight. The last, Paul, an open enemy to the name of Christ, and converted in sovereign grace while he was occupied in the destruction, if possible, of that name, only saw Him in the glory, and went out to call the Gentiles to the faith: marvelous witness of the sovereign grace of God, and of a glory which renders a magnificent testimony to the perfect and accepted work of Christ, to which believers are led by faith in Him and in His work. Both these two great apostles laid the same foundation of the salvation preached, that there is but one Savior and one work by which we may be saved.

Now the grand and important fact, on which all the history depends, is the descent of the Holy Spirit. Doubtless, in all Biblical history, the responsibility of man is found, as well as the ways of God, through the deeds and weakness of man; but nevertheless the presence of the Holy Spirit on the earth, sent by the Father and by the Son of man, and dwelling in the faithful and in the house of God, is of immense importance. It is only when God has accomplished redemption that He comes to dwell in the midst of men. He did not dwell with Adam in his innocence, nor with Abraham, nor with any, till He had brought Israel out of Egypt, and had rescued them from the hands of the king of Egypt, in whose hands they were

prisoners; then He came to dwell in their midst in the cloud, and the tabernacle was filled with His glory.

Thus, as soon as the Son of man is gone into heaven to sit down at the right hand of God, having accomplished the work of redemption, the Holy Spirit descends according to His promise of the Comforter, and the baptism of the Spirit is realized. Sent from the Father, He cries, "Abba, Father," in the hearts of those who have received Him. Sent by the Son from the Father, He reveals the glory of Him, the man in heaven; and, more than that, forms the body of Christ joining the members to the head, so that he "that is joined to the Lord is one spirit" (1 Cor. 6:17), dwelling in the believer, and also in the universal congregation of believers, so that they are together the habitation of God. It is evident that this truth is of immense importance; the spiritual liberty given to the child of God, the unity of the assembly of God, and the union of the children of God, all depend on the presence of the Spirit, as all are founded on the work of the Savior on the cross. Then this truth reveals the state of the external church where He dwells, because she has grieved the Spirit, and has been — and has acted — in a manner altogether contrary to what He would have her be and do, so much so that the judgment of God is ready to fall upon her.

Since I have spoken of the descent of the Holy Spirit, it must be understood that the "new birth" is not the point here (though that may be accomplished by the same Spirit), but rather the personal coming of the Spirit, when the Son of man ascended into heaven. The Holy Spirit has worked divinely since the foundation of the world. He it was who moved upon the face of the waters, who inspired the prophets, who has been the immediate instrument of

all that God has done on the earth and in the heavens. But He only came here below when the Son of man went to sit down at the right hand of God (John 7:37-39), and is only received when we believe (Eph. 1:13; Gal. 4:6). This is seen also clearly elsewhere: we are sealed when we have believed, and especially when we have believed in the value of the blood of Christ. Washed in this precious blood, we are fit to be the habitation of the Spirit of God. "Know ye not," says the apostle Paul, "that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit which ye have from God?" (1 Cor. 6:19). As when the leper was cleansed and purified under the law, he was first washed with water, then sprinkled with blood, then anointed with oil (Lev. 14:8-9; 14-18) — clear figure of our purification by means of the word of God when we are converted and born again, then of the sprinkling of the blood of Christ, and finally of the anointing of the Holy Spirit by which we are sealed for the day of final redemption.

Also all gifts, the exercise of which is found in the church, are the manifestation of the Holy Spirit who works there. But here, in the Acts, the exposition of the operations of the Spirit is not found, but the fact itself of His coming in order to work.

Meditations on Acts 1

Acts 1.

Let us now come to the examination of the narrative itself. This begins with the great truth of which we have already spoken. The disciples were to wait at Jerusalem for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We shall find again the proof of another precious truth. The Lord, after His resurrection, gave commissions to His disciples by the Holy Spirit. We shall not lose the Holy Spirit when we are raised again: truth perhaps simple, but which makes us feel how great will be our capacity for happiness in that state. Now a great portion of our spiritual strength is employed to enable us to walk in integrity, in spite of the flesh and the temptations of the enemy; but then neither the one nor the other will exist. All the power of the Spirit in us will be employed in rendering us fit for the infinite felicity we shall find there. We shall enjoy it according to the strength of the Spirit, as Christ gave gifts by the Spirit to His disciples after His resurrection.

Remark now the intimacy of the Lord with His disciples. He spoke of the things belonging to the kingdom of God. Christ is now glorified, but His heart, full of divine love, is not removed, is not any the farther away from His own. When He appeared to Saul, He said, "I am Jesus of Nazareth whom thou persecutest" (Acts 22:8). He speaks to Ananias with authority it is true, but as with a friend, opening His heart respecting Saul, and sending Ananias to speak to him.

He was not ashamed to call His disciples friends on the earth; He is not ashamed to treat them as friends now. Immense blessing! To feel that the Lord of glory is near to us, that He holds us as friends and loved ones, and that He can feel compassion also for our infirmities.

The disciples expected still the visible kingdom of the Lord in Israel; their hearts were still Jewish. They quite believed that He had risen again, but expected that their hopes of the restoration of Israel as a nation would be realized by the Lord, now that He had come out of the sepulcher. The Lord did not tell them that the kingdom would not be restored to Israel; but that it did not concern them to know the times and seasons which the Father had put in His own power. The kingdom shall be restored to Israel—when is not revealed. The Son of man will come in an hour when He is not expected. He sits at the right hand of God the Father till His enemies shall be made His footstool. In the meantime He gathers His co-heirs, those who are content to suffer with Him; and caught up into glory we shall reign with Him. It is not revealed then, it was not revealed to the disciples—the hour of the Savior's return; but they should receive, said the Lord, not many days hence, the power of the Holy Spirit, which should come on them, and they should be witnesses to Him in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth. And, having said these things, He was taken up, while they beheld, and a cloud received Him and took Him away out of their sight. They were to be eyewitnesses as far as this point of His heavenly glory. The Holy Spirit was sent after Him (see John 15:26-27). We shall find later that Saul saw Him in His heavenly glory for the first time, of which thing he was to be the special witness. How the

Holy Spirit has rendered clear testimony to this glory, we shall see in the discourses in the Acts; and again it may be seen in the epistles of Peter and elsewhere.

But here is found, before the coming of the Holy Spirit, a very remarkable testimony rendered by means of angels. The disciples had their eyes fixed on the heavens while Jesus was going there. This was very natural. The beloved Savior, given back to them from the grave, was, apparently at least, abandoning them again—for heaven, it is true, which ought to have strengthened their faith. He had left a promise of the power of the Spirit, which, however, had not yet come; and therefore the consciousness and direction of this power, which was to reveal all the truth, was wanting to them. He had gone away, and what should they do? They must wait.

And as their eyes were then fixed on the heavens, behold, two by appearance men, but in reality angels, stood beside them, asking why they looked up into heaven, and making them the revelation of His return. A fact very remarkable, since the Lord had, after the Lord's supper, made known to the disciples that He was going to the Father; and the first consolation He gave His disciples was that He would come again and take them to Himself in the Father's house, where He was going to prepare them a place; then He speaks of the presence of the Comforter which was to be accomplished. There He speaks of His coming to introduce His own into the Father's house; here, of His glorious appearing, when He will make Himself seen from the place where He has gone.

There He Himself speaks of the special privilege of His own according to His personal affection which He had for them. He wished to console them, His heart had need of

them; He desired to have them near to Himself, in the same glory, so that they might see His glory, but especially that, where He was, there they might be also. Here it is His return in glory, which would be like His going away.

This was the disciples' first consolation, once they were deprived of His presence. Then another Comforter would be given to dwell with them meanwhile here below. But whether in the declaration on the part of the Lord in His love, or in the revelation made by the angels, the first thing in the Savior's heart and in the revelations of God is that He will come again. Immense is the gift of the Spirit during His absence, and forever immense is the nature of the state in which redemption has placed the assembly of God here below: but its hope is, and the height of its joy will be, to see the Savior as He is, to be always with Him, like Him, to see and to be forever with Him who does love us and has washed us from our sins in His own blood, and to see Him face to face! Greatest blessing, too great for us, if not the fruit of something still greater—the cross and the sufferings of the Son of God.

Once this blessed Savior has suffered, and the Son of God has been made sin for us, and has died as a man on the cross, nothing is too great; it will only be the fruit of the travail of His soul. He shall be satisfied; His love shall be satisfied in our happiness and in our presence with Him. Look only at Zephaniah 3:17, where the love and the glory are inferior to this: "Jehovah thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love; he will joy over thee with singing." The Father will rest in His love, and in the accomplishment of all His counsels for the glory of His Son; showing, at the same time, in the ages to come, the excellency of the riches

of His grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. Such is our expectation.

The disciples return to Jerusalem, and live there together in an upper chamber. They persevered with one consent in supplication and prayer, with the women and with Mary, the mother of Jesus, and His brethren. But the effect of the promise of the Father is only found in Acts 2. All that we have at the end of Acts 1 is connected with a Jewish situation; that is, with the condition of the disciples before the coming of the Spirit, yet possessing an understanding which had been opened by the Lord to understand the word. They had not the power of the Spirit, but intelligence of the word; because their standing was in relation with Christ raised up from the dead, they were enlightened by the divine light communicated to them after His resurrection. These verses accord perfectly with verses 14-48 of Luke 24. Then comes the promise of the Spirit, the accomplishment of which is found in Acts 2.

The well-known active energy of Peter employs the knowledge given by the Lord, applying Psalm 109 to Judas, whose office, says the psalm, another should take. They drew lots, according to Jewish custom, leaving the decision in the hands of God. Matthias is chosen and added to the eleven apostles. Verses 18-19 are a parenthesis. The sabbath-day's journey, the lots, and all the circumstances, show clearly the actual state of the disciples and the thought of the Holy Spirit on this step. They work with intelligence of the word of the Old Testament; but the Spirit had not yet come. It is important for us to understand the difference. The Spirit gives now intelligence (1 Cor. 2:14); but this is not of itself power.

The Lord is faithful to lead His own in the path of truth. His grace is sufficient, His strength is made perfect in weakness, and also He always gives us the strength necessary to accomplish His will; but the power of the Spirit is another thing. Now, we are specially called to follow His word, although we may be feeble (see what is said to the church of Philadelphia, Rev. 3).

It is impossible for Christ to fail us in our obedience, and His strength is sufficient for us. Faithful to His word, while we wait for Him in weakness, we shall be pillars in the temple of His God, when He sees the hour of glory. Yet the Holy Spirit dwells in the faithful, sealed with Him by the Father according to His promise.

Meditations on Acts 2

The Coming of the Holy Spirit.

But the great event of which we have spoken now claims our attention—the immense fact of the coming of the Holy Spirit to dwell with the disciples of Jesus, in each, and in the midst of all together. Thus, in 1 Corinthians 3:16, the church as a universal assembly is the temple of God; and then, in Corinthians 6:19, the body of the faithful is the temple of God. All those who, steadfast in Jesus, habitually gathered together were thus assembled on the day of Pentecost. We have seen (Acts 1: 14), that they continued with one accord in prayer while waiting for the Comforter, promised according to the word of Jesus.

Suddenly an impetuous wind is felt, filling all the house where they sat, as the cloud filled the tabernacle, so that the priests could not enter there (1 Kings 8:11). But now men themselves composed the tabernacle where God disdained not to dwell. The blood of Jesus had purified them, and rendered them fit to be the habitation of God through the Spirit (or in Spirit) (Eph. 2:22). Marvelous truth, fruit of accomplished redemption, and blessed knowledge, that a Man, much more than a man, sits at the right hand of God (John 7:39). But how beautiful is the truth, this divine fact, that—such is the effect of the death and of the blood of Christ, and of our reconciliation and purification—instead of driving away the priests by His presence, God, in grace, makes us His habitation! What a contrast between the law and the gospel!

But, besides this, a marvelous testimony is found in this fact to the grace of God. The presence of the Holy Spirit depended on the sitting of the Man Jesus at the right hand of God; demonstration and fruit of the accomplishment of the work of redemption. Now this could not be limited to the Jewish people. This presence was in itself a testimony to that accomplishment, and the earnest of our inheritance, Christ being dead for all, and ascending into glory. For the moment, the patience of God fulfilled the work of grace among the Jews, people of the promises; but the gospel which should be preached was for the whole world.

When the judgment of God fell on man at the tower of Babel, it dispersed them, confounding their speech; but God took Abraham, separating him from his country and from his father's house, to have a seed and then a people for Himself. During many years God endured the iniquity and unfaithfulness of this people, sending prophets, till no further remedy could be found; at last He sent His own Son, and they, as we know, rejected and crucified Him. Then the nation is put aside till the sovereign grace of God—His church, the fullness of the Gentiles, being gathered out—commences anew on the footing of the new covenant, and of the presence of the Messiah on the earth.

In the meantime He gathers together the heirs of Christ, the heavenly assembly. Thus—although for a moment the Spirit had separated in the midst of the Jews, spared as a nation by the intercession of Christ on the cross, till they should have rejected a glorified Christ in the same way that they had a crucified Christ come in humiliation: and also to gather together all those among this people that had ears to hear—it is shown by the Spirit how the God of

grace was ready to overstep the limits of the chosen people and surmount the judgment of Babel, speaking to all the people in their own tongue—highest testimony of grace towards the world!

The barriers remained, but God surmounted them—passed over them—in order to announce the Savior's grace and salvation unto the whole world. We also see this special gift every time that God intervenes anew, as in Samaria and in the house of Cornelius. In fact, it was impossible that a glorified Savior should be only the Jewish Savior. The history of this people, when they had rejected the Savior, was finished, save by grace: and the eternal redemption of God could not be for the Jews alone.

The visible character that the Holy Spirit takes corresponds to this work. When it descended on Christ, the Spirit was like unto a dove, symbol of the meekness and sweet tranquility of Him of whom it was written, "He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory" (Matt. 12:19-20). But to the disciples He said, "That which I say in the darkness, tell it in the light; and that which ye have heard in the ear, proclaim it on the house-tops."

The Spirit came then as an impetuous wind, filling all the house, and as cloven tongues of fire. The partition was symbolical of the diverse languages, the fire of the penetrating power of the word of God, discernor of the thoughts and intentions of the heart. It seems to us, that not only the apostles, but all the one hundred and twenty, were invested with this power. They were all together; and

the explanation given by Peter of the prophecy of Joel confirms the matter (Joel 1:14-15; 2:1,17).

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak in strange tongues, according as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now, at Jerusalem, men of all countries were present, and the rumor of what had happened brought them together. This great crowd was astonished to hear each his own dialect, speaking together and saying, "Are not all these Galileans? How then do we hear each his own tongue?" They were in doubt, saying, "What meaneth this?" Others, caviling, said, "They are full of new wine." These were, especially the Jews, always prone to incredulity.

To them Peter replies, speaking firmly in their mother tongue, and makes them understand that this was what Joel had said, prophesying that these things should happen in the last days. It is clear, on reading Joel 1 doubt not, that the Holy Spirit will be poured out anew when Israel is re-established in its own land. It will then be the rain of the latter season. Remark that verse 30 of Joel 2 should come before those preceding. These things will happen before the terrible day of the Lord comes: but the blessings are after that day. Peter says, in a general way, "in the last days," and speaks of judgment as yet to come, as in fact was the case.

But what is important in his discourse is the presentation to the conscience of the Jews of their actual position: because, whatever the case may be, God is always clear and positive in the declaration and in the setting out of the sins of those souls where grace works. In short, this was their position; they had outraged and crucified Him whom God had set at His right hand, His own Son. Him they had put to death, and God had raised Him up, besides what had been demonstrated by the power manifested in His works.

Horrible position! and we say it not only for the Jews, but for all men. Their Messiah, foundation of all their hopes, rejected; the Son of God put to death—a rupture which seemed irreparable between God and man; and on man's side, it was in fact irreparable.

All was lost. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, and mankind had refused it. Sin was there, transgression against the law was already there: God had come in grace, and man had not received Him. Now He had gone back into heaven; but, blessed be His name, the counsels of God were not frustrated: far from that, they were accomplished. Grace had won the victory; and where man had manifested his enmity against God, God had manifested His love towards man, and accomplished the work for the salvation of believers in Christ. “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by hand of lawless men have crucified and slain” (Acts 2:23).

God has made use of the iniquity and enmity of man to accomplish the work of redemption. The enmity of man and the love of God were contrasted in the same fact on the cross, in the glorious manifestation that His love surpassed and surmounted the enmity of man. Woe to him who neglects and refuses this immense grace, this work alone efficacious for salvation!

Meditations on Acts 3

Acts 3.

The third chapter of the Acts is remarkable in the ways of God. The declaration is not found, as in the second, of a present introduction of those who repent and confess the name of Jesus, into the blessings of the remission of sins, nor of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter shows, as in all his other discourses, that the death of Christ was the effect of the thoughts of God, though He was put to death by wicked hands: but rather as the accomplishment of prophecy than as the fruit of the counsels of God. The Spirit descends in virtue of the proclamation by the gospel of God's ways with Israel. The Lord, interceding on the cross for the people, had said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). His prayer was heard, and the judgment of God suspended in the design of presenting repentance to the people once more.

God knew well that the Jews, hard of heart, would not receive the merciful voice of the long-suffering of God; and had warned those who had ears to hear (Acts 2:40) to save themselves from this untoward generation. But He would not come to judge till everything possible had been done, and they had rejected a glorified Christ, as they had rejected a Christ come in humiliation here below. The Spirit, therefore, by the mouth of Peter, starting from the intercession of Christ, proposes repentance to the people, saying, that then Christ would return. The apostle enters more particularly into the sin of the Jews, and presents the facts with great power to their consciences.

It may seem strange that the apostle should speak of the repentance of all the people, and of sparing them, when the Christian assembly had already commenced, and he had warned them to avoid the judgment which was ready to fall on a people which had crucified the Lord of glory. But God knew well that the rulers of the people would render His grace vain; and reject the testimony of a glorified Christ, as they had put to death a Christ present in grace. He prosecuted His counsels according to His own knowledge, but He did not carry out the judgment of His government; ill everything possible had been done to spare man, inviting them to repentance.

Thus Abraham was told that his seed must descend into Egypt because the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet accomplished (Gen. 15:16). And Jeremiah 7-14 (and in other places) does precisely what Peter does; he says clearly by his prophetic knowledge that the people and the vessels of the temple would go into Babylon: at the same time he exhorts the people to repent, and that thus doing they would be spared. And it is laid down as a principle, that when Jehovah had pronounced the condemnation of a people or of a city, if that people or that city should repent of its wickedness, He would turn away from the judgment that He had pronounced (Jer. 18:7-11). Thus, then, the apostle exhorts the people to repent, and Christ would return.

Going up to the temple, the apostles Peter and John had healed a man, lame from his birth, who asked alms at the gate called "Beautiful." The man goes up together with the apostles, leaping and praising God; a crowd naturally gathers, as the man was well known. Peter takes advantage of the occasion to put before the eyes of the people what

had been done. It was not by his own power. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of their fathers, had raised up His servant Jesus, whom they had put to death. Horrible position! what open opposition! fatal—if grace had not been there among the people of God.

It is thus that Peter always presents the truth. They had rejected Him, and God had recognized and glorified Him. And here he enters much more particularly into their sin, more than in Acts 2. He presents the facts with great power to their consciences. They had betrayed the Lord, and denied Him in the presence of Pilate when he had decided to let Him go. They had denied the Holy One and the Just, had desired a murderer, and killed the Prince of Life. But God had raised Him up—once more opposition between the people and God. The name of the risen Savior at the right hand of God had given to the cripple the perfect health in which they saw him. And here the Spirit responds in grace to the Lord's intercession; and the apostle attributes to ignorance the terrible fact of having rejected the Lord, whether on the part of the rulers or of the people.

That which had been foreordained by God was now accomplished—the sufferings of Christ announced before by their prophets; and, if they repented, Jesus would come back: God would send Him from heaven. Those times of blessing that would be fulfilled on the earth by His presence they would have; times that might come on the Lord's side, but for which the repentance of Israel was absolutely necessary, and for which it is still necessary. That always remains true. Their house, said the Lord, should be left unto them desolate, until they should say, "Blessed be he

that cometh in the name of Jehovah” (Matt. 23:38, quoting Psa. 118:26).

When Israel repents, the Lord will come, and they will own that He whom they had rejected was the Lord Himself; and they will be full of sorrow and shame, but be pardoned and liberated; and all the blessings, of which the prophets have spoken, shall be fulfilled. Meanwhile, heaven held Jesus, hid from the eyes of men. But Peter presents this repentance to the Jews, and the present return besides.

But before he could finish his discourse, the rulers of the Jews arrive, take possession of the apostles, and throw them into prison. Jesus glorified is refused, as completely as Jesus in humiliation. All is finished for Israel, with respect to its responsibility—the marvelous patience of God, and the grace that had made intercession for the beloved people on the cross. Nothing more could be done: it only remained to carry out the judgment of a people who would not have grace. Such is the history alas! of the natural man.

Let us mark this, that here the Holy Spirit is not offered, as in the discourse of the preceding chapter, which began the new order of the ways of God; but he speaks of the return of Christ Himself to accomplish all that the prophets had said. The presence of the Holy Spirit distinguishes the time between the first and the second coming of Jesus—the present interval. I do not say that the Spirit will not be poured out after the second coming, but the coming and presence of Jesus distinguished that period, and His absence the present, as moreover the presence of another Comforter instead of Him. And this reveals to us a Christ glorified in the heavens, makes Him the object of a living faith, unites us to Him, makes us understand that we are children of God, joint-heirs with Christ, that we are

in Him and He in us, and makes us members of His body, while we wait for Him to take us to Himself. The love of God, too, is shed abroad in our hearts.

Although Peter never speaks of the rapture of the saints to be with Jesus, yet we may turn to 1 Peter 1:11-13, where we find the testimony of the prophets, that of the Holy Spirit come down from heaven, and the accomplishment of the promises to happen on the appearing of Jesus—the three things which appear here. It is not a question of gathering believers to Christ, nor of the coming of the Holy Spirit. We find ourselves entirely on Jewish ground. And God, having first raised up His servant Jesus, had sent Him to bless them, that is, down here in the world; and as they would not receive Him, repentance was offered them. But the rulers interposed, resisting the Holy Spirit, just as they had refused Christ on the earth, thus sealing their own judgment. The final sentence will be found in the history of Stephen.

Another truth is introduced here, which is not wanting in importance in the ways of God; though it may not be equal in importance to the moral state of men which led them to reject the Lord come in grace. After this moment the throne and the government of God cannot be found on the earth. The providence of God watches over all; not even a little bird falls to the ground without His hand. But this throne does not exist on the earth, and will no more exist till the Lord Jesus, the Son of David, establishes it, till He comes to whom it belongs. The throne of God, between the cherubim, was taken away from Jerusalem when the Jews were led captive into Babylon; but a little remnant of the Jews was brought back to Jerusalem, in order to present to them again their true King, the Son of David, Jesus of

Nazareth. But they would not receive Him. Thenceforward the kingdom of God is changed to the kingdom of heaven; the King is in heaven, and the kingdom is like the grain of wheat, which, once sown, springs and grows, without man's hand being applied to it (Mark 4:26). Christ works; without His grace nothing would be done; but He does not appear. He sits on the throne of God, and has not taken His own throne; He will take it when He returns.

Thrones are perfectly established by God; the Christian recognizes fully the authority of princes and governors as ordinances of God, and submits to them. But it is not the immediate kingdom of God. From the captivity of Babylon till the coming of Christ are the "times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24); and God gathers the joint-heirs of Christ, who are not of this world, as He was not. They are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; they will reign with Him in glory, joint-heirs by grace of the inheritance of God.

There are two great subjects in the Bible, after personal salvation; the divine government of the world with the Jews as center, under Christ; and the sovereign grace that has given those who are content to suffer with Him the same glory that Christ enjoys as Man, predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He may be the first-born among many brethren. Already we enjoy the same relationship with His God and Father. "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (John 20:17). Already children and heirs here below, when Christ comes we shall rejoice with heavenly joy with Him, and we shall reign with Him.

The Jews, and with them the Gentiles on the earth, will enjoy the peace and blessings resulting from the reign of Christ. Acts 2, though it does not go any farther than to the presence of the Spirit here below, speaks of the first and heavenly position; Acts 3 of the second. The word of God in Acts 2 brings forth its fruit in gathering souls for God's assembly, and for heavenly glory. In Acts 3 the call to repentance is refused on the authority of the people; and the Lord sits at the right hand of God in heaven till His enemies are made His footstool.

And the work of God goes on here below. The reign of Christ on the earth is deferred because of the unbelief of the Jews; and the presence of the Spirit, Christ being in heaven, to gather together the heavenly citizens, and to put them into a new, eternal, and heavenly relationship with God—this is the foundation of the history recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. The following chapters unfold the progress of the work, its difficulties and their causes. "Unto you first God, having raised up his Son [servant] Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts 3:26).

Meditations on Acts 4

Acts 4.

What we read in this chapter is very sad, but full of instruction. The state of Israel is frightful, and the contrast to the apostles, and to all the believers marvelous. There is ecclesiastical authority and hatred of the truth and of the Lord on one side, and the presence and power of God on the other. Authority, depending on public opinion, is timorous at this juncture, and for a moment by this means held in check by the hand of God; and the courage of faith, given by God, is sustained by the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit.

The priests deliberately resist the action of the Holy Spirit though admitting that the power of God had been manifested. Is it not frightful? Oh what audacity, of what malice, is the heart of man capable when abandoned by God and left to its own hatred against Him! "The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes. For he flattereth himself in his own eyes, until his iniquities be found to be hateful" (Psa. 36:1-2). And for what follows see also Luke 12:1-12. Horrible and vain opposition, for the word of God will be fulfilled in spite of men. If we suffer, it is our glory. Our portion is to be found in Psalm 27; and then in Psalm 37, "Fret not thyself—trust in Jehovah—delight thyself also in Jehovah—commit thy way unto Jehovah—rest in Jehovah, and wait patiently for Him—cease from anger, and forsake wrath; fret not thyself in any wise to do evil."

We shall see the path of the apostles; what courage, what tranquility, what clearness of judgment, doing exactly what became servants of God—those who, in the testimony of God, represented Him on the earth! Doubtless an extraordinary power was displayed in them, but the principle is just the same for us all. Moreover the word did not remain without effect, the number of men who had believed became about five thousand.

We have seen that the chief priests had put the apostles in prison. The morning came, they meet at Jerusalem, and make the apostles appear before them. They demand by what power and in what name they had done the miracle. The old story is again repeated—official authority opposed to the power of God. Thus the high priests and the rulers of the people demanded of the Lord by what authority He worked. But what madness, what hardness of heart, what lack of conscience! A miracle had evidently been performed by the apostles: it was known by the people, and they could not deny it. It is God Himself who works, but they will not allow the knowledge of it to spread among the people. It was not convenient that the power of God should be manifested outside their office; for if divine power operated outside their office, they could no longer secure authority to themselves. But it was not for them to command God; and not only this, but they were directly opposed to that power which was of God.

In such cases absence of all conscience is always found, as when the Lord did not reply to their questions, but, in His divine wisdom, asked them what the baptism of John was. And they, fearing the people, dared not say that it was not of God, because public opinion was against them. They were forced to acknowledge their incapacity; evidently,

then, the Lord was not bound to account to them for what He had just before done.

Here something more is found. What the apostles had done was an act of power and not of authority, and the priests place themselves in open opposition to God. They would have suppressed His power if they had been able; otherwise they were humiliated. This was necessary, for the miracle had been performed in the name of Him whom they had crucified. They were adversaries of God, and adversaries consciously and willingly, for they had acknowledged that it was impossible to deny the miracle. This was indeed the power of Satan, but also of an office destitute of the power of God. Whenever man finds himself in such a position, he is unwilling that God should work. But what a state of soul, what a frightful condition!

Let us contemplate the spectacle of an unlettered and ignorant man, but believing in Jesus and full of the Holy Spirit. He announces openly, and with frank candor, not only that it was by the name of Jesus that the man had been cured, but that He was the stone set at naught by the builders, now become the head of the corner, and that there was no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. The position of the rulers is clearly established, such as we have seen it. The man there present had been cured by the name of Him whom they had crucified, and whom God had raised from among the dead.

But alas! the will of men was not moved, though they had nothing to say against the facts. The power of God was there; the testimony could not be refuted; but they would not have divine testimony. And, having conferred together,

they dismissed them, “straitly threatening them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name” (Acts 4:17).

Their part was taken against God and against His Anointed. They commanded the apostles, therefore, when they had brought them in again, never to speak again in this name. Peter does not boast, does not insist on his rights or on his liberty, does not threaten the priests and council, does not show on his part any of his own will; he remains tranquil in obedience, but in obedience to God rather than to man. God was with them; the others were only men. They must obey God. He appeals to the priests and themselves, if it was not right to do so. Again they threaten them and let them go; witnesses were before them who glorified God for what had been done.

It is well to remark that the apostles do not assail the Jews—they do their duty; and when these oppose themselves, conscious of doing the will of God sent by Him, they declare that necessarily they were doing His will—that, when God willed and sent, they had to obey. It is the calm, the tranquility, of him who does not think of himself, either through fear or through human ardor. It is full of the Holy Spirit; what is said, what is done, comes from Him. Such a man works perfectly on God’s side, because the man is put aside, and God by His Spirit works in him. Though it may be the man who presents himself perfectly in the position in which he finds himself, yet it is that Spirit who produces the perfection in him. “It is not ye,” said the Lord, “that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you” (Matt. 10:20). If man works, then there is imperfection. God works in man, and then man is what he ought to be. Is it always thus?

But the miserable position of the Jews unfolds itself only too clearly. God was no longer to be found among the chosen people who had rejected their Messiah, the Son of God, in whom are all the promises of God; and now they were abandoned. God dwelt by His Spirit among the Christians. God will fulfill His promises to the nation in the last times, but then it will be in pure grace. He is faithful, whatever may be the iniquity of His people. What Peter proposed to Israel in Acts 3, repentance, will be accomplished in their hearts by grace, when the assembly of God shall have been taken up into heaven. Then they shall see Him whom they have pierced, and shall be blessed; but meanwhile they are put aside, kept apart however, till the fullness of the Gentiles be brought in. Then Israel as a whole shall be saved. But now they are displayed as resisting the Holy Spirit, as having rejected the Messiah. Now we see the power of the Spirit and His presence manifesting itself in the midst of the assembly.

The apostles returned to "their own"; for now there existed a company, a society, the house of God; composed, it is true, of Jews, but apart, outside the national pale. There they recount what has happened. Then, moved by the Holy Spirit, with one heart they raise the voice to God, acknowledging the accomplishing of Psalm 2, where the rejection of the Messiah, the Son of God is announced, and the absolute power of God, whatever might be the wickedness of men who did nothing but fulfill the counsels of God. Nevertheless they do not ask that the kingdom should be established, according to what is said in that Psalm, of which kingdom the Father has put the times into His own power (Acts 1:7); but the manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit is pronounced in the same place,

whether in the full courage to announce the word, or in the works of power done in the name of the holy servant of God, Jesus, His Son.

After they have prayed, the presence of God is manifested in their midst, and the place where they are assembled shakes. Here too, is seen, in an exterior way, the difference between the new birth and the presence of God by the Spirit. Many more important proofs of it are to be found; but I speak of it, because here it is an outward sign, impossible to confound with the work of grace in the soul. Their prayer is heard. They are all filled with the Holy Spirit, and speak the word of God with great boldness. But it is not only in the gifts of speech; it is the faith which does it all, that shows the effect and the power of being filled with the Holy Spirit. We find a work of the same character in the description given in Acts 2: there was but one heart.

No one retained his own property, but distributed to those who were in need. With great power the apostles bore testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was on them all. None among the disciples lacked anything. Those who possessed lands or houses sold them, and laid the prices of the things that were sold at the apostles' feet, who distributed to everyone according to his need. Beautiful testimony of the power of love, the love of God shed abroad by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of those who were filled with it! Among the others we find Barnabas, especially noticed here, because we shall find him soon occupied in the work of God, the companion of Paul; so that he is called an apostle. But God has not forgotten the others.

Such is the scene which passes before our eyes when the church' was established in the beginning—when the Spirit, ungrieved, displayed all the effect of His presence. Most blessed scene, giving us to understand what it is to be filled with the Holy Spirit! He dwells in every true Christian; but it is another thing to be so filled with Him that He may be the source of all that is thought, of all that is done, and that all that the heart, which is His vessel, produces may be the fruit of His presence; that there may be no doubting, no shutting up in the career of love, that Jesus may be faithfully confessed before men. The heart is set free from its own love, and loves according to the love of Christ. Liberty, true liberty, is found, and the practical life, and its fruits are the fruits of the Spirit.

What a blessed state! And whatever may be the ruin of the church, in principle this state belongs today to every Christian; circumstances may hinder the form that existed in the days of the apostles; but the Spirit of God, at the bottom, is more powerful than circumstances.

Meditations on Acts 5

Acts 5.

Although a man may be truly a Christian, yet the flesh always remains in him, which is just as ready to show itself in the assembly as in the world. The desire to have a good reputation among men may arise in the heart, although such a reputation may merely be sought for among Christians. Thus too it happened when the assembly of God first began. Love produced the inclination to think of others rather than of themselves. But the flesh also would have the reputation of doing so, without denying itself, deceitfully thinking to keep back its money, and at the same time to gain the benefit of a reputation for giving it away. But here also the great truth of the presence of the Holy Spirit is the subject of God's revelation given in this book.

Ananias and Sapphira have lied to the Holy Spirit: this is the gravity of the sin of Ananias and his wife. God dwelt in the midst of His own in the assembly. Deceived in heart and conscience by cupidity, whether of money or of human glory, Ananias did not recognize His presence. But still another was acting in this sad event. Satan suggested to them the means of keeping back the money, and still of winning fame. But the Holy Spirit was there, and the folly of men and malice of Satan did nothing but make manifest the truth and the power of His presence, in a sad way it is true, but in a way that could leave no doubt of it.

Ananias, whose sin was thus unexpectedly to himself revealed, falls dead by the judgment of God who was there.

But what a solemn judgment! And it is not surprising if, not only the Christians, but also the outside world, were terrified at such a testimony to the presence of God that was entirely unmistakable. Moreover the sin was not a simple failure. Ananias and Sapphira had agreed together in their eagerness of endeavor to deceive God, forgetting that He knew everything and that He was there.

But, however sad and solemn the fact might be, it was a testimony from which it was impossible to detract, that God Himself was present; a testimony to the great truth that God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, had come down to dwell in the midst of His people, and forever (John 14:17), so that they might be taken up to dwell in the Father's house. The apostles were filled with it; everything at that time was in the power of it. But the assembly of God has been unfaithful; the Spirit has been grieved, and therefore we see no longer those actions which bore testimony to His presence..

This, nevertheless, does not in any way render it invalid—that would be impossible. The word of Christ is—He shall dwell with you; and the Spirit is as able to accomplish the will of God in His children now as in the time of the apostles, though it may not be shown in the same manner. But it is more blessed, says the Lord, to have our names written in heaven than to cast out demons: and by the true work of God in souls, and in all His ways, He manifests His presence in the assembly, and in Christians who depend on Him, and are filled with Him, just as much as He did in the days of the apostles. It is not proper that it should be shown outwardly in the fallen church as in the faithful assembly long ago established by God Himself, as though He sealed its fall with His approbation. But God

changes not, and His grace and power are the same, and are as available as ever for all that is necessary and all that is suitable to the state of the church; and He still does all that is requisite for His glory and our full blessing. He works in His own with the same power according to the circumstances in which they are placed.

Now many signs and wonders were wrought by the hands of the apostles, who were to be found habitually (it seems to us) in Solomon's porch in the temple. The great and the rulers did not dare to identify themselves with them; but the people, convinced in their simplicity, increased the number and importance of the Christians in the holy city. We see always fear on the part of the great and of the ecclesiastical rulers. They could persecute, but they could not join the Christians, because then their power would be compromised. As Paul says, "not many mighty, not many noble, are called" (1 Cor. 1:26). The reproach of Christ is always linked to His name, wherever there is fidelity.

But still the power of God manifested itself in such a way that in Jerusalem and in the cities round about they brought sick folks, so that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them; and the sick of the city and those vexed with unclean spirits were all healed. But all this excited the envy and indignation of the chief priests; the divine power and authority had evidently passed away from their hands, and they were unwilling that they should be found elsewhere. They could not prevent God from manifesting His power, but they could take possession of the persons who exercised it, at least when God allowed it. They do so, and throw the apostles into the common prison.

But this did nothing more than prepare the way for another display of the hand and power of God. When God is working, vain are the efforts of men. We have seen, and shall see, the internal power of the Holy Spirit. Here we find angels, the servants of God, in favor of the men who preach the good news of salvation through Christ. I do not doubt that they ever minister, according to the will of God, to all His children who walk in the way of His will; and they may be employed otherwise, if it please God, as it is written in Hebrews 1. But here they operate in a visible way. The angel opens the doors of the prison, leads the apostles out, and tells them to go their way, and to speak in the temple all the words of this life, which they do at once at break of day.

Meanwhile the high priest and they that were with him meet together in the great council of the Jews, and send the sergeants, commanding them to bring the apostles before them.

They go therefore to the prison, which they find shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors, but no prisoners within. The priests, confounded, know not what to think. Who can make war against God, and not find himself discomfited? Satan can do much, he can persecute and exercise great influence over unbelieving souls; but, where the working of the power of God is present, he cannot surmount it. Confidence is found on the part of God's servants; and, at the bottom of their heart, the adversaries are afraid and perplexed. (See Josh. 2:9; Phil. 1:23; 1 Peter 3:6.) Satan had the Sadducees ready to resist the work of the apostles who presented the resurrection, as the Pharisees to oppose Christ who preached true righteousness.

But the work of God goes on in the midst of suffering. He allows His own to suffer; it is given to them to suffer for the name of Christ; but He accomplishes His counsels in spite of man. The officers then brought them without violence, fearing the people lest they should have been stoned. The apostles appear before the council, and the high priest reproves them, because they had preached Jesus, in spite of the prohibition, and that thus they thought to bring the blood of Jesus on them. It is apparent that their conscience was ill at ease. The simple truth was that they were responsible for the blood of Jesus; but when a man is spurred on by Satan to commit a crime, he does not fear to do it, but, once committed, the deceit of Satan leaves him; the crime weighs on his conscience, and Satan cannot alleviate it, but often goads him to desperation, as he did with Judas.

The reply of Peter to the rulers is very brief and decisive; already they knew it well. "We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Spirit, whom God hath given to them who obey him" (Acts 5:29-32). When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them.

But here again the hand of God appears; and as He had miraculously used an angel to let Peter out of prison, so now He employs the hand of man to arrest the power and the malice of the elders and high priest. The human prudence of the Pharisee Gamaliel, a man much esteemed, gives them to realize, by several examples, the peril of

putting themselves in conflict with God. The Pharisees were always opposed to the Sadducees, and the high priest belonged to the sect of the Sadducees, so that the Pharisee could always employ his human sagacity to gain a hearing. And God could use it to preserve His servants from the wicked hand of their enemies.

They consent to the counsel of Gamaliel, but without any fear of God. The will is not changed, the enmity against the testimony of God remains in all its force; but they are afraid of compromising themselves, and know not what to do. The apostles are beaten, and forbidden to speak in the name of Jesus. It is enmity without strength, without conscience, and without knowledge, blind from unbelief, and resisting in vain the power of God! The apostles continue their work, teaching and preaching both in the temple and in every house.

Meditations on Acts 6-7

Acts 6-7.

But the flesh manifests itself in Christians, and the more so if their number be large. Now we find a new event happening; in the multitude the power of faith and the fruits of the Spirit begin to grow feebler. Love and confidence —love's constant companion—diminish; but at the same time the strength of the Spirit found in the apostles takes its stand against difficulty. And not only this, but an opportunity is given for securing greater regularity in the daily ministration of the assembly. The preaching of the word is separated from the care of the poor. In this case the apostles desired that the people should choose those who might care for the widows. We shall see farther on that the apostle Paul himself, with Barnabas, appointed elders, but, when it was a question of money, neither the twelve nor Paul would take any part in it, nor confound the divine service of the word with the administration of the money furnished by the faithful (1 Cor. 16).

The twelve desired to be occupied only with the word, and Paul would not charge himself with the money for the poor at Jerusalem, unless brethren appointed for this purpose were with him. But, although the flesh showed itself, the Spirit was enough to overrule circumstances. In the case of Ananias and Sapphira this power and the presence of the Spirit was manifested in judgment against hypocrisy; here we find it seeking to make its way in the assembly, producing order and right where danger of disunion was manifested in the midst of the disciples.

But another principle respecting the Holy Spirit, easy to believe but often forgotten, is now made evident—His full liberty: as we read in 1 Corinthians 12:11, “dividing to every man severally as he will.” We have seen up to this moment the activity of the apostles, established in their office by the Lord Himself, if we except Matthias. We find now seven men, full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom, chosen by the people to serve at the tables where the distributions were made to the poor widows; and among these were two specially used by the Holy Spirit in the preaching of the gospel; and, at this moment, Stephen. In 1 Timothy 3:13, we find, “For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good decree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

Stephen was already a man full of the Holy Spirit and of faith, but now his gift is unfolded. He does signs and wonders; even his adversaries could not resist the power and wisdom with which he spoke. The Holy Spirit here works freely as in Philip. He also was obliged to give up his office for the work of evangelization, for he went to Samaria. By the liberty given by the Spirit he is a minister of the word, and not of the tables. It is a new phase of the work of grace and of the Spirit. We shall find still other proofs. It is a very important principle, the truth and force of which extend to the present day. They are not sent by the apostles but directly by God. It is the strength of the Holy Spirit that urges them to the work, consecration to Christ, and love of souls.

It seems also that Stephen had said more, and spoken more openly, than Peter. The latter ever bore testimony to Israel's open opposition to God, for they had crucified Him whom God had exalted to His own right hand. We

know not how Stephen spoke; but at all events he gave rise to the accusation of having said that Jesus would destroy Jerusalem, and change the customs which Moses had established. Evidently he always preached Christ and His glory, as did Peter; but he said more—he warned the people of the consequences of their sin. Peter laid down the fundamental truth that showed the state of the Jews before God. Stephen, taking lower ground and speaking more familiarly, announces the consequences of non-repentance. Both testimonies were fully of God, and inspired, but differed in character.

The accusations being brought before the council, Stephen is seized and forced to appear before the high priest and his accusers. To these there only remained enmity against God, and the power of death, for God allowed them to fulfill their purposes. But the occasion produces the magnificent defense of Stephen, indicating the position of the Jews with the utmost precision, and closing the history of humanity, of man before God here below. Before the flood God bore testimony, but He established no institution. We have perhaps Adam, Abel, Enoch and Noah, godly men, but not one of them was the head of a race according to God; but after the flood God began in the new world to found institutions for the government of the world, for the blessing of man, and to unfold truth and His ways.

At first no promise was made to man. In the judgment pronounced on Satan we find a prophecy of the final work of Christ, the object, by grace, of Adam's faith, and also of ours, the everlasting gospel; but God made no promises to the first man. After the flood God began to unfold His ways. In Noah He established government in order to restrain

violence. Then, when man fell into idolatry (Josh. 24), not only was he wicked, but he chose demons as the power of the world in place of God; and God called Abraham to be for Himself, and the father of a race that He might on earth recognize as His, whether after the flesh or after the Spirit. The great principles of election, of calling, or of the promises are established. Then the law is given on Mount Sinai, by which man is put to the proof in a still more definite manner. Then, after long patience, in which prophets were sent to recall the people chosen according to the flesh to the obedience of the law, and sustain the trust of the few faithful by the promise of the Messiah, God sent His only-begotten Son, His well-beloved, saying, in the words of the parable, "They will reverence my Son" (Mark 12:6); but we know what happened. The history of man was finished on the cross. Not only had he sinned, but he had rejected grace when the Savior had come.

Now they reject the testimony that spoke of a glorified Savior, sent in virtue of His intercession on the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). As we have seen, God replied to this intercession in the testimony of Peter and of the apostles; and in the announcement of the Holy Spirit of a glorified Savior, Him whom they had rejected; but, as we have again seen, they refused the testimony of the Holy Spirit by the mouth of the apostles.

And here we have a kind of résumé, an explanation of their state, their history from the time of Abraham till that day. It is the history of man from the moment that God began His dealings with him—in the beginning, in giving the promise, whether to Israel or to Christ, the true offspring; then in the law, in the prophets, and, finally, in

Christ Himself. All this time the Spirit was working, and now especially, after Christ had been glorified in heaven, as we have seen. Stephen recounted this history; grace in the call of Abraham; what happened to Joseph and to Moses, wherein the Spirit worked and had been rejected by Israel; then the law violated at the outset in the calf of gold; then the prophets; then Christ Himself; and, finally, the testimony of the Holy Spirit. They had broken the law, persecuted and put to death the prophets who had spoken of the coming of the Just One, of whom now they had become the betrayers and murderers. And more than this, they still resisted the Holy Spirit, as their fathers had always done.

All the dealings of God pass before our eyes; the law, the prophets, Christ, the Spirit. In all, the people are found in enmity against God. Meanwhile they confided in the temple, of which God had declared by the prophet that the Most High dwelt not in temples made with hands. Such is the history of Israel — of man. Conscience is hardened, will is unchanged in the Sanhedrim, and nothing but hate and opposition to the testimony of the Holy Spirit is revealed; their hearts are goaded to resistance, and put the witness himself to death. They were unable to answer him; it was indeed their history of which they so loudly boasted — and what a history! Man always resists the testimony of the Spirit; and, if the conscience be stung, hatred breaks out violently against the witness.

On the other hand we see a man, a Christian, full of the Holy Spirit, doubtless here manifested in a very special way; but that which was visible to Stephen is the object of faith for us. Mark first the perfect tranquility of the servant of Christ. With beautiful simplicity he tells a story

familiar to all—a story, however, which carried with it the condemnation of the Jews. To reason with him was needless, for they could not deny the facts. Then, kneeling down quietly amid the stones which fell on him, he prays for his enemies. What moral power! How entirely it overcomes all circumstances, and displays the man of God in the presence of the fury of his adversaries!

But let us examine not only the character of Stephen's testimony against his enemies, but his own state. He is the embodiment of a man full of the Holy Spirit, and his enemies are the embodiment of men who resist the Spirit. First, heaven is opened to him; he is enabled to keep his eyes fixed on the heavens—touchstone of the state of the soul—and sees the Son of man standing at the right hand of God. He saw indeed the glory of God, but does not speak of it; the new and blessed thing was, that Man, in the person of the Son of God, stood there.

I believe that here He does not sit, because, until the Jews had refused the testimony of His glory, the Savior was expecting to come back according to the address of Peter. As soon as Stephen is slain this testimony is at end; and, a single soul in heaven, the gathering of the spirits of the redeemed begins, which will continue till the Lord comes to reunite the bodies and spirits of His own, and bring them into heavenly glory. Thus, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, it is said that Jesus is set down at the right hand of God, expecting till His enemies be made His footstool. He sits down on the throne of the Father, and not yet on His own. This is what rouses the hatred and fury of the Jews. "They cry out blasphemy!" and stone the witness of God, of the glory of Jesus.

For Stephen heaven is opened, and Jesus is seen in divine glory; and this is what forms his soul in such a beautiful way into the likeness of Jesus. As He prayed for enemies, so also Stephen prays for his; and as the Lord Jesus commended His spirit to His Father, so Stephen exclaims, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Not only does he pardon his enemies, but quietly kneels down to do so. The view of Jesus transforms the heart into His likeness. That which was seen by Stephen is the object of faith for us, made clearer by what happened to him.

Meditations on Acts 8

Acts 8.

An important fact, which renders the signification of our narrative still clearer, is here presented to us. Here we find Saul taking part in the death of Stephen. We have seen that the death of Stephen was the end of the history of the enmity of the human heart against God, when God had done everything to try it, and also to restore it; its incurable enmity was manifested, and the end of man before God. There was no longer hope of finding any good since God Himself has made use of everything—judgment in the deluge, the law, the prophets, His own Son, and the testimony of the Holy Spirit. All was in vain. The more God worked, the more man's enmity manifested itself.

Here for the first time we find Saul. Not content with taking part in the death of Stephen, he goes into distant cities in search of Christians to bring them bound to Jerusalem. He is the apostle of man's enmity against Christ. If the history of man was finished, that of the sovereign grace of God was beginning. The spirit of the first martyr takes its place in the presence of Jesus. But the entire number must be completed before Jesus can come and reunite them with their bodies.

Here we find the first general persecution, which, however, in the hands of God, served to scatter the seed of the gospel. This also is a proof of the free activity of the Holy Spirit to make use of whomsoever He sees fit to select. Still another important fact: while all the Christians are scattered by the persecution, the apostles remain at

Jerusalem. The special mission of Matthew 10:23 was not accomplished. It will be by the power of God hereafter, I doubt not; but not at the moment of which we read here. It is the multitude of Christians scattered by the persecution who preach the gospel in Palestine, and afterward among the Gentiles. Saul persecutes the assembly with cruel zeal; and the Christians leave the city. It was neither the settled design of man, nor the spiritual zeal of the apostles, but the fury of the enemy, which according to the wisdom of God first disseminated the gospel outside the gates of Jerusalem. The spirit of Stephen gone up to heaven, the gospel of grace is carried into the surrounding districts by means of the enmity of man, and the providence of God who makes use of it leads the scattered ones to communicate in love the gifts they possess. What is man? and what the wisdom and grace of God?

Another example of the free activity of the Spirit is found in the person of Philip, chosen to take care of the widows. His service is finished with regard to the widows; but he has acquired a good degree, and great liberty in the faith in Christ Jesus. Setting out from Jerusalem, he goes down to Samaria; and there by the power of his word, and by the miracles given him to do, the people are liberated from the influence of a notorious instrument of Satan—Simon, who exercised the arts of sorcery and had been held to be the great power of God. “Then Simon himself believed also; and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done” (Acts 8:13).

It was the miracles which had exercised this influence over his spirit, not the seed of God, the divine word which had entered into his heart. To believe by means of miracles

alone is not the faith which operates by the Holy Spirit, although God may work miracles and signs in order to confirm His word. The end of John 2 shows that Jesus did not trust those who had believed in this way. When the Spirit of God works, requirements are produced in the soul which Jesus alone can satisfy. Thus Nicodemus was under the influence of the miracles when he went to Jesus. To the others reasonable conviction sufficed, and they remained where they were.

The sole desire of Simon is to possess the power of conferring on others by the imposition of his hands the ability to work miracles and signs. He wished to buy it with money, thereby showing that there was no work of God in his soul. He had "neither part nor lot in this matter." He was in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity; his heart was not right before God. His sin excited the indignation, not the compassion, of Peter. "Thy money perish with thee," said he. But still his heart is not touched with compunction. He asks only that what had been said might not come upon him; not that his thought might be forgiven, or that the state of his heart might be changed.

Here we find still other things which we shall do well to consider. The difference between the operation and the sealing of the Spirit is very clear. The Samaritans had believed and had been baptized, but had not received the Holy Spirit; for He had not yet descended upon them. He had worked by the word in their hearts; men and women were converted, born again, had confessed the name of Jesus; but they were not yet sealed. Then it belonged in a special manner to the apostles to impose hands, and confer the gift of the Spirit. In Acts 19 we see that Paul conferred it; he was a true apostle. Ananias was sent that Saul might

receive it; this was a special mission of the Lord Himself. The Spirit might also come without the laying on of hands, as on the hundred and twenty, and on Cornelius; but not one had the power of conferring it save the apostles. It is said, “of the apostles’ hand” (vs. 18).

It is possible, too, that the Spirit might come on a man in this way without an internal work giving life. The Lord does not habitually work thus; but cases of it are not wanting in the Old Testament, such as Balaam, king Saul, and others, where the question of conversion is not raised, showing that that is another thing altogether. In the New Testament we do not find a case of it, but the thing is supposed (1 Cor. 12; Heb. 6), and the power to do miracles with the aid of the Holy Spirit and without conversion and life, is clearly presented by the Lord Himself (Matt. 12:26-27); the Lord does not deny the fact, but declares that He knows not those who have done them; Matthew 7. See Deuteronomy 13. Judas at least was sent to do such.

We see then a new character of the apostolic authority; then the free activity of the Spirit clearly displayed in Philip. By his means the gospel is communicated to a distant country through a proselyte come to Jerusalem to worship the true God; a man in whose heart the word of God possessed full power. It is beautiful to remark in Philip the readiness of his obedience—how he allowed himself to be led by the will of God. He is the object of all attention in the city of Samaria: a notable work had been done by means of him. “Arise,” said the angel of the Lord, “and go...unto Gaza, which is desert” (Acts 8:26); but he was not told what he was to do there. And he goes there immediately. There he finds the treasurer of the Queen of Ethiopia. The Spirit says to him, “Go near, and join thyself

to this chariot”; and he runs immediately to it. The treasurer was reading the word of God, but the key of faith in Jesus was wanting. Philip mounts the chariot, and preaches faith in Jesus to him. All was ordered by God. He was reading what was immediately connected with the sufferings of the Lord; and by the power of the Spirit the explanation of the passage is sent him by the mouth of Philip. The eunuch, with the heart prepared by grace, and already having faith in the word, becomes a Christian. He is baptized by Philip, and goes on his way rejoicing. It is remarkable that the name of Christianity remains to this day in that country, much corrupted (it is true), but in the form which this man implanted. They believe as to the profession of Christ, but practice circumcision — (verse 37 is not authentic).

The Spirit of the Lord catches away Philip, and by the miraculous power of God he is found at Azotus. Time and space are nothing to God. From Azotus he evangelizes in all the cities till he comes to Caesarea. Further on we find him stationed with his family at this city. He had by this time obtained the fair name of Evangelist.

Meditations on Acts 9

Acts 9.

We have glanced at the history of the free activity of the Spirit in those who were dispersed by the persecution, in Stephen, and in Philip. Then follows the deeply interesting narrative of Saul and of his conversion. In that of Stephen we saw that man had reached the extreme end of his iniquity, not only in crucifying the Lord, but in refusing the offer of grace, and of His return in virtue of the Savior's intercession on the cross. There, for the first time, we find Saul; but he is not content with this quiet hatred. "And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that, if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem" (Act 9:1-2).

He is the apostle, of his own will, of hatred against Christ, and of the persecution of God's children. Now the Lord allowed this, in order to make him the witness and apostle of the sovereign grace which opened his eyes, converted and pardoned him. Here it is evidently sovereign grace meeting the fury of the ardent enemy of truth and grace, who sought, as he himself says, to destroy Christianity, and banish the name of Christ from the face of the earth. While occupied in this very purpose, the Lord stops him on his way, and reveals Himself to his soul, and also to his eyes, so that he might be an eye-witness of His

glory. A light from heaven shone round about him — “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” (Acts 9:4).

But two very important truths are contained in this remarkable scene. The Lord’s glory is revealed. Saul had not seen the Lord — had not followed Him when present in the flesh. The twelve apostles had known Him in the days of His flesh, and had seen Him disappear in the cloud; they knew by faith that He was seated at the right hand of God, but they could not be eye-witnesses of His glory. It is then that Paul begins. He saw the Lord’s glory, but knew not who He was. One thing he was certain of — the glory and the voice of the Lord Himself had appeared to him. He asks therefore, “Who art thou, Lord?” Then the Lord replies, “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.” He was not a man of the earth, nor the Messiah gone up to heaven, but the Lord of glory recognizing Himself still as Jesus, and also Jesus of Nazareth.

The starting-point of the doctrine is different: the same redemption, the same Savior; but the revelation given to the twelve is that the man Jesus is gone up to heaven; God has exalted Him. The revelation given to Saul is that the Lord of glory is Jesus of Nazareth. It begins with heavenly glory; then, in the second place, that all Christians are united with Himself, members of His body. This doctrine is not unfolded but it is not said, “Why persecutest thou My disciples?” as a doctor or a rabbi, but “Why persecutest thou *me*?” And this is the Lord of glory. “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.”

Such are the fundamental points in the history of Paul, the enemy of the Lord of glory, converted, pardoned, justified, necessary witness of sovereign grace. The gospel of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, of the glory

of the Lord, is confided to him; then the truth of the union, of the unity of Christians with Christ, glorious Head in heaven. Peter preached that God had glorified Him whom the Jews had crucified, and invited the rebels to come to God by the sacrifice which he had perfected; and to those who repented Jesus would return. Saul preached that this salvation was for all men; and that God, as Savior, could not limit Himself to the narrow bounds of Israel, but that He announced Himself to the whole creation under heaven; then, that the assembly of God was united to Jesus, His body.

We shall see that God did not permit disunion, but desired that there should be a single assembly. But it is not the less true that Paul was a witness that there was no difference, that all men were lost, all children of wrath, one just as another; and that Jesus, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, had united all in one body—a truth which the Jews (and also the Christian Jews) always resisted, tormenting the apostle in his work. Peter himself dissimulated, so that all the Christian Jews, led by his authority, which was only the fear of man, sided with him. Not one of the apostles speaks in his epistles of the assembly, the body of Christ on earth, save only Paul. The glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; sovereign grace, by which he was the example to all those who should afterward believe in Christ Jesus; and the whole in virtue of the cross—such was the gospel confided to Paul.

His traveling companions were witnesses to the truth of the vision, but did not know of the revelation confided to Paul. The bright light shone around them, but they did not see the Lord. They heard a voice, but not the words of Him who spoke. Paul was a witness of that which he had

seen and heard. Paul's companions were able to testify to the vision, which was a real thing, and not an invention of Paul for his own glory. The whole was confirmed by the mission of Ananias, to whom the Lord revealed what had happened, sending him to Saul to open his eyes, and receive him into the Christian assembly by baptism, and by the gift of the Holy Spirit; for the sudden light had blinded Saul.

God had drawn him away from all communication with the outside world, in order that he might be entirely occupied with his soul, and with the state in which he found himself. In fact his situation was without a parallel. Externally he was a man without spot, of irreproachable reputation according to the law; he had a good conscience. He believed it his duty to do much against the name of Jesus, and he did it. The authorities of the religion of the fathers encouraged and sent him, in every way supporting him in what he did with such zeal; conscience, legal justice, religion, all that formed his moral life, had made him the fierce enemy of the Lord of glory. But at one blow all the foundations of his moral life were ruined. It was by these very foundations that he became the enemy of the Lord, and resisted the Spirit who called men to repentance by the testimony rendered to His glory. Saul had assisted in an active way in this opposition, when the Jews stoned Stephen. But this did not satisfy him. His zeal required that he should persecute also those who believed in distant parts. Thus occupied he meets with the Lord, whose name he was seeking to extirpate. He was therefore the head, the chief, of sinners; in ignorance it is true, but nevertheless willingly. Where was his good conscience according to man? Where his legal justice? Where his religion, of which the priests

and religious authorities had for him been supreme before? All had led him to discover himself an enemy of fiery zeal to the Lord, face to face with whom he found himself now, but still the object of His grace, at the very moment when he was occupied so thoroughly in destroying His glory. What a revulsion! What an overturning in his heart! Who can tell what passed in him during those three days?

And yet the Lord does not send Ananias to him till this internal moral work was completed. Old things have passed away, and now all things have become new in his soul, in the bottom of his thoughts; all is of God who has revealed Himself in the glory of the face of Jesus Christ. He is no longer a Jew, although he may be one externally: but he has not become a Gentile; joined to the Lord of glory, Jesus Christ, he knows henceforth no man any more after the flesh. He knows the Lord, he knows His people as united with Him, Gentiles and Jews alike lost sinners, children of wrath; but he knows the sovereign grace towards himself which has called him, has revealed the Son of God to him, and has given him eternal *life*, even while engaged in destroying His name. All was grace, pure and sovereign grace, grace which went so far as to make of Christians one body with Christ in heaven, and to give them to know it. How marvelous the revelations we find unfolded in the epistles of the apostle! The gospel of the glory of Christ is easily understood when we realize how and when the apostle was converted.

But it is worthwhile considering some of the circumstances which accompanied the conversion of the apostle. The Lord made use of a converted Jew, hated by his countrymen, to convey to Paul the formal testimony of His grace, and receive him into the bosom of the assembly, in

order that, as we before said, he might never more fear, the vision having passed away that might be mistaken. Here is a quiet man who had received a communication from the Lord, fully confirming what had happened to Saul. Moreover, Saul is made by another revelation to expect Ananias so that he may receive his sight by the laying on of his hands.

But I should like to call attention to still other circumstances —the full liberty, and, one may say, the familiarity with which Ananias speaks to the Lord (with reverence and submission, of course); and, in the same way, the Lord with him. When the Lord calls him, he replies immediately, "Here am I." Nevertheless the Lord, the Man who interests Himself in His own as friends whom He loves, speaks with an open heart to Ananias; showing him not only the way, the house where Saul was to be found, but that which was necessary to identify him, namely, that Saul prayed and that he had seen Ananias coming to him to lay hands on him and restore his sight—just as one tells a servant what to say, or to a friend what is in the heart.

Thus the Lord took knowledge of what Paul was doing, and speaks of it to Ananias. And we see in the answer of Ananias a perfect trust in this goodness of the Lord. He begins to reason with the Lord. He had heard that this man was come to bind those who called upon the name of the Lord. And the Lord does not reprove him. Of course he had to go and do what the Lord desired; but He explains the matter to him, and communicates to him His thoughts concerning Saul, that he was a chosen vessel to bear His name, and that He would show him what things he should suffer for His name's sake. In a word the Lord opens His heart to Ananias, as a friend whom He treats

with full confidence, speaks naturally, but confidently tells all He feels to Ananias.

It is very important to remember that Jesus is always man. If He were not God, His humanity would have no value; but, being God, the fact that He interests Himself in us as a man, as men whom He is not ashamed to call His brethren, is infinitely precious. He can feel with us, take part in all our circumstances, trials, difficulties, and troubles. He loves us as the Father loved Him, a man and Son on the earth. His love has divine perfection, but He feels as a man, as a man on the earth, tempted in like manner as we are apart from sin. He is ever a man; He thinks of us as One who has passed through all these things with divine love and human sympathy. Not only does He know everything as God, but He has had the experience of a man. Precious truth, unfathomable grace!

We have no need of saints—if they could hear us—to move His heart to favor us, to render His love warmer, His interest more profound, or His knowledge of our condition more intimate. But He has had the experience on purpose to be able to understand and sympathize with His own in every circumstance of the life of God in man on the earth. How great is the intensity of the Savior's love! How near to us! How intelligent and intimate is His heart in the conflict of faith! He knows all, feels all, and is with us in everything to help us. Blessed be His love!

It is possible that He may not reveal Himself to us in visions, but His heart is not colder to us than to Ananias; His wisdom is not diminished; His willingness is not weakened to help us, neither is His arm shortened. The intimacy and the confidence of our hearts ought to be the

same to tell Him everything; certain it is that His ear is open to listen to us.

Thus sent and encouraged, Ananias obeys, goes in perfect confidence towards him who not long before breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the Christians; and lays his hands on him, saying, "Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 9:17). Saul immediately receives his sight, and rises, is baptized, eats, and walks with the disciples at Damascus. Without delay he preaches Christ in the synagogues, declaring Him to be the Son of God. Although the lion had become a lamb, yet he had not lost his energy; but his object is different; now he preaches what he had formerly sought to destroy. The subject of his preaching differs a little from that of Peter, and responds to the revelation of Christ, which was made to him. Peter preached that God had exalted the Jesus whom they had rejected; Saul, that Christ was the Son of God.

But the pungency of Saul's preaching stirs up the animosity of the Jews. It is always the religious who oppose the truth, because their own importance and traditions are compromised. The rancor of the flesh, particularly in religious things, knows of no giving way. They seek to stone Saul, making conscience and religion their plea. But God watches over His servant; their plot is made known to Paul; and, while they wait day and night for him at the gates, the disciples take him by night, and let him down over the wall in a basket. Thus he escapes out of men's hands.

The following verse (26), does not, I think, apply to an immediately succeeding period. When, however, he arrives at Jerusalem, they are still afraid of him, not yet knowing

all that has happened to him; but the good Barnabas introduces him to the apostles, and makes known to them the whole truth of his conversion. Here again the apostle bears faithful witness, and again religious men seek to put him to death. But the time had not yet arrived for his own special mission. The brethren bring him down to Caesarea, and he sets out for Tarsus, his native city.

The narrative now returns to the work of Peter. Although Saul was called to preach the gospel to the nations, and was set apart to this mission by a special dispensation of God founded on a more perfect revelation, which left the Jews behind as sinners by nature as well as the Gentiles, and taught that there was no difference, since all had sinned, bringing in the new creation, and knowing Christ no more after the flesh; yet there were not to be two assemblies; the oneness of the church was to be maintained.

Peter is employed, after the conversion of Saul, to bring the first Gentile to the knowledge of Christ. But he never taught what the church was as the body of Christ: this is not revealed in the case of Cornelius. That the Gentiles should take their place among the Christians without becoming Jews, or being circumcised, was something that Peter and the other Jews had great difficulty in believing.

As to the progress of the gospel, let us see what is taught us in the sequel. We shall find that those who had been scattered, being Hellenists, or Jews who had lived in foreign countries, and were accustomed to maintain daily intercourse with the Gentiles, spoke with these: so that the free action of the Spirit also communicated by this means the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul had a new formal mission to every creature under heaven, and then he taught what the assembly was—a truth set forth by no other.

See Colossians 1. And he himself was to be a member of the assembly, already founded and established on Christ, which was His body, the habitation of God through the Spirit, though he alone taught this doctrine.

It is not without importance to remark that the Romish system is founded on the authority of Peter, and draws all its pretensions from him; but the doctrine of the church was never confided to Peter. Peter was not the apostle of the uncircumcision, but of the circumcision (Gal. 2); full of power for the work among the Jews, he left that among the Gentiles entirely in the hands of Paul. Peter does not speak of the body of Christ, we who are Gentiles; and the instrument whom God adopted to establish the church among the Gentiles was Paul (1 Cor. 3).

The foundation is one, that is, Christ; the gospel of salvation, one (1 Cor. 15:2). Moreover, God Himself founded the assembly on the day of Pentecost by the gift of the Holy Spirit; but, as a human builder, Paul it was whom God employed to establish the church among the Gentiles, and unfold what it was. The other apostles never speak of the body of Christ, nor of the presence of the Holy Spirit on the earth. Peter then goes about continually, and the power of God manifests itself in him. Aeneas is healed; Tabitha is restored to life. The effect, however, of the first miracle is greater than that of the second. All that dwell at Lydda and Saron, rich countries on the sea-shore, turn to the Lord. At Joppa many believe on Him; and there Peter tarries many days.

Meditations on Acts 10

Acts 10.

While Peter remains in Simon's house, God is occupied with the Gentiles, of whom Peter was not thinking and, even when he did think of them, not at all disposed to admit them among the believing Jews. The angel of God appears to Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, a devout man, faithful according to the knowledge he possessed, fearing God, and praying continually. He was then converted, but did not know that salvation which had been announced by grace in Jesus, obtained for us on the cross. There are many people who, though they may have learned more than Cornelius, and who bear the name of Christians, have not got beyond this state. These are like the prodigal son (Luke 15), when he repents and arises to go to his father. He was on the right way, but he did not know how he would be received by his father. Such people possess perhaps more light, but as to their relation with God, they are in the same state.

But the conversion of Cornelius, and his introduction to the Christian assembly, was evidently of great importance. The Gentiles were to participate in the grace and blessing of the gospel. The promises had been given to the Jews—none of them to the Gentiles; but the revelation of the grace of God could not be limited to one people. In His government of the world God could choose a people for Himself, when mankind had abandoned Him and had altogether fallen into idolatry, in order to maintain on the earth the knowledge of the one true God, and to put the

heart of man to the test, show what it was, and unfold His ways in the midst of mankind. But God, revealed in grace according to His nature, could not in any way be the God of a single nation.

Hidden behind the veil, He could give a perfect law, promises, and prophecies; but at the death of Christ the veil is rent in twain, God is fully revealed in grace and justice, and could no longer be the God of the Jews only. Moreover, at the death of Christ, the Jews as a nation were set aside till they should repent. Yes, it was God's will that the Gentiles should take part in the new blessings of grace. All were sinners; but God purified by faith one as freely as another.

Independently of the Jews, He sends His angel to Cornelius. His prayers and alms are recognized as being acceptable to God. He is told to send men to Joppa to call for Simon, who, the angel tells him, lodged with one Simon, a tanner. He would tell him what he ought to do. Here is a new and important fact. God was thinking about the Gentiles, and desired to admit them to the assembly without their becoming Jews or submitting to the law. Cornelius, a truly devout man, humble, and fearing God, acts immediately according to the word of the angel, and calls two of his servants and a devout soldier, and, having declared to them all that had happened, sends them to call for Peter.

As they travel, God prepares Peter's heart for a mission, to accomplish which he, till then, had been by no means ready. But God desired to have the Gentiles. Peter was praying on the roof of the house where he lodged, and becoming very hungry, he would have eaten; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance and saw as it were

a great sheet let down from heaven to earth, full of all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air, which it was not lawful for the Jews to eat. And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Rise, Peter, kill, and eat. Peter, faithful to Judaism, refuses to do so; he had never eaten anything common or unclean. Then the voice said to him, What God hath cleansed, that call thou not unclean.

As Peter seeks for the interpretation of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius come to the door and ask for him; and the Spirit tells Peter to go with them, doubting nothing; for, said the Spirit, I have sent them. Peter, therefore, brings them in and lodges them, and on the morrow goes away with them, only taking the precaution of getting certain brethren to accompany him. Arrived at Caesarea, Cornelius throws himself at his feet as the messenger of God. Peter lifts him up, and asks for what reason he had sent for him.

Many relations and intimate friends of Cornelius were gathered together. All doubt as to the meaning of the vision was now removed. By the authority of God Himself, Peter found himself in the society of the Gentiles, which was unlawful for the Jews. He acknowledges God's willingness to receive those that feared Him and worked righteousness among all nations, not only among the Jews. While Cornelius and his friends listen with godly faith, he recounts the mission of Jesus, how the Jews had crucified Him, and God had raised Him up, of which thing the apostles were the witnesses, having eaten and drunk with Him after His resurrection; the proof that He was still a true man, though He possessed then a spiritual body, and that He was the same Jesus whom they had known alive on the earth. At the end of the Gospel of Luke, the basis

of every record of the Acts, it is remarkable how Jesus in perfect grace, takes pains to make the disciples certain that He was the same Jesus whom they had known. There we are told, that He ate and drank in order to demonstrate it (Luke 24:36 and so forth). "And when he had thus spoken, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them" (Luke 24:40-43).

Still the principal thing remained. Cornelius was already converted, devout, faithful, and full of the fear of God, according to the light he possessed. But he did not know salvation, the work of the Savior, and its efficacy. Led only by the grace of God, he received with faith what Peter told him. Now it was declared to him that, according to the testimony of all the prophets, he who believed in Jesus received the remission of his sins. The Holy Spirit seals by His coming this truth received with simple faith into the hearts of Cornelius and his friends. The Holy Spirit is given then to the Gentiles, without their becoming Jews or being circumcised. Henceforth it was impossible not to receive them into the Christian assembly. God had received them, and had put His seal on them. Peter commands them to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

We have here four distinct points: the conversion of the soul by grace (Cornelius was already converted, and his prayers and alms accepted by God); then the testimony of the remission of his sins by faith in Jesus, the victim by whom propitiation was made for us on the cross; then the seal of God in the gift of the Holy Spirit; and, finally, the formal reception among the Christians. This order is

not that which is found elsewhere; because God was here showing that it was His will that the Gentiles should be received. But it is important to distinguish the four things, and to observe the true force of each of them.

Meditations on Acts 11

Acts 11.

The difficulty to the Jews of receiving the Gentiles was a great one. To do so was to give up all their privileges, all that remained of the ancient glory of Israel. Peter therefore, on his return to Jerusalem, is reproved; he had eaten with the Gentiles. Peter narrates all that had happened, and how God had given them the gift just as to believing Jews; how then could he hinder God? The Spirit had sent him to the Gentiles; the Spirit had been given to them. It was the accomplishment of the words of John the Baptist; and other brethren were witnesses to the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Jews could no longer resist the clear evidence of the will of God. Grace overcoming in their hearts, they exclaim, "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18).

It is important to ponder deeply the difference between conversion and salvation. I have already spoken on this subject, but it is one that is so much neglected, and Christians are so accustomed to be content with a low state of soul, and are so uncertain with regard to salvation, that I shall take the opportunity of adding a few more words. Cornelius was already converted; his prayers and alms were acceptable to God. He was to call for Peter, who would tell him words whereby he might be saved. God had been working in his soul, but he did not yet know the value of the work accomplished by the Savior. It is the same in the case of the woman in Luke 7; she loved the Lord deeply, had felt the height of His grace and the depth of her sins;

but knew not that all was pardoned. The Lord tells her so. The prodigal son was converted, confessed his sins, and turned towards his father, but he was not yet clothed with the best garment. His father had not yet fallen on his neck, he knew not his love; he hardly hoped to be admitted as a servant, and was not in a fit state to enter into the house. Every privilege awaited him, but he did not possess them.

I doubt not that He who has begun the good work will continue it till the day of Christ Jesus. As long as a soul reasons about its state, seeks to know whether it is saved or converted, and judges by its own heart of what is in the heart of God, it is under law; salvation for such an one depends on his own state, not on the love of God and the efficacy of the work of Christ. He may perhaps say he is truly converted; he feels the need of salvation, and believes that others have found it; but he does not himself possess it; just as Israel was not out of the land of Egypt till the sea was crossed. Two things, which cannot be separated, are necessary; faith in the work of Christ, and the knowledge that it is finished. I say they cannot be separated, because, when we believe in the work of Christ, and by faith trust in it, we are sealed by the Holy Spirit; we enjoy peace (the love of God being shed abroad in our hearts), we are reconciled to God, and in Christ are made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; and we know it by the Holy Spirit given to us. In spirit we are in the Father's house, partaking of the food with which He nourishes His beloved children. Not only has the heart turned towards God, but Christ is our righteousness, who also appears for us continually before the face of God.

Before the narrative of the mission of the apostle Paul, we find once more the free activity of the Holy Spirit in all

the members of the body of Christ. Those who had been dispersed by the persecution raised against the Christians on the death of Stephen were preaching everywhere, but for the most part to the Jew only. It never occurred to them that the grace and the thoughts of God could overstep the limits of His people after the flesh. A few of them, however, who, living in Gentile districts (especially at Antioch), daily came in contact with the Gentiles and desired their salvation also, preached the Lord Jesus to them. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number, having believed, were converted to the Lord.

Thus we find that no sooner is the unity of the assembly secured by the admission of Cornelius to it by means of Peter—he first making use of the keys of the kingdom to admit, according to the Lord's promise, the Gentiles also—than the free action of the Spirit is reproduced. The gospel is spread among the nations, not by means of Peter, nor of Paul, who afterward became the great minister of God towards the Gentiles, but by means of the faithful, stirred up by the love of Christ reigning in their hearts, and giving them the desire that His name should be glorified. It was not a question of ordination, nor of human consecration. All, except the apostles, had been scattered, and all were preaching. That there are especial gifts is evident in the word, but it was love to Christ and souls that opened their mouths.

And observe, the fact is not merely recorded in the word, but their activity is approved by the Lord. "The hand of the Lord was with them." The gospel was first preached to the Gentiles by private Christians, moved by the grace of God to communicate to others the blessing which they themselves enjoyed; and they sought to establish

the authority of Christ over mankind, and glorify His name—an important principle clearly demonstrated in this narrative.

Let us bear in mind that the first dissemination of the gospel among the nations was effected, not by means of official preachers, but by ordinary Christians, not sent out by men; but moved by love to Christ. Subsequently Paul was sent expressly by the Holy Spirit, and received apostolic gifts; but he was not sent by the other apostles but directly by God and by Jesus Christ, by means of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, in the providence of God, the free activity of Christians became the occasion of his mission. "Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem; and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch: who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith; and much people was added unto the Lord" (Acts 11:22-24). Then Barnabas goes to seek for Paul, whom the brethren had brought to Caesarea, from whence he had gone to his native city, Tarsus. We have seen that Barnabas was a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, but he was not a man capable of taking the initiative, of starting and maintaining such a work as that of the conversion of the Gentiles. Thus, though blessed by God, he is not His instrument for this work. He was himself conscious of this, and so, with kindness and simplicity of heart, and doubtless led of God, seeks the instrument chosen and called by God. He had already introduced him to the Jews at Jerusalem, who were afraid of their late persecutor.

The power of Saul's call had separated him from everything to be for Christ alone. He awaited only the formal message from the Lord, a new source of courage and the effect of the spirit of humility and obedience. In our times, it is a difficulty that there is no clear and open call like that of Saul, but we have seen that all were free to evangelize; and moreover that they were bound to accomplish the work according to the strength of the love of Christ working in their hearts. And if there is a special gift, this gift is unfolded in the exercise of it. Besides, we have the promise and the precept, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth liberally to all men, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him" (James 1:5). Such were the first disseminators of the gospel among the Gentiles. Apostolical gifts are indeed wanting, and that is a great loss; but it is an honor to be thus dependent on God, and that activity should be the fruit of the spiritual state. We shall experience our own weakness, but also the unwavering faithfulness of God. We have also the warning of the same James, "Be not many masters." The word of God is enough for all times; if it is not enough for us, it will be for our condemnation. The grace of God must work in us. Let us bear it in mind.

We see, however, the greatest liberty in the exercise of the ministry. Barnabas seeks Saul; Paul takes Silas, Timothy, and others; he wished Apollos to go to Corinth, but Apollos did not wish to go there. Saul then, and Barnabas, exercise their ministry together; they assemble themselves with the church, and teach much people. It was thus that a Christian assembly was founded at Antioch, the capital of the Gentile world in that quarter, and the point from which the Grecian world was evangelized.

But it was important that this assembly should not be separated from that of Jerusalem, and so we are suddenly taken back to that city. It is still lovingly recognized; and we shall see that God makes use of the very strength that sought to bring the Gentiles under subjection to the law, to set them free, maintain unity, and preserve liberty. Now the union is strengthened by the fruits of love. A prophet (and there were such in the new assembly) announces that there should be a great dearth throughout all the world; and the disciples determine to send aid to the brethren in Judea; which is done by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

Meditations on Acts 12

Acts 12.

The Spirit now takes us back to Jerusalem. He was willing to forget neither it nor the testimony of God found there. The Spirit here records an event which sets forth the care that God, in His providence, had of His own (and especially, by means of the angels, for Peter), working in them by His Spirit. He permits that James, the brother of John, should succumb to the malice of Herod, the enemy of the gospel. That this was pleasing to the Jews gave the king a further pretext for continuing in the path of his opposition. Little mattered the death of a few Christians, if their death gave him popularity with the Jews. He therefore seized Peter and put him in prison, purposing after the feast of the passover to give him up to the people.

But the thoughts of God were otherwise. The night before he was to be led out to the people, Peter slept in perfect peace under the protection of God, although, so that the hand of God might be shown in his liberation, he was strongly guarded by men. He slept between two soldiers, bound with two chains. Sentinels before the door guarded the prison likewise. But we are more secure in the hands of God than when exposed to the violence of men, even though they may seem to have us firmly enough in their grasp.

The angel awakens Peter, and at the sound of his voice the chains fall from his hands. Every detail is minutely recorded. At the word of the angel Peter binds on his sandals and girds himself. The care of the angel is most

minute. And when, after having passed the two guards, they reached the outer gate, it opens to them of itself. The angel accompanies Peter through one street, and then disappears. Peter, who till this moment imagined he saw a vision, now becomes conscious that God has delivered him from the hands of Herod and from the expectation of the Jews. Observe here how visions resembled the reality, since Peter believed the reality to be a vision. Thus, considering the things, he comes to the house of Mary, the mother of Mark, a place probably often the scene of the meetings of the Christians. It was the home of the sister of Barnabas. Mark had gone with Barnabas on his separation from Paul, but Mark is again found in Colossians, and in 2 Timothy 4:11 his service is recognized as profitable for the ministry. Sweet it is to see how grace, shut out for a while by failure, hastens to recognize the brother brought back to the path of devotedness, and to renewed usefulness in the work of the Lord.

Peter does not remain there, but, telling them to make known to James what has occurred, departs and goes to another place. But here we shall do well to remark a few particulars. The refuge of the faithful is in prayer. They had come together to ask God for the preservation of Peter, and God had heard their prayer. They did not know how, but they had put trust in God. It seemed to be the natural resource of the hearts of these believers; and the feeling was a common one. In the difficulty which had occurred, the danger of the beloved apostle, they meet together to look to God. Prayer Was given to their hearts by the Holy Spirit as a refuge in adversity; and though they might not know how God would respond, yet they were always answered according to His own counsels. Peter is set free according

to their desire; but we see how little the heart, though by grace it may have confidence in God and turns to Him in its need, believes that its supplications will be granted. Here their need had been expressed to God, but when the answer came, they could not believe it was possible.

Peter is set free by the intervention of the angel, and Herod is struck by the judgment of God when he sets himself up against Him. Can we expect similar intervention now? I do not believe that miracles are performed today; angels no longer appear; it was not a gift that could continue. In Ephesians 4 no miraculous gifts are to be found. But I fully believe, according to the Lord's promise, that prayer is heard, and that the angels work in favor of the children of God as much now as in those early times. As to prayer, the word of God is clear. The condition is made, however, that what we ask be according to the will of God, and that prayer be made in faith; and we are told that, if the words of Christ abide in us, we shall ask what we will.

The Lord and the apostles exhort us to prayer without ceasing, in confidence, never letting our faith fail. We do well if we make known our requests to God in every case; but it does not follow that we shall always receive what we ask—as, for example, it happened to Paul with regard to the thorn in his flesh. For him it would not have been good for God to have answered him. But the result of our prayers is that the peace of God which passes knowledge shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Phil. 4). His throne is not disturbed, neither is His heart burdened by our solicitations; and the peace in which He dwells continually shall, when we have placed these requests on His throne, work effectually in our hearts. The outward manifestation of the power of God, the testimony

rendered at the beginning to the word of God, does not repeat itself; but God's care, His answers to prayer, and the blessed service of angels, still remain to the children of God. (For the angels, see Heb. 1:14.)

Here we find then God's care for the assembly at Jerusalem; but we shall not again see any activity on the part of Peter. That such was to be the case is demonstrated by the fact of this intervention. We know that he went to Antioch, probably for the work of the Lord, but this is not stated. There he was unfaithful to the Lord, and is reproved by Paul. He wrote to the Jews in the provinces of Asia Minor, but it is not known whether he went there. It is possible that he lived in Babylon, but it is uncertain; many Jews lived there. In his epistle he salutes on the part of the saints there; but we possess no account of any of his doings. He was the first to introduce the Gentiles to the public Christian assembly, in order to preserve unity.

At this period ordinary Christians, in their dispersion, disseminated the truth among the Gentiles. Unity was still preserved; and the wisdom of God declared, by means of the assembly at Jerusalem, that the Gentiles were not under the subjection of the law. But as for Peter no more is heard regarding his activity; for the divine work was now to leave Jerusalem. He is fully recognized here by the care of the angels, but the power of the Holy Spirit is only found in Paul and in his companions. Antioch is the starting-point, and not Jerusalem; as for Rome, it is the last place where the church is established, and it was not founded there by the apostles. Before the arrival of Paul Christians, who, like many others, had gone to the capital of the world, met together there; and Paul wrote to them before going. What became of Peter is not recorded, and, save in Acts 15, where

what he had previously done is mentioned, he now entirely disappears from the narrative. Paul, sent from Antioch by the Holy Spirit, is the instrument of God for the preaching of the gospel among the Gentiles, and to teach what the church was, the mystery which had been hid from ages and generations. See Colossians 1:23-27. It is his history which follows in Acts 13.

Meditations on Acts 13

Acts 13.

Barnabas and Saul, having accomplished their mission, return to Antioch, from whence they had gone to Jerusalem with the contribution for the poor. Now in the assembly at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers. These ministered to the Lord and fasted. While thus engaged, with hearts consecrated to the Lord, the Holy Spirit said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (Acts 13:2). Doubtless the command was given by the mouth of one of these prophets, for this reason called such; but the important fact to remark is that these two apostles were called by the Spirit Himself.

Then, under the impression of the seriousness of the call, having again fasted and prayed, they laid their hands on them and sent them away. And it was on a mission of the greatest importance. The gospel, and the revelation of the assembly, is now formally given to the Gentiles, they and the Jews, as believers, being united in one body on the earth and for the heavens. Let us consider a few particulars.

Already Paul had been called by the revelation and the authority of Christ, and more precisely by the revelation of a glorified Christ. Saul had not known Christ on the earth. Of this we have spoken. He had been separated both from the Jews and from the Gentiles. As regards religion, he did not belong to the one class any more than to the other, but was united to a risen and glorified Christ. Henceforth he knew no man after the flesh, not even Christ—that is, as a Jew who awaited a Christ on the earth, according to the

promises given to the nation. As a witness called by God his starting-point was the glory—Christ in heavenly glory, the same who had suffered by the hands of those who were still persecuting His members on the earth. For him the cross was the end of his Adamic and Judaic life. He was dead to the world, to the flesh, to the law. He labored as an apostle of, and one who belonged to, a new creation.

Moreover, he drew neither his authority nor his mission from the apostles who preceded him; his mission did not even originate at Jerusalem, and was not dependent on the sanction of the apostles there, nor of the church at that place. His mission was given directly from God and from Christ. Personally called by Christ three years before, he is now sent by the Holy Spirit, and departs from Antioch, a Gentile city, from the bosom of an assembly where the Gentiles had first gathered together. He did not go to or from another assembly. The superstition and legality of the Jews very nearly did so, but God did not permit it, as we shall see. His mission was nevertheless entirely independent; it was dependent on the authority of Christ alone, and on the power of the Holy Spirit. The apostle insists much on this point in the first two chapters of the epistle to the Galatians.

He desired to be absolutely independent of Peter and the others; and not only did he assert his having been sent from God Himself, but he was obliged to rebuke Peter, who, for fear of those who came from Jerusalem, had been unfaithful to the truth and to his own convictions. Paul was free from all men, subject to Christ, and in love the servant of all; a model and example for all Christians, as indeed he himself tells us. He fully recognized the mission of Peter to the Jews, as well as that of the other apostles; but though he

preached the same gospel as they, his mission was directly from God Himself.

Barnabas and Saul are not only called, but sent by the Holy Spirit. They depart therefore to Seleucia, and from thence sail to Cyprus. But here the state of the work is manifested—a new aspect of affairs. The Gentiles are disposed to listen. Judgment falls on the Jews for a time, on account of their opposition to the gospel, especially on its proclamation to the Gentiles. See 1 Thessalonians 2:16. Till now all the light that was in the world the Jews possessed; but, having rejected the true and perfect Light of the world, they had fallen into darkness, and hated the light, and all the more because jealousy filled their hearts. The apostle never denied their privileges. In Salamis he began by preaching in their synagogues. He did not give up the Jews till the Jews rejected the gospel.

Now John Mark, the son of her in whose house the disciples had met together to pray for Peter, was with them. The relationships of the apostle were still Judaic, for, though himself free, Paul profoundly loved his nation as the people of God. Having gone through the island, they find with the governor a certain Jew, a false prophet. The governor, a prudent man, desires to hear the word of God. The sorcerer Elymas, however, withstands the apostles, seeking to turn the deputy away from the faith. But if the hurtful power of the enemy was with the sorcerer, the power of God was with the apostles. They strike the false prophet with blindness. Such is a remarkable picture of the state of the Jews, and of the power of God shown in the propagation of the gospel. The deputy, astonished at the doctrine of the Lord, believes.

Saul now assumes the name of Paul, having (we are not told how) changed his Jewish name for a Roman one. The moment was a convenient one. The word literally signifies “to work”; but I do not think this is either the source or the intention of it.

After crossing the sea, John Mark leaves them. His relationship with Jerusalem was too strong for him, and the difficulties and dangers of the work of the apostles too great for his faith. Barnabas was his uncle; Cyprus, the country of Barnabas. Alas! how many there are whose faith depends on circumstances! They go on steadily while surrounded by these circumstances; but when the path leads to simple dependence on the faithfulness of God, their steps at once begin to flag.

The power of the Spirit of God creates His instruments, and adapts each for His work; and, set forth by the energy of the Spirit, they are sustained by His power in the midst of all circumstances, whatever they may be. We shall see that even Barnabas could not continue always with Paul, nor consent to know no longer any man after the flesh. But it is sweet to see how, as I have already said, Paul in the end recognizes Mark as profitable for the ministry (2 Tim. 4:11). So Mark goes away, and Barnabas and Paul continue their journeying in strange lands, where the gospel is unknown.

Leaving Perga, they come to another Antioch, in Pisidia, where they enter into the synagogue of the Jews. Called on by the rulers of the synagogue to exhort the congregation (for the ministry was freer among the Jews than in modern Christian churches), they announce Jesus and the resurrection. Let us notice certain points in this address. As was generally the case, it was composed of facts.

The apostle briefly relates the history of Israel till the time of David; and then lays down the two fundamental parts of the gospel—namely, the fulfillment of the promises, and the powerful intervention of God in the resurrection of Christ, by which He was shown to be the Son of God. In this way also he begins the Epistle to the Romans. All the narratives of the Acts depend on the mission given at the end of Luke. The subjects are repentance and remission of sins. For Israel the way had been prepared by John the Baptist. Then God, according to His promise, raised up (not raised from among the dead) a Savior.

But they of Jerusalem had accomplished all that the prophets had spoken, knowing neither the Savior nor the voice of the prophets, which, in crucifying Jesus, they had fulfilled. But God had raised Him from the dead, and He had been seen for many days by those who had accompanied Him from Galilee. Thus was the promise in Psalm 2 of the coming of the Son of God, the King of Israel, accomplished. But, we would add, as to the responsibility of Israel, it is lost on account of the rejection of Christ; yet on the part of God all the promises were firmly established in His resurrection according to Isaiah 55:3, and as to His person, the prophecy of Psalm 16 is accomplished. All that the Jews were now to receive was to be given in pure grace. On this foundation the doctrine of the gospel is established. The remission of sins is announced, and justification from all things, from which the law of Moses could not justify. The basis of the new covenant has been laid, and the blood of that covenant shed, though the covenant itself be not yet established. It will be with Judah and with Israel in the last days, but founded on what has been already accomplished.

The apostles then exhort their hearers not to neglect the salvation which had been announced to them. The fundamental truths of the gospel ever remain the same; the remission of all sins to believers; the person of Christ proved to be the Son of God by His resurrection; and the fulfillment of the promises made to Israel, though that people be for a time set aside. But this justification being for believers, it was for the Gentiles also.

The Gentiles then ask that these words may be preached to them on the next sabbath. The fame of this new doctrine quickly spreads, and nearly the whole city comes together to hear it. But the poor Jews, moved with jealousy, cannot bear to be surpassed in religious influence, and that another religion than theirs should work on the Gentiles. Oh, poor human heart, always stronger in religious people! The truth it has already believed in (and believed in because received by many, themselves unconverted; and because, besides being the truth, it does them honor to profess it) does not put the heart to the test. But truth is always truth, even though it be not received by the many; it does put the heart to the test, and must be received only because God gives it.

The Jews now begin to contradict and to blaspheme. Paul at once takes his stand, and acknowledging that the gospel ought first to be preached to the Jews, as heirs of the promises, openly declares that he turns to the Gentiles, taking the remarkable prophecy in Isaiah 49 as the commandment of the Lord. There the Spirit presents Israel as the nation in which God should be glorified. But then the Messiah had labored in vain, for Israel was not gathered in. Still it was but a small thing to bring back the tribes of Israel; the Messiah should be a light to the Gentiles, and the salvation of God to the ends of the earth.

On the ground of this declaration of the will of God, the apostles turn to the Gentiles.

Such was free grace, poured out on all, leaving the strict confines of Judaism, and directing itself to the whole world. But still the grace of God, mingled with faith, was necessary to make the truth enter the heart, so that it might be born of God. This is what happens here. The power of God accompanied the word and “as many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48). The result is this:—opposition on the part of the Jews, testimony throughout all the earth (except at Jerusalem, chap. 15), and the operation of grace in the heart, whereby it is led to the acceptance of the gospel.

Already, on the first sabbath day, many Gentiles and proselytes had followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. The Jews, however, on account of their failure, are put aside. The spiritual energy of Paul now places him at the head of the work. Till this moment it has been Barnabas and Paul; henceforth we shall find Paul and Barnabas.

The gospel is shed abroad in all these regions; but the opposition of the Jews increases. They “stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts.” Similar scenes are enacted everywhere. By the permission of God (He, however, still holding the reins in His own hand) the devotees of the old religion, and the devout women, with the chief men under their influence, seek to cast out the gospel. The apostles shake off the dust from their feet, in testimony of the justice awaiting those who rejected the grace and salvation

of God. "And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 13:52).

Such is the varied picture of the work of the gospel in the world, and the first public exhibition of its result, when announced in the face of the opposition of the old religion, which still exercised its power over unconverted hearts, in presence of the need and unbelief of mankind. And such, in spite of conflicts and difficulties, is the power of the gospel under the influence of the Holy Spirit. It is first preached to the Jews, because they had the promises; then it is given to the Gentiles, because all believers are justified by faith in Christ. A dead and risen Christ is for all. Opposition springs up from the hatred of the Jews, of the devout women according to the old religion, and of the principal men of the city. Judgment, though not executed, is pronounced; and then grace, working in the hearts of the believers, leads them to faith and joy in the presence of the Spirit, those who do not believe being left under judgment. Expelled from Antioch, the apostles prosecute their labors elsewhere.

Meditations on Acts 14

Acts 14.

At Iconium many believed, but the Jews renewed their efforts against the gospel. As God worked by the word, however, the apostles abode there a long time. But, the city being divided, and their adversaries desirous of doing them injury, they set out for Lystra and Derbe, where they preach the gospel, as also in the regions round about. At Lystra the power of God was manifested by the hand of Paul in healing a cripple who had never walked. Here we find that the faith of the cripple had to go with his restoration; in other cases this does not appear, the cure being effected by the power of God alone, by him who was His instrument.

The people, astonished by the miracle, call Barnabas Jupiter, and Paul Mercury, because he was the chief speaker. Barnabas (as Mercury was servant to Jupiter) is mentioned first in the narrative. The priest of Jupiter desires to do sacrifice with the people. The apostles, Barnabas and Paul, vexed in heart at seeing the purpose of the people, and far from desiring any honor for themselves, rend their clothes, and running in among the crowd to stop them, announce the one true God (not here salvation), who, till then, "had suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:16-17).

Such was the beautiful description of what God was, even among the Gentiles, and of what He gave to be known by them; I do not say that they did know Him,

for they preferred the imaginations of their own hearts, and the gods who favored their evil lusts. Nothing could *be* more horrible than what man showed himself to be, when God left him, on account of his perversity, to himself. What they did every day in their idolatry is unfit to be written. The account of it may be found in Romans 1. The apostles seek to persuade the Gentiles of Lystra to give up their idols, and to believe in the one, true, and bountiful God, whom they had come expressly to declare to them, to lead them to His knowledge and to faith in Him. Scarcely, however, do they succeed in preventing the people from sacrificing to them.

But the Jews (not satisfied with having driven the apostles from Antioch and Iconium, and moved by an animosity, grievous to the heart, against the gospel) come to Lystra also, and persuade the people, who, ignorant and fickle, now seek to stone those whom, shortly before, they had been ready to adore. Paul, the more culpable in their eyes because the more active in the work, is stoned, and, apparently dead, is dragged out of the city. Such is man—such the religious, when they have not the truth; Paul himself had been such—but such also is the power of the gospel, when active in an unbelieving world.

But it was not in the thoughts of God that His servant should then perish. “As the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city; and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.” Much blessed in this city, he goes on his way and returns to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, from whence he had been expelled. Outrage and violence neither impede the work nor enfeeble the courage of the servants. When the Lord so wills it, they return in peace to the very places from whence they have

been driven. It is beautiful to see the calm superiority of faith over the violence of man, and how God conducts the heart of His servants. They submit to, or, if possible, avoid violence; but if the work requires it, God opens the door, and the laborers are there with it again.

Now another part of their work is here presented. They continue to preach the gospel; but it was now necessary to establish assemblies, and put them in regular order (vs. 23). They give the disciples to understand that Christ was not come to bring peace on the earth which would meet with the opposition and enmity of the world, but that through much tribulation they must enter the kingdom of God. It was a warning for all times to make men understand that persecution was not a strange thing. "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12) — not, however, all Christians. If a Christian conforms to the world, he will avoid persecution; but he will lose the joy of the Holy Spirit and communion with God; he will be saved as by fire, and an entrance into the eternal kingdom shall not be abundantly ministered to him. If we walk with God, we shall not be barren in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

I speak thus, because for many the time of open persecution has passed away; but, if we are faithful, we shall most surely experience persecution both from the world and from our own families. The world cannot tolerate faithfulness. If the Christian walk with the world, instead of winning the world to Christ, he himself gets at a distance from Him, and will lose, I do not say life, but his spiritual privileges, his joy, and the approval of Christ; and his testimony is against Christianity. By his ways he declares that the friendship of the world is not enmity against God.

The Christian when with the world is in no respects at ease; and when in the company of spiritual Christians his conscience reproves him because he is walking badly, and that which is a joy to them, he cannot enter into. May all who are disposed to or in danger of being let to mingle with the ways of the world give heed to this exhortation!

The apostles chose elders for the assemblies in every city. It is neither chose by common vote, nor ordained; this is not the true rendering of the word, but “chose.” The same word is employed in 2 Corinthians 8:19, where the assemblies chose brethren to accompany Paul with the money collected for the poor of Jerusalem. The same word occurs again in Acts 10:41, where it is used in respect of God, and “chosen” is necessarily the sense. The apostles then chose elders for the assemblies. The epistle to Titus is another proof that the authority of the apostles was the source of that of the elders. I do not dwell here, however, on this question, though it is an important one, since the ordinary translation leads to putting the truth in a false light.

We have not in these days apostolical authority; and election made by the assembly is a thing unknown to the word. The authority descended from Christ to the apostle, and from the apostle to the elder. The word Bishop, in its present acceptation, is also unknown in the word. All the elders are really called bishops, as in Acts 20:17,28; no other bishops are found in scripture; and at the beginning Paul and Barnabas chose them for every assembly among the Gentiles, as afterward Paul sent Titus to establish them in every town in the island of Crete.

It is important here to observe that the apostle not only preached the gospel for the salvation of souls, which

was his principal work, but that he united the converts in assemblies, to which he was afterward able to write; and that the church or assembly which he founded in every city was properly ordered and represented the universal assembly, of which those who in each place composed it were members (1 Cor. 12), with the promise that Jesus would be in the midst of them. But the wickedness of Christians, or of Christians so-called, and forgetfulness of Christ's return (Matt. 24:48-50), have corrupted Christianity according to the prophecies of the New Testament. See 2 Timothy 3:1-5; Jude 4; John 2:18-19; Matthew 13:28-30. All is disorder, confusion and corruption.

But we are here learning the primitive order, before the assembly became corrupted. John tells us that the last time has already come; and Paul that "the mystery of iniquity doth already work" (2 Thess. 2:7); Peter, that the hour has arrived to judge the house of God; Jude, that those who should be judged at the end had already crept in unawares.

The testimony is as clear as day, if we have ears to hear what is written in the word; that in the time of the apostles the corruption of the assembly of God had already commenced, and that, when the apostolic energy of Paul should be absent, evil from within and from without would inundate the church like a deluge. Matthew 13:29-30 teaches us that the evil effected by the enemy in the kingdom of God should not be taken away till the judgment. It all exists still, while the patience of God gathers in His own.

Then, when they had prayed with fasting and had commended them that believed to the Lord, the apostles go down by Pisidia to the sea-shore, preach in Perga, and pass on to Antioch. Here we see the true force of what had been done in Acts 13:3. They had been recommended to

the grace of God, for the work they had now fulfilled. This is repeated in Acts 15:40, so that Paul would have been twice ordained, if this had been ordination; and he would moreover have been an apostle ordained by the laity. This, however, he stoutly denies (Gal. 1:1); "an apostle," he says, "not of men, neither by man." The Judaizers sought to have it so, but he refuted it with all his power. These insisted that his mission was from the church at Jerusalem, and opposed him precisely because it was not. He was not willing to be an apostle at all, if not from God, and from Jesus Christ.

It is to Antioch they go, not to Jerusalem; they return to their starting-point, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God. The work of the Holy Spirit connects itself with Antioch, in its earthly relationship; the power is all from above. There the apostles recount the great things which God had done for them, and how He had opened the door among the Gentiles. "And there they abode long time with the disciples" (Acts 14:28).

In the preceding narrative we find this history of the preaching of the gospel among the Gentiles, by formal apostolic mission, the difficulties, the position of the Gentiles and of the Jews, the circumstances under which it was propagated in the world, and that independently of Judaism and of Jerusalem, a work in which Peter took no part. God worked mightily by him among the Jews; but, except that he was employed to introduce the first Gentile, he had nothing to do with them. He was the apostle of the circumcision, and with the other apostles formally gave up the work among the Gentiles to Paul and to Barnabas (Gal. 2).

Meditations on Acts 15

But the Jews—those at least who made a profession of Christianity with Satan as their instrument—sought to place the Gentiles under the yoke of Judaism, and destroy the work of God within, if they could not hinder it without the church. They went down from Judea to Antioch, teaching the brethren that they must be circumcised, and observe the law of Moses, in order to be saved. The moment was a critical one. It was necessary, according to them, that the Gentiles should submit to the law of Moses, and become Jews, or that two separate assemblies should be formed. Paul and Barnabas, however, oppose themselves to these exactions. But God did not permit the question to be settled at Antioch.

It will readily be understood, that, had the cause of the Gentiles been vindicated by a decision given at Antioch, and, in spite of the Jews, they had preserved their liberty, the danger would have been imminent of two assemblies being formed, and of unity being lost. All the spiritual and apostolical power of Paul therefore was insufficient to overcome the opposing spirit at Antioch, and decide the question. It was God's will that it should be decided at Jerusalem, and that the Christian Jews themselves, the apostles, the elders, and the whole assembly, should pronounce the freedom of the Gentiles; and that thus holy liberty and unity should be secured. It is decided, therefore, that Barnabas and Paul shall go to Jerusalem concerning this matter. We learn from Galatians 2:2 that Paul went thither in obedience to direct revelation.

God permitted that these Jews, without mission, zealous without God for the law, the authority of which over the conscience had been terminated by the cross, should raise this question, so that it might be definitively settled. The apostles and elders, therefore, meet together. It seems that all the believers may have been present, since verse 12 speaks of the multitude; however it is the apostles and elders who meet together. Paul and Barnabas relate what has happened in their journey—the conversion of the Gentiles—and the brethren rejoice with great joy. Here the most simple hearts enjoy with simplicity the grace of God. But at Jerusalem they met with greater difficulty. Nothing could be more opposed to grace than the doctrine of the Pharisees, which asserted that righteousness must be obtained by works, and by the administration of ordinances.

Arrived at Jerusalem, they declare there also all things that God has done with them. But here God in His grace manifests the question as having been produced by the hardness of the heart; that is, that some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed demanded that the Gentiles should be circumcised. I do not believe, however, that it is Paul or Barnabas who relates this fact, which had happened at Jerusalem. The apostles and elders then meet together. After much disputing (for the principals, led doubtless by the Holy Spirit, were wise enough to allow all who thought themselves capable to give their opinion; and in order that after the thoughts of men the voice of God might be heard) Peter reminds the assembly how God had chosen him first to bear the gospel to the Gentiles, and that the Spirit had been given to Cornelius without his being circumcised; that God Himself had borne witness to them by the Holy Spirit just in the same way as to the

believing Jews; that He had made no difference between them, purifying their hearts by faith. He acknowledges the yoke of the ordinances, and warns them not to tempt God by putting it on the neck of the Gentiles. For did not they themselves believe that they had been saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus, and not by ordinances?

Then all the multitude kept silence, and Paul and Barnabas declared what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. (Here, at Jerusalem, Barnabas is always mentioned first; it is probable that he spoke more than Paul, relating what had been done. Paul had labored more than any other; but at Jerusalem it was natural that Barnabas should be more forward than Paul.)

Then James, who held the first place at Jerusalem (see Acts 12:17; 21:18; Gal. 2:12), gives a summary of the judgment of the assembly, which no one opposes, and, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, a definite form to the thought of God, expressing His will respecting the Gentiles. The work of the Holy Spirit is here in the first place remarkable; and also His full liberty, so that all the thoughts of men are brought to light, and given utterance to. In the next place, what God proposed to reveal by Peter in the case of Cornelius; and then the wonders that had been wrought by the hands of Barnabas and Paul among the Gentiles. Such is what seemed good to the Holy Spirit, who was given to Cornelius, and who wrought also among the Gentiles with signs and wonders by the hands of those who were sent out from Him.

Then James (who, as we have seen, represented the Judaic spirit, and in whose mind the feelings of the assembly at Jerusalem concurred, but who was fully under the influence of the Holy Spirit) expresses the thought of that assembly,

and of the eleven apostles of Jerusalem, whom we may call Judaic, the judgment of God on the vital question under consideration; namely, that the Gentiles should not be subject to the law of Moses. The word of the prophets supported this sentence, for they had declared that there should be Gentiles on whom the name of the Lord should be called. It is with this intention that he cites the past.

Thus the Gentiles were free. The things they had to observe were duties before the publication of the law. The worship of one God, and the purity of man, were always obligatory. Noah had been prohibited from eating blood, in testimony that the life belonged to God. These great principles are established by this decision—the abstaining from idols—that life belongs to God alone, purity of life in man. They were principles necessary for the Gentiles, and corrected their evil habits; principles recognized by the law, but which had not been distinctly laid down by it.

The assembly did not vote. All consented, under the influence of the Holy Spirit to what had been expressed. All agreed, apostles, elders, and the whole assembly, to send men chosen from among them to confirm by word of mouth the account of Barnabas and Paul, and the written decision which they took with them from Jerusalem. The apostles and elders assembled together to examine the question, but all the brethren joined with them in the letter sent to the Gentiles. Thus it was not the Gentiles who maintained their rights in spite of the assembly at Jerusalem, but by the wisdom and grace of God, the assembly at Jerusalem which acknowledges the liberty of the Gentiles as to the law; and unity is thus preserved.

We may add that it was not a general, or other assembly, for it was the assembly at Jerusalem, and the apostles and

elders of that city, who met together, with a few from Antioch on the part of the Gentiles, to consider the question. The Councils, for many centuries called "general," were convoked by the emperors to settle the disputes of the bishops: first in the east, on which occasions there were never more than six bishops present from the west; and afterward when the Greek church separated from the Latin church, when there was no emperor from the west, councils being assembled by the popes without a single bishop from the east being present. These popes, without one bishop from the east, and profiting by the need of the emperor of the east who was menaced by the Turks, sought to unite the east to the west in the fifteenth century at Florence, but the attempt failed.

What we have here is that the apostle and the Judaic assembly, by which God had begun the work, set the Gentiles free from the law; and unity is preserved. We learn, too, how the Holy Spirit gives unity of thought concerning the questions which had arisen, since the gathering was waiting on the Lord. Thus is the liberty of the Holy Spirit preserved to the Gentiles, and, by the goodness of God the unity of the whole assembly maintained. It is declared that no commission had been given to those who had disturbed the Gentiles, subverting their souls. Subsequently, after much long-suffering on the part of God the Jews are called, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, to give up Judaism. The law and Christianity cannot be united.

Paul and Barnabas, then, taking leave of Jerusalem, come to Antioch, assemble the multitude, and give them the letter. The brethren, having read it, rejoice for the consolation. Thus was the state of the whole assembly settled, and also the relationship between the Jews and

Gentiles. The necessary rule for them is established. They are to walk well, avoiding certain things. Judas and Silas remain for a time with the disciples at Antioch, exhorting them, and rejoicing in this new fellowship of the love of the assembly at Jerusalem for the brethren among the Gentiles. Then Judas leaves them, but Silas, drawn towards these new brethren, remains at Antioch. Paul and Barnabas also remain there, teaching the brethren; and many others likewise interest themselves on their behalf; for the power of the Holy Spirit was working in their midst. Life was fresh in those days.

After some time Paul, active and full of love, his work accomplished for the moment at Antioch, turns towards the gatherings he had founded, desiring to know how it fared with them. But now Barnabas, like Peter before him, disappears from the scene. Not that he no longer worked for the Lord, but he did not maintain himself at the same level of service of Paul. Eclipsed in the work when with him, now he disappears altogether. A good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith, he was yet not detached from everything as was Paul, for whom, according to his call on the way to Damascus, Christ glorified and His own was all in all.

This remarkable servant of God knew no longer anything after the flesh—a consecration necessary to the founder of the church of God. He had given up Judaism that he might become a minister of the economy of the church. (See 1 Cor. 3:10; Eph. 3:1-2; Col. 1:23-25.) This economy had always existed in the counsels of God, but after the delay granted by His patience till the preceding mission of Paul from Antioch, which mission was then only put into execution, it is put on its true footing, on

account of the attachment of Barnabas to things which were only objects of natural affection. John Mark was the son of the sister of Barnabas, and the island of Cyprus his native country (Col. 4:10; Acts 4:36).

Barnabas was quite disposed to accompany Paul in his journey, but he wished to take Mark with him; this, however, was displeasing to Paul, for Mark had left them in the preceding journey at Perga. He had not courage sufficient to confront the difficulties of the work outside of Cyprus. Paul only thought of God, Mark of the circumstances; but it is not thus that difficulties are to be overcome. It is possible that the flesh may have manifested itself in Paul; but at all events he could not boast of being in the right. Paul did not think of the economy entrusted to him, but of what according to faith suited the work—the principle of life and heart necessary to accomplish it. He did not know the results, but what was necessary to produce them. Separation was necessary, and that God had wrought out in him. Still acerbity was unnecessary. At the bottom Paul was right, and the hand of God was with him. Even where the purpose of the heart is just, the flesh may very soon manifest itself.

Barnabas separates himself, and sets out for Cyprus, his country, taking Mark, his nephew, for the work of the Lord, but no longer the companion of Paul in the work to which God had called him. We do not forget the real worth of Barnabas, a true servant of Jesus, to whom the Holy Spirit Himself has borne witness; only he was not suited to that work. We learn ourselves that a heart consecrated to the Lord, without other attachment, separated from everything, is alone suited to represent Christ in a ministry such as that of Paul, and indeed in every true ministry.

Affection is good, but it is not consecration. Woe to us if we have not natural affection—it is a sign of the last times (2 Tim. 3:8); but these are not suited to such a work, a work which demands that one should not know anything after the flesh. Natural affection is not the “new creation,” though fully recognized by God in Christ Himself, when He was not in the work; neither is natural affection the power of the Holy Spirit, which alone produces the effects of grace in the work of God.

Barnabas then goes his way; such was his will. Paul chooses Silas, and is recommended by the brethren to the grace of God—a second ordination if it were a question of that, but it is quite another thing. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches. Remark here that many had been formed where the apostle had not before been, as he found the first time he passed through the island of Cyprus.

Meditations on Acts 16

Now from the beginning of Acts 16 down to the end of Acts 20 we have the public ministry of Paul among the Gentiles during many years when he has commenced his apostolic ministry (as under the grace and direction of the Lord, head of the work), having undertaken it, it being laid upon his heart by the power of the Holy Spirit, and taking with him first of all Silas, and afterward other co-laborers but always to help him—in a work, in which by the authority of the Lord and led of the Spirit, he held the first place; the activity, the direction, and the movement proceeded from him, the others who accompanied him being only co-laborers and being under his direction: but he stands alone now as apostle of the Gentiles (Rom. 11:13; Eph. 3; Rom. 1:13,15; Gal. 2:7-8).

We have seen that now Barnabas has separated himself. Paul (1 Cor. 3), as a wise master builder has laid the foundation; others worked independently, as Barnabas and Apollos. But Paul had the revelation of the mystery of the church, and the administration of the economy among the Gentiles to found and set in order everything. See 1 Corinthians 16:1; 7:17 and many other passages. Timothy and Titus and Silas, and many others named in his epistles labored under his direction; and he sent them wherever the exigencies of the work required. He had already taken with him Silas; and now, having returned to Lystra and Derbe, he chooses Timothy to whom the brethren bore a good testimony.

It appears that Paul laid his hands upon him (2 Tim. 1:6), the young man having been marked out by prophecy, as he had been himself; then the testimony of the elders was added, and they also laid on their hands (1 Tim. 4:14). It is possible that Paul may have laid his hands upon him when he visited Derbe on his first journey.¹⁰ That, however, is not said; at the same time, it was known by the brethren of Lystra and of Iconium, as also at Derbe; prophecy had marked him out; and the testimony of all, manifested by the laying on of the hands of the elders, confirmed it. Paul conferred on him the gift of the Spirit (2 Tim. 1:6-7) by the laying on of his hands, although it may not be said openly when it is quite possible that he might have been active already in that locality, but he was specially gifted for the present work by that imposition of hands of the apostle.

There yet remains a special fact to remark upon. Confusion had entered into the practical life of the Jews, as among the Christians. The mother of Timothy was a Jewess, his father a Greek; a thing unlawful among the Jews. His mother was pious (it is not said if it was before his conversion or after); also his grandmother was so (2 Tim. 1). Now such a marriage was totally contrary to the custom of the Jews. (See Neh. 13:23-31; Ezra 9-10.) According to these books the sons and daughters were heathen, and ought to be rejected and sent away, as well as the wife. It was a disorder. Paul availing himself, not of the law but of the privileges of grace, and thinking of the Jews, of whom there were many in those regions, circumcises Timothy.

10 In Acts 20:4, the reading should be: "and Gaius and Timotheus of Derbe." Gaius was not of Derbe. The difference is only in the punctuation.

This was not according to Judaism; on the contrary, it was against its order, but he took away what would have been a stumbling-block for the Israelites. It was pleasing to the Jews: he did it to gain them; in a word, it was not a legal act, quite the contrary. It was an act of superiority to the law. The Jews all knew that his father was a Greek; and the position of Timothy, his mother being a Jewess, was scandalous for them, and the apostle takes away the scandal. The hearts of the Jews would find themselves contented; and they would have had something to say if the son of a Greek, by whom his mother had been rendered impure, had presented to them the gospel. It was an arbitrary act, but the scandal was taken away, and he went against the prejudices of his people. But when the Jews wished to force him to circumcise Titus, he yielded to them not even for a moment (Gal. 2:3-5).

At the same time, as they passed “through the cities they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and the elders”; a perpetual testimony, if the Christian Jews should wish to put their brethren from among the Gentiles under the law of Moses, that they acted against the thoughts and authority of the apostles and of the elders, of those whom the Lord had established for Christ by the Holy Spirit, who in the Jewish church itself were as an authority. That the Judaisers were not in any way authorized by the chief men gives a source of joy to the Gentile brethren thus established in the faith.

And remark how the Christian faith is now spread throughout all the regions where Paul prosecuted his labors; and the number of those gathered together increased daily. Now we follow his labors in other countries and regions.

Here we find another precious truth: the perpetual direction of God by the way, be it directly by the Spirit, or be it by other intimations. Paul was sent to preach the gospel to the entire creation under heaven; but that field is large, and so he labors under the authority of the Lord, the Son, who is over the house of God; as also He was announced as Lord and Savior to poor sinners. They execute then this mission in Phrygia, and in the regions of Galatia. He had already commenced in Phrygia on his first journey, but now he enters Galatia, a large province, for the first time. These had suddenly gone astray from the right way, through the means of Judaizing Christians: people who wished, as we have seen, to join the law to Christianity. We possess the epistle written by the faithful care of the apostle to deliver them from their error: an epistle more severe than all, since they had taken away the divine foundation of righteousness and true holiness — more severe than that to the Corinthians, who had committed nevertheless sins more horrible than the heathen, and had got into deplorable disorder. He says all the good he can to the Corinthians, although he does not spare them as regards their deeds, but reproaches them; and also he did not wish to visit them until they repented. But as to the Galatians he says nothing loving to commence with, but sets himself at once to reproach them, and at the end salutes no one. Troubled in his heart he does not know how to take them (chap. 4:20), he would wish to be among them in order to speak according to their wants. His love had not grown weak, but he travailed again in birth of them until Christ was formed in them. We see the power of the love of the blessed apostle. Moses, weary, fatigued by the unbelief of the people, asks if he had brought forth all this people that

he should carry them as a father. Paul, full of the love of Christ, is contented to do it a second time rather than lose them. He was their father in the faith; so powerful is the love of Christ in the heart!

After having crossed Phrygia and Galatia, the Holy Spirit forbids them to preach in Asia. Later he dwelt about three years in Ephesus, the capital of the province; and all Asia¹¹ heard the word of God. Arrived in Mysia they essay to go into Bithynia; but the Spirit of Jesus suffers them not. Having passed by Mysia, they come to Troas. There Paul has a vision in a dream. It was not the open direction of the Spirit; it was left to spiritual intelligence to understand the meaning. A man of Macedonia appeared to him, beseeching him to come and succor them.

As Paul lived in the things of God, he interpreted the vision as his mission, by the knowledge he had both of the thoughts of God and of the wants of men, and passed over therefore at once into Macedonia. Perhaps it is not very important, but we may remark here, that for the first time we find the writer speak in the first person: "We endeavored"; that is to say, Luke, who has written the facts, becomes now the companion of Paul in his work.

Here the question presents itself: In what manner and to what extent can we expect the direction of God in our work? The answer is analogous to that which we have already given with respect to the intervention of God in order to liberate us from dangers. We cannot expect visible and sensible interventions; but we can expect with certainty the care and direction of God by His Spirit in the heart, if we walk with Him—To "be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Col.

11 Then it was the name of a province of the Roman Empire.

1:9)—to be led by the Spirit if we walk in humility. See Romans 8:14; Colossians 1; also Psalm 32:8-9. I do not doubt that, if we walk with God and look to Him, the Spirit will put in our hearts the special things that He wishes us to do. Only it is important that we keep in memory the word of God, in order that it may be a guard against all our own imaginations; otherwise, the Christian who lacks humility will do his own will, often taking it for the Holy Spirit. That is but the deceitful folly of his heart; first, that it knows them; secondly, taking it for the Holy Spirit: but, I repeat, he who looks with humility to the Lord will be conducted by the Lord in the way; and the Holy Spirit who dwells in him will suggest to him the things which He wishes him to do. "He that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man . . . We have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:15-16).

Here then the apostle gathers that the Lord had sent him to Macedonia, and goes there. He stops at Philippi, the principal city of the country and a Roman colony. He commences, as he always does, with the Jews. It appears that there was not synagogue—there. It was the custom of the Jews to have their worship in such a case, as it is still, on the banks of the river—I believe, for the sake of purification. There were but a few women there: Paul contented himself with them, and spoke to them of Christ, and of salvation through Him. There was Lydia, a proselyte who worshipped the true God; she was among these women, had not the knowledge of Christ, but the piety which does not neglect the worship of the Sabbath day in a far distant country, where it was not the natural occasion to observe it. The blessing is accorded at least to that one in whose heart this faithfulness is found. The Lord opened the heart

of Lydia to attend to the things spoken by Paul. She was a Gentile, but brought to the knowledge of the only true God; and she is another example of the difference between conversion and the knowledge of salvation in Christ.

There were many such worshippers—their souls were wearied with the folly and iniquity of paganism, which was insufficient to satisfy the needs of the soul, and through grace they were turned to the only true God known among the Jews, and they frequented the Jewish worship, without being circumcised. They were called religious persons, persons who served God. They listened to the apostle more than the Jews, and were often the occasion of their jealousy; of this class was Lydia. See Acts 17:17 and 13:16 where it is said, “and ye which fear God.” They are found without being named, in Acts 13:1, and distinctly verse 43, and also elsewhere. Lydia is baptized with all her house: and Paul and his companions enter her house and dwell there. It may be said that now the assembly was founded at Philippi.

But the enemy is not satisfied to allow the work to make progress, without doing anything to oppose it. On the contrary he works with deceit; he does not assail the work openly. He has the appearance of helping it, certainly not recognizing Christ as Lord, because then he would no longer be Satan (the adversary), but flattering the apostle, in order to be able to mix himself up with the work of the Lord, to accredit himself with this union, and to spoil it at the same time. He acts thus with more finesse in order that Christians may be less wise to refute him. To be supported by the world (and Satan is the prince of it) will appear to be a great help to the progress of the gospel. The enemy disguises himself, makes himself the friend of the servants

of God and of the work, transforms himself into an angel of light. The Gibeonites with deceit made themselves the friends of Israel, and in consequence they were never conquered, as our friends are not conquered. Thus, when the Christian or the assembly, mixes itself with the world, the loss is always on the side of the Christian, because the world in its nature is always with its motives, but the flesh is always in the Christian. He may draw near to the world, but not the world to the Spirit. The testimony, however, is lost. Wine mixed with water is no longer pure wine, it has lost its taste. The friendship of the world is enmity against God.

The world seems amiable when it draws near to Christians and their testimony, but it draws near to Christians to spoil their testimony, and to put itself in esteem; but to Christ it cannot draw near. The spirit of Python can flatter the servants of God in order to gain them; it can speak of God, of the most high God, even of the way of salvation, but not of Christ Lord and Savior, of the state of sin and guilt in which man is, in which he is lost. That would be to confess that he who says such things is lost. That is quite another story. When the world unites itself to Christians, their testimony is lost, and the fault is always that of the Christians. They accept the world, because they have already lost true spirituality, the love of Christ rejected by the world, the love of the holy glory of His cross in which His heavenly glory was exhibited in this world.

But the apostle does not seek to excite the enmity of Satan, he does not accept that testimony, he keeps himself ever separate, neither does he act so as to change it into open opposition. He continues quietly on his way. At last he can

no longer bear the voice of the unclean spirit, it being so grievous to his heart that he associated himself with him; he casts him out by the power of the Holy Spirit. Suddenly the enmity of the natural heart under the influence of the world is revealed. And that influence is more fatal for man than the possession of the body and faculties.

The Lord drove out the legion with a word; but the world, frightened by the manifestation of divine power, cast out Jesus from its confines. Similarly here, the demon being cast out, the masters of the damsel through human motives to which the demon lent himself, seeing that their gain was lost, stirred up a persecution against Paul and Silas.

What the servants of the most high God do is now of no consequence. Man's god is money, power and human glory. Satan never wishes that the power of God should be cast out. To be recognized, accredited, to join himself to the excellency of the truth pleases him, because he knows well that true power is with God, and thus that which remains of the truth in effect increases his influence, for that is now only increased, not destroyed. He will speak sufficiently of the truth to deceive Christians if it were possible, in order that, such as he is as prince of the world, he may not the less be in light.

The pure light manifests him, and thus is it that Christianity, and Christians, less wise than the apostle, have mixed themselves with the world, and the result is that Christianity lies under the power of Satan. The apostle did not act thus; but now it is quite possible persecution will arise, and that is what came to pass here. If the enemy cannot accredit himself with the gospel, he will oppose it.

The motives were purely human, the influence that of Satan. The motives presented to the magistrates were nothing but false pretexts. They worked on the pride and the fear of the authorities, who desired peace, and that was disturbed by the enemies, not by the Christians. Besides the gospel did not oppose Roman dignity which possessed the city, it being a colony. The magistrates ask no more; they had stirred up a multitude which strove for its privileges. Rending their clothes, they command them to be beaten, and then send them to prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely. He, having received such a charge, thrusts them into the inner prison, making their feet fast in the stocks.

All then was tranquillized; but the magistrates thought nothing of justice, nor of paying costs (feeing counsel) for poor evangelists. But God has not forgotten them, and bears marked testimony to His servants. He permits them to be punished unjustly, and it is their glory to make no resistance. It is a means by which still brighter testimony may be given to His word, and to His servants.

They are thrust then into the inner prison, and there sing praises to God, and the prisoners hear them. Suddenly there is a great earthquake, the doors of the prison are opened, and every one's bands are loosed. God intervenes for His own, and to bear testimony to His word. When persecution is allowed, the wickedness of man can do much, but he cannot hold against the power of God those who fall into his hands. The jailor wishes to kill himself; but Paul crying out that they were all there, prevents him from doing so. Leading out Paul and Silas, he asks them what he must do to be saved. The answer is simple, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy

house" (Acts 16:31). The word is then announced to him and his, and he is baptized with his house. He then cares for his prisoners, and washes their stripes, being filled with joy and peace with all his house.

Tranquility restored, the magistrates, believing that all trouble is thus ended, send word to the jailor to let Paul and Silas go. But it was a struggle between the testimony of God and the power of Satan; it was necessary that the unjust magistrates should own their fault, and the rights of the gospel of God. Paul did not wish to excite this struggle (an important warning to us), but to continue his work peacefully. The devil was seeking to mix himself up with the work, to associate himself, to the eyes of the world, with what was done by the servants of God. This provoked the apostle. It was necessary either to receive the testimony of the devil, and join his name to that of Christ, or to enter into a struggle. He casts out, therefore, the unclean spirit; and open war is thus at once declared.

Satan is the prince of this world; and the world, stirred up by the present power of God in the work of the Spirit, is, unless kept down by God, stronger than His servants. Here God permits the world to manifest itself in violence and injustice, in the multitude as much as in the magistrates. The servants of God submit to this injustice, are beaten and cast into prison, their enemies being the guilty ones, as is nearly always the case. I say nearly, because it is possible for Christians to fail in wisdom, and to provoke a struggle without cause. They do not resist; but here the power of the Holy Spirit and the state of their souls show complete superiority to circumstances. Full of joy in prison and in the stocks, they can sing praises. Testimony is rendered even to the prisoners. As far as the body is concerned, the

world is stronger than the Christian, if God allows it to act; but in soul, the Christian is always above circumstances, if he can realize the presence of God. His presence is the greatest of all circumstances, and overcomes the others. One can rejoice even in sufferings, as we see in Acts 5:41; Romans 5:5.

Moreover, God makes use of the circumstances, and enters, so to speak, into the struggle Himself; the doors are opened, and the bands are loosed. In body man is powerless, unless God see fit to intervene; and often He does so by His providence, if not in a miraculous way. All were witnesses or convinced that God was victorious in the struggle—though some, in spite of themselves. The magistrates had taken part in the wrong with great injustice, and it was necessary, therefore, that they should own their fault. Now that all was calm, they sought, in the wisdom of the world, to let the affair blow over in silence. But when God works and shows Himself, He makes it plain that He has rights in this world.

Paul and Silas were in prison against all the rights of God and of men; and the magistrates are obliged by the firmness of Paul to own their fault, and to ask the servants of the Lord as a favor to depart. This, as it suited them, they do without delay; only, being perfectly free, they enter into the house of Lydia, see the brethren, comfort them, and depart.

When Paul sought to make use of his rights as a Roman in order to arrest injustice, he lost his liberty, and was sent a prisoner to Rome, although the Lord had directed everything. But here he did not attempt to arrest injustice; he submitted, only taking advantage of this right afterward, when it was a question of the innocence of the gospel and

of its conduct, and when it happened that the magistrates, and not he, were in the wrong.

But God has this peculiar work in the world, the blessings of grace; and makes sure of all this for the conversion of the jailor. He works as a man of the world at his post; but by this manifest intervention of God, he is awakened, convinced of sin, and given to feel his need of salvation. Now that all call themselves Christians, one asks if a man is a good Christian, truly converted; but then all were heathens or Jews, and became Christians. Now Christianity is salvation. The grace of God has brought salvation into the world in the Son of God; and by His work on the cross, it is announced by the Holy Spirit. The need makes itself felt when the conscience is moved by the Holy Spirit. What it seeks for is salvation, as here does the jailor. The answer is simple and clear: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

The object of faith is the person of the Lord Jesus, and the redemption accomplished by Him; and all believers, reaping the benefits of this work, are saved. Now one investigates and scrutinizes in order to know whether one has faith in the heart, and whether it be true faith. We all pass more or less through this state, but true peace is never to be found there. It is perhaps, however, useful in humbling us, and teaching us that in us dwells no good thing. But we are not called upon to believe in the faith which is in us, but to believe in Christ Jesus; and God declares that all believers are justified, and have eternal life. I do not examine my eyes to know whether I see, but look at the object before them, and know that I see. People quote the passage in 2 Corinthians 13:5; but those who do so deceive themselves, leaving out the correct beginning

of the passage, “Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me ...examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith” (2 Cor. 13:3,5). The apostle shows them their folly in doubting his true apostleship. If Christ had not spoken by him, since they had received his word, how was it that he had been the means of their conversion? For the same reason he continues to inquire, “Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you” (2 Cor. 13:5). Christ therefore had spoken by his mouth. There were many proofs of his apostleship. Here he shows them their stupidity, because if he were not an apostle, they would not be Christians. Of their conversion they had no doubt. If we examine ourselves to know whether we walk as Christians, we do well; but if we do so to know whether we are Christians, it is not according to the word.

Faith looks towards Jesus, not towards self. The experience of the examination of the heart, in order to discover what passes there to make one believe, leads us to see that it is impossible thus to find peace, or even victory, for we are looking at what is behind us; when we are convinced of this, the answer of God is there—He has given salvation in Christ, and he who believes is justified. The Lord says, “Thy sins are forgiven...thy faith hath saved thee go in peace” (Luke 7:48,50). The woman looked to Jesus, and believed His word, not thinking of the state of her own heart. The state of her heart, the conviction that she could not find peace and salvation in herself, led her to look to Jesus, and in Him she found peace. The gospel gives the answer of God to the heart clearly and fully. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

I learn by experience that in me dwells no good thing, and that I have not the strength to conquer. I cease to look

towards myself, as though I could become better. The flesh is always there; the will may be good (in a converted man), but practice does not correspond to will. Not amendment, but salvation, is needful to us: and that we possess in Christ by faith, and, in salvation, peace. Being unable to accomplish justice in ourselves, we submit to the justice of God. By the faith that Christ Himself is our justice before God, we learn by experience what we are ourselves. This experience is itself the fruit of the work of the word by the Spirit in the heart; but by this we learn that we are lost, that, looking to Christ, we are saved. "Believe...and thou shalt be saved." Good works are what suit the position we then occupy. It is the same in human relationships of children, wives, servants; it is necessary to be in the relationship, or the duties do not exist. When we are saved, we become the sons of God, and then we find the duty of sonship; but it cannot exist before we are sons. The duty of man as the creature of God existed, but on that ground we are lost. Christian duty does not begin till we are Christians. It is remarkable, here and elsewhere, how whole households are admitted to the Christian assembly.

Meditations on Acts 17

Acts 17.

To suffer with patience, to sing in the midst of tribulation — this is power; then with the same strength we can, when free, carry on the Lord's work, with like courage. So says the apostle, referring to such circumstances, in 1 Thessalonians 2:2; having been stoned and shamefully entreated at Philippi, he boldly and energetically continues to preach the gospel at Thessalonica. It is there we find him at this point of our narrative. God leads through persecution just as by all other means. The Apostle selects localities where there were synagogues. Passing through Amphipolis and Apollonia, he stops at Thessalonica; where was a synagogue. It was a large city, where to this day many Jews are to be found. "To the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16), characterized his work.

In Philippi we find Satan's opposition apart from the Jews, for, though Paul had there sought the Jews also, they had no part whatever in the conflict. The enemy had desired to identify himself with the work of the gospel, falsifying it in order to avoid the destruction of his own power: but he does not support open opposition. But when the religious element is present — that is a religion which boasts of possessing the rights conferred by God on His own on the earth, the professors of which do not submit to the truth — this is always a source of persecution. In Philippi it was simply an arrogant and self-interested people who spurned all religions which spoke of the true God, as well as everything else except its own superstitions,

and only sought to preserve peace under the government of Satan. It was the world that cast out Paul, as the Gadarenes did Jesus. It could endure the manifestation neither of the truth, nor of the power of God.

In the narrative which follows we again find the religious element in enmity to the truth; the Jews jealous of the gospel of grace, and of the Gentiles, to whom it was announced, although the former had the first place in its administration. For three sabbaths Paul reasons with the Jews of Thessalonica in the synagogue, according to the custom, showing them that it was expedient that Christ should suffer, and rise again, and that Jesus was this Christ. Some of the Gentiles, who worshipped the true and one God, whose need had led them to recognize Him who had revealed Himself, believed. They were many in number, and of the chief women not a few.

The blessing of God does not fail to excite the jealousy of the Jews, and to the enmity of the human heart all means are lawful. Stirring up the people of the baser sort, they assault the house of Jason, seeking to bring out the servants of God, but they do not find them there. Jason, however, and certain other brethren they drag before the rulers of the city, accusing them of teaching doctrines opposed to the authority of Caesar, and of saying that there was another king, Jesus. But the rulers, troubled, it is true, with the people, were wiser than those of Philippi; for, taking security of Jason, they let them go. The chief culprits, Paul and his companions, not being found, were not there; and the brethren, finding the door shut for the moment against the work, send Paul and Silas to Berea, a neighboring city.

In the epistles to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 2:14), where also the apostle speaks of the state of the Jews (2

Thess. 1:4), it appears that immediately after the apostle's departure, a violent persecution sprang up, and that the converts suffered greatly, but remained faithful, so that their faith became celebrated everywhere. It was to these that the apostle wrote his two first epistles, immediately after his departure from Athens and Corinth, in order to encourage them to persevere, having sent Timothy from Athens, to know if they stood fast in the faith (1 Thess. 3:1). In reading these epistles, and Acts 18:6, we find that the first was written from Athens when Silas and Timothy had rejoined him (Acts 17:15; Thess. 1:1). Then he had sent Timothy to Thessalonica, who, on his return, brings good tidings of the state of the Thessalonians. The first epistle is then written. It seems that Silas and Timothy had come back and again rejoined the apostle, when he had already left Athens and was come to Corinth (Acts 18:5).

Of this journey we have no account, but it is the proof of the tender care with which the apostle watched over the new converts, and sought to establish them in the faith and path of Christ. The two epistles are remarkable for the freshness and affection of the communications, of which they are full, and especially the first, for the testimony which the apostle could render to the state of the disciples.

It will be useful to examine for a little what the apostle taught during his short stay at Thessalonica. We have very little, almost nothing, of the apostle's discourses outside of the synagogue. At Athens he makes a speech in the Areopagus, but he does not preach. He preached, it is said, Jesus and the resurrection. Let us gather up what is said here. In the synagogue he maintained that Christ should suffer and rise again from among the dead; moreover, he announced the kingdom of God, because He was accused

of having taught that there was another king, Jesus (Acts 20:25). Short though the time was in Thessalonica, yet during his sojourn there, he had taught the disciples the coming of the Lord; which, in reading the Epistle, is perfectly clear. The disciples had learned that Jesus had delivered them from the wrath to come, the resurrection, and the expectation of the Son of God from heaven; that they were called to suffer with Christ, and to walk in holiness; the coming of the Lord with fire for judgment, and that with all His saints; that they should be caught up to meet the Lord; that the man of sin should be revealed, and that the mystery of iniquity was already working, but that they were called to share the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. He taught salvation by the truth and by faith through the power of the Holy Spirit who sanctified them for God; and all this by grace, to those who were chosen for salvation. Even the peculiarities of the last days were communicated to them (2 Thess. 2:5).

But all this was for the disciples; only the coming of the Lord in judgment of the living—this world—was announced to all, and they were exhorted to flee from the wrath to come, from which Jesus was the deliverer. It was necessary now to announce facts known to all; but if he speaks of salvation, the person of the Lord, as also His coming, has a far greater place in his doctrine than in that of the preachers of today. A present salvation is clearly announced, through Christ dead for us, so that we might live with Him. That which was everywhere presented for salvation is described with much simplicity and clearness in 1 Corinthians 15, Christ put to death for our sins, buried, and raised up the third day. But here also the facts hold a greater place than now. We reason on the value of

the facts, and this is necessary; but the more the facts are put in evidence, the more will the preaching be powerful.

While the people are occupied with Jason, Paul sets out for Berea, and with undiminished courage enters into the synagogue of that city. Here the grace of God is manifestly with him, to dispose the hearts of the Jews to listen, and to search the word, and many believe. But the unhappy Jews carry on their work, and come from Thessalonica, to stir up the people against Paul and the others. It is mournful to see their permanent hatred to the gospel. But it is ever thus with an old religion set aside by truth which its professors will not receive.

A few brethren conduct Paul to Athens, and he sends an order to Silas and Timothy to join him there at once. But with all this, the enemy does nothing but order the path of the gospel, according to the will of God.

Now at Athens the sight of the idolatry ardently practiced in that city pressed heavily on the spirit of the apostle. He reasons in the synagogue with the Jews, and daily in the market with them that met with him. Athens had been a city famous for the glory of its arts and of its arms, and for its schools of philosophy. Having succumbed to the Roman yoke, it had lost its importance, and lived in idleness, seeking for some new thing, still philosophizing, and boasting in the memory of its ancient glory in pagan philosophy, surpassed perhaps by that of Alexandria and Tarsus (where Paul himself had been educated), although where the leaders of Roman society studied. The fruit was not great in this vain and idle city, but the instruction for us is precious.

The apostle's discourse at the Areopagus was not the preaching of the gospel. It was his apology before an ancient

tribunal whose decisions had, in times gone by, possessed great weight, but which then, though still allowed to exist, no longer retained its ancient importance. But the fact that the apostle was obliged to present himself before the tribunal, gave him the opportunity of manifesting the wisdom and grace he possessed through the Spirit of God. As we have seen he preached in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia. In the market-place, where the philosophers and townspeople met together, he announced Jesus and the resurrection, His person, His victory over death, the testimony that God had accepted the sacrifice of Christ, and moreover that in Him we are admitted into a new creation (a position which Adam, even in innocence, never occupied) the kingdom of the second, of the last Adam.

I do not say that all these points were unfolded, but the apostle announced the grand foundations on which all these truths are built up. He did so according to the need and capacity of his hearers; and nobody is so incapable as a philosopher, and those under his influence and who walk in the vain thought of being something, when in reality they are nothing, and such was the true character of the Athenians. Knowledge is blinding. Human intelligence does not know God. God enters the conscience when He speaks in order to make Himself known; and in proportion to the pretension of the human mind to intelligence, is the hardness and inaction of the conscience. It is as though dead, and man as though he had none, and therefore no capacity to receive the truth whereby he may know God. These wise men thought that Jesus and the resurrection were gods, so far were they from the truth. The mind of man, and the activity of his intelligence, when it is a question of morality and of God, can do nothing but always drive him

farther and farther away. He finds no basis for morality, and consequently no true rule; and when God is submitted to the human understanding, He is no longer God in any sense. God does not present Himself to man in order to know what he ought to be. Conscience and faith put God in His own place, and man in his true relation to God; and the word is the means of doing so, the word in which God reveals Himself, and shows what man is.

Some mocked the apostle, saying, "What will this babbler say?" Ridicule is often a means in the hands of the enemy to turn away souls from the truth, because men are afraid to identify themselves with what others despise. Conscience and moral courage are the very last things to be found in the heart of man: grace awakens conscience, and gives strength to follow it. Still here was something new; and that was always enough for the Athenians, fatigued by the nonentity of their existence. Accordingly they lead Paul to the Areopagus, once honorable and honored, in order to know what this new doctrine might be. Because however frivolous philosophical opinions may be, they cannot quietly endure either truth or Christ. One human opinion may be as good as another; but the testimony of God operates on the conscience, and demands the heart.

Paul, surely taught by the Holy Spirit, replies in the Areopagus with admirable wisdom, and a calm love which lays hold on the sole circumstance to which he could attach the truth he desired to communicate to them. His practiced eye had observed in the city the only little remnant of truth by which he could lead them to recognize their true position. It was not simply a declaration of the salvation of the soul, which had already occupied him in the synagogue and public market-place; here he explains

the true character of the religion of idols, but with perfect delicacy; and seeks to bind that remnant of truth which the enemy had not been able to destroy, with truth more positive, with the name of Jesus, and with that which appealed to the conscience.

The people of the city, idle and at heart skeptical, were given up to idolatry; and, the circle of the gods being exhausted, they had dedicated an altar to the unknown God. It is said that in former times a fatal malady had reigned in the city; and that the inhabitants, having prayed in vain to all the gods to remove the plague, had consulted an oracle, who directed them to dedicate an altar to the unknown God. It is unnecessary, however, to seek for any special source of this worship. At the bottom of all idolatry there is the idea of God, corrupted, and taken possession of by Satan, so that men may worship demons; but the idea cannot be eradicated from the heart of man. Infidels seek to do so, but it always remains at the bottom of the heart, in spite of all their efforts. It is born with the birth of man, and creation bears witness too clear and too strong to allow the heart to believe that everything was made by nothing. And then conscience speaks too loud to allow it to be unhearkened to. Man does not want God and tries to forget Him; he reasons, and seeks diversions; but the thought always returns, and possibility makes itself felt. He endeavors to get rid of the thought by every means, but still it is always there; and the thought of God always makes us feel guilty.

God is to be found in all idolatries, neglected and forgotten, it is true; but He exists in all mythologies, and is found in the conscience when awakened by fear. When men are in agony (so says a Christian of pagan times) they

do not say, "Oh, immortal gods!" but "Oh God! a proof, I would add, of a soul naturally Christian." They made great gods and little gods, placed a god or a goddess at fountains, in woods, and wherever they could see the operations of nature; but behind everything remained the deep feeling that there was one only and all-powerful God. Thus among the Brahmins in India, in Egypt, among the Sabeans, among the Scandinavians, there were gods without end, yet one God not worshipped but owned as the source of everything. This God, the Author of all, rested in darkness. In India not a single temple was ever dedicated to him, but still He exists and is the source of everything. Among the Sabeans, the ancient Persians, there was another kind of pagan religion which recognized Ahrim and Ahrmasda, a bad and a good god, and in which God was worshipped in fire, and which had no idol; there was another god as the source of these. I say source, because a creation was not owned among the pagans. See Hebrews 11:3.

The imagination, under the influence of Satan, created gods everywhere, but at the bottom the idea of God was there. And yet this God, the true, was unknown—deplorable state of mankind, deprived of God, of whom they stood in such deep need! thus enemies to His true knowledge, because the conscience, which makes responsibility felt, could not endure His presence, because the heart desired things which the conscience in the presence of God condemned. They made gods who would help men to gratify their passions. Man cannot suffice to himself; he has lost God, and fears Him; his heart stoops to that which is more degraded than himself. He seeks, but in vain, to satisfy the need of his heart by means of objects

which degrade him, and make him forget God, of whom the thought is anguish to his heart.

God, the unknown God, now reveals Himself; and the apostle, with great happiness of thought laying hold of the inscription on the altar, announces the true God whom they did not know. This is not the gospel; but he identifies the God he had already preached in the gospel of Jesus and of the resurrection with the truth they themselves admitted, and, defending it, speaks to the conscience. The unknown God would judge the world by this Jesus, in that He had raised Him from the dead. This truth he applies to their conscience and to idolatry, under the yoke of which they were subjected. By the power of the Spirit in Paul they stood accused, convicted of having falsified the idea of God and denied His glory, the glory of the only Creator, for they had only recognized Him by the confession that He was unknown.

Here was what was done by the apostle. He announced to them clearly this true God, who had manifested Himself in the gift of life, and in the things necessary to sustain that life. Through the conscience He was then not far from each of them. During the times of ignorance, God had borne with the wanderings of man; He had passed them over without judgment. Now He was calling to all men everywhere to repent, because a day was appointed in the which He should judge the world; He speaks of the judgment of this habitable earth, in righteousness by the Man whom He had ordained; whereof He had given assurance unto all men, in that He had raised Him from the dead. In this way He reveals by the power of the Spirit the one true Creator-God, the Sustainer of all things, the knowledge of whom had been lost in the folly of idolatry,

into which man had been deluded by the enemy, who, by means of the passions of deceived beings, had made himself God. Then he declares the approaching judgment of this world by Jesus, the risen Man, but that grace, in the patience of God, invited all men to repent.

Such was the apostle's defense; not of himself, truly; but he brings his hearers into the presence of God, and sets forth that which the conscience could not deny, and that this was what they ought to have known (Rom. 1:19-20). Then he reveals what was new, namely, that judgment was approaching, that it was to be executed by the Man established by God, of whom He had given assurance, in raising Him from the dead, as the public proof of His ways and power, which ended the path of man on earth, and overthrew the power of Satan. The accusers receive their own sentence. To the existence of God they say nothing, but many mock at the idea of resurrection.

It is the present exercise of the power of God that man cannot receive; let there be a God, and it is well; but let Him do something, let Him intervene presently, and man cannot willingly receive it. But the mighty word of the apostle touches some hearts even among this frivolous people. The harvest is small, but God does not leave Himself without testimony. A few, believing the gospel, join themselves to the servants of God; but the testimony being rendered, the apostle remains there no longer. Philosophy and frivolity united, as is always the case, give a high opinion of self, are bad soil for grace, and do not deserve that God should wait long for the good will of vanity. Grace can be effective everywhere; but here testimony and judgment are given against philosophy and the pretensions of men.

Meditations on Acts 18

Acts 18.

There was but little fruit in this gifted but frivolous city: for God has chosen the foolish, the weak, and the despised things of the world, to bring to naught the things that are; and the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain. The apostle pursues his journey to the other important Grecian center, Corinth, a commercial city in a superb situation, but deeply corrupt, being dedicated to Venus, whose priestesses were given up to vice. Even at this time wealth abounded, and the city had become proverbial for luxury and dissoluteness.

The ambassador of God appears in the midst of this luxury, as a poor workman of the world; and we know from his letters that he refused to take anything from the wealthy Corinthians, while he received with joy the offering sent as the fruit of their love by the simple brethren of Philippi. There was afterward another special reason why the apostle would not receive money from the Corinthians. This was that false teachers, seeking to profit by the work of Paul, pretended to labor without receiving anything; and Paul desired to take away every occasion of influence from these evil men, and that they should not pretend to that which was not equally verified in him.

Arrived then at Corinth, he finds two people of his own trade, and with them he lodges and works. There, in the simplicity of Christian life, the work of God begins. The Jews had, and always have, a trade. We are apt to believe

that the apostles soared above all difficulties, because armed with divine authority, and that they were free from all fear. We, no doubt, who believe they have the Lord's authority, receive them as sent by Him: but the Gentiles recognized neither the Lord, nor those sent by Him. They were in the presence of the enemy's power. God had committed His word to them, that they might convey it to the world, which lay under the power of Satan; and this word they possessed in the weakness of the flesh. By faith they knew that the Lord would be with them; and certainly His faithfulness did not fail. But this is known by faith; and they felt all the difficulty of a work which introduced the light of God and the authority of His testimony in the midst of darkness, where the enemy reigned over the spirits of men.

It is a serious thing to make and carry on war for God against the prince of evil. We must know what we are doing, what the enemy is, and what He is whom we represent in this war, so that we may consider it according to the rules of a war of God, that He may sustain us, that the consciousness of His call may be with us, and that thus our faith and confidence in Him may not be interrupted. See how the apostle speaks of his entrance among the Corinthians; "And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Cor. 2:3-4). One cannot do better than read the first four chapters of the first epistle, and for the question of money, Acts 9; what was the testimony, the life, and the feeling of the apostle in 2 Corinthians 4; 6 and 10. And how deep and real his testimony in Acts 12 and especially in verse 9, the source of his power in the midst of weakness! For in this epistle,

as elsewhere, we find what the apostle's own feeling were, and what his labors; his heart appears. In 2 Corinthians 11 the effect produced by sufferings is shown.

With fear and much trembling then, he commences the work in this seat of Satan. First he reasons in the synagogue, as he did everywhere, "to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16) from Athens, Paul had sent Timothy, who had joined him there according to Acts 18:15-16; 1 Thessalonians 3:2. Now Silas and Timothy return, and are found with Paul (Acts 17:5). Pressed in spirit by their presence, he bears still stronger testimony that Jesus was the Christ. He had labored faithfully during their absence; but the presence of other Christians gives courage and strength to his spirit according to God. The feeling of what Christianity is fortifies the heart, and the state of unbelievers is more present to the mind, and more urgent to the heart. But the rights of Christ hold the first place in the apostle's heart; and when the Jews contradict and blaspheme, he leaves them, and, shaking his garments, says to them, "Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles" (Acts 18:6).

Leaving them he enters into the house of a Gentile, one who worshipped the one true God. There were many such among the Gentiles, who, weary of the folly and iniquity of idolatry, worshipped in the synagogue, although they had not become Jews. It seems that he had left the house of Aquila and Priscilla. The house of a Gentile who owned the one true God was suited to his work; and to him the work was everything. Still, he does not go far away from the synagogue; and Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, is converted with all his house, whether from the testimony

rendered by Paul in the synagogue, or after he had left it. Moreover, the testimony now reaches the Corinthians, and many believe and are baptized. The work, rejected by the Jews, is now established in the city; for, notwithstanding its wickedness, the Lord had many people there.

Besides this, the Lord encourages Paul by a vision in the night, saying to him, "Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace." The Lord was with him, and saw fit to hold the door open. All things were in His hands, and He would not permit the enemy to hinder the work because of wicked men. "He that openeth, and no man shutteth" (Rev. 3:7). It is interesting to see how the Lord watches over the work, and over the hearts of His laborers. It is possible that direct communications and visions may not be given now as they were then; but God has not ceased to guide those who labor faithfully in His name, to manifest Himself to their hearts, and He holds still, as then, the keys; He opens, and no man shuts. It is sweet to see that, when we work for Him, He is with us, to speak to our hearts, and to direct us and regulate all our circumstances for His glory, and that according to a divine wisdom.

At Corinth the apostle remains a year and a half, teaching the word of God. The Jews, roused by the folly of their enmity against Christ and the gospel, seek to accuse Paul of a crime because he preached the gospel. They bring him before the judgment seat of the governor, a man profoundly indifferent to everything religious. The apostle is accused of having persuaded men to worship contrary to the law. The proconsul, Gallio, drives them from the judgment seat. He was right. His office was not to maintain the Jewish law, but to preserve order and peace in the country. It was only another proof of the unreasonable and unbridled hatred of

these poor people, who had refused the grace of God, and nourished themselves in enmity against all.

The crowd take Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things. For him the Jewish religion was a miserable and contemptible superstition, because it separated its professors from all the world; for the human heart loves not the truth that condemns the falsity of the world and of its ways. If the chief of this religion were beaten, it was nothing to him; in his eyes he deserved it, and so they could do it. Unbelief despises superstition, and yet supports it; but it hates the truth, and, if it can, persecutes it. The poor Jews united these true characters—the truth of the oneness of God, and superstition in ordinances, which separated them from all the Gentiles. Contempt and persecution were the only fruits of their assault on the apostle.

The position of this people is shown in a special way in the narrative before us. But Paul's relation with them is also shown; we see to what an extent he was still bound to Jewish customs. He takes a vow and shaves his head in Cenchrea. He feels obliged in his heart to observe the feast at Jerusalem; and gives this to the Jews at Ephesus as his motive for not then remaining in their city. He is a true Jew, and acts like one; and the Spirit records these facts that we may understand the bonds which still held the spirit of the apostle. The state of a soul with regard to religious habits is a different thing from the energy of the Spirit of God in the declaration of the truth. We shall see the effect of these bonds strongly pronounced at the end of his career, whether toward the Christians at Jerusalem, or in his submission to their wishes.

He leaves Corinth then with Priscilla and Aquila, after a work largely blessed. The history of this assembly we read in the two epistles addressed to it. We may remark that it is an example of the influence which the world, in the midst of which it is placed, exercises on the assembly of God. Breathing the same atmosphere, it is always in danger of following its habits of thought; the effect on the mind of surrounding things, which ever resound in the ears of Christians, and, alas! too often in their hearts. It is difficult to avoid being more or less associated with what surrounds us universally. What we need is faith, which lives in things unseen.

Paul does not stop at Ephesus, where the Jews were disposed to listen to him, but expresses the hope of seeing them again. Leaving Priscilla and Aquila, two quiet people, but faithful and consecrated to the Lord, he goes on towards Jerusalem. There he salutes the assembly, and sets out for Antioch, the starting-point of the gospel for the Gentiles, and from whence he had been sent by the Holy Spirit. At Jerusalem he merely salutes the assembly, for here we are on Christian, not Jewish, ground.

Meditations on Acts 19

Acts 19.

The apostles' work is now situated in another provincial center in the capital of the province of Asia, which was then only the south-west canton of Asia Minor, Caria, Lycia, and so forth. Paul had before been prohibited from preaching the word in Asia, having been sent into Macedonia. Now, while he remains at the capital, all the province listens to the word of God. It is good to wait on God and to follow His direction; His work is then much better done, and with a certainty that human plans can never give us. Having passed through the upper portion of Asia Minor (the northern and central), Paul arrives at Ephesus. In this important city he remains nearly three years. Here also the power of his ministry is displayed in a remarkable way. It is the special subject of this chapter. We are ignorant as to how Apollos was fully introduced into the Christian position. He was doubtless baptized, and had received the Holy Spirit; but nothing is said about it. All we know is that he was instructed in the way of the Lord by means of Aquila and Priscilla through the word. It was independently of Paul, and had to be so.

In this chapter the apostolic power and the difference of the estate of the disciples of John the Baptist are clearly shown. The apostle perceives something in the state of these disciples which did not correspond with the presence of the Holy Spirit—the essential distinction of the Christians. They believe that the Messiah had come, and that Jesus was that Messiah; but they had not followed Him on the

earth; they had remained with John, and had not received the Spirit. John had told them that Christ would baptize with the Spirit, but they did not know whether that Spirit had just come, according to the promise of God and the word of John. It is not meant, "If there *be* a Holy Ghost," because all the Jews well knew that there was; but they did not know if the Holy Spirit spoken of by John had come. The words are the same as those in John 7:39. Whoever became a Christian by baptism received the Holy Spirit. It was the seal of faith.

Paul explains to them that John had taught faith in Christ to come; but now He had come and moreover had been exalted to the right hand of God. They are then baptized in the name of the Lord. Paul lays his hands on them, and they receive the Holy Spirit, who bears witness of His presence by the gifts communicated to these disciples. It is a clear testimony to the apostolic power of Paul (Acts 8:14-17). The Holy Spirit was given without the laying on of hands, as on the day of Pentecost, then in the case of Cornelius, and generally with others. But among men the apostles alone possessed the power of communicating the Spirit. The miracles done by Paul's garments, and also by the shadow of Peter, likewise testify to the power vouchsafed to them by God. God desired to bear witness to the word of His grace.

This became still more remarkable when others, who pretended to cast out demons, undertook to make use of the name of Jesus. This placed the reality of the Lord's power over that of the devil in the clearest light. Certain Jews sought to profit by the power of the name of Jesus preached by Paul, but without having faith in His person. But the devil knew well with whom he had to do. He knew

Jesus, and did not dare to resist Him; and he also well knew that Paul was His servant. But under what pretense did these unbelievers exercise authority over the power of the devil? The man possessed by the devil rises up against these Jews, and drives them out, so that they flee from the house naked and wounded.

What a testimony to the truth of Paul's mission, to the power by which he worked, and to the war that goes on in man between grace and the devil! It was not, and is not yet, the time for the Lord to manifest His power and His rights, in binding the enemy. His desire is that war should be carried on by man in faith, and by the power of the Spirit who dwells in believers. But it comes out clearly here, what this war is; and the total difference between the possession of truth and of the Spirit, learned as a certain truth, and the employment of the name of Jesus, without faith in the heart. One cannot exorcise the devil by the name of Jesus, when true faith in Jesus has no place in the heart.

The people were terrified by what had happened; but this ought not to surprise us. They felt how near they were to the power of God and to that of Satan, openly manifested. The enemy is no less dangerous when he works secretly. A single word from Jesus had been sufficient to cast out a legion of demons, no more to enter into the liberated man. But the influence of Satan persuaded the Gadarenes to beseech Jesus to depart out of their coasts, and He goes. The presence of God makes the heart tremble more when it perceives it, than that of Satan. Such is the condition of poor sinners. But Satan at bay is more to be feared than when he goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. "Resist the devil," it is said, "and he will flee

from you" (James 4:7). But we need all the armor of God to deliver from his snares.

The power of God in Paul is seen in three ways: first, the Spirit is communicated by the laying on of his hands; second, very wonderful miracles; third, the devils themselves are forced to own the power of His word, and the authority of Paul, when he makes use of the name of Jesus; and they make a difference between him and those who under false pretenses employ that name. This was soon known by all, Greeks and Jews, and they were filled with fear. It moreover works on the conscience of the believers, who come and confess their deeds, bringing the books of their curious arts, for which Ephesus was celebrated, and burning them before all to the value of fifty thousand pieces of silver. When God reveals Himself in power, the heart opens before Him, and confesses sincerely all that the conscience knows, doing so openly for His glory. This is a special effect of the manifestation of His power. Man thinks no longer of himself, or of his shame, but is overcome by the presence of God.

But we must retrace our steps a little in order to observe the progress of the apostle's own work. For three months he reasons in the synagogue. It seems that the Jews were not so badly disposed as in other cities (for example, at Thessalonica and elsewhere). They had desired that the apostle should remain there some time, when he had gone to Jerusalem. However, the greater part did not long endure the preaching of the gospel. Many became hardened, and did not believe, speaking evil of the truth and of the Christian profession before the multitude. Paul then leaves them, separates the disciples, and continues to dispute daily in the school of one Tyrannus. Two years he

spends in this way, so that all who dwelt in Asia, Greeks and Jews, heard the word of the Lord Jesus.

Thus was the Christian assembly formed outside the synagogue, the Jews (as ever) being contradictory and opposing. Their attempt to make use of the name of Jesus, without faith, was likewise turned to their dishonor. Though the goodness of God sought for them, yet their enmity against the name of Jesus, and against the grace which wounded their pride, they never lost. God then placed His blessing elsewhere. And when the Christians were separated from the Jews, and the assembly settled apart, this extraordinary power of the Spirit was manifested in Paul, as a testimony from God to his work, and to the growing assembly. Thus was this important gathering formed by divine power. For two years God held the reins, and kept the adversary in check, in order that the testimony of Christ might be firmly established in this capital of Asia, and resound in all the country round about. All had been under the direction of God. Formerly, Paul had not been permitted to go to Ephesus; but now, under the good hand of God, he labors there without hindrance—two or three weeks at Thessalonica, and two or three years at Ephesus. In the two cities the work is done according to His will. Now that the work is finished, as far as Paul is concerned at this time, he proposes to depart.

The enemy left free, and spurred on by the powerful effect of the word of God, raises a great tumult against Paul and the gospel (vs. 23). But it is vain to fight against God. His fury expends itself in shouts and cries. But when God allows it, opposition manifests itself in its true character. The devil works on the passions, on selfish interests, on base motives, which rise up against the love, the grace, and the

salvation which God sends to ruined men. God be praised, it was too late! It was the efficacy of His grace in liberating the slaves of a diabolical superstition, the worship of false gods, that is, of demons, which called forth all this tumult. We have seen that till the work was finished, the enemy was kept in check.

A certain man, Demetrius, gained large sums from the manufacture of little silver shrines to Diana, because this Diana was celebrated in the entire pagan world; and her temple was one of the seven wonders of the world (vs. 27). Incited by the desire for gain, he assembles the craftsmen to oppose the truth which was destroying all their trade (vss. 25-26), the truth which showed that gods made with hands were no gods. How deep the gloom into which man, without God, and by his very need of a God, throws himself!

Not only were their gains at stake, but the importance of their goddess and of their city was in danger of being destroyed. They do not say, "Great is Diana," but "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." The knowledge of the true God makes our own nothingness felt, and judges the state of the heart; but in a false religion there is an alliance with the passions of the heart. The worshippers are great according to the measure of their religion, and of that which they worship. If the Diana of the Ephesians was great, the Ephesians themselves were important according to her importance. To despise Diana was to detract from the greatness of her followers. Gain and importance were the two things which accompanied the worship of this goddess. Such was the source of the passions awakened by a few clever words from Demetrius. Such is the religion of the natural heart, which however feels the need of a God.

It is a false religion which does not act on the conscience, unless perhaps to *produce* fear, if God be against it; but which nourishes human passions, and allies itself with the malice of the heart against truth.

The multitude rise in fury, and rush with one accord to the theater. The brethren restrain Paul, and prevent him from going there, whither his zeal would have led him. God watches over His servant; there was nothing for him to do there. The crowd, however, take possession of two brethren, companions of Paul, and drag them to the theater. Certain chiefs of the public festivals of Asia, friends of Paul, send to him, warning him not to present himself at the theater, where there was only violence and tumult. But once more the poor Jews prove themselves without light. Walking in darkness in their own errors, they put forward one of their countrymen to defend the doctrine of the one God. But this only still further excites the fury of the people, who cry out for the space of two hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." Without God it is impossible either to oppose the devil, or to maintain the truth; neither the truth of the one God, nor the name of Jesus associated with that of Paul who announced Him, had any power without faith and truth in the heart. The poor Jews had rejected the Savior, and without their perceiving it, strength entirely failed them, as it did Samson, shorn of the Nazarite's hair. Although enemies to the new doctrine, yet they expected to be able to present amicably the doctrine of the one God. But, enemies to the grace of God and despised by men, all they could do was to excite the multitude to continue still longer their senseless and passionate cry, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians" (Acts 19:28).

The town clerk, having appeased the people, gives them to understand that the authorities would most likely interfere on account of the tumult, and that the men (Gaius and Aristarchus) had done nothing contrary to the law. He then dismisses the disorderly and irregular assembly, which had done nothing but show what man is under the power of Satan and moved by his own selfishness.

In short, we have in this chapter, presented in a remarkable way, the conflict between the Spirit of God working in the servants of Jesus, and the power of the devil, kept in check, however, by God, as long as His work was being performed; and the sorrowful position of the Jews, all their moral power being taken from them, since they were opposed to the gospel. The assembly of God being formed beyond their limits, they were no longer His people; when they sought to make use of the name of the Lord, it turned to their confusion; when they defended the doctrine of the one God, which they believed, it only made the people cry out the more, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." Till the Lord comes, this conflict must continue; and though miracles have ceased, yet the care of His servants never grows weaker in the heart of Jesus. He works as really as ever, and the government of God orders everything for the good of His work. He may indeed permit Satan's rage to break forth, but He never forgets His own.

He can allow the apostles to be driven from Thessalonica and Berea, and then keep the enemy in check at Ephesus. But He always watches over His servants. He can hold the door open where He will, and shut it where He sees fit to do so. We can rely on Him! Only let us be directed by Him who openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no

man openeth. When we have “a little strength,” He sets before us an opened door.

Meditations on Acts 20

Acts 20.

From 2 Corinthians 1 and 4, it would appear that the persecution was more violent, and that it continued longer than during the public events recorded in Acts 19. But what these particulars may have been, we are not told. But after the stormy assemblage in the theater, Paul calls the disciples together, embraces them, and departs into Macedonia. Going over those parts, he exhorts the brethren, and arrives in Greece. There he remains three months. He had thought of returning from Greece to Syria; but the Jews—ever envious, and enemies to the gospel, as well as to the one who preached it outside their limits, since they had rejected Christ, and hope for them was gone—laid wait for him. The truth which they had had was always the truth; but now that the Son of God had come, and the Father and His love been manifested in Him, that no longer possessed any power; for this revelation was one of life eternal, and of the satisfaction of divine justice. They could not endure the thought of being placed on one side on account of the truth they would not receive, and therefore laid wait for Paul. When this becomes known to the apostle, he returns by way of Macedonia.

Let us remark in this brief narrative, which is not accidental, that when Paul had planted the gospel in a country, he did not abandon the converts, but returns with affectionate solicitude, instructs, exhorts, edifies, and watches over the seed planted by his instrumentality, in order that it may be preserved, and grow in the knowledge

of Christ. He does not neglect the Lord's garden, well knowing that tares may spring up where the good seed grows, and that the enemy can spoil the harvest, if it is not well guarded. It is more needful now than ever to do this, for we are in the perilous times of the last days. Though the enemy can never pluck the sheep out of the Good Shepherd's *hand*, yet he may disperse them; they may be subjected to the effect of every kind of evil doctrine, by which their growth is hindered, the Lord's glory trampled upon, testimony to Him destroyed, and the candlestick taken away. Let the Lord's servants take warning!

Paul then returns by Macedonia. It's not important, but in verse 4 we should read, "Gaius and Timotheus of Derbe." From verse 5 we see that many attached themselves to Paul in the work; and others, besides those in verse 4 went before. Luke, the author of this book, and perhaps others too, accompanied the apostle in his journey towards Troas. The others tarried for him at Troas. It is not without interest to see this emotion of hearts moved by the gospel which Paul preached. All were free; some, such as Apollos, laboring apart; the others, the companions of the great central figure—great for his faith in Christ, and as sent directly from Him by the voice of the Holy Spirit—occupied and sent by Paul to carry on and accomplish the work in places he would himself have visited, had he not been obliged to go elsewhere, when the opportunity presented itself for them to be thus sent.

Leaving Philippi in five days, they come to Troas, and there remain seven days. Everywhere assemblies had been formed. Here a door had been opened to Paul in coming from Ephesus, but he had not been able to remain long, being uneasy about the Corinthians, since he did not find

Titus there, whom he had sent to them. It was at Troas that Luke, who wrote the Acts, had attached himself to Paul, to accompany him the first time he visited Macedonia. We do not know how the gathering at Troas was formed; but there was one, and we are given to see, into it a little, not its discipline or gifts, as in Corinthians, but its ordinary walk.

The first day of the week the disciples met together to break bread. This was evidently their custom. It was the first day of the week, and the disciples gathered themselves together according to their habit, to break bread. It was the first object of their meeting, the center of their worship. Other things were done; they spoke, taught, as Paul did, sang; but they met together to break bread. This is confirmed by 1 Corinthians 11:20, where the apostle says that the Corinthians did not really assemble for the Lord's supper, since each ate his own supper, not thinking of the others, but eating and drinking for his own pleasure. Now this shows clearly that the object of the assembly was the Lord's supper. At the beginning they broke bread every day (Acts 2:42,46). When gatherings were formed everywhere, and zeal had been enfeebled, they met only on the first day of the week, the day of the Lord's resurrection. This was not a rule, but Luke speaks of it as a usage well known everywhere among the Christians. It seems that Paul had awaited this day to speak to the disciples, simply because it was the day of their meeting together; however, that is not certain. However it may be, he profits by the occasion to preach to them before setting out, and he speaks till midnight. They met, it seems, in the evening.

The discourse was long, and they had not yet broken bread; the weather was hot, and there were many lights. Such is human weakness, that all this so affected a certain

Eutychus, that he was overcome with sleep, as Paul was long preaching, and fell down from the third floor, where he was sitting by the window. He was taken up by the men dead. Paul naturally interrupts his discourse, goes down and throws himself on him, declaring that life is still in him. The separation had not yet taken place; he was stunned by the fall, and if the power of God had not interposed, he would have been caught in the clutches of death. Life, however, had not yet gone out of the body; and by the Spirit, Paul so works on it, that the functions of life are restored. The bonds between soul and body are re-established. In the case of the child restored to life by Elijah (1 Kings 17:21-22) the soul had already left the body, and returned to it. From these cases, as always elsewhere, we see that the soul is entirely distinct from the body; and though in our present state it works by means of the body, yet it is in its habitation; that life in this world is the activity of the soul by means of the functions of the body, the activity of which is restored by sleep, because we are feeble; that when the soul leaves the body, the man is definitively dead, but that the activity of the soul by the functions of the body may be interrupted, as is partly the case in sleep; and this action is re-established if the soul have not left the body, if God does so or permits it.

In its highest part—the spirit, the soul in relation to God is alas! at enmity against Him: it will not and does not submit to Him. With its inferior part, it works in the body: marvelous creation! in relations with God above, and with nature below. It is a mixture of thoughts which seek to rise to God but cannot, and of creature thoughts. It is responsible to God according to the nature it has originally received from Him. When born of God, it receives a totally

new life, in which it is in relation with God, according to grace and redemption, a life animated by the Spirit which it receives from above, and which makes of the body an instrument for the service of God. Possessing this life, we know that, "if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1). I have said this in reference to Eutychus, because in these days the simplicity of the truth regarding the soul is lost sight of by many.

Paul then goes up again, and, having broken bread, talks still even till daybreak, comforting much the souls he saw perhaps for the last time. He then departs leaving Eutychus alive to the joy of the brethren. Paul sends on his companions by ship, and goes himself on foot, desiring to be alone. For us this is often a wise thing; to be alone, apart from men, but alone too with God, where we can think of Him, of ourselves before Him, of the work, as He sees it, and where in His presence responsibility is felt, instead of activity before men. No doubt this activity ought to appear in His presence, because it is holy; but at all events the activity of man is another thing than to place oneself before God, such as He is for us. It is not less true that this communion with Him, as His servants, gives and sustains a blessed confidence in Him, an intimacy of soul with Him, full of goodness and of grace.

Paul had instructed his companions to take him in at Assos, which they do: from thence they proceed to Mitylene, to Chios, and finally to Miletus, half a day from Ephesus. Paul had determined not to stop there, desiring if possible to be at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. If he had stopped at Ephesus, he must have remained some time,

as he had labored there for a long period, and with great blessing. He passes on therefore, sending from Miletus for the elders of the assembly at Ephesus, the center of the work in that region. It is evident that the apostle was preoccupied with the circumstances in which he was placed—with the apparent end of his career. This thought, it is probable, exercised an influence over him, when he went alone on foot to Assos. And also it was the cause of his long speech at Troas.

It is not only imagination which suggests this idea; the apostle expresses (at the end of the Epistle to the Romans, written when he was about to leave Corinth (Rom. 15:31), his fear that he might be an object of hatred to the rebels in Judea; and he desires the Romans to pray that he may be delivered out of their hands, hoping thus to be able to see their face with joy, and from Rome to continue his work in Spain. We know that in Palestine he was taken, and after two years confinement at Caesarea, went a prisoner to Rome; that he remained there as such two years more; and that there, as far as the word is concerned, his history terminated. It is possible that he may have been liberated; I believe so, from what we find in the Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon (Phil. 1:25-26; Philem. 1:22).

Also, from 2 Timothy it seems that he was set free, and that he returned to Asia. But as to the Biblical record of his labors, all is finished at the end of the Acts, which leaves him a prisoner at Rome. According to God's thoughts, such as they are communicated to us in the scriptures, that was the end of the apostle's work. And he felt that such was the case; and it is no more a question of going to Spain, or traveling anywhere beyond Rome. The Holy Spirit spoke

of bonds and tribulations; and Paul's thought now turned towards his departure from this world.

The elders being come from Ephesus and assembled before him, Paul speaks of his ministry as of a thing accomplished. A little before he had told the Romans that he had no longer any place in those parts, his career there being over (Rom. 15:23). Revisiting the scenes of his work in Asia, and the regions of Asia Minor, he shows us the character of this work, and the effect of his departure; and this renders his discourse very important. He had served the Lord with much humility, in trials and in tears, caused by the snares of the Jews, whose opposition was continual and without conscience. In spite of it, however, he never failed both in public and in private to preach and teach all that was necessary for them, repentance towards God, and faith in Jesus Christ, as the true state of a soul brought to God. Nothing is said, as to the order of these two things in the heart, although in such order there is something practical, but of the true character of repentance and faith. Repentance was to be preached in the name of the Lord Jesus (Luke 24:47); so that His name might be owned, and that sinners might repent. It was founded on the ground of the grace and truth that came by Him; but true repentance takes place in the presence of God, and goes beyond sorrow for having done wrong, or shame, or the mere work of the natural conscience.

The soul revealed to itself through grace comes with open eyes into God's presence. All is judged according to Him whose presence is manifested to the soul; everything is judged as it appears in His eyes. The word of God is His eye in the conscience, and makes us feel that He has seen all, and then things appear to us as they do to Him. We

no longer excuse ourselves, nor do we desire to do so. The result is confession to God by a conscience which feels itself in His presence (Heb. 4:12-13); while the heart restored desires holiness, and the soul feels its responsibility for all that we have done. We justify God in our condemnation (Luke 7:29); though in such a case there is always some confidence in His grace, not peace but confidence; for He who has become light to the soul is also love, Himself being both these things. When He reveals Himself as light in order to show us our sins, it is in love He does so in Jesus; and He is love. He cannot reveal Himself to the soul without being the two things, for in His nature He is both.

Take the case of the woman in Luke 7. The light and the love of God had penetrated into her soul; she did not yet know what it was to be pardoned, but her heart had confidence in Jesus; and at the same time her conscience was deeply convinced of sin.

Take again the case of Peter (Luke 5:8), the prodigal son (Luke 15:17-19), and of the thief on the cross (Luke 23:41). Repentance thus is the effect of the revelation of God to the soul, which then shows itself; and up to a certain point it knows God as light, which manifests everything. "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did" (John 4:29). But as love to the soul, the Lord inspires confidence, though the remission of sins be not known. This is discovered by the soul by faith in Christ Jesus—not only that Jesus is the Christ, but that by Him its sins are pardoned, for He was dead for our sins; and if we receive the word of God, we believing in Him know, that He has taken all our sins on Himself on His own body on the tree. When He had by Himself purged our sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high; because by one

offering He has perfected forever them that are sanctified by that sacrifice.

Although faith in the work of Christ is necessary in order to possess peace, yet His person ever remains as the object of the heart—the Christ who has loved us, and given Himself for us, who now is glorified at the right hand of God, after having borne our sins, and submitted to death and the curse for us, but ever living for us now; who Himself will return to seek us, and make us perfectly like Himself in glory. We believe in Him, not only in the efficacy of His death. He is our righteousness before God, made such by God Himself, and we are accepted in the Beloved. John 17 tells us that we are loved with the same love wherewith the Father loves the Son. If true repentance is made in the presence of God, and in respect of Him, confidence and peace come by means of the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ. He has made peace by His own blood.

Such was the testimony of Paul, the truth of the conscience, peace, and the knowledge of God by His Son Jesus come down here in love, ascended into heaven as man, having accomplished the work which His Father had given Him to do. So great were the truth and the revelation, and so like the apostle is the execution of his ministry! But this ministry was drawing to its close, without knowing that such was the case. The Spirit testified in every place that bonds and tribulations awaited him; and he foresees that they would see his face no more. This furnishes the opportunity to speak of the effect of His departure. The sheep of Jesus are safe in His hands; as to the life He has imparted to them, they can never perish—none can pluck them out of His hand. But a temple had been established, a house on the earth, of which the apostle was by grace

the founder according to the will of God, the wise master-builder (1 Cor. 3:10). According to another figure, He has placed a candlestick on the earth to shine round about Himself, and this He can take away. There will always be a house of God built with His hand, and by His power which will never grow less—Christ the foundation, the stones living, by grace placed on this chief corner stone, and growing to an holy temple for the Lord (Matt. 16:18; 1 Pet. 2:4-5; Eph. 2:21).

Against this work of the Lord—a work carried on by grace in the heart—the gates of hell cannot prevail; for it is the fruit of the power of the Lord Jesus, working in grace. Moreover, this temple is not yet entirely built—it is growing. At least we may expect that by grace every soul can be introduced into it. God alone knows the moment when the work of grace which forms the assembly, the body of Christ, shall be accomplished. See 2 Peter 3:9. But God's will has been to form an assembly on the earth. The work of Jesus, of which we have spoken, is done here below; but beyond this, as we have seen, God formed an assembly by the ministry of Paul, a temple on the earth, confiding the building of this temple into the hands of men, and under their responsibility. It is now the habitation of God through the Spirit, Jews and Gentiles being built up together, founded according to the will of God, but left to the responsibility of man. "But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon." "Now if any man build upon this foundation [Jesus Christ] gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is" (1 Cor. 3:12-13).

There are three kinds of workmen: a good Christian and a good workman, such as Paul; a good Christian and a bad workman, himself saved, but his work to be consumed; then he who seeks to corrupt and destroy the temple of God, whose work, as well as himself, shall perish. Such were the heresiarchs, who, moved by the enemy, sought to corrupt the faith. Three sects of them existed during Paul's own time; but as long as he remained in the world, his spiritual energy resisted and overcame evil; such as immorality among the Corinthians, and the loss of the doctrine of grace among the Galatians. But with his departure this energy disappeared. He had already said (Phil. 2:21) that all sought their own, not the things which were Jesus Christ's. No soul was to be found like that of Timothy to care for the state of the Christians.

Paul tells the elders then that, after his departure, grievous wolves should enter in among them, and that even of their own selves perverse men should arise, and draw the disciples away. Till Satan be bound, and the Lord come to do it, there will ever be conflicts. Since the beginning of the world, whenever God has established anything good, man's first act has been to destroy it. First, there was man himself; then, in the world after the flood, Noah got tipsy, and his authority was lost. Israel made the golden calf before ever Moses came down from the mountain. Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire the first day after their consecration, for which cause Aaron could no more enter into the inner sanctuary with his priestly garments of glory. Solomon having loved strange women, his kingdom was divided. So in the assembly established on the earth, soon after the apostle's departure, evil presents itself; and it is of this that the elders are forewarned.

Where were the other apostles? At Jerusalem. Peter, the apostle of the circumcision, leaves the gathering scattered by the destruction of Jerusalem. The chief of the apostles abandon to Paul the preaching of the gospel among the Gentiles, to which work the Lord Himself had called him at the first, and then again expressly, by the Holy Spirit at Antioch. To the other apostles, therefore, he does not entrust his ministry. Still less does Paul imagine that there can be successors in his office. He knows nothing of successors; but he exhorts the existing elders to faithfulness and watchfulness, commending them to God, and to the word of His grace, "which," he says, "is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." Christ, ascended up on high, can still give evangelists, pastors, and teachers; and He does give them; but the office of personal apostolic care has disappeared. "After my departure," says the apostle. This is a departure without succession. It is sad, surely, yet true; and we have seen it in all that God has established among men. His grace continues, the faithful care of Christ can never fail. The Spirit has given His instructions for this time, as at the beginning, and the Lord is enough for the present condition, as He was faithful in the past. But such a thing as a succession to his apostleship is unknown to Paul when he speaks of his absence. God, and the word of His grace, are for him the refuge of God's people. They can meet together, and Christ will be in their midst; they can profit by the gifts He has granted according to His promise. The rules for our walk are contained in the word; but the apostleship, as a personal energy watching over the organization of the assembly, has disappeared, leaving no succession behind it.

This is a solemn truth, which must be well borne in mind. But we must never forget that Christ is always enough for the assembly; that He is faithful in His care of it, and that He can never fail in strength, in love or in faithfulness. What we have to do is to count on Him, and that with purpose of heart. Divine power is manifested more in Elijah and Elisha than in all the prophets of Jerusalem from the time of Moses himself. The Lord gives what is needful to His people. The word of God confirms sadly, but abundantly, what Paul says here. His testimony is that not only should evil appear in the exterior constitution of the church, but that it should continue till the Lord comes in judgment. Let us consider what the word of God says.

Jude declares that it was already needful to write to them, to exhort them to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints, because certain men had crept in unawares who turned the grace of our God into lasciviousness. They were corrupting the assembly from within; and what is very remarkable, he declares that these are they (that is, the class of persons) who will be among the objects of the Lord's judgment, when He comes with ten thousands of His saints. The corruption, begun during the time of the apostles, will continue till the coming of the Lord. So much for internal corruption. But this is not all. Evil unfolds itself from the other side, as we find in the Epistle of John. Some had abandoned Christianity openly. "Little children, it is the last time; and as ye have heard that Antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists, whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us" (1 John 2:18-19).

Thus we see that though this apostle survived Paul for many years, and certainly watched over the assemblies, in

Asia Minor at least, dwelling, as it is said, at Ephesus, it was only in order to record the fact that the last time was already come, which was shown by the presence of these antichrists, and by the apostasy of many. If it be asked why God waits so long before executing judgment, the answer is to be found in 2 Peter 3:9: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." To Him a thousand years are as one day. In the time of the Jews, judgment was pronounced (Isa. 6), eight hundred years before it was executed, that is, when they had finally rejected the humbled, but also glorified Son of God.

The epoch of this ruin of the assembly on the earth is determined, namely, on the death of Paul—"After my departure." Doubtless, corruption had been rapidly growing. The mystery of iniquity was already working during the apostle's life; but his spiritual energy knew how to resist it. He being gone, however, it went on increasing without hindrance, except from the grace of God in individuals, and the chastisement by which God arrested the decline into ruin and corruption. The testimony of God, although hid under a bushel, has never yet been extinguished; and God has from time to time raised up witnesses in the midst of darkness, feeble perhaps, but true; and, at the time of the Reformation, delivered whole countries from open corruption. But we have seen that the evil, introduced in the time of Jude, was to continue till the judgment.

This solemn and humiliating truth is confirmed by other passages. The assembly has never been restored. Not only does John say that the last time has come, but that this is marked by the presence of antichrists. Now Antichrist

shall be destroyed by the coming of the Lord. Paul reveals to us that the apostasy that began to show itself in John's time will be fully unfolded at the last time; when Antichrist himself shall be manifested, whose coming shall be after the working of Satan, and whom the Lord shall destroy when He comes in glory. The mystery of iniquity was already working, even during the apostle's life, and the progress of evil was to continue from his days till the Lord should come. Thus too, the Lord says that the tares are to grow till the harvest.

It seems to us, then, that the death of Paul is the moment from which we must count the prevalence of evil. We say "prevalence," because evil was already working, though Paul resisted it by the power of the Spirit; and because this evil was to go on increasing till Christ should come; because in the last days perilous time should come, and the form of godliness without the power of it. Then in 2 Timothy 3 we also get the word of God set forth as that which is necessary, and sufficient to render the man of God perfect, and furnished unto all good works. All this truth is powerfully confirmed by what is said in Revelation 2 and 3, where the Christian who has ears to hear is called upon to hearken, not to the church, but to what the Spirit saith unto the church; and in His words we find judgment pronounced by Jesus Christ on the state of the church.

We would add that it is one thing to submit to the discipline, or practical judgment of an assembly, regarding evil, and quite another thing to suppose, when we are called upon to judge of the state of the church by the words of Christ and of the Spirit, that the authority of the assembly is the perpetual safeguard of the faith. The universal assembly, Christianity, is corrupted and divided,

and cannot, even as an instrument in the hands of God, secure the maintenance of the truth. It is submission to the word of God only that can do it.

In order to show how far the primitive church wandered from the truth, we shall quote from a book read in the assembly, one hundred and fifty years after the death of John, cited by one of the best fathers of the primitive churches as part of the inspired scriptures, and esteemed as such by another, who was less orthodox, it is true.

The author, pretending to have received a revelation says, "A man possessed a vineyard, and commanded his servants to gather the fruits. The servant, being very faithful, did what was entrusted to him, and besides, out of devotedness to his master, rooted all the weeds out of the vineyard. The master who was so much pleased with the servant, that he consulted his son and his friends as to what should be done for the faithful servant, and it was decided to make him heir with the son. Now the master is God, the son is the Holy Spirit, the friends are the angels, and the servant is Christ. God had sent him to establish the clergy for the support of the faithful; but He had done much more than this, and what God had not told him to do—He had taken away sins. Thus it is, according to the consultation of God with the Holy Spirit, and the angels, co-heirs with the Holy Spirit, who is Son and Heir of God." Such is what was read in the churches, written by the brother of Pope Pius, and pretended to have been inspired by God. And this a hundred and fifty years after the birth of Christ. What is recounted in the same book of holiness is no better. What is there related as holy in the visions of Hermas, it is impossible to transcribe on these pages!

Such then is the testimony of the apostle; after his departure, evil would prevail, active both within and without. He tells them nothing of the nomination of successors to the elders, any more than he does of a successor to himself. He insists on the faithfulness of those who were there, whom the Holy Spirit had made bishops (for bishops and elders were one and only one office); and commends them to God and to the word of His grace, which was able to build them up, and give them an inheritance among them that were sanctified. In fact, no means is established in the word for the continuance of the organization of the assembly. People are mistaken on this point. The disciples were waiting for the coming of the Lord, the Lord Himself. See the parables of the servant, Matthew 24, of the virgins and the talents. But the apostle shows that this coming might be delayed till long after the life of those then on the earth. The sleeping virgins are the very same that are revealed; the servants who received the talents those found afterward at the coming of the Lord. Paul says, "We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:15). They did not know when He would come, but still they waited for Him (Luke 12:36). What has produced the moral ruin of the assembly is, that she has ceased to look for the Lord; but has said, "My Lord delayeth his coming" (Matt. 24:48). She has taken and beaten her fellow-servants, has eaten and drunk with the drunken. The hierarchy has been established; worldliness has invaded the assembly; and thus alliance has been made with the world.

The apostle recalls his own faithfulness, how he had been an example to the elders, laboring with his own hands, since it was more blessed to give than to receive. Then,

kneeling down, he prays with them all. And they, weeping, embrace him sorrowfully, chiefly for the word that he had spoken, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship. Solemn departure, the end of the apostle's public work. He speaks of it as of a finished work, announcing that henceforward, in consequence of his absence, evil would prevail in the outward assembly of God on the earth, but assuring the faithful that God and the word of His grace would be enough to build them up, and give them an inheritance among those that were sanctified. This was certain. The power of Christ secures it; but the exterior system, Christianity, would be corrupted, having given up the expectation of the Lord's return. Paul teaches the same truth in 2 Timothy 3. John tells us that the last time has already arrived.

The patience of God continues to accomplish the work of grace; and Christ to supply the gifts necessary to the perfecting of the saints, and the building up of the assembly, although our coldness greatly hinders the Spirit. And this will be the case till the end of the gathering of the saints. Christianity has ripened in the midst of evil, as foretold by the apostles. It is evil which began in apostolic times, and which was already sufficiently mature in John's time, the last of the apostles; for he says that the last times had already come. We trust that the cry, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him" (Matt. 25:6) has already begun to go forth, and that many hearts will respond, and kindle their lamps. May the Lord add daily to their number!

Meditations on Acts 21

Acts 21.

From Miletus, Paul sets out for Jerusalem. In this journey, nothing of importance occurs till the apostle's arrival at Türe. There he finds disciples who tell him not to go up to Jerusalem; and this they do by the Spirit. We have already spoken a little of this. To tell him by the Spirit not to go up was more than to forewarn him that bonds and tribulation awaited him. He felt bound in spirit, and doubtless the hand of God was leading him, though it was not that free action of the Holy Spirit in his heart that had guided him in the Lord's work. He means by the state of his soul as a victim, and by this providence, not to preach to lost souls in order to save them, but to bear testimony to the Lord in the face of death. In such a testimony he answers for himself, and therefore for the Lord; but he was not seeking souls. He does nothing hurtful, but he does not work in the power of the Holy Spirit. To him the Lord Himself was everything. That was not changed; and the circumstances in which the apostle is found during these last years of his life resemble those in which the Lord was placed at Jerusalem. But in Him we see perfection in man; in Paul the grace of God with man, but man in his imperfection was not doing that work now. He was going to Jerusalem with money from the Greeks for the poor saints who lived there—a good Christian work, but not the apostolic work of the gospel. He could not bear witness as an apostle at Jerusalem. The Lord had told him so. Still as a prisoner he had a testimony, and the Lord was with

him: and also towards those who had not otherwise heard the gospel, such as the governors and kings.

It is true that he followed afar off in the Lord's footsteps, being betrayed by the Jews, and placed by them with Gentiles to be put to death; but his true work as an apostle to the Gentiles was at an end, at least as far as we know from the word. We have seen that there is a certain difference between "who said to Paul through the Spirit," and "the Spirit said." If the Spirit Himself had said it, it would have been disobedience to Paul to have gone to Jerusalem: but it seems to us that it was rather a warning given by the Spirit, that he should not go there. Certainly it was much more than to say that afflictions awaited him. It was a solemn warning from the Spirit by the mouths of the brethren; and moreover he was "bound in the spirit." But this warning the apostle neglects. He feels constrained to go to Jerusalem, but notwithstanding this, he is led by the providence and grace of God manifest towards him, faithful and blessed.

The Lord goes as a sheep, dumb before her shearers; and neither opens His mouth, nor replies to His accusers. Paul, however, claims Roman citizenship, and raises a tumult in the council by declaring himself a Pharisee. That he was a Roman, and also (as a Jew) a Pharisee, was true; but where was any testimony in these worldly facts? Christ was condemned solely for the witness He bore to the truth, to Himself before the Jews and before Pilate, although by the latter He was recognized as entirely innocent. Paul is betrayed by the Jews, and given over to the Gentiles as Christ was, and by them punished, though not put to death; but Christ is condemned by His own divine perfection, by jealousy and hatred against God, manifest in goodness.

But Paul is condemned by the enmity of the Jews to the Gentiles.

The apostle follows the Lord, but it is afar off. With full heart we honor the apostle so faithful, so blessed, and own the power of the Spirit in his work among the Gentiles. But to Jerusalem he went neither to seek the Gentile, nor to bear witness to the Jews. The Lord had told him, "they will not receive thy testimony" (Acts 22:18). And it is precisely when he reminds the Jews of these words of the Lord, that their fury breaks forth. But Christ was the object of the testimony: and though Paul witnessed a good confession, yet he was only the witness, honored however, and following the Lord in the distance.

Let us follow now the sad history of the apostle's end. At Türe he enjoys again Christian simplicity and affection. Then he and his companions, accompanied by the brethren of Türe, go down to the sea, and there kneeling down on the shore, join in prayer. Then taking leave of them, Paul embarks in the ship, and the others return to their homes. Blessed by his faithful labors, Paul leaves the field forever. It is possible, and also probable that he was liberated from his captivity at Rome, and that he recommenced his work, but we have not the history of this in the Bible. Arrives at Caesarea, he leaves the vessel, and enters into the house of Philip the evangelist, whose preceding history at Samaria, together with the treasurer of Candace, we have already perused. There a prophet comes from Jerusalem, who announces once more that bonds awaited Paul there. His companions and the brethren of Caesarea then beseech him not to go up to Jerusalem; but in vain, Paul declaring that he is ready to die there for the name of the Lord Jesus.

“And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.”

Here we must draw the distinction between the apostle's service, in which he was the minister of God Himself, and guarded by the Holy Spirit, when his words were those of the Spirit conveyed by his mouth, and his individual walk when he is found in a place where he had not been sent to accomplish the work assigned to him. This distinction made, let us compare the path of the Lord with that of the apostle, and faithful as the latter was, mark the difference. The Lord, when He hears that Lazarus is sick, remains quietly for two days in the same place, and then, God's time being come, goes up to Jerusalem to do the will of His Father. The disciples, astonished, and fearing that death awaited Him there, warn Him, saying, “Goest thou thither again?” (John 11:8). But the will of God was clear to the Lord, and therefore His path also, and He replies, “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world” (John 11:9). All is calm, all is in the light of a divine day for His heart. The Savior is the object of testimony, perfect in Himself. The apostles, however great and faithful, were only witnesses of His perfection and His glory. In themselves, no matter how marvelously blessed, they were only men as others. Paul had to reprove Peter publicly, and to separate himself from Barnabas. Here, conducted by the hand of God, and strengthened by His grace, he is led, bound in the spirit, to pass through circumstances that put to the test his state of soul, and brought his public career to a close.

He goes up then to Jerusalem forewarned (though neglecting or resisting these various warnings of the Spirit),

accompanied by the brethren who were with him, and an old disciple, Mnason, with whom he was to lodge. Arrived at Jerusalem, the disciples receive him gladly; and here begins the history of that submission to human forms and Jewish customs which terminated in his captivity at Rome. But he does not follow these Jewish forms and ceremonies that he may thereby attract his countrymen to the gospel, but because persuaded into them by the elders and James, in order to show that he was himself a good Jew, faithful to the law, and to Jewish customs. It was precisely this that threw him into the hands of the hostile Jews, and then into those of the Gentiles. Jesus, on the contrary, in the dignity of His perfection, sits in the temple to instruct the multitude. All classes of Jews come to prove him; but all are judged, and reduced to silence by the divine patience of the Savior, and none dare ask Him any more questions. Then, as we have said, the Lord is condemned for the witness He bore to the truth.

When Paul arrives, the elders assemble with James, and, attached as they were to Judaism, and surrounded by Christian Jews, in order to uphold the reputation of their religion and unite Christianity to Judaism, counsel Paul to satisfy the prejudices of the believing Jews by purifying himself after their custom, and offering sacrifices in the temple, so that he might appear a good Jew to their eyes. Paul accedes to their proposal; and we encounter the strange spectacle of the apostle offering sacrifices, as though all such had not been abolished by the Lord's death. He neither upholds nor wins the Jews who were not set free from their customs. Still God permitted him willingly to conform to these Jewish ceremonies. Being at Jerusalem,

though warned by the Spirit not to go there, what could he do?

Let us remember, if we have been cast for the Lord's name out from a place where we have been under the authority of the governing power, not to re-enter it, so that we may not again be placed in the position from which we have been freed. The relationship has been broken by the authority itself, and if we have left it by the will of God, by returning we place ourselves anew under the abandoned authority; and if this be contrary to that of the Lord Jesus, under which we came when liberated from human authority, we reestablished over us the authority which had been destroyed, and thus strife begins between the authority of Christ over us, and that which we have abandoned. It is impossible to go on well thus. We were free under the authority of Christ, free to do His will; and we have returned to the authority which prohibits obedience to Christ. For example, suppose that a son or daughter has been driven from home for the Lord's name; by this act the parents have renounced their authority. If this son returns to his father's house, he places himself under paternal authority, and what can he do when his parents oppose the faith of Christ? He is powerless; and moreover, has so lost his liberty as to renew over himself the authority which opposes that of Christ, has given up the latter to return to that which is contrary to it.

Mark again the power of ancient habits. For us it is as clear as the light of day, that the sacrifices of the Jews are annulled, and that the precious sacrifice of Christ has abolished them entirely. But here is a multitude of Christians at Jerusalem, zealous for the law, offering sacrifices, and their elders counseling Paul to do likewise.

Let us remember that his submission to these customs put an end to the public testimony of the apostle. Still, as we follow Paul's history, let us ever bear his work in mind, all his labors, and the blessing which accompanied them. In this submission to Jewish ceremonies, he was not guided by the Spirit; he followed the advice of the elders; they were tenacious of the law; and his position was theirs. Paul does what they desire; and joining himself to four other men who had a vow goes with them to the temple to signify the days of purification, when a sacrifice should be offered for each of them.

But before the end of the days, certain Jews of Asia recognize Paul, and stir up the people against him, crying out that he taught everywhere against the law of Moses, and that he had profaned the temple. The doors are shut, and the crowd begin to abuse and beat Paul. While they are thus engaged, the Roman captain learns that all the city is in an uproar, and comes to liberate Paul from their hands. Such is the result of the attempt to conform to the superstitions of others, not made with a view to winning souls by guarding against offending them, but in order to convince these superstitious Jews that he walked as they did, thus only confirming them in their darkness!

If here we think of the Lord ever perfect, we shall perceive the difference of His path. Paul is taken by the hands of the Jewish rabble; Christ, when the band arrives, gives Himself up voluntarily, saying, "Whom seek ye? ... I have told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way" (John 18:7-8). It is not in any way to disparage the Lord's blessed workman, unequaled in his labors, caught up into the third heavens, that I point out this difference, but only that we may realize the unique

perfection of the Savior, the witness in His ministry of divine perfection in man, always, no doubt, but especially during His last sojourn at Jerusalem, when this perfection was proved to the end, then only shining more brightly, and found wanting in nothing.

Meditations on Acts 22

Acts 22.

The captain permitting Paul to speak to the people, the apostle relates the story of his conversion, then that which brings to light his submission to the superstitions of the Jewish Christians. This was the result of personal amiability, grace, and condescension to his brethren, but not of the direction and power of the Holy Spirit. His position was a false one; and in a false position it is impossible to do well. Though the grace of God may support, and sustain those so placed, yet the Holy Spirit cannot act in free power by their means. It is in sovereignty that He acts, and the instrument is like blind Samson, the power exercised being the end of his own career, as well as that of his enemies.

What is seen clearly in Paul is the absence of this power. The Lord's grace was always there. Thus, what he did in the temple was the effect of the counsels of the elders, not of the direction of the Spirit.

Captured now by the captain, he is allowed to speak to the people. As Paul addresses them in their own language, they listen in silence, while he relates the story of his conversion, of the revelation he had had of the glory of Christ, as well as that given to Ananias, a devout Jew. The moment he reaches the cardinal point of his discourse, however, the fury of the audience breaks out with a violence which the presence of the captain and soldiers cannot check. "I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles... And then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth" (Acts 22:21-22). It was precisely what the Lord had

said to him, "They will not receive thy testimony concerning Me." What then was he doing at Jerusalem? The word that had sent him away from Jerusalem on his glorious mission is fulfilled when he re-enters it, to the ruin of his work, making him once more a Jew, bound by the law.

Like Jesus, Paul is condemned on account of the truth of his mission; but in the apostle's case, in a position that contradicted the mission itself. But the Jews complete their sin by rejecting, and giving up to the Gentiles, the grace offered to them. The word that raised the tumult was also the occasion of his imprisonment among the Romans. This was the proof, that as an apostle he had nothing to do at Jerusalem. He loved his people, and that deeply; for he had returned to Jerusalem, in spite of all that had been said to him. Desiring to bear witness there, he had reasoned with the Lord; but the Lord had replied that he ought not to go there. He excuses himself to the Jews, without doubt; but if they would not receive his testimony, what was the necessity of saying that the Lord had sent him? This discourse is the main point of the apostle's history, on which all the rest depends.

Paul justifies himself before the Jews, declaring how like themselves, he had persecuted the Christians even unto death, and that they and the high priest were witnesses of it. Then he relates how all had been changed by the appearing of the Lord in glory, who had declared Himself as Jesus, and shown him how, in persecuting the Christians, he was persecuting the Lord Himself; and lastly the part that Ananias, the devout Jew, had taken in the affair. All this they tolerate, but when the apostle speaks of a mission to the Gentiles, their wrath breaks forth. They complete their sin. "Forbidding us," had said the apostle, "to speak to

the Gentiles—to fill up their sins always: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost” (1 Thess. 2:16).

There are three degrees in their sin. First, they crucified the Lord of glory, and were guilty of the ten thousand talents (Matt. 18); but Christ intercedes for them on the cross, and the Holy Spirit responds to this prayer by the mouth of Peter (ch. 3), declaring that if they repented of their sin, Jesus would return. But they stopped the mouth of Peter, and then stoned Stephen who bore testimony to the glory of the Son of man at the right hand of God. This was the second degree; they would not believe in a glorified Savior, when the Spirit bore witness to Him.

All this happened among the Jews. But Paul had a mission among the Gentiles, since the Jews would not have the grace offered to them. They would have been willing enough to enjoy the promises made to Israel, although they had rejected Him in whom all the promises were fulfilled; but of having compassion on His servant, they did not even think. It was the end; all was finished; the debt of the ten thousand talents weighed down on them. Jerusalem would neither have grace itself, nor leave it to others. Judgment will come upon it. The patience of God, long-suffering patience, at length came to its end for hearts that refused to surrender to the perfect grace of God. But the judgment of God is only pronounced at Rome (Acts 28); a judgment already announced eight hundred years previously (Isa. 6). But in the patience of God, this was not executed till they opposed themselves openly to His grace.

But judgment had to be executed. Christ in humiliation worked by the power of God; then Christ having been glorified, the Holy Spirit was sent into the world. Paul was afterward raised up to carry the gospel to the Gentiles; and

all having been rejected, nothing remained but judgment. The mystery of the union of Jews and Gentiles in one body was promulgated by Paul, and was the true point of progress of his testimony. It was grace itself that was rejected. God permitted the journey of Paul to Jerusalem, so that all might come to an end. Grace ever continues, even during the period of his captivity at Rome; and the mystery itself is fully unfolded by him in the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians: and then he has given us the true Christian character, the practical fall of the system (Phil. 2:21), and the superiority of faith to all the circumstances in the Epistle to the Philippians. In 2 Timothy, the walk of the faithful Christian amid a scene of ruin, is clearly taught.

It will be worth our while to notice a few particularities in the apostle's discourse. The Lord still calls Himself Jesus of Nazareth. We know that He was glorified, but this makes Him shine with a light more brilliant than that of the sun. He is ever the same benign and gentle Man who learned human sorrows in the midst of men. He thinks of others, and considers all Christians as part of Himself. "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest" (Acts 22:8). Infinitely precious truth! Then we find in Paul the same liberty as we have seen in Ananias. He reasons with the Lord (vss. 18-21), saying that more than any other he was fit for testimony at Jerusalem. And this makes his sincerity evident. Yet in this he might perceive the Lord's wisdom, for he is bearing witness against his own presence at Jerusalem. And here too we see what a perfect conscience is, by grace and by the blood of Christ. He recounts to Christ all his sins, and the hatred which at the beginning had been in his heart to the Lord's name; how he had persecuted the members of Christ, and taken part in the

death of Stephen; and all this he presents to the Lord as a motive for his mission to the Jews. But his conscience was pure now.

I believe we have spoken of a little difficulty which Paul's words present here, but I shall not err in repeating it. The companions of Paul saw the light, but did not hear the voice of Him who spoke with him. In Acts 9 we read that they heard the voice, but saw no one. They did not see the Lord, nor did they hear His words, but they saw a great light, and heard a voice without being able to distinguish the words.

This is just what was necessary. They were undeniable witnesses that the vision was true and real, but the communication was for Paul alone. Only he saw the Lord (Acts 22:14-15). For he had to be taught by Him, and bear testimony as an ocular witness that he had seen Him.

Moved by the violence of the multitude, the captain desires that Paul should be led into the castle, and commands him to be examined by scourging, but, already covered with stripes, Paul takes advantage of his rights as a Roman citizen. It was not lawful to bind such. He is not scourged therefore. On the morrow, loosed from his bands, he is brought before the Jewish Council, that they might know of what he was accused. And now Paul, who a little before had represented himself as a Jew in order to escape the prejudices of the Judaizing Christians, declares himself a Roman citizen in order to avoid unjust punishment from the Gentiles. It was not a sin, for he was really a Roman; but where was the power of the Spirit? Where is the Christian who would not do likewise?

Meditations on Acts 23

Brought before the Council, the apostle begins by declaring his innocence. "And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth." This undoubtedly was violence; yet produced not by testimony borne to Christ, but by self-justification. Paul replies with an insult, calling the high priest a "whited wall." He had merited this, it is true; but such an answer did not display the meekness of Christ. Being reprov'd, Paul owns his fault; but his defense tells us of the absence of the power and of the knowledge of the Holy Spirit. "I knew not," is not what the Holy Spirit would say. All is true; but we do not find the energy of the Spirit of God. Moreover, he is not now merely a Jew and a Roman, but also a Pharisee. Such a title he counts no longer dross and dung, it has become once more a gain.

However, God makes use of this to liberate Paul from the hands of the Jews. Full of zeal for their opinions, and of wrath against one another, the Council begin to dispute; and the discussion becoming warm, the captain fearing Paul might be pulled in pieces amid the tumult, commands the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them. In the hands now of the Gentiles, he is taken by the soldiers to the castle; there we find the perfect grace of the Lord towards his faithful servant, in bringing him through trying circumstances without the consciousness that he was suffering for the testimony of God. For Jerusalem all was finished; and the Lord, knowing that Paul must go to Rome, appears to him the night following, saying,

“Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.” What grace! He encourages His servant. It is possible that his position was not the effect of the action of the Spirit; nevertheless, even had he not drawn down the hatred of the Jews on himself, he would have been in peril.

The cross, and grace towards the Gentiles, had made him the object of the enmity of this people. He had confessed Christ glorified, as revealed on his way to Damascus, and declared his mission to carry the name of Christ the Savior to the Gentiles. The Lord does not remind him of the faults he had committed, but of his faithfulness. He encourages him, and makes him understand (and this was the more necessary, since he was a prisoner, and might say, “I have failed, I have not hearkened to the warning of the Spirit”) makes him understand, I say, that whatever might happen, he was under His hand and His care. Watched over in Jerusalem, he would arrive in safety at Rome, and there be permitted to bear witness to Him. What consolation for the heart of His poor servant! And what grace on the Lord’s part! The apostle might have said to himself, “Now my testimony is over, and I myself am the cause of it.” Ah! why did I not follow the counsel of the Spirit? The end of my work is come, and I have done it! “But the Lord manifests Himself. Paul is in His hands, and Jesus owns him still as a witness to His name. And shall we not recognize him whom the Lord owned? Assuredly. It is possible that the spiritual power of the witness is not displayed; it is possible that such a warning ought to have stayed his steps, and made him ask the Lord what he should do; but still the hand and heart of the Lord were with him. The grace is the

more remarkable, as such a position had deprived him of the power of the Spirit of God.

The hatred of the Jews only hastened the liberation of Paul from their hands. Many conspiring for his death, the captain sends him to Caesarea, the residence of the governor. God has everything at His disposal. Here, therefore, for the first time we learn that the apostle had a nephew and a sister. Though he knew no longer anyone after the flesh, yet God knew his danger, and made use of the natural affection of a relation. Paul concerns himself little either about the young man or the peril he was in, but sends him to the captain, and the conspiracy is frustrated.

But amid the circumstances in which he was placed—though the lowest in his history—how grand the figure of Paul appears! if we compare him with those by whom he was surrounded—priests dominated by base passions, without conscience and without heart, and seeking only their own importance. In the captain, bound to subdue the passions of a people whom he despised, we see, in his sending Paul to the governor, a worldliness full of duplicity and contempt for the rights of others. Such, alas! are everywhere the ordinary, though base feelings of poor mortals. In Paul, though oppressed, and occupying a false position, integrity and grandeur of soul shine out; from a soul sustained by the great things with which he had been in relation; from the thought of a glorified Lord, and of a mission from Him for the salvation of poor sinners. Such things his persecutors could not understand (which shows that his position was a false one), but which issued naturally from a heart filled with them. But all he does is to throw what was holy to dogs, and pearls before swine. Nevertheless these things enlarge and illuminate

the apostle's *figure* in the scene we delineate, where, though *scorned* and trampled upon, he stands out in relief from among all the great ones, for the beauty and grandeur of his moral figure.

We now find the apostle in the hands of the Gentiles; and though there may have been no free action of the Spirit in Paul himself, yet the providence of God cares for him, ordering everything for the testimony he was to bear; and His favor is with him. The implacable enmity of the Jews only produces the fulfillment of the counsels of God, and debases them in the eyes of all who possess a noble heart. Though their desire was to gain possession of his person, yet he was to remain no longer in their power, and he is therefore conducted to Lysias, to Felix, to Festus, to Agrippa, and at last to Caesar. Such was the intention of God. Such too the means employed by Him to present the gospel to the governors and to the great; not by raising up, as many frequently think, men of the world to do so; but God makes a prisoner His servant, in order that the gospel might be carried to the knowledge of governors and kings. "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence" (1 Cor. 1:27-29).

Paul then, under a guard, journeys by night (for the captain was distrustful of the Jews), with a letter representing matters in a light favorable to himself, introducing him as a Roman, and preparing a good reception for him by the governor.

Meditations on Acts 24

Acts 24

Instead of abandoning their inimical endeavors, the Jews go down to Caesarea to accuse Paul. The accusation is what our narrative itself suggests—his acts among the Jews in countries beyond Palestine, and his profanation of the temple.

For confirmation of their allegation, they refer to the captain. The dignity of Paul's reply is self-evident. While speaking with the respect due to the governor, he does so with perfect independence, with simplicity, and with a good conscience, as one innocent. His faith as a Christian—which the Jews called heresy—and particularly his belief in resurrection, it is not requisite to confess. Formally denying what they accuse him of, he demands that his adversaries prove what they say. The only thing of which they could accuse him, was of having spoken of the resurrection in such a way as to raise a tumult in the council, and this they were little disposed to bring to light. Their violence on that occasion had obliged the captain to rescue Paul out of their hands. Felix, accustomed to Jewish habits, and knowing that the dispute arose out of the doctrine of Christianity, which had by that time acquired publicity, defers his judgment till Lysias should descend from Jerusalem to Caesarea. Meanwhile, Paul is set at liberty, and his friends are permitted to minister to him.

Some days later, Felix, who seems to have been absent with his wife Drusilla, a Jewess, calls for Paul, to hear him

concerning the faith in Christ: for now the new doctrine had spread everywhere, and was attracting the attention of all. Felix, as well as his wife, being well versed in the things of the Jews, desired to know from its original source what Christianity was; and therefore summon Paul for this purpose. But Paul, ever occupied with souls and Christ, speaks to the conscience of the governor, telling him of judgment to come. Felix then, trembling, remands the apostle till "a more convenient season." Thus divine testimony is borne to the council, Lysias, and to the governor. Besides this, the governor hoped that Paul would give him money to be liberated. But to such dealing Paul does not consent, and therefore remains a prisoner. Felix, having to go away, and desiring to leave a favorable impression on the minds of the Jews, leaves Paul bound. Though aware of his innocence, and able to set him free, he cared nothing for justice. Money and public opinion were of more importance to him. God's intention, however, was that Paul should appear before other governors and kings, and at last before the Emperor himself. And this therefore is what happened.

Meditations on Acts 25

Acts 25.

Festus, the new governor, after three days goes up to Jerusalem. There the chief of the Jews inform him against Paul, and propose to have him brought to Jerusalem, intending to kill him on the way. But Festus will not consent, saying that he would return soon to Caesarea, and that then they could go there and accuse him.

Here again, God, in His providence, watches over His servant. Arrived at Caesarea, Festus makes Paul appear before him, and in order to gratify the Jews who accuse him, proposes to him to go up to Jerusalem. This he had before refused to the Jews; but now, in order to gain popularity, he proposes it. These two years had neither lessened the hatred, nor awakened the consciences of the Jews; and in the Roman (Festus), only base motives existed—love of self and of his own importance.

Paul upholds his integrity, and is watched over by God. He denies once more the things his accusers could not prove. Festus thinks nothing of justice, but only of gratifying the people. Paul replies with great dignity, that Festus was well aware that he had done nothing amiss, that he had not the right to give him up to his enemies, and concludes by appealing to Caesar. Such was the fulfillment of God's purpose, that, conducted to Rome by His providence, Paul should there bear witness before the Emperor himself. This was not the thought of Festus, nor of the Jews, nor yet the testimony of the Spirit in Paul. But the will of God is accomplished without that of men.

We have seen that Paul was both a Roman and a Pharisee. With him it is no longer the weak things, the base things, and the things which are despised, the things that are not, that bring to naught the things that are. All is no longer dross and dung. Paul now makes use of these things to avoid injustice and death; and God employs them to conduct the apostle to Rome there to be a witness of the truth before the great of the world. Such too the cause of his audience with Agrippa, and of his journey to Rome. Having appealed to Cesar, he must of necessity be sent to Caesar; and Festus therefore decides accordingly.

But while these things are happening, the king Agrippa and Bernice come to salute the new governor. The latter relates to them the history of Paul, giving himself (as we find everywhere in the world, as well as in this instance) a character for equity and fidelity to the principles of justice and honor. But the story of the resurrection was only a Jewish superstition. Agrippa, one of the Herods, and king of the southern part of Palestine, was by race an Edomite, but a Jew by profession. He was consequently well-informed as to the religious questions of the country; and curious to know clearly, and from a reliable source, what the Christianity might be that had produced such a movement of spirit in the people of his country, asks to hear Paul. Festus, well knowing that the accused was not guilty of anything, and anxious to obtain some pretext for sending him to Caesar, accedes to his request. Of Paul's innocence we have the testimony of the governor, in his address to Agrippa, as well as of the others who listened to him. He did not know what to write to the Emperor, and so brings Paul before this audience in the hope of discovering something to say.

Meditations on Acts 26

Acts 26.

Paul now shows that it is on account of the promises made to the fathers that he stands charged, and this too was the ground of the Jews' accusation. "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" (Acts 26:8). He had thought that he should do many things against the name of Jesus, and zealous like the other Jews against the Christians, had persecuted them unmercifully, even into strange cities. Then he relates the appearing of the Lord Jesus on the way to Damascus, whither he was going to imprison Christians—how he had been arrested by the glory of the Lord in heaven, and learned that it was He Himself he was persecuting, since all Christians were one with Him. It was then that the unity of believers with Jesus was for the first time declared, a truth more fully unfolded afterward by means of the apostle.

But the conversion itself was effected by two things; first, the heavenly glory of the Man, Jesus Christ the Lord; Paul, seeing this first, and then learning that it was Jesus; and secondly, that all Christians were united in one body with Him. Paul was persecuting Jesus Himself. But thenceforward he was to be a witness both of the things he had seen, and of those in which He who had been revealed to him would yet appear unto him. He had been separated from his own people, the Jews, and from the Gentiles, to whom now he was to be sent. He was no longer a Jew, but yet had not become a Gentile. He was associated

with the Lord of glory, and was sent out from Him as a witness of His glory, and of the grace that could take up an open enemy, and make him the expression and witness of the perfect grace that had converted and saved him. His mission, as God's workman, was to open the eyes of the Gentiles, and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they might receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them that are sanctified — the whole by faith in Jesus. "By faith that is in me" (vs. 18), applies more particularly to forgiveness and inheritance, though as a matter of fact, the words extend to the entire sentence. Obedient to the heavenly vision, he had preached repentance everywhere, beginning with the Jews, exhorting them to turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. Though the Jews had sought to kill him, yet by the help of God he had continued till that day, saying none other things than those which the prophets had said should happen — that Christ should suffer, rise from the dead, and show light to the people and to the Gentiles.

To Festus, all this was mere fanaticism. But Paul replied with perfect dignity and propriety, in a way which was the best proof that he was not beside himself, but that he spoke the words of truth and soberness. Such a testimony, however, to an unconverted Gentile, whose conscience had not been reached, was nothing but pure madness. At all events, Festus felt that these things were entirely beyond his knowledge. He saw that Paul could not be charged with any misdemeanor. He understood nothing about the matter. The formal politeness he had at first shown now disappears, as well as the propriety of his position. The power of what Paul had said has sufficed to reduce him to his natural state of soul. But Paul maintaining both

dignity and propriety, places Festus anew in the position of governor, and addresses himself to Agrippa, who knew the truth of these things, and before whom therefore he could speak freely. Turning towards the latter, then, he asks, "King Agrippa," appealing to his conscience, "believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest" (Acts 26:27).

Being above all circumstances, Paul is completely master of the occasion. Agrippa is confused by the apostle's question, since he was a Jew by profession, though nothing in heart! and ashamed of being placed in a corner before such company by his simple but powerful words, tries to parry the blow, and says jestingly, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." But Paul, whose large heart is occupied only with the reality and happiness of Christianity, replies, "I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds." Such was the beautiful expression of a heart full of grace, and therefore of love for others, and of the consciousness of a happiness that two years' captivity had rather strengthened than weakened. But how highly by his nearness to God, is he, the poor prisoner, the despised Jew, elevated above both governors and kings! He treats them with deference and respect, as was his duty, but because he was able to do so from his place of moral superiority to them, which he had by faith in a glorified Savior. Humble, and at peace, when the opportunity presented itself, he could display the greatness of what was in his soul, and utter desires for the great who only possessed outward splendor.

For the pagan Festus, who only relished human grandeur, he was nothing but a madman; for Agrippa, nothing but a trouble and vexation of spirit. He had

desired to know what this Christianity that was attracting the attention of all around him, and that pretended to come from God and demand the submission of all with His authority, might be; but he did not expect himself to be challenged so personally. For Paul the prisoner, it was eternal life and the presence of God who had saved him, and the earnest of the glory to which he was heir. His testimony had been given.

The effect on king Agrippa is evident. Not that he was converted—far from that—but his conscience was touched. He speaks to Festus as a little king to a governor, not as feeling lightly, nor despising the truth and Christianity, but is careful to declare that Paul might have been set at liberty if he had not appealed to Caesar. Two things are thus made manifest; the innocence of Paul, since Agrippa fully understood the truth of his case, and that his appeal to Caesar was the only hindrance to his liberation. It was the will of God that he should go to Rome, but if he had not made use of his worldly rights to regain his liberty, he might have gone there free. Yet the hand of God was in all this, for the one who had given his decision in the matter had listened to the testimony through this appeal to Caesar; and from his knowledge of the ways of the country, was able to declare with confidence, that it was only the appeal that prevented him from being set free. It is manifest in what light the apostle's faith considered the effect of his captivity (Phil. 1:12-13,19). Moreover, the Epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and to Philemon, are the precious fruit of his captivity at Rome. But his mission to the Gentiles, as far as the Spirit speaks of it, is now at an end. Yet, though his mission is over, the apostle remains a bright

and blessed object. We shall find the condemnation of the Jews closing our history.

Meditations on Acts 27

Acts 27.

It having been decided that Paul should be sent to Italy, he is consigned with other prisoners to the charge of one Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band. They set out with the intention of sailing along the coast of Asia.

Aristarchus accompanies the apostle. He had already been with Paul in former journeys. We have met him at Ephesus (Acts 19), with Gaius, who at Corinth was the apostle's host. Julius treats Paul courteously at Sidon, giving him liberty to visit his friends. God cared for his servant, and granted him leniency on the part of this officer. Besides, the authorities were well aware that he was not guilty of anything. They were obliged to send him to Rome in consequence of his appeal to Caesar.

They continue their voyage then, though slowly, the wind being contrary, till they reach a place called "the fair havens," in the island of Crete, and near the city of Lasea. It was already the month of November, and the navigation dangerous; and the port belied its name, being much exposed to the wind. The port and ruins of Lasea are still discoverable. Human wisdom advised departure, the master of the ship hoping, with a favorable wind, to reach Phenice, a better port, and there winter. This place has also been recognized in modern times. Of the two winds which prevail in that latitude, the one is soft but capricious, and the other very violent.

Here again we discover the apostle's nearness to God, his intimacy with Him, and the Lord's abundant grace towards

His servant; and through this communion, Paul becomes master of the situation. On the authority of God, he is able to forewarn the sailors and captain of the vessel what is to happen. But this revelation was expressed in general terms, and the centurion placed more confidence in the owner and pilot than in what Paul said. To him, this was a mere human prediction. And when the smith wind blew softly, they thought they had gained their desire of reaching Phenice. But God holds the winds in the hollow of His hand. The soft and favorable wind that tempted them to set sail, did not continue; and soon a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon, which blows from Greece, and even more from the east, sprang up, and drove them towards the south-west, threatening to cast them on the quicksands of Africa, which lay almost in the direction in which the wind was driving them. After much difficulty, they succeeded in getting the boat on board, but this after all, proved useless in saving them. God was not willing that the many souls in the vessel should be saved by human means, but that Paul's word should be accomplished, and he himself be the occasion of the safety of all.

It is useless to enter into the details of the voyage. Everything possible was done to save the ship, but in vain. The description given us is perfectly exact, and even technical. Carried by the tempest, they are cast on the island of Malta. But what is important for us is the position which the apostle occupies. All hope of escape was gone. But now God interposes, and by means of a revelation made to Paul, revives the failing courage of the sufferers. The apostle reminds them of what he had said at the "fair havens," telling them that they ought to have followed his advice, and that now they were reaping the fruit of refusing it, and

trusting to the knowledge of the sailors. But they were to be of good cheer, for there would be no loss of life, but only of the ship. As before governors, Paul, the servant of God, held morally the superior position, so now he occupies the same place, amid perils sufficient to reduce the crew of the ship to despair. God was watching over Paul. It was necessary that he should appear before Caesar; and full of grace, the Lord had given him all those who were with him.

The ship being driven by the force of the wind near to the land, the sailors cast four anchors out of the stern. Then, as all are looking anxiously for day, the crew, thinking only of themselves, endeavor to escape in the boat, under pretext of getting out an anchor from the forward end of the vessel. But Paul is there, observes all, and directs everything on the part, one may say, of God. It was necessary that he should save them. Paul had now acquired full influence over those in authority. The presence of God, and the divine knowledge he had received of what was to happen, had gained for him the confidence of all. Cutting therefore the ropes of the boat, the soldiers let her drop off. Their salvation was to depend on God, and this had to be owned. If any could have been saved by human means, all might. But all would have perished if the sailors had not remained on board. All the work had to be performed by God.

If we follow the counsels of God through His word, we shall avoid many mistakes. He can save us still when we err, but it will be through suffering and loss. Israel refused to ascend the hill of the Amorites, and had therefore to remain thirty-eighty years in the desert. Here, Paul's companions would not listen to his words, which were those of God, and they lost everything, except life. Their deliverance, it is evident, came from God alone, and was effected for the

honor of His servant, whose words they had despised. It is always important for us to ascertain the will of God before entering any untried path. If we are assured of this, the difficulties will be only difficulties; and the help of God is enough to overcome them. But if we are not sure about His will, then doubt and weakness arise in the heart, because faith to count on God for help is not there, since we are not certain that the path is according to His will.

Paul then comforts them, and persuades them to eat, for the storm had prevented them from taking any regular meal for fourteen days. On the authority of God, he assures them that not a hair of their heads shall perish. He then gives thanks, and eats himself, in order to encourage them. Then all take heart, and eat also. Sufficiently refreshed (for they eat with the more courage, being cheered by that of the one who walked with God, and with whom was His secret), they begin to lighten the ship by throwing the grain overboard. It was not wrong to do so. God can take up the means and the intelligence of men and use them; but these means did not do much good; the hand of God did everything. The ship is then run aground at a place where two seas met, and while the fore part remains fast the stern is broken by the violence of the waves.

But God is faithful to His promise. The soldiers desire to kill the prisoners, so that none may escape; but the centurion, moved by all that had happened, and guided by God, wishes to save Paul, and therefore does not permit them to do so. According to his command, those who can swim cast themselves into the sea, while the others reach the shore on pieces of the ship. God paid this tribute of honor to His servant. He who governs the winds and seas, brings all through the tempest, though through their

own fault, in order to manifest the apostle's nearness to Himself, and saves all, as Paul had foretold, who therefore shines here as elsewhere, for the power of his faith, and the simplicity of his confidence in God. The wisdom of man went for nothing in the deliverance of the crew and the others. All had to resign themselves to God for salvation; and they were saved. All power to avail of this necessity was frustrated by the word of Paul.

Meditations on Acts 28

Acts 28.

God honors His servant on the island where he and his companions had been cast. He works miracles, and receives no hurt from the viper which fastens itself to his hand. Paul had brought captivity on himself by his appeal to Cesar, but still God was with him. It was necessary that he should bear witness before Cesar. God made use of his journey to Jerusalem (where, it is true, the power of the Spirit was not manifested in Paul) in order to bring him before Caesar himself; and this could not otherwise have been accomplished. Far from abandoning him, He displays His grace and power to him most fully.

I have already mentioned that his public testimony, as far as we learn from the Bible, was now at an end. The last testimony to the Jews had been given, and their judgment sealed; but the Lord's grace does not fail now; He comforts and sustains His servant in every circumstance in which he is placed. The weakness of man is found, it is true, even in Paul; but also the grace and the wisdom of God. It is remarkable that the church of the city of Rome was not founded by any apostle. Before Paul's arrival, there were already Christians in Rome; and the gospel in its apostolic power came in captivity.

The voyage, is continued without incident of importance. Brethren, however, are found at Puteoli, and here the apostle remains for seven days. From thence, he goes on to Rome. The brethren there must have heard that Paul was coming, as they come out to meet him. He

was probably left at Puteoli, while the centurion made known his arrival in Italy to the authorities. The rumor of this would then reach the brethren. But here we meet once more with the apostle's experiences. The love of the brethren constrains them to go to meet him. Paul, seeing them, thanks God, and takes courage. He was then cast down—I do not say discouraged—but he needed to take courage. Here we find a difference in the experimental state of Christians, which it is important to remark. On the one side, there is the state of the soul in itself, and on the other, its strength in the presence of difficulties and the power of the enemy, and in the labor required for the gospel in a world the prince of which is the devil; although these two things react on each other. Though we may have a deep sense of feebleness, and be filled with perplexity, yet, if we walk with God, if confidence in His faithfulness and His goodness do not fail us in the work, and before our enemies we lose sight of self, then the power of God will work in us, and act against that of the enemy, and amid the unbelievers among whom we labor.

Thus it happened to Moses. Leaving Pharaoh's court, he went down among the people of God in slavery. Faithful and blessed, he was owned by God in what he did; but he carried human power with him; and when he had killed the Egyptian, he fled for fear of the king's anger. Forty years in the desert dissipated this human confidence, though lack of faith in God was mingled with the sense of weakness. He was not eloquent, he said, not fit to appear before Pharaoh. But when sent from God, he presented himself before the king, it was neither in false fleshly energy, nor in the sense of weakness. The power of God was there; and as we read,

he represented God to Pharaoh, overcame all obstacles, and delivered the people from his oppression.

Paul himself, when called to labor amid a rich and corrupted populace, said, "And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3). Feeling the difficulties and the power of the evil, he threw himself on the aid of God, and the work was accomplished in demonstration of the Spirit and in power. It is in human weakness that the Lord's strength works, and is made perfect. How the Lord, perfect in everything, went through all the sufferings of His heart with His Father in Gethsemane, before drinking the cup! He did not then drink the cup, nor make propitiation for our sins: but as man, He contemplated all that lay before Him. The power of Satan was there to hinder Him from persevering till the end in the path of obedience. His soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; but He told all to His Father; and when the enemies came, was as calm as in the days of His service. Here our wisdom is to present all to God, in the conflicts that may be before, as in our service. Then He will be with us when the work is over. Though our weakness may be sensible to us, yet the power of God will be with us. Paul, full of this when with others, and in the most difficult circumstances, feels the painfulness of his own situation, and is encouraged by the presence and love of the brethren.

Paul goes then to Rome, where the centurion places him, with the other prisoners, in the hands of the captain of the guard. But the apostle is under the care of, and guarded by the hand of God. He is allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him. The conduct of the Jews had not alienated the apostle's noble heart (I say noble, because he was a chosen vessel; compare Matthew 25:15) from

his people, the people of God. He sends and calls for them; but only that they may hear for the last time their condemnation foretold. Still, some believe. Here we find the end of the ways of God towards Israel, and that of the labors of Paul, the prisoner at Rome. The threatenings of God, prophesied by the mouth of Isaiah, eight hundred years before (Isa. 6) are now accomplished. His long-suffering, the gift of His Son, the many warnings of the prophets, all had been in vain. And though judgment had been deferred for a time through the intercession of Christ on the cross, yet they were not more willing to recognize Christ glorified, than in humiliation. It was mercy that prolonged the testimony of grace, sending it even to countries at a distance from Jerusalem, among those of the dispersion, after Jerusalem had rejected the divine blessing. But no effect was produced on these; and judgment fell on the unbelieving nation, till the sovereign grace of God shall call them to enter into the privileges of the *new* covenant, and the Lord Jesus shall come, bringing the better blessing of pure grace. But the history of Israel in its responsibility is over, as well as that of the gospel in its free power. God has never ceased to preserve a testimony on the earth; and has given power and fruit according to the good pleasure of His will; His name be praised! But the work of liberty and apostolic energy is over.

The gospel is captive at Rome! But the providence of God watches over the truth, maintains testimony, and does not allow it to be entirely hidden. There have been evil times, in which iniquity and superstition have prevailed, and truth has been persecuted; and others in which God has held the door open, and given full liberty. Often, however, faith and steadfastness shine more brightly in evil days than

in times of peace and tranquility. Elijah, who was caught up to heaven without dying, is not found in the reign of Solomon; and when he himself could find none faithful in Israel, God maintained and guarded His seven thousand in the midst of the unbelieving and apostate people.

Though it pleased God to allow Paul to remain a prisoner, yet He held the door open for souls. For two whole years he dwelt in his own hired house, preaching the kingdom of God, and the things of Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

Such is the touching end of the public career of the apostle of the Gentiles, faithful above all, large of heart, able by grace to understand the wonderful counsels of God as a grand whole, and to feel their perfection and their greatness; and equally capable of entering into the circumstances and relationships of a fugitive slave with his master, with an affection and a delicacy without example. Bound to the Lord with a heart that led him to suffer all for Him, and for souls dear to Him; bold even to fearlessness; tender and affectionate as a mother for her babes; energetic and patient, he suffered all things for the elect's sake, that they might obtain salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. As truly risen with Christ, he knew no man after the flesh, being separated from both Jews and Gentiles, and united to a glorified Christ, his strength and hope, his all in all.

If he possessed a fault—he was a man, and displayed his manhood fully—it was in loving too much the ancient people of God, his brethren after the flesh. For this fault he was made prisoner, but the ways of God were carried out according to His wisdom. If we would know the effect of his confinement, at least of his being made prisoner, let us

read the beginning of the Epistle to the Philippians 1:12-20. It is beautiful to see the faith and courage of the apostle after two years imprisonment. He might have reproached himself, and said, "Ah, if you had not gone to Jerusalem, if you had not appealed to Caesar, you might still have been preaching everywhere, have gone to Spain." But such was the will of God; and He was with him in his trouble. Submitting to this will, he rises above circumstances, renders thanks to God for all, finds that His wisdom is better than liberty, and works where God has placed him. Faith and confidence through grace raise him above his position to be with God, to act on His part, in whose presence he dwells.

We ought to be thankful to God, we and the church, forever, for the fruit of this period, in which the apostle was free from constant labor. The epistles to the Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon, were written at this time. Two are profound dissertations on the privileges of Christians and of the assembly. Another is the expression of the experience of a godly soul led entirely by the Holy Spirit. Then the fourth is the outflow of the apostle's personal affection for a soul he has won to the Lord and to eternal life—a poor slave, it is true; but he says, a son whom he has begotten in his bonds. Generally speaking, they are letters in which the highest truths of Christianity are unfolded, and in which we learn what is not to be found elsewhere in the New Testament—at least, not fully taught, though the truths themselves are spoken of, but only in part, and introduced by the way. These scriptures complete the circle of the revelation of God.

The career of the apostle Paul was more remarkable than that of any other. His fellow apostles accomplished

the work of the Lord within the narrow limits of Judaism. The starting point for him was the Lord in glory, and that all Christians were recognized as being one with Him. "Why persecutest thou me?" the Lord had asked him. This glorified Lord, salvation, and the kingdom that was to come, he preached to every creature under heaven. Then, for the completion of the word of God, he unfolded and taught what the church was.

He developed the truth as to her position, the union of believers with Christ, the presence of the Spirit in believers and in the church, establishing them as the temple of God on earth. The revelation of the church, or assembly, put an end to Judaism, since there were no longer either Jews or Gentiles, but Christians united in one body to Christ. Paul was thus the head, as servant of Christ, and founder of a new economy; and he also presented himself as a model whom converts were to imitate in their walk and ways.

No other apostle held such a position. The twelve followed Jesus Christ while He was in the world; but this Paul did not do. Then they saw Him taken up to heaven, and believed that He was glorified at the right hand of God. Paul, till then an enemy to Christ, but converted through sovereign grace, while acting in the violence of his enmity, began with the vision of the Lord in glory, who had made Himself known to him as Jesus of Nazareth. What he preached, he called *his* gospel, the gospel of the Lord's glory. The knowledge and revelation of the counsels of God were confided to him; and he was caught up to the third heaven, and there heard unspeakable things which it was not lawful for a man to utter. His apostleship was to the Gentiles, to the whole world; and to this he was called by the Lord in glory, and sent expressly by the Holy Spirit. He began with

the Jews, the people beloved of God, the possessors of the promises; but, according to the prophecy of Isaiah 49, he turned towards the Gentiles, when the former rejected the testimony of God. Of the church, as the body of Christ on earth, and habitation of God through the Spirit, no apostle except Paul speaks. (See Col. 1:23-29).

In the apostle's character, we find both good and bad features which stamp him a man as we are. None of these things were seen in Christ, entirely and alone perfect in every respect. But as a man of like passions to ours, Paul, the servant of Jesus Christ, had no equal. Although in captivity at Rome, the word of God was not bound. God watched over it, and Paul, dwelling in his own hired house, received all who sought after truth, and taught them with perfect liberty the gospel so dear to him. In all times, God has made it public, more or less, in order to give life through faith; but its history, begun by the marvelous power of the Holy Spirit at Jerusalem, terminated at Rome, where, in the person of Paul, to whom it had been entrusted, it lay a prisoner. Judaism crucified the Lord, and imprisoned the gospel of the glory, but God, in spite of the efforts of Satan, disseminates it, especially in these times—His name be praised! In respect to the church, it remained bound till the present day. But though preachers have little strength, yet the Lord holds the door open, and no man can shut it.

Collected Writings of J.N. Darby

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